

**Caring for Our Home Grounds:
A Commons Conservation Congress in Vermont's Center-West Ecoregion**

Opening Talk Notes – November 2, 2019

By David Brynn, Co-Founder, Executive Director, and Conservation Forester
Vermont Family Forests Foundation

GREETINGS TO VERMONT'S CENTER-WEST ECOREGION

Good morning. Welcome. Greetings to you. Thank you for being present .

Now, please rise and face north toward the northern bank of the Winooski River.
Please call and respond.

HAIL WINOOSKI RIVER!

HAIL WINOOSKI RIVER!

Now please turn east toward the Green Mountains to the eastern edge of the Mad River Watershed.

HAIL MAD RIVER!

HAIL MAD RIVER!

Now please turn south past the New Haven River toward the southern edge of the Middlebury River watershed.

HAIL MIDDLEBURY RIVER!

HAIL MIDDLEBURY RIVER!

Now please turn west toward the western edge of our still-Great Lake Champlain.

HAIL LAKE CHAMPLAIN!

HAIL LAKE CHAMPLAIN!

Now please turn to the person next to you and say

HAIL FRIEND, WELCOME TO VERMONT'S CENTER-WEST ECOREGION!

HAIL FRIEND, WELCOME TO VERMONT'S CENTER-WEST ECOREGION!

Thank you.

WELCOME

Good morning again.

Welcome to “Caring for Our Home Grounds: A Commons Conservation Congress in Vermont’s Center-West Ecoregion”.

My name is David Brynn. I am a Commoner. I live in the Isham Brook sub-watershed of the New Haven River watershed in Vermont’s Center-West Ecoregion. I am also Co-Founder, Executive Director, and Conservation Forester with Vermont Family Forests, a lead sponsor of today’s Commons Conservation Congress.

Special thanks to all of you for being fully present and for all who have made today possible.

WHAT IS A COMMONS?

Today, we the people who live, work, and play in Vermont’s Center-West Ecoregion are gathering as Commoners to explore ways to help our water, wildlife, and air resources weather the storms of an increasingly unpredictable, violent, and rapidly-changing climate.

Aristotle said that there are three types of things and interests – publicly-held things and interests, privately-held things and interests, and commonly-held things and interests.

The publicly- and privately-held things and interests are generally enclosed. The natural ones have deeds and boundaries associated with them. They have ‘yours’ and ‘mine’ associated with them. National forests and family forests are examples of publicly-held and privately-held things.

The commonly-held things and interests are generally unenclosed. The natural ones generally do not have deeds and property lines associated with them. They have ‘ours’ associated with them. The natural ones flow, roam, and blow across publicly- and privately-held properties. Water, wildlife, and air are examples of commonly-held natural resources.

Our water, wildlife, and air resources are examples of commonly-held things and we now call them common-pool resources. We Commoners have real, compelling, and special interests in conserving the health and resilience of our common-pool resources.

To paraphrase David Bollier, “Commons certainly include physical and tangible resources of all sorts, but they are more accurately defined as paradigms that combine a distinct community (A) with a set of practices, values, and norms (B), that are used to conserve or manage a common-pool resource (C).”

“Put another way, a Commons consists of a common-pool resource + a community of commoners + a set of practices, values and norms adopted to conserve the common-pool resource.

The three elements – A. Common-pool resource, B. Commoners, and C. Commoning practices -- are an integrated, interdependent whole.”

In short, all three elements are required to make a Commons a Commons.

WHAT ARE WE UP TO TODAY?

Today we are focusing on the common-pool resources of water, wildlife, and air within Vermont’s Center-West Ecoregion.

Today the community is a group of people who have stepped up as Commoners to explore how to do a much better job of caring for our home grounds.

Today a range of protocols, values, norms, and optimal common-pool resource conservation practices will emerge from our facilitated discussions.

In sum, we are partaking in a Commons conservation dance that involves: A. Our Common-pool resources of water, wildlife and air; B. We the people acting as a community of Commoners; and C. A yet-to-be-determined set of social and ecological practices, values, and norms that will conserve our common-pool resources in a rapidly changing climate.

We could decide to set up a wiki commons, or a local currency commons, or a tool share commons, and/or a community forest commons to help conserve our natural water, wildlife, and air common-pool resources in Vermont’s Center-West Ecoregion. We might decide to set up a water, wildlife, and air common-pool resource monitoring cooperative.

All of these involve: A. Common-pool resources + B. Commoners + C. Commoning practices. They meet the definition of a Commons.

Whatever options we ultimately decide upon, our task today is much simpler than we might at first expect.

Why?

Our common pool resources of water, wildlife, and air are calling out for conservation that is supported by the Commoners who live in this place we get to call home. A polluted Lake Champlain, our increasingly fragmented wildlife habitats, and an atmosphere that is choked with carbon all show that effective Commoning is needed. We Commoners are being summoned by our common-pool resources to wake up to our conservation responsibilities.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Buckminster Fuller reminded us that with any challenge, it is important to start with the Universe and it is equally important to be naïve enough to believe that we can make positive differences that will move us to a better place.

We can do this if we tap our collective consciousness, if we celebrate our ecological ethnicity, if we focus less on fighting the bad and much more on imagining and manifesting the good, if we embrace concurrence and inclusive, polycentric governance, if we move from a bio-centric world view to an eco-centric one, if we think and act holistically, if we employ the indigenous virtues of Gratitude, the western virtues of Prudence, and the eastern virtues of Compassion. If we give each other and the land our mutual-aid and support.

As our friend Deb Brighton recently reminded me, the economy is a commons. It too is largely unenclosed and tended or exploited by those who step up to the task.

We the people -- we the Commoners -- can re-shape our economy through the identification, adoption, and application of commoning practices that represent our best and brightest steps toward a healthier, more beautiful, more inclusive, more resilient, home grounds nested in Mother Earth and manifested in a triple top-line economy.

We certainly can and probably should still rely on the State of Vermont to be our trustee. But we can also elect to step up to more of the task as Commoners.

We have many bright angels ready to help us. For example:

- Aldo Leopold advised us that tinkers must keep all the parts and that health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. By land, Leopold meant the soil, water, flora, wildlife and the air.
- Gary Snyder instructed us to find a place, call it home, do well by it, and hope that others are doing the same elsewhere.
- Wendell Berry said that if people want their community to cohere, to flourish and to last, they will always include nature as members of their community.
- David Bollier reminded us that there are essentially no natural commons unless commoners step up to the tasks of conserving them through commoning. David made it clear that Harden completely and conveniently missed that point in his *Tragedy of the Commons*.
- Professor Eleanor Ostrom earned a Noble prize for economics for her life-long efforts in advancing the care of common-pool resources and the use of polycentric governance. Dr. Ostrom left us with Eight Points of Commoning that are available to serve as a checklist for today's explorations.

UNWRAPPING THE GIFTS ~ AGENDA

Today we seek to honor these and many other gifts. And today we hope to unwrap many of them and more in service to our natural water, wildlife, and air common-pool resources here in our home grounds of Vermont's Center-West Eco-region.

Here's today's agenda:

First, we will acknowledge the gifts from the Western Abenaki peoples who have loved and honored these home grounds for thousands of years.

Second, we will learn about and explore the Vermont Conservation Design as an essential tool for conserving our common-pool resources of water, wildlife, and air.

Third, we will gather in small facilitated groups and then reconvene as a community of commoners to explore and celebrate what we love and to identify tangible ways that we the people – we the Commoners -- can step up to conserve the natural common-pool resources of water, wildlife, and air in Vermont's Center-West Eco-region, the place we get to call home.

NO SMALL TASK

This is no small task. However, we are up to it. Why?

Because we love this place.

Because we are becoming Commoners to this place we call home.

And because we are waking up to our roles as Commoners and to the power of our emerging community in conserving the health, integrity and beauty of our common-pool resources starting with water, wildlife, and air.

Shall we begin?

[[[Introduce Sandra

Introduce Eric

Eric Sorenson, is a *Natural Community Ecologist with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife*.

Eric has been with the department since 1996. He holds a master's degree in ecology from the University of Maine. As the natural community ecologist for the department, Eric is responsible for the description and classification of Vermont's natural communities, working with landowners and the general public to conserve important natural communities, reviewing and providing recommendations on how to minimize environmental impacts of development projects and providing presentations and field trips based on ecology, wetlands, natural communities, and biological diversity.

Additionally, Eric is also responsible for conducting state-wide inventories of natural communities as well as identifies opportunities to protect biological diversity and landscape-scale features (such as large habitat blocks and wildlife corridors). Eric is a principal architect of the Vermont Conservation Design. Eric co-authored the seminal book *Wetlands, Woodlands, and Wildlands: a guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont* published first in 2000, again in 2005 and with a revised and updated version to be released in time for the holidays. During his time off, Eric enjoys hiking, traveling, running, gardening, and harvesting trees in his woods for firewood.

Introduce sessions

Wrap up

David Bollier, Thursday, November 7, 2019 at 6:30 pm at the Walkover Gallery

Wiki

Thank yous