Sample Topics for 2014

- Sustainable and Regenerative Agricultural Practices (How do we maintain the productivity and economic viability of farms while minimizing the environmental impact of agriculture- pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizer, runoff, methane generation by livestock.)

- Localvore Movement (Serious efforts to encourage consumption of local foods in Vermont are having an impact on the food industry. Does it work? Is a local food economy more sustainable than a national, or international system? What other costs and benefits accrue?)

- Management of Threatened Species (There is, for example, controversy over a report recommending management of the Soft-shelled Turtle in lake Champlain.)

- Amphibian Road Crossings (Recently, efforts to fund an expensive amphibian crossing in Monkton appear to have been successful. Some argue that transportation money would be better spent on conventional maintenance and repair. What is the value of wildlife crossings on roadways?)

- Wetland Conservation (Why are wetlands so important to maintain? How is wetland conservation carried out and regulated in Vermont?)

- Mercury Contamination in Waterways (There are specific guidelines for eating fish from Lake Champlain due to concern about mercury content in the fish. Why is the mercury there? How can we reduce mercury concentrations in the lake?)

- Sludge Disposal at OMYA (OMYA stores waste water from its plant in old quarries. Test wells near the site have revealed questionable results. Is the company really a polluter? How can they improve their practices.)

- Invasive Species Management (What is an invasive species? There are many in Vermont. How do we decide which ones to pay attention to? What can be done to remove these species? Why should we remove them? How can we prevent the spread of invasive species?)

- Vermont Gas (Construction of a natural gas delivery pipeline from Burlington to Rutland is being discussed in three phases. Phase I has been reviewed and phase II is under consideration by the Public Service Board. This is contorversial and complex. Economic

interests, fuel and energy choices and climate change intersect with regulatory policy and process.)

- Global Warming and local choices (This is related to mny of the other topics listed here.)
- Transportation (Vermonters drive more miles per person that any other Americans except for residents of Wyoming. Why do we drive so much? What is the real cost of all this driving? Are there alternatives that would be more efficient- electric vehicles, bicycles, light rail, buses?)
- Housing (Affordable housing is hard to come by in Vermont, and green affordable housing is even harder to find. How can we design housing, both structurally, and in terms of site planning to encourage more sustainable life styles?)ransitioning to new sources of Energy (Vermont Yankee, an old nuclear power plant has been closed for decommissioning. How do we replace this source of energy? Is there a future for nuclear power plants?)
- Ridgeline Wind Farming (Why is there so much resistance to wind farms in Vermont? Another energy demand topic.)
- Industrial Scale Solar Panel Arrays. (Several have been constructed in the Champlain Valley recently, and there has been some resistance. This could be studied along with wind farming.)
- Logging (Vermont is approximately 80% forested today. What management practices allow us to harvest trees and maintain healthy forests?)
- Rubbish Disposal (Much of Vermont's non-recyclable waste goes into one or two large Landfills. How are these sites managed? How is contamination of ground water prevented? How long can we keep using these sites? What will we do when the sites close? Can the waste stream be reduced?)
- Green Technology (should Vermont become a center for light industry in Green Technology research, design and production? What do these industries need to support them, where should they be located?)
- Track local newspaper stories about the environment for other ideas (Google The Burlington Free Press or Rutland Herald and search for environmental stories.)