



News from the Forest

Winter 2005

LITTLE HOGBACK COMMUNITY FOREST LLC LAUNCHED!

In New England, forestland is becoming increasingly fragmented, with forestland ownership shifting to higher income, often non-resident property owners. VFF's Community Forests Project offers nothing short of a new model for forestland ownership. After intensive research and planning, VFF has launched its first community forest, known as the Little Hogback Community Forest LLC.

by Deb Brighton,
Community Forests Project Leader

With a diversity similar to that of a natural forest, the community is taking shape around the Little Hogback Community Forest (LHFC), LLC. The people interested in becoming members include retired couples and young families, rural neighbors and people living on small lots in the village, teachers and students. Among their reasons: "I always wanted to own land," "I love the concept," "It's a great place to walk with my kids," "Just the firewood alone would make it worthwhile to me," and "I have always liked VFF and would like to be part of it."

LHCF LLC will own and manage a 115-acre forested parcel off of Boro Hill Road in Monkton. The LLC will have sixteen shares, each costing less than \$3000. The low price is possible because of easements that will be held by the Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Family Forests. The easements will ensure that the land will be carefully managed in perpetuity, that it will never be subdivided or developed, and that if it

is resold, it will be sold at a value that reflects its dedication to sustainable forestry.

The parcel will be managed as a single unit, according to VFF principles, and a share entitles its owner to recreation, firewood, proceeds from timber sales, and the satisfaction of carefully stewarding a beautiful piece of the world.

The LLC will actually have two parts: the land, and a management reserve fund that will cover annual costs, such as property taxes, insurance, and any necessary maintenance. A small portion of the original share price, plus the income from a timber sale that is already marked, will capitalize the fund for the next ten years. It is anticipated that there will be timber sales every ten years, and that the proceeds will first recapitalize the management reserve fund before any distributions are made to members. There will be firewood available annually to members who would pay a small fee to have a designated lot marked by a forester for them. (See our website for the People's Prospectus, which describes the LLC in detail, or request a printed copy.)



LHCF project leader, Deb Brighton, right, fields questions from an information meeting participant.

Vermont Family Forests

Vermont Family Forests is a non-profit education organization whose mission is to conserve the health of the forest community and, when appropriate, to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefit. We accomplish this mission through public education, forest certification, and research and demonstration projects.

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To subscribe to *News from the Forest*, please email us at info@familyforests.org or call 453-7728. Call us or visit our website at www.familyforests.org for more information on VFF's programs.

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(Little Hogback, cont'd from page 1)

Because a goal of the VFF project is to put the land in the hands of community members who might not otherwise be able to afford to purchase a parcel, deferred loans are available to community members whose incomes are below \$59,600. *(See our website to learn about the Deferred Loan Program, or request printed information.)*

Over 40 people have attended one of the three public informational meetings held in January. Some were ready to buy a share; some raised excellent issues that we are rethinking and researching;

others were just curious and keeping an eye on this new movement. On a windy day during which the temperature didn't get much above zero, 15 hardy hikers verified the recreation potential and the trees marked for harvest. So what's the timetable, people asked as they took off their snowshoes?

Vermont Land Trust, the current owner of the parcel and partner in this project, is

willing to hold the land until the members are ready. VLT is also willing to allow the timber sale to occur when the weather is right, regardless of who is the owner at that time, with the understanding that the income will flow to the Management Reserve Fund. The closing date depends on when people feel they comfortable enough to decide whether or not to buy the shares.

Visit our website's Community Forests Project Page,

<http://www.familyforests.org/research/community-equity.shtml>,

to read a detailed project prospectus, project journal, deferred loan description, and schedule of events, and to view maps of the Little Hogback LLC property.

If you do not have internet access, please call us to request a printed information packet.

Our next step is to analyze and propose resolutions to all the issues raised, and to circulate this to all. At that point, we are willing to hold

workshops or develop more materials on any specific details people are concerned about—from tree growth to taxes. If there are more than sixteen people interested in buying a share after all the questions are answered, we will hold a simple lottery. It's our hope that anyone who doesn't get a share in this parcel will be able to buy into the next one. ♦



Little Hogback Community Forest hike participants pause for a brief rest in a small clearing with views of Hogback Mountain and Bristol Pond.

VFF WORKSHOPS & EVENTS

GAME OF LOGGING, LEVELS I & II

Level I: May 14, 2005 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (raindate: May 21)

Level II: June 4, 2005 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (raindate June 11)

Fee: \$125 (fee for Level I includes ½ gallon of Greenbar non-petroleum bar and chain oil.)

Instructor: John Adler, Northeast Woodland Training

Because the Game of Logging workshop series provides such useful information for chainsaw users of all skill levels, VFF offers GOL training twice a year. In Level I, participants learn the fundamentals of saw handling and control, systematic chain saw maintenance, and how to maximize equipment performance. They also learn site evaluation techniques, as well as new techniques for precise felling, limbing and bucking. 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. ***Pre-registration and advanced payment required. Enrollment is limited, so register now for this excellent and popular course!***

BELTANE COMMUNITY FOREST FESTIVAL

April 30, 2005 5:00 p.m.

Join VFF and the Watershed Center for the second annual Beltane Community Forest Festival at the Waterworks Property in Bristol. Beltane, also known as May Day, celebrates the coming of spring. Festivities will include a lake-side bonfire, potluck dinner, music, dancing, and more!



FLY FISHING & FOREST HEALTH

May 21, 2005 9:00 a.m. - noon

Fee: adults \$10, children free (accompanied by adult)

We're delighted to have Dave Henderson of the New Haven River Anglers join us for this exciting spring workshop, co-sponsored by the Bristol and Lincoln Conservation Commissions. We'll begin at Sycamore Park (formerly Palmers Trailer Park/ Tin City on Route 116) with Dave sharing the basics of fly fishing—fishing gear, which flies anglers choose on a given day and why, how to cast, and fishing ethics. Learn about river health, upon which healthy fish populations depend, and how forest health upstream impacts river community health downstream. ***Pre-registration requested.***

HORSE LOGGING IN THE FAMILY FOREST

This one's still in the works, but we wanted to share our excitement about it as it unfolds. In a workshop for the general public, horse logger Patrick Palmer will demonstrate horse logging techniques and know-how. Stay tuned to our website and e-mail calendar of events for updates!

Other Community Events:

MIDDLEBURY AREA LAND TRUST: *Winter Birds and Animal Tracks*

Sunday, February 20, 10:00 a.m. - noon

Location: Wright Park, Middlebury (Seymour St. Ext. entrance) **Leader:** Barb Otsuka, Vice President, Otter Creek Audubon Society

Get outside on a winter's morning and explore Wright Park with OCAS Vice President Barb Otsuka. The hike will explore tracks and signs left by wildlife visitors and residents and observe some of the birds that make Wright Park their winter home.

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 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 practices, explaining what it's about and how you can achieve it. For a complete listing of the management practices, visit our website, www.familyforests.org, under "Publications," or give us a call (453-7728) and we'll mail or e-mail you a copy.*

Why Leave Small Branches in the Forest?

by David Brynn

VFF Forest Management Practice: *Leave all materials that are less than 3 inches in diameter on the site.*

In his book, *The Soil and Health* (1947), Sir Albert Howard pointed out the direct connection between the health of the soil and the health of the plants, animals, and humans that depend upon that soil. He went on to describe the role of decomposed organic matter or *humus* in making the soil healthy.

"Humus is the most significant of all Nature's reserves and as such deserves a detailed examination. A very perfect example of the method by which Nature makes humus and thus initiates the turning of her Wheel is afforded by the floor of the forest.

Dig down idly with a stick under any forest tree: first there will be a rich, loose accumulation of litter made up of dead leaves, flowers, twigs, fragments of bark, bits of decaying wood, and so forth, passing gradually as the material becomes more tightly packed into rich, moist, sweet-smelling earth, which continues downwards for some inches and which, when disturbed, reveals many forms of tiny insect and animal life.

We have been given here a glimpse of the way Nature makes humus – the source from which the trunk of the tree has drawn its resisting strength, its leaves their glittering beauty."

Forest friends and stewards can give the forest a helping hand in the making of this all-important humus by leaving small limbs and branches to rot in the forest. Although the practice appears a bit messy to some, the health benefits

for the forest are enormous. In fact, the limbs will rot very quickly, especially if they are lopped close to the ground.

Others might suggest that it is wasteful to let perfectly good wood rot in the forest. But in reality, there is no such thing as waste in a healthy natural ecosystem. The forest can and will use the nutrients and energy embedded in the limbs. And besides, an acre might produce half a cord of limbwood per year. This would have a stumpage value of \$5 on a good day. The ecological value of this woody material far exceeds \$5!

The limbwood adds important sources of carbon and energy to the forest floor. It also increases the ability of the forest to hold on to positively charged cations such as calcium and magnesium. These elements are often naturally in very short supply—even more so now, due to the accelerated losses from acid rain.

The limbwood absorbs much of the energy from pounding rain, reducing soil erosion. And when there is overland water flow during major storm events, the limbwood serves as debris dams that slow the runoff while trapping soil particles before they are lost to the streams. By leaving limbwood in the forest, landowners protect seedlings from white-tailed deer, provide habitat for many critters, and discourage unauthorized ATVs. ♦

David Brynn is VFF's founder and advisor and the Addison County Forester.

Federal Funding for Wildlife Habitat Improvement Available

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) has cost-share funds available for wildlife habitat improvement projects. The program provides 75% cost-share for numerous management practices including: tree planting (hedge rows, Clayplain Forest restoration, etc.), field mowing and brush hogging, mast tree release, apple tree release and pruning, wetland restoration, invasive exotics control, and streambank restoration. Interested landowners should contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service directly. Their number in Addison County is 388-6748. ♦

VFF Portfolio Takes Another Step Forward

by David Brynn

Four VFF certified forest landowners are preparing for upcoming timber harvests in a whole new way. By working together and pooling their standing marked trees in VFF's Portfolio of "trees the forest is willing to yield," they hope to improve the cost-effectiveness of their small-scale harvests.

The four certified parcels have much in common. Each of the family forests has an approved forest management plan that provides for the conservation of water quality, site productivity, and native biological diversity while also prescribing timber management activities.

Each of the family forests has been carefully marked for a commercial timber harvest by a professional forester according to approved plans. And each forest has a summary of the number of trees and estimated tree volumes marked by species.

At Chris Johnson and Carol Boyd's woodlot in Lincoln and Bristol, Upland Forestry marked a total of 346 trees and roughly 30,000 board feet for cutting in 6 small patch cuts and a thinning. White and yellow birch, red and sugar maple, black cherry, white ash, and beech will be harvested under frozen winter and dry summer conditions.

In Rita and John Elder's Starksboro sugarbush, white birch and white ash trees will be removed to favor sugar maples. About 124 trees and 15,000 board feet are marked for harvest under frozen winter conditions.

The Watershed Center's pine plantation just north of the reservoir on the Waterworks Property is marked for thinning. The harvest will remove every fifth row and lightly thin remaining rows, yielding 172 red pine trees (10,524 board feet) and 204 white pine trees (12,360 board feet).

About 40 acres of the Vermont Land Trust's Little Hogback parcel in Monkton—described earlier in this newsletter—has been marked by Harris Roen for thinning. An additional 6.5 acres is marked for regeneration in small patches. This sale has about 50,000 board feet of timber of many species, predominantly red oak and sugar maple.

Each of these sales is very small. Some are so small that, were they offered for bid separately, it would be difficult

to interest prospective buyers in looking at the marked trees, much less in getting them to submit a bid on the timber. In the VFF Portfolio approach, the timber sale showings for each of the woodlots are coordinated to happen on the same day.

At the showings, the prospective buyers will be shown the timber and introduced to the sale conditions. They will be asked to bid on the timber in two ways. The first bid will be the *Lump Sum Plus Method* that was described in the VFF Fall 2004 newsletter. In this approach, the buyers give the price they are willing to pay for the standing trees, cut into logs, and readied for trucking on the designated landing. The logger works for the landowner (the seller) instead of the mill (the purchaser).

The second bid method is similar to the traditional mill scale method where the sawmill uses the International ¼ scale and their own grading system to evaluate logs when delivered to the mill. However, the VFF approach differs in that the prospective purchaser will be asked to use the grading system developed by the US Forest Service and

to scale the logs on the landing.

In one final twist, the prospective purchasers will be asked what prices they would ask to 'sell back' lumber to the landowners. In this particular case, the landowners are interested in getting back a portion of the lower grade lumber from their logs in order to convert the lumber into hardwood strip flooring. The sawmill can keep the higher value FAS and Select lumber as well as the lower values cants and slabs.

In the past, sawmills have been reluctant to strike this type of arrangement. However, with supplies of timber being constrained, we hope that this pooling of marked trees, as well as FSC-certified acres, will help to improve access to cost-effective, high quality, value-adding services and provide the raw material for producing face-based, place-based, Family Forest® Brand flooring.

Will it work? Find out in the next VFF newsletter. And until then, "May the Forest Be With You!" ♦

David Brynn is VFF's founder and advisor and the Addison County Forester.

"We hope that this pooling of marked trees, as well as FSC-certified acres, will help to improve access to cost-effective, high quality, value-adding services and provide the raw material for producing face-based, place-based, Family Forest® Brand flooring."

COLBY HILL ECOLOGICAL PROJECT

The Colby Hill Ecological Project monitors the biological diversity—plants, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, invertebrates, lepidoptera (butterflies), and odonates (dragonflies)—of 680 acres of private land in Lincoln and Bristol, Vermont. Now entering its seventh field season, CHEP is accumulating information that will help provide baseline ecological data against which the biodiversity, biological integrity, and water quality of other properties in this region can be measured.

Of Beetles, Mites, and Spiders: CHEP Surface-Active Invertebrates Study

Invertebrates dominate the earth's biota. The number of described species approximates 2 million, but some estimates of invertebrate species richness are as high as 80 million. Despite their important contribution to biological diversity, however, terrestrial invertebrates have generally received little attention in conservation planning.

—Mark Ward, Jeffery Collins, & Susan Young

(from the introduction to the final CHEP report on surface invertebrates)

After countless hours sorting and classifying thousands of specimens, CHEP researchers Mark Ward, Jeffery Collins, and Susan Young released their final report on surface-active terrestrial invertebrates on CHEP-monitored lands. Between 1999 and 2002, the bug team collected 11,990 specimens in 107 subsamples. The collected invertebrates represented seven phylogenetic classes and 22 orders. Researchers identified 5,761 specimens to the family level, accounting for 101 invertebrate families.

Of the nearly 12,000 invertebrates collected, 6,073 were mites (order: Acarina). The orders with next highest number of specimens were the springtails (Collembola) and the beetles (Coleoptera). The order Coleoptera was represented by the largest number of families (22).

What is the upshot of all these numbers in layman's terms? As Ward, Collins, and Young state in their report, *Terrestrial invertebrates are low on the food chain and thus respond more rapidly to subtle environmental changes than*

vertebrates. In small preserves, invertebrates offer a way of monitoring ecological integrity that may not be feasible with relatively small vertebrate populations. The baseline data on invertebrates present on CHEP lands—which are typical of much of the landscape in this part of the western Green Mountains—can help scientists track the region's ecological health. ♦

Research Reports On-Line

The Colby Hill Ecological Project is collecting long-term biodiversity data on lands typical of mid-elevation Green Mountain landscape. Some of those reports are already available for viewing on our website, <http://www.familyforests.org/public-education/colby-hill.shtml>. Others will be added shortly. Tune into our website to stay up-to-date on the results of this intensive inventory process.

Wildlife Monitoring Tool for Landowners

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension has published *A Landowner's Guide to Inventorying and Monitoring Wildlife in New Hampshire*, designed to help landowners better understand the wildlife on their properties. It offers tips on observing wildlife, along with worksheets to help you keep track of your observations, guidance on creating a habitat map of your property, detailed how-to descriptions of wildlife inventory methods, and contact information for state and national wildlife monitoring programs where you can contribute to larger studies.

You can read the 86-page guide on-line at <http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Forestry/Pubs/wilguide.pdf> or purchase a \$10 hardcopy by writing: UNH Cooperative Extension Forestry Information Center, 214 Nesmith Hall, 131 Main St., Durham, NH 03824.



A Ctenuchid moth, native to northeastern United States and Canada, visits milkweed on CHEP-monitored lands in Lincoln, Vermont. Photo: Lester Anderson

Words matter, and the words we choose when defining relationships matter.

VFF’s work is all about relationships among members of the forest community—landowners, foresters, loggers, mill and kiln operators, wood workers, architects, forest products customers, and the forest itself. At VFF, we try to define and articulate relationships among forest community members in a way that shifts them from traditional linear, hierarchical, and often competitive relationships to ones that are circular, collaborative and mutually respectful.

In that light, we’ve reexamined our use of the words *steward* and *stewardship* to articulate the relationship between forest landowner and forest. The term *steward* implies hierarchy: The term *friend* does not. Picture yourself entering the forest as *steward*, then picture yourself entering it as *friend*. The difference is profound. With that in mind, we have created the *Forest and Forest Friend Agreement* to express the possibility of mutually respectful relationship. Though, of course, a forest doesn’t actually enter into a contractual agreement, you see evidence that it’s keeping its end of the bargain each time you see the fresh water, diverse habitats, and beauty it creates.



FOREST AND FOREST FRIEND AGREEMENT¹

This contract is made this ___th day of _____, 200_ between a ___ acre _____ forest community located in _____, Vermont and further described on the attached map, and here-in-after described as “Forest” and _____ of _____, Vermont here-in-after referred to as “Forest Friend”.

Forest agrees to:

1. Provide a beautiful place for soul restoration, peaceful contemplation, and re-creation;
2. Filter and provide clear, clean, wonderful water supplies;
3. Recycle leaves, twigs, branches, stems, and roots, and return them to the soil;
4. Provide a protective organic mantle that prevents the soil from compaction and erosion;
5. Mine bedrock for nutrients and minerals;
6. Provide habitat for a wide range of native plants and animals;
7. Recover fully from natural disturbance events; and
8. Provide many forest products as long as the ecological capacity of the forests allows such.

Forest Friend agrees to:

1. Conserve forest health as the highest priority;
2. Remove forest products from the forest only when it does not reduce the forest’s capacity for self renewal;
3. Identify the natural communities of the forest as one of the first steps in management;
4. Carefully design, layout, construct, maintain, and close all elements of the access network in full compliance with the spirit and intent of applicable best management practices;
5. Protect site productivity through excellent design of access and by exercising restraint in removing biomass;
6. Be more concerned with what is left than what is taken;
7. Practice full cost and benefit accounting;
8. Mimic natural systems to the maximum extent possible; and
9. Combat invasive exotics.

It is mutually agreed that:

1. Forest health is the forest’s capacity for self-renewal;
2. Conservation is the effort by humans to understand and preserve that capacity;
3. Wilderness provides the base-datum of normality of how a healthy ecosystem looks and functions;
4. Forests were healthy long before humans arrived to cultivate them; and
5. Without healthy forest ecology there cannot be a healthy forest economy or community.

Signed: _____ (Forest) Date: _____ Witness: _____
Signed: _____ (Forest Friend) Date: _____ Witness: _____

¹ This document has been assembled by VFF, but it was inspired by the creative work of Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, Paul Hawken, Justin Brand, Terry Tempest Williams, and many others. We thank and honor them all.

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Participants in VFF's recent Community Forests Project public information meeting look over a location map of the Little Hogback Community Forest. See lead story, page 1.