Appendix B: Vermont Monitoring Cooperative Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

(Summarized from the April, 2014 VMC Advisory Committee Meeting)

STRENGTHS (What does VMC do well?)

Facilitating collaborations

- Dedicated collaborators
- Long history of collaborations across organizations and disciplines
- Cross cutting Annual Meeting
- Opportunities for regular connections among collaborators
- Funding for small scale / pilot projects

Monitoring

- Cross ecosystem monitoring……trees, air, water, soils, wildlife
- LONG TERM – historical archive
- Continuity of a large number of environmental datasets
- Co-location of research projects (intensive research sites for data integration)
- Synthesis of disparate datasets (e.g. 2009 Synthesis Report)

Data Management

- Safe and accessible data archiving
- New database structure for improved search capabilities and links to other databases
- New web portal for easier data discovery, visualization, access and download
- Providing access to spatial datasets relevant to forest health beyond what is available at state level geospatial clearinghouses

Outreach and Impact

- Communicating scientific findings via regular newsletters
- Informing land management decisions
- Education –outreach to the community of environmental professionals
- Stimulating new research ideas among collaborators

WEAKNESSES (What VMC should be doing, doing better, specific gaps in our activities or misplaced resources?)

- Lack of national visibility and relevance
- Poorly articulated connection to national forest health program
- Lack of diversification of funding structure
- Structure and leadership….lack of stability in administration, successional plans, clarity in how roles are assigned.
- Focus on Lye Brook and Mt. Mansfield intensive may not represent other biophysical regions.
- Perception of interest only in intensive sites limits inclusion of datasets from other locations.
- Plethora of data not included (or linked) to the database for integration / synthesis.

In addition, VMC could be:

- Linking collaborators to work on competitive proposals
- Documenting the importance of our forested ecosystem / ecosystem services provided
- Compiling more regular synthesis reports
- Publishing yearly updates and trends in environmental datasets
- Documenting how funds are leveraged
- Documenting outcomes
- Offering opportunities for new blood / energy in collaborative network and governance structure

OPPORTUNITIES (What could strengthen VMC's impact?)

- New strategic plan to more directly align VMC with partner priorities and identify focus of ongoing activities
- Opportunity now to expand beyond collecting data to integrating data.
- Regularly bring together collaborators to summarize and update findings from long-term monitoring efforts.
- Connect with outside researchers to use our existing datasets for analysis to produce "actionable science"
- Leveraging joint efforts (efficiencies) across organizations.
- Tie into the work of other consortium organizations (e.g. the rivers program, the water quality monitoring program, climate assessment groups).
- Connecting across the region (comparisons of conditions and trends)
    - Connect to other long term ecosystem monitoring programs (FIA, LTER, NEON, NERC)

    - Comparisons to other sites (Harvard Forest, Hubbard Brook, Bartlett, Huntington Forest (NY)
- New website development…great way to engage collaborators and public to showcase environmental efforts for all collaborators
- Web portal / database workshops to increase use and utility of VMC data system

THREATS (What obstacles does VMC need to overcome?)

- Instability (and lack of diversity) in funding sources
- Upcoming retirements (attrition) and resulting weaker connections to organizations
- Lack of clarity/awareness of VMC beyond current collaborators.