



September 21, 2012

**To:** The Faculty and Staff of the University of Vermont  
**From:** Jane Knodell, Provost and Senior Vice President  
**Subject:** Envisioning Environment at the University of Vermont

A critical element of the vision that drives the University of Vermont is a call to preeminence in our commitment to the environment. Indeed, the University of Vermont has significant breadth in environmental research, teaching, and outreach. Work in the environment spans the entire University and includes, but is by no means limited to, environmental engineering, environmental science (chemistry, biology, physics, geology), environmental health, environmental economics, environmental education, environmental policy, environmentally inspired creative works and sustainability in business. We are rightly proud of our accomplishments and contributions in these areas. At the same time, there is a growing sentiment that we have the potential to achieve far greater excellence, visibility, and impact in the study of the environment. The Fall, 2012 semester presents us with an opportunity to engage in creative and bold thinking about how we can capture and build a national and international reputation through a clear intellectual vision, better coordination and building on our existing strengths.

Working in partnership, the Offices of the President, Provost and the Faculty Senate have developed an *Envisioning Environment at UVM* work group. This cross-college faculty group will be charged with conducting an inventory of the strengths of environmental education and research at UVM; identifying our comparative advantage in this realm; evaluating our current organizational structure related to environmental education and research; assessing “best practices” nationally and internationally; and developing several alternative models for how we might organize, support and maximize this work at the University of Vermont.

The group will be Co-Chaired by Professor Stephanie Kaza and Professor Beverly Wemple, both of whom are accomplished environmental scholars. We are in the process of constituting the balance of the group’s membership and expect to have all members named by September 28 (a complete listing will be posted on the Provost’s website). The work of the group will be advisory, highly consultative and will include conversations with faculty members, staff members and Deans across the University. The group will report its findings to President Sullivan, Senate President Roberts and myself by December 20, 2012.

Essential to the success of this exercise is active participation; our common commitment to a genuine spirit of inquiry; and an unfettered willingness to imagine the vast possibilities for the significant and critical role of the University of Vermont in the study of the environment. I am confident that we will each play our part in support of this important work.