



News from the Forest

Summer 2004

Where We Stand

As Vermont Family Forests approaches its tenth anniversary, we reflect on our mission, what we've accomplished, and what remains to be done.

"Conservation means harmony between landowners and the land. When land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by the land; when both end up better by reason of their partnership, we have conservation. When one or the other grows poorer, we do not."

From Aldo Leopold (1939) *The Farmer as a Conservationist*

Vermont's Forested Landscape

Three hundred years ago Vermont was blanketed by a healthy temperate rainforest. Within 150 years most of the forest had been cleared away and the land thoroughly exploited. Today -- due in large part to the land's capacity for self-renewal -- forest now covers over 78% of the state. In order for this remarkable ecological recovery to continue we must learn to manage our demands and to minimize adverse impacts.

Vermont expects a lot from her forests. These demands include timber supplies, wood energy, non-timber forest products such as maple syrup, and four seasons of recreation. Vermont also depends upon her forests for high quality water supplies, pretty views, wildlife habitat, solitude, and soul restoration. Many of these forest values are priceless for the community yet valueless to the forest steward in the traditional marketplace.

Vermont's forests are adversely impacted by global warming, air pollution and acid rain, invasive exotics, forest fragmentation and simplification, and exploitive logging practices that result in soil erosion, stream sedimentation, loss of biological diversity and high-graded timber supplies. These adverse impacts are perpetuated by an increasingly global economic system that always externalizes costs and commonly fails to differentiate sources.

About 70% of Vermont's forestland is non-industrial and privately owned. Owners of these private forestlands often have diverse interests and short tenure. Family forest owners often want to conserve the health of their forests but do not know how to act upon their values.

Wendell Berry once wrote that the two great ruiners of private land are ignorance and economic constraint. Vermont -- like many other states -- has a long history of providing educational programs for family forest owners and the loggers

and foresters who assist them. These programs have focused more on *forest products* such as timber, wildlife habitat, and recreation and less on *forest health*. Forest health must receive greater attention. To paraphrase Vermont Smallholders Association founder Justin Brand, "Without a healthy forest ecology there cannot be a healthy forest economy."

Vermont's traditional forest industry model is a linear and vertical one with forests and unempowered stewards at the bottom. Vermont has focused much effort on attempting to improve *timber quality* on family forests but has expended little energy on systems that would allow family forest stewards to achieve greater success in *forest product marketing*. Without this success in the marketplace, Vermont's family forest owners and stewards cannot be expected to maintain the health of their forests or to produce high quality forest products over time.

These long-term emphases on forest products over forest health and on high-quality timber production over the success of forest stewards in the marketplace have put the ecological health and economic viability of Vermont's family forests at considerable risk.

What VFF Has Accomplished

VFF puts healthy forests first. VFF's mission is "to conserve the health of the forest community, and when appropriate to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefits." Healthy forests are fairly easy to spot. They are the ones that have clear, clean, highly oxygenated streams running through them. They also have well designed access networks that work with the land. Soils are stable and productive, and there are diverse populations of native flora and fauna.

Vermont Family Forests is a grassroots effort that started in 1995. The Addison County Forester collaborated with the Lewis Creek Association by offering workshops on many elements of careful forest stewardship. After several of these very successful and well-attended workshops, the collaborative educational effort was dubbed "Vermont Family Forests."

A mission, set of principles, and a forest management checklist were adopted and eleven workshops were conducted on a wide variety of forest conservation subjects in 1996. In 1997, VFF identified 32 forest landowners -- with (Continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1) about 5000 acres and an excellent history of stewardship -- to form a pool of well-managed family forests. VFF applied for a grant through the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund to become certified through the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). VFF was certified by FSC and incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 1998.

VFF has established a small but well-equipped office in Bristol and hired a part-time staff. VFF continues to offer workshops related to ecologically sustainable forestry and has been a leading sponsor in the Game of Logging training course. VFF also provides ecological forestry information through its website, www.familyforests.org, and through its newsletters, reports, and other publications.

VFF has developed many systems and tools to support the family forest steward. VFF provides family forest stewards with affordable access to FSC certification. VFF makes products such as non-petroleum bar and chain oil, log and tree scale and grade systems, management plan templates, sample contracts, and forest health monitoring protocols readily available to family forest stewards.

VFF conducts research through teams of natural resource managers, forest ecologists, community organizers, ecological

economists and other private contractors. Our most recently completed project assessed the availability of sustainably harvested, local, forest biomass as a fuel source for Middlebury College. The report received high praise from Middlebury College.

VFF continues to work on an innovative project known as Community Equity that seeks to create conservation easements that actually conserve the health of the forest while valuing the forest so that landowners receive reasonable returns on their investments. This is a critically important element, in that even if landowners increase their success in the forest product marketplace exponentially, the gap between the values of land as forest and developed land continue to widen.

VFF has developed and tested a unique Community Supported Forestry System that is circular, collaborative, and local. In the VFF CSF System, forest products flow from healthy forests through local value-adding processes and are then sold as branded products to well-informed customers. More value is generated in the local community and more value is returned to the forest and the stewards of the forest. VFF experiments have identified substantial demand for high quality forest products that originate from healthy local forests and that result from collaborative local value adding.

Major Challenges That Remain

- Family forest stewards often do not understand the basic principals of forest health or the forest practices that conserve forest health.
- Healthy forests where ecologically sustainable forestry is practiced often generate lower economic returns for the stewards in the short term.
- Forest landowners have infrequent harvests and these harvests often generate low volumes and a variety of species that require aggregation and sorting to improve economic value.
- Family forest stewards are not organized or positioned to convert low value logs into higher value products and then to market those forest products successfully.
- High quality value-adding services such as sawmills, kilns, and commercial moulders for producing hardwood trim and flooring are generally not available to family forest owners under favorable circumstances.
- Customers with aligned values cannot easily access forest products from local forests that have been independently certified as well managed.
- The VFF certified pool of well—managed forests is very limited in acreage and lacks an economy of scale.
- Forest landowners, loggers, consulting foresters and other natural resource managers, sawmill and kiln operators, and secondary wood product manufacturers view each other as suppliers or even competitors rather than as community members and stewardship partners.
- Private consulting foresters are often the primary source of information for family forest owners, and can be financially conflicted between the roles of forest manager and forest product broker.
- The existing vertical system provides participants at higher levels, particularly consulting foresters and sawmills, with some success and strategic position, and this can make them resistant to change.
- Existing methods for marketing standing timber and logs put family forest owners at a distinct disadvantage in that logs are scaled by, and the loggers work for, the sawmills.
- There is not a uniform standard for log grade in Vermont.

SPOTLIGHT ON VFF'S FOREST MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

At the heart of VFF's vision of ecological forest management is its Forest Management Checklist. If landowners adhere to these 36 management practices, they will protect water quality, conserve or enhance site productivity, and maintain or improve native biological diversity on their forest lands. Below, we highlight one of the 36 practices, explaining what it's about and how you can achieve it. For a complete listing of the 36 practices, visit our website, www.familyforests.org, under "Publications," or give us a call (453-7728) and we'll mail you a copy.

VFF Forest Management Practice:
"Any forest management in natural communities that are ranked as "very rare" (S1) and "rare" (S2) or in natural communities ranked as "uncommon" (S3), "common" (S4), and "very common" (S5) but with little or no evidence of past human disturbance should be reviewed by the VT F&W Natural Heritage Biologists."

Conserving forest health is no small task. If forest stewards want to practice forestry that really protects forest health, they must be careful to maintain or enhance water quality, site productivity, and biological diversity. Of these, biological diversity presents the toughest challenges because it requires "a landscape view".

Forest stewards can do great things to protect water quality and site productivity on their own forests. Well-designed access, following the AMPs, and avoiding soil erosion and compaction can all be accomplished within the confines of a family forest.

Forest stewards can also do great things to protect native biological diversity by doing such things as mimicking nature, retaining snags, dens, and large downed wood, maintaining healthy riparian zones. All of these can be accomplished within the confines of one's own family forest.

But we are told that if we are to be successful in conserving forest biological diversity we must have "a landscape view". A landscape view means looking at the larger picture to maintain connectivity and to protect biologically unique areas. This means looking well beyond the borders of individual properties.

One very important way to accomplish this is to look at natural communities. We Vermonters are very fortunate to have *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland: A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont*, by Elizabeth Thompson and Eric Sorenson to help us identify our natural communities. It is a book that

every Vermont forest steward should own and use regularly!

Wetland, Woodland, Wildland ranks each natural community to "indicate the relative rarity of natural community types" on a state basis. S1 and S2 communities are those natural communities that have been determined to be extremely rare and very rare respectively in the state by the Vermont Nongame and Natural Heritage Program. S3 and S4 communities are not rare in the state but high quality examples of them are uncommon.

This is why VFF recommends identifying natural communities first. Then, if S1, S2 and excellent examples of S3, S4, or S5 communities are found, VFF recommends reviewing forest management options with a forest ecologist before proceeding. This is an excellent way to "use a landscape view" in the protection of native forest biological diversity. It is also lots of fun!

MARKET OPPORTUNITY FOR CERTIFIED FIREWOOD

VFF has fielded requests for certified firewood during the past few months. These have varied from individuals looking for a few cords of certified wood to a business interested in more than 50 cords annually. As fossil fuel prices increase, people will increasingly turn to local forests for fuel. VFF certified landowners have the opportunity to offer firewood that comes from healthy forests where managers have conserved site productivity, protected water quality, and maintained native biological diversity.

If you would be interested in selling certified firewood directly to customers, please contact us. Our website lists certified forest products available from VFF certified landowners. We can list you among those providers and refer firewood inquiries to you via our website. If you'd prefer to sell certified logs to a firewood processor, or if you are a firewood processor interested in selling certified firewood, please contact us at 453-7728 or info@familyforests.org.

GREAT FORESTRY RESOURCE

Forest Landowners Guide to Internet Resources: States of the Northeast. <http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/flg/>.

This web-based resource, compiled and annotated by the United States Forest Service, offers more than 1,100 links on a host of subjects, including biodiversity, conservation easements, economics of forest investments, estate planning, mapping, riparian forest management, silviculture, certification, timber sales and much more.

Check Out VFF's Updated Website!

*Read an in-depth description of **current research and demonstration projects**, including the **Colby Hill Ecological Project**, the **Middlebury College Biomass Study**, and the **Community Equity Project**.

*Visit the **Colby Hill Ecological Project** pages. You can download *research reports*, read about the *Biodiversity Outreach Project*, and browse the *Biological Inventory Resources* page, which includes guidance, recommended readings, and useful links to help you inventory your forest's biodiversity.

*Explore VFF's **Certified Ecoforestry Program**--find out what it is, how it works, and how you can take part.

*Find out about **Upcoming Events** and explore our **Events Gallery** for photos and descriptions of past offerings.

*Download past **newsletters** and other useful **publications**.

*Browse our **Ecological Forestry Tools** page and find out where to purchase **VFF certified forest products**.



Visit us at www.familyforests.org.

MEET A VFF CERTIFIED LANDOWNER

Mike Quinn, North Ferrisburgh

Ever since Mike and Katy Quinn bought their 102-acre parcel from Katy's parents back in 1989, Mike's enjoyed learning about the land and working in the woods. When, in the mid-90s, he wanted to harvest maple from his woods to build a barn, he contacted Addison County Forester David Brynn for advice about access roads, timber management, and portable sawmills.

This marked the beginning of a long relationship with David and, when David launched Vermont Family Forests in 1998, with VFF. "I went on a tour of David's land and was really impressed with his forest," Mike says. So when David approached Mike in 1998 with the idea of joining the fledgling VFF pool of certified landowners, he signed right on.

David had hooked Mike up sawyer Bob Growney during Mike's early barn-building project, since Bob had a portable sawmill that fit Mike's needs well. The two later teamed up to provide certified lumber for VFF demonstration projects. Mike's forest yielded logs for Lake Champlain Maritime Museum's schooner project and Shelburne Museum's English Barn. Mike's participated in numerous VFF workshops—from Game of Logging and Wood ID to tracking with Susan Morse and

Winter Tree Identification. He's also taken part in meetings to explore licensing of the VFF Family Forest® brand.

Mike Quinn, right, checks the identity of a trailside tree during VFF's Winter Tree Identification workshop, led by forester Laura French, left.



Mike interacts continually with his land, walking and cross-country skiing through it, logging, thinning, and gathering firewood. Being certified has made him think hard about the trees he harvests. Take firewood, for instance. "It's a juggling act," he says, between wanting firewood and wanting to preserve standing snags. He is quick to defend the juggling. "If you want wildlife and clean water, it's a good thing."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Natural Community Mapping Workshop

Wednesday, September 22, 2004, 8:30 A.M. - 12:30 P.M. \$35

Location: The Waterworks Property, Bristol (See directions on our website events page)

Ecologist Eric Sorenson and Addison County Forester David Brynn will lead this workshop for natural resource professionals and landowners interested in being introduced to the art of creating natural communities maps for forest management plans. The workshop will begin indoors, with an introduction to the process of creating a rough natural community mapping from aerial orthophoto interpretation, soils maps, and other resources. Participants will then move to the field to learn how to field check a rough natural community map by identifying site indicator plant species, conducting soil tests, and using the natural communities guidebook, *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland*. Refreshments will be served.

Game of Logging Training Course, Levels I & II

GOL Level I, October 23, 2004. (Raindate: October 30)

Time: 8:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M

GOL Level II, November 6, 2004. (Raindate: November 13)

Time: 8:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M

Cost: \$125 per level. Workshop cost includes 1/2 gallon of GreenBar non-petroleum bar and chain oil and VFF t-shirt. (Pre-registration required: Payment in full is required to reserve a spot in the workshops). **Limit:** 10 participants

Location: Level I: Johnson Family Forest, Lincoln.

Level II: Elder Family Forest, Starksboro. (Directions to each site are posted on the VFF website.)

The Game of Logging training program combines Scandinavian logging techniques with the latest systems for working safely around trees. The Game of Logging program is broken into four levels, the first two of which VFF is offering this fall. Participants must have completed Level I before taking Level II. *We can't overstate the value of these training courses. We've had participants who have used chainsaws for 30 years prior to taking GOL Level I say that the course changed the way they work in the woods.*

In GOL Level I, participants learn the fundamentals of saw handling and control and how to maximize equipment performance. They cover more advanced areas such as site evaluation and new techniques for precise felling, limbing and bucking. Regardless of your experience, you'll take home valuable new skills from this workshop. You do not need any experience with chainsaws to take this course. **In GOL Level II**, participants learn basic saw maintenance and chain sharpening techniques and build upon their knowledge gained in GOL I, practicing more advanced techniques for precise tree felling.

Participants need to bring protective head gear (including eye and ear protection), chaps, work boots, and chainsaw. Let us know if you need to borrow any of this gear, as our instructor can easily provide extras. Register soon--enrollment is limited.

COMMUNITY EQUITY

Workshop Reaches Out to Hogback Landowners

Liz Thompson, ecologist from UVM and one of the authors of *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland*, helped 25 area landowners see the Hogback Mountain area through her eyes at a meeting sponsored by VFF on June 29. She organized her approach to the landscape by identifying natural communities—assemblages of plants and animals, the physical environment and natural processes that affect them. Recognizing natural communities helps simplify the mind-boggling endeavor of flipping through lots of guidebooks to identify what you find on your land. But, better than that, it's a way to understand what's happening

ecologically—not just identify species.

VFF landowner John McNerney, a pilot, had flown Liz over the Hogbacks in the spring so that Liz could get an aerial view and take pictures. At the meeting, Liz interspersed slides taken on that flight, showing the patterns that indicate different natural communities, with slides of what the natural community would look like on the ground. She asked for ground truth, and participants who had hiked in each spot verified her expectations. "It was just the way you described it," said Jim Runcie who has rambled over much of the area.

CERTIFICATION NEWS

Independent, third-party certification shows customers that we're really practicing what we preach. The Forest Stewardship Council, through its Smartwood certification program, provides this important verification. Such independent certification costs money, both for the annual audit performed by FSC and for staff hours required to enter new forests into our certified forest pool.

Until recently VFF has absorbed all costs associated with enrolling new forests in our FSC-certification program. Because this is not sustainable for the organization, we have begun to charge a \$125 one-time fee to certify a new forest. This covers VFF's costs for reviewing the management plan, map, and memorandum of agreement to assure compliance with all certification requirements. With this certification fee, landowners will receive VFF's beautiful 9" x 22" metal Forest Steward sign for their forest.

DONATIONS

We offer our sincerest gratitude to the following donors, whose gifts help sustain VFF's operations:

Jason and Nina Bacon

Melita Bass

Jean Cate

Raven David and Ed Everts

Chris and Michaela Granstrom

Therese Fafard and Nathan Heilman

Nan Jenks-Jay

Warren and Barry King

Martha McCaughlin

Christopher and Shiela McGrory-Klyza

Bill McKibben

Richard and Pat Murphy

Barbara Otsuka

Andrew Perchlik

Michael Quinn

Jim and Chris Runcie

Jean Wagner

Marshall Webb



Louise Brynn

Special thanks to the following individuals for their generosity:

Jonathan Blake, *for his beautiful photographs of the Beltane event*

John McNerney, *for overflights of VFF project areas*

Chris Johnson, *for use of his land for Game of Logging workshops*

A wooden bluebird, crafted by local artisan Gary Starr, explores Louise Brynn's bluebird box, made with certified spruce from Stephen Taylor's VFF certified forest during a recent Otter Creek Audubon Society workshop.



Vermont Family Forests needs Your support!

VFF runs a very lean operation to develop and sustain all the exciting education, ecological forestry, and research and demonstration projects you're reading about in this newsletter. With your help, we can continue and expand our work to conserve the health of the forest community and, when appropriate, to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefit.

Please help us carry out this good work.

Yes, we would like to support the work of Vermont Family Forests with a contribution of:

\$1000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 Other _____

Name _____ (please write your name as you would like it listed in our annual report)

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

For your gift of \$100 or more, we'd be delighted to send you a VFF t-shirt. Please circle size: Child L, Adult S, M, L, XL

Please send us additional information on your forest certification program.

If you would like to make a gift of stock or mutual funds, please call Sandra Murphy at VFF, 802-453-7728.

Your contribution is tax deductible to the extent of the law.

COLBY HILL ECOLOGICAL PROJECT

Biodiversity Workshop Series

Fifteen participants joined ornithologist Warren King and Addison County Forester David Brynn for the latest offering in the Biodiversity Workshop Series, *Bird Habitat Stewardship in the Family Forest*. On a delightfully sunny and crisp May day, we trekked through Lincoln's Colby Hill Town Forest, identifying birds and their habitat and learning how to best maintain or improve those habitats.

Tool for Getting to Know the Birds of Your Forest

When trees are fully leafed, as they were during the Bird Habitat workshop, the best way to identify birds is by their songs. Barry and Warren King recommend the CD, *Birding by Ear*, by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson, as a great tool for learning and/or brushing up on bird songs.

VFF will use a recent donation to purchase this CD and its companion, *More Birding by Ear*, for our small but growing Forest Tools Library. Check them out and get to know your avian neighbors!



Warren King (center right) and David Brynn (right) led the spring CHEP workshop, *Bird Habitat Stewardship in the Family Forest*.

On-line biodiversity inventory tools

If you're interested in beginning to inventory the flora and fauna in your forest, you'll find helpful information to get you started on VFF's website, www.familyforests.org/public-education/colby-hill.shtml.

Upcoming Natural Community Mapping Workshop

The next offering in the Biodiversity Workshop Series is one that no forest landowner should miss. Understanding and mapping natural communities is a key first step in understanding and managing your forest. For a full description of this exciting workshop, please see our Upcoming Events listing on page 5 of this newsletter.

CHEP Monitoring Update

The 2004 field season is under way, and CHEP researchers have already completed the annual bird count and have begun small mammal surveys using mist nets and live traps. Mammalogist Jan Decher is trying out a new tool this field season—a movement-activated camera. When an animal passes the camera, it snaps a photo. Take a look at his initial results below. We'll post these and any subsequent photos on the CHEP section of the VFF website.



Candid Camera

Using a movement-activated camera, mammalogist Jan Decher captured these images of some of the residents of CHEP monitored lands in Lincoln, Vermont. Wild turkey, left. Black bear, center and right.

PO Box 254
Bristol, VT 05443



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Jonathan Blake



Louise Brynn

More than eighty community members took part in Vermont Family Forests' first annual **Beltane Community Forest Festival** on May 1, 2004, at the Waterworks Property in Bristol.