In Search of a New Land Ethic

A Note from the Founder

Because we all share this planet earth, we have to live in harmony with each other and with nature. This is not just a dream, but a necessity.

— Dalai Lama XIV

The autumn 2012 edition of Vermont Life magazine features a story about logging in Vermont. It makes the point that loggers are not appreciated for the high quality work that many of them do and for the essential roles they play in our forest economy. The article rightly suggests that “loggers have a public relations problem.”

Although this public relations issue is very real, Vermont’s loggers also need the compensation, training, equipment, and regulatory environment that will promote the kind of forest conservation work that most of them would like to deliver. (The Vermont Life article features a full page photo of a mud-caked skidder wheel that drives this point home!) In short, this lack of appreciation of loggers represents much more than a public relations problem. It is a forest relations problem that requires a holistic solution.

In order to be in harmony, our relationships with our forests must be less exploitive and more restorative. Evidence of this new relationship will include cleaner streams, more productive forest soils, enhanced biological diversity, improved carbon sequestration, and increased resistance to invasive exotics.

Vermont was named for the verdant, primeval, temperate rainforests that once blanketed her mountains. Today, even after three centuries of road building, land clearing, and timber cutting, Vermont is still a place where biologically diverse forests are willing to grow, but we cannot take their resilience for granted.

Founded in 1995, Vermont Family Forests’ mission is to help “preserve the capacity of Vermont’s forests for self-renewal, and, when ecologically appropriate, to cultivate local forests for community benefit.”

Vermont Family Forests’ work has taken many forms. We pioneered FSC Group Certification. We created a portfolio of “what the forest wants to yield” and got architects to design for it. We developed, adopted, and apply the VFF Forest Health Checklist and the Town Forest Health Check. We monitor forest health through the Colby Hill Ecological Project. We help make forest ownership possible through innovative community forestry. We demonstrate the VFF Community Supported Forestry Model. And much more.

In a nutshell, VFF advocates for a different relationship with the forest well beyond that articulated by Gifford Pinchot as Wise Use. VFF seeks a relationship that puts forest health first. We try to conserve water quality, soil productivity, and native biological diversity before harvesting trees for human use.

Manifesting this new relationship is a major task, especially considering that our economic system presently fails to account for air, water, soil, or biodiversity. This faulty accounting requires the adoption of a land ethic that recognizes forests as members of the human community and vice versa.

In an age of a rapidly changing climate and an exploding global population, we need to change our ways and not just our message. We need to take better care of all of the players, including loggers and landowners, value-adders, and customers. Most important, we need to put forest health first, on the ground, day-in and day-out. As the Dalai Lama pointed out: This is not just a dream, but a necessity!

This annual report summarizes some of the key activities we have accomplished in 2012. We deeply appreciate your continued interest and support.

May the forest be with us!

David J. Brynn
Research & Demonstration

Vermont Family Forests’ Colby Hill Ecological Project completed 15 years of long-term ecological monitoring work in Lincoln. The 2012 researchers included Jim Andrews (reptiles/amphibians); Jan Decher, Chris Gray, and John Hutchins (small mammals); Warren and Barry King (breeding birds); Greg Borah (mammal tracking); and Marc Lapin (flora phenology). Jan Decher presented the team’s findings at the 86th Annual Conference of the German Society for Malamian Biology in Frankfurt, Germany. CHEP research findings can be viewed at www.familyforests.org.

In 2012, the Vermont Reptiles and Amphibians Atlas Project, directed by Jim Andrews, reviewed and entered over 2200 new Vermont reptile and amphibian reports from every county in Vermont. Reports included all known herptiles in Vermont, except Fowler’s toad (missing from Vermont since 2007) and boreal chorus frog (missing from Vermont since 1999). 488 people submitted reports, including 390 first-time contributors.

Vermont Family Forests continued its NeighborWood Project, as part of the University of Vermont’s Community Biomass Project. A NeighborWood Heating Charrette has been planned for November 17 in Bristol to envision a Hogback EcoRegion Firewood Heating Cooperative. For more information, contact info@familyforests.org.

The renovation of the George D. Aiken Center at the University of Vermont was completed in 2012. VFF helped to procure 27,000 board from the Jericho Research Forest, a process involving many UVM students; Brendan Weiner, former Green Forestry Director & VFF Conservation Forester; Bill Torrey, logging operator; Jerry Currier, trucker; Ken Gagnon of Gagnon Sawmill; and many more. Vermont Family Forests’ systems were employed from forest to delivered products. Learn more at www.uvm.edu/rsenr/greening-aiken.

Public Education

VFF visited several local schools in 2012. Our most recent outing was with Travis Park’s remarkable 5th graders at Bristol Elementary School. We explored The Watershed Center’s Edith Stock Community Forest on Mountain Street, where students gathered data on forest health and productivity.

Hogback Community College. Jim Andrews taught his 2-credit Conserving Vermont’s Reptiles and Amphibians course again this year. John Elder led his second HCC course, entitled Writing the Waterworks. Rachel Edwards completed spring and summer sessions of Forest Tai Chi. Wendy Sue Harper’s Forest Soils of the Hogback EcoRegion was exceptionally well received. The Waterworks Property served as the outdoor classroom for many sessions. Game of Logging Training included 9 courses and 85 students in 2012.

Community Forests

Vermont Family Forests has been assisting in the conservation of another forest located just to the northwest of the original Waterworks Property in Bristol. When completed, the conservation easement will reside with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the land will be held by The Watershed Center. VFF also provided a timber appraisal of a 380-acre parcel north of Bristol in anticipation of conservation by the Vermont Land Trust.

Eco-spirit Award

In February 2012 David Brynn was honored to receive the Spirit in Nature’s Eco-Spirit Award on behalf of Vermont Family Forests. “The Eco-Spirit Award is presented annually to persons whose lives are illuminated by their appreciation of the beauty, mystery, and preciousness of the natural world…. They lead us to a path of hope for a future of all life and nature on earth.”

VFF Products

VFF cruising sticks, t-shirts, and Town Forest Health Check manuals continue to be very popular items. We are also selling non-petroleum chainsaw bar and chain oil. The oil is non-carcinogenic, extends chainsaw bar life, and reduces groundwater pollution.
Project Partners

Bristol Best Night
Bristol Conservation Commission
Bristol Elementary School
Bristol Recreation Department
Forest Guild
International Society of Ethnobiology
Lake Champlain Maritime Museum
Lewis Creek Association
Lincoln Conservation Commission
Lincoln Library
Little Hogback Community Forest
Middlebury College
Monkton Conservation Commission
Mount Abraham Union High School
New Haven Planning Commission
Northeast Woodland Training
Shoreham Carpentry Company
Starksboro Conservation Commission
The University of Vermont
The Watershed Center
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Project
Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation

Staff Changes

After seven years of work on small mammal research for VFF’s Colby Hill Ecological Project (CHEP), Dr. Jan Decher has accepted a position as a Curator of Mammals at the Zoological Museum Alexander Koenig in Bonn, Germany. Jan will be responsible for the digitization of the German bat banding database and the entire mammal collection. We wish Jan and his family much happiness.

Chris Gray, mammalogist at the University of Vermont, will continue the small mammal monitoring for CHEP in 2013.

E. Callie Brynn was named as VFF’s Conservation Mapping Specialist. Using ArcView spatial data system, Callie creates superb maps for forests in the VFF pool. Callie graduated from the University of Vermont with a degree in Art History. In addition to her mapping at VFF, Callie works as a Right-of-Way Agent with Coler & Colantonio in Hinesburg, VT.

Alan Rawls has been working part-time as a VFF Forest Conservation Technician. A Monkton native, Alan comes to VFF by way of Oregon, where he worked as a timber cruiser, logger, and tree planting contractor. This summer Alan cleared trees and shrubs from the Ann Hoover Dam at the Waterworks, completed a parking area reclamation project in Lincoln, and completed several non-commercial forestry projects for VFF landowners. Welcome, Alan, to the VFF family and thank you for all of your high quality forest conservation work!
Thank You to Our Friends~

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Charles and Elise Adams
Lester and Monique Anderson
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Jason and Nina Bacon
Daniel Baker
Cindy L. Barber
Ruth and Will Beecher
Mark and Nancy Benz
Robert Bernstein
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