



Annual Report 2022

The Heart of Forest Care

"Always include local nature—the land, the water, the air, the native creatures—within the membership of the community."

— Wendell Berry, "Conserving Communities," *Another Turn of the Crank* (1995)

"In the company of spiritual friends, we can help each other uphold our vows by offering compassion in the face of environmental suffering and working together to restore damaged areas."

— Stephanie Kaza, *Green Buddhism: Practice and Compassionate Action in Uncertain Times* (2019)

Over 25 years ago, we founded Vermont Family Forests to serve as a forestry organization dedicated to putting forest health first. We knew it would be challenging and soon realized that "If it isn't complicated, it isn't conservation!" In the early days, we invited 40 family forest owners to join us for a conversation on what this might look like. I recall standing in front of that room in the Old Bristol High School and looking at this amazing group of people who I considered to be my forest friends. I was the Addison County Forester at that time. Many of these same folks and their children and even grandchildren are still with VFF today.

At this first meeting, I pondered what it was that these people had in common beyond the fact they were NIPFs — non-industrial, private, forestland owners. About that time, we started calling them family forest owners and the name stuck.

What did they have in common? It was that each one of them loved their land. Values and interests were different but to a person they loved their land, wanted to do well by it, and still do.

We hope this 2022 annual report captures the love that is still shared, honored, and cultivated at VFF. Really good people who love their land. Tending their forests organically. Protecting health and beauty. Breaking bread together. Striving to slow, spread, and sink the flow. Building "lines of grace" that hopefully are up to the challenges of a rapidly changing climate. Focusing more on what is left than what is removed. Monitoring the health of our unenclosed ecological commons—water quality, wildlife species richness, atmospheric carbon storage and sequestration, and forest reliance. Why? They love the land. All of it. Not just the trees and soil they own. But also the critters, water, atmospheric carbon, and forest resilience, which are unenclosed and upon which all Vermonters depend and benefit.

It seems we are always busy at Vermont Family Forests. In 2022 we were also productive in conserving forest ecosystem health in a variety of ways. And that is what gets us up in the morning. Enjoy!

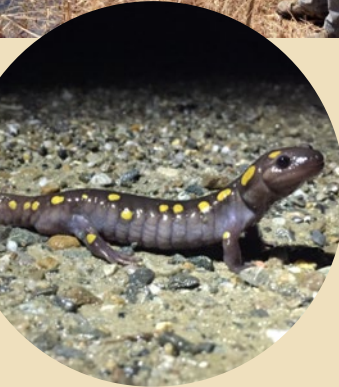
May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be safe. May you be free. And may the forest be with you.

David Brynn,
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "David J. Brynn".



Eastern newt (red eft stage) Lincoln



From top: Jim Andrews and Kate Kelly count wood frog and spotted salamander egg masses at a CHEP study pond; wood frog and spotted salamander; snake motel; new pool at VFF's Wells Farm, which quickly attracted breeding amphibians.

Colby Hill Ecological Project

2022 marked the 25th year of the Colby Hill Ecological Project (CHEP) biological inventory and monitoring on Vermont Family Forests' Anderson lands in Lincoln and Bristol. This year, members of the CHEP research team gathered data on amphibians, birds, large mammals, and water quality.

Herp Highlights in 2022

- In February, Jim Andrews presented his CHEP research—as detailed in *Phenological Differences in Wood Frog and Spotted Salamander Egg-Mass Onset and Peak Accumulation* (Andrews and Talmage, *Northeastern Naturalist*, Nov. 2021)—to the Association of Massachusetts Wetland Scientists (AMWS).
- The herp research team added three snake motels at VFF's Anderson Guthrie-Bancroft land, to better assess the presence of larger snakes. Topped with black rubber, the "motels," with their stacked layers of wood planks, attract snakes to bask.
- The team also performed tree species surveys near each of the amphibian breeding pools and the salamander covers. This baseline data will help researchers track changes in forest composition (specifically as related to Emerald Ash Borer) and assess impacts on amphibian populations.
- Finally, in an inspiring example of resilience and renewal, a shallow depression that formed during construction work at Wells Farm in 2021 quickly filled with water, creating a new pool near one of the three CHEP research ponds. Researchers kept an eye on the pool and noted that by April 5, 2022, wood frogs had moved in and laid eggs. By April 13, spotted salamanders arrived, and American toads by July 15.

Eyes on Water Quality

In 2022, we added Cold Brook to our water quality study, which began in 2021 with Beaver Meadow and Isham brooks. The combined acreage of our newly purchased Cold Brook lands, along with adjacent Guthrie-Bancroft land, comprises the lion's share of the Cold Brook watershed.

Volunteers from the Addison County River Watch Collaborative collected water samples to measure *E. coli*, temperature, phosphorus, nitrate, turbidity, and chloride. We plan to use the data to assess the influence of conservation practices on stream health. (Photo: Craig Zondag)



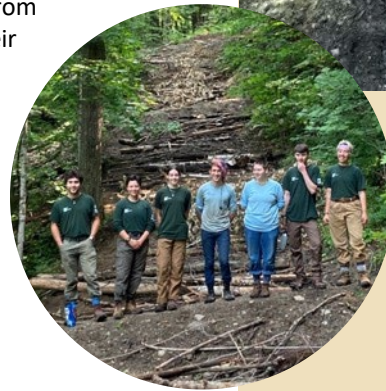


Eastern meadowlark, Lincoln (Nick Tepper)

Cold Brook Land Conservation

In March, 2022, Vermont Family Forests purchased a 95.6-acre forest in Bristol and Lincoln that adjoins two other VFF parcels in the Cold Brook watershed. Encompassing a long stretch of Cold Brook, the land is identified as highest priority area for wildlife habitat connectivity by Vermont Conservation Design. After assessing existing logging access roads on this steeply sloped parcel, we hired a local firm (Nezin Excavating) to build 65 broad-based dips along the steepest road section.

In July, we welcomed a crew from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to further stabilize and rewild this steep road section with logs and brush from the surrounding forest. The crew camped at VFF's Wells Farm during their week of work. Their efforts helped stabilize forest soil and thwart erosion, protecting water quality in nearby Cold Brook. During a celebration at the end of their week of work, crew members described the immense satisfaction of taking part in this restorative work.

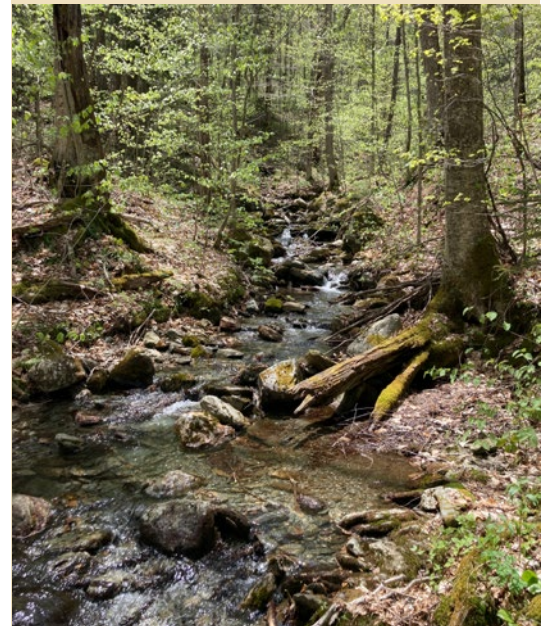


Chainsaw Training & Forest Renewal

We've hosted Game of Logging training courses for more than 20 years, knowing they are a key to safe, careful woodwork. Working with the excellent instructors at Northeast Woodland Training, we offered eight sessions that served 80 students in 2022.

Most classes were held at our Abraham's Knees land in Lincoln, where the students' training served forest health. The trees they felled remain in place, where they will help restore forest soils and deter deer browse, aiding forest regeneration.

In 2022, we also installed a gate—built by local metal-fabrication guru Chuck Norton— at Abraham's Knees to deter motorized vehicles, which will help to limit soil erosion on existing access trails. Foot-powered travel is welcome.



From top: Andrew Cousino excavates broad-based dips to stop erosion of a steep access trail on VFF's newly acquired land along Cold Brook. The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps crew stands amid their rewilding handiwork on the logging access trail and log landing along Route 17. Their efforts protect water quality in Cold Brook.





Norton Reservoir, The Waterworks, Bristol



Conservation Forestry

2022 brought changes to our conservation forestry staff. After eight years with Vermont Family Forests, Kathleen Stutzman returned to the forestry program at the University of Vermont to pursue a master's degree. Kathleen first came to VFF as a volunteer in 2014 and soon joined the VFF staff. Heartfelt gratitude for all her great work.

Ralph Tursini joined Vermont Family Forests as conservation forester in March, bringing his wide and deep skills as forester, educator, and woodworker to the table. In addition to working with several landowners to write or update forest conservation plans, Ralph worked in a number of family forests to help landowners carry out careful, organic, ecologically sound practices outlined in their Current Use (UVA) plans.



Collaborating to Expand Current Use

Responding to an urgent need to expand Vermont's timber-focused Current Use (UVA) program to recognize and value wild forests, Vermont Family Forests continued work with the Wild Forests Vermont initiative. VFF Executive Director David Brynn testified before the House Natural Resources Committee on the importance of UVA changes from the perspective of a family forest owner. He submitted op-ed pieces to *VT Digger*, *Addison Independent*, and *Times Argus* on behalf of Wild Forests Vermont, supporting inclusion of a Wild Forests Category within UVA.

In her testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee, Duxbury Selectboard member Jamison Ervin—a global expert on parks and forest management—cited a Vermont Family Forests study ([Enhancing Flood Resiliency of Vermont State Lands](#), commissioned by the State of Vermont and completed in collaboration with hydrologist Kristen Underwood), which shows the impacts of forest roads on state lands on stream sedimentation, flood resilience, and water quality.

During the 2022 legislative session, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 146, amending Vermont's Current Use program to add a sub-category of "Reserve Forestland" to the Managed Forestland land use category. This modest change allows private landowners whose forests meet particular (and frankly uncommon) criteria to manage qualifying portions of their land for non-timber values. This is a small step in the right direction, and we will continue to work for more.

Community-based Forest Renewal

Conventional forest plans use the term "Timber Stand Improvement," or TSI, to describe various forest management activities aimed at growing high-quality timber. We think "Community-based Forest Renewal" better describes the work we do to help landowners fulfill their Current Use forest management plan commitments. CFR practices focus first on forest health, with the side-benefit of improved timber quality. Through the CFR practice of girdling trees (above), landowners enhance large dead wood, feed mycorrhizae, maintain carbon storage, and provide habitat for wildlife.

Wild forests sequester and store carbon, protect water quality, support biodiversity, and increase flood resilience. They protect assets we hold in common—water, wildlife, and air—an immense contribution to the public good.





Chestnut-sided warbler, Lincoln (Nick Tepper)

Little Hogback Community Forest

Since 2007, the 115-acre Little Hogback Community Forest (LHCF) has been jointly owned by 16 shareholders. Each shareholder owns the right to enjoy and benefit from carefully conserved forestland on which subdivision, development, and over-cutting are off limits. Half the shares are reserved for community members whose incomes are less than the county median. Periodic timber sales fund land maintenance, property taxes, and bookkeeping.

In 2022, LHCF carried out its first commercial timber harvest since LHCF began in 2007. Utilizing the new access trail laid out and build in 2021—a true line of grace with gentle slopes, which replaced existing trail sections with much steeper grade—LHCF hired A. Johnson Co. to harvest 40,000 board feet of hardwoods. During the process of clearing the new access path and new log landing, LHCF felled many trees, producing 7 cords of firewood.



Family Forest Carbon Program

Developed by the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy in 2020, the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) connects family forest owners with carbon markets, empowering them to help address climate change while earning income from their land. In 2022, the program expanded to Vermont. Landowners began asking about the program, so we took a long, careful look at it, both to assess its merits in fighting climate change and to assess its applicability to the forest landowners we work with.

We began a pilot project in the fall, working with a small number landowners who were interested in learning more. Some parcels didn't meet the criteria for participation. Some landowners decided that the program—which carries a 20-year commitment—wasn't right for them. We navigated the enrollment process with one landowner, for whom the program was a great fit. By year's end, we concluded that the program is a good match for the way VFF relates to forests, making it a viable tool in the VFF forest conservation toolbox.



Hunting Access

In 2022, 25 hunters received written permission to hunt on VFF lands, where they occupy the ecological niche once held by wolves and mountain lions. We survey hunters at the end of each year, and always appreciate their stories and feedback, like these, from the 2022 hunting season...

"While on the line, north toward Mt Pleasant I saw a bear. Third bear seen in past four years in same area."

"No success in November but enjoyed the walk through the forest."



From top: VFF Executive Director David Brynn visited the log landing during the LHCF timber harvest; Paul Fornier performed the logging for A. Johnson Co. Simply equipped with chainsaw, skidder, and log truck, and working under frozen winter conditions, Paul's light-on-the-land work benefitted all involved, including the forest.

Bottom photos: LHCF members gathered in May to split two cords of firewood to sell. The sale helped defray such annual costs as taxes and bookkeeping.



West Barn, Wells Farm, Lincoln



From top: A spruce sapling affixed to the
ridgeline celebrates reconstruction of the
West Barn by Vermont Heavy Timber.
Jamie Masefield brought his expertise in
drystone dyking to Wells Farm, giving the
Middle Barn a beautiful new foundation.
New timbers mingle with old in the
restored bank barn. The West Barn's
timber frame rises. David Brynn stands in
the restored West Barn as he welcomes
visitors to our first gathering in October.
West side of the completed barn.

Restoring Wells Farm

Restoration of our education campus at Wells Farm took a major leap forward in 2022. Back in 2021, Miles Jenness of Vermont Heavy Timber began a major overhaul of the West Barn. Built in the 1860s, the West Barn is one of oldest barns in Lincoln, and it was in dire need of major repair. That year, Miles and his crew fully deconstructed the barn, stored all reusable timbers, and took damaged timbers back to Mile's workshop for restoration or replacement. Dave Newton and his crew then removed the crumbling foundation and completed a new concrete and masonry foundation.

In the summer of 2022, Miles and crew returned and the West Barn rose again. By October, they were adding the finishing touches, just in time for our first public gathering. We were mighty grateful for the rock-solid restoration work when the gales of December blasted through Lincoln.

Completion of the West Barn had big ripple effects for our education campus at Wells Farm. With timbers for the West Barn reconstruction stored in the Middle Barn, we were without indoor meeting space during the 15-month project. We scheduled our first Middle Barn event for October, with fingers crossed that the space would be ready. Indeed it was! We look forward to many more gatherings in the West and Middle barns in 2023 and far beyond.

With the Middle Barn fully occupied as storage for the West Barn reconstructions, we held our annual **Woodwinds in the Middle Barn** concert under a tent nearby. As they have for several years, members of the Full Circle Recorder ensemble sweetened the summer air with their harmonies.





VFF Anderson Wells Farm, Lincoln



Halcyon Journey at Wells Farm

What better way to herald the return of in-person gatherings to Wells Farm than with a gathering that celebrates an iconic species of Vermont's clean waterways—the belted kingfisher? More than 40 participants attended author Marina Richie's dynamic presentation of insights, images, and excerpts from her book, *Halcyon Journey: In Search of the Belted Kingfisher*, winner of a 2022 National Outdoor Book Award.





Common Polypody, Vergennes



From top: Students set up turtle traps during VFF's *Conserving Vermont's Reptiles* course; painted turtle; eastern newts; students in the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum's Longboats Program visit the Kenyon Family Forest; in May, they celebrated the completion of their whaling boat, *Sugar Moon*.

Hogback Community College

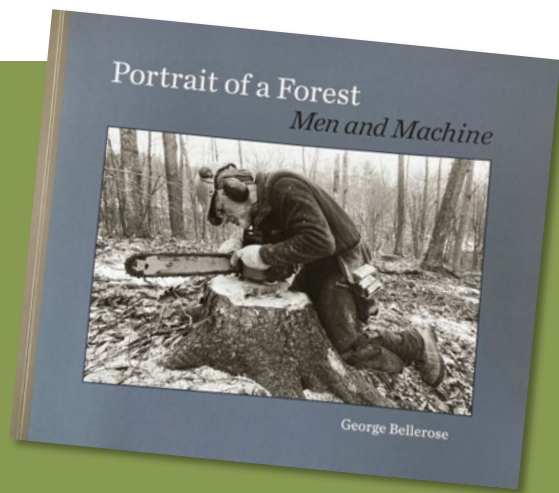
In 2022, VFF's Hogback Community College (HCC) was all about herps—reptiles and amphibians, that is. When Covid arrived in March, 2020, we suspended our in-person courses. One—*Conserving Vermont's Amphibians*—was in mid-stream (no pun intended). Students had just completed the in-class portion of the 23-hour course, but hadn't yet started field studies. In 2022, we picked up where we left off two years earlier. Herpetologist Jim Andrews led students on three full-day outings throughout the spring to see the remarkable amphibians who inhabit the varied landscapes of this place we call home.

Meanwhile, Jim taught a second HCC course for Vermont Family Forests in 2022—*Conserving Vermont's Reptiles*. During this 27-hour, in-depth exploration, 21 students encountered many of Vermont's turtles and snake species in the field, and learned about their ecology and conservation. Both courses offered more than 20 continuing forestry education credits through the Society of American Foresters.

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum

Each January, local high school students enrolled in the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum (LCMM) Longboats Program jump into an intensive, semester-long process of building a traditional wooden boat together. As he has done each winter for more than 20 years, VFF Executive Director David Brynn brought the students into the forest to get a hands-on experience of the forest community that provides wood for the museum's boat-building program. As luck would have it, the students' visit in 2022 to the Kenyon Family Forest in Monkton coincided with an active timber harvest there, under perfect winter conditions. So after exploring the basics of forest health and tree identification, students watched as Tom and David Kenyon felled white pines in their carefully tended forest, some of which were earmarked for the boat-building program. Over the next few months, the students built a beautiful 29' Beetle whaleboat that will be rowed and sailed as part of the museum's summer expeditionary program.

In December, Weybridge-based photojournalist George Bellerose gave us 100 copies of his new book, *Portrait of a Forest: Men and Machine*. In it, George brings his immense skills as photographer and writer to the spectrum of forest work here in the Center-west Ecoregion. We, in turn, shared these beautiful books with our forest landowners and community.





Spring Salamander, Brandon

Dick's Path— Tribute to a true friend of the forest

Dick and Sally Thodal stewarded their family forest in Middlebury together for many years until Dick passed away in 2022. Most of their forestland is on an island in the Muddy Brook tributary of Otter Creek. This required logging under frozen winter conditions, and Dick was inspired by the many logistical challenges. Over the years, he tested many approaches for getting forest products off the island in ways that were sustainable, safe, and strategic. Dick was excited to learn about VFF's legacy log forwarder—a unique rig designed to move large (as much as 32-foot!) logs out of the forest by lifting and rolling, rather than skidding them. This approach requires an access path with few ditches, many broad-based dips, good alignment, and gentle grades. We call such access paths lines of grace. Dick was intrigued by all of it.

Not that long ago, Dick and I walked to a huge white pine located deep in the Lands of the Watershed Center ("The Waterworks") that would be perfect for building a Lake Champlain Maritime Museum longboat. Though getting to "yes!" is an involved process, Dick was, as always, intrigued by the challenge. In tribute to Dick, we are proposing a project that we hope will result in a beautiful, multi-use, log forwarding path at The Waterworks. It is a complicated project. It will take noodling, examining various alternatives, following Optimal Conservation Practices, and a host of other things. In other words, this project has Dick's name all over it! Hopefully it will result in the Richard Thodal Memorial Log Forwarding Path—DICK's PATH for short.

— David Brynn

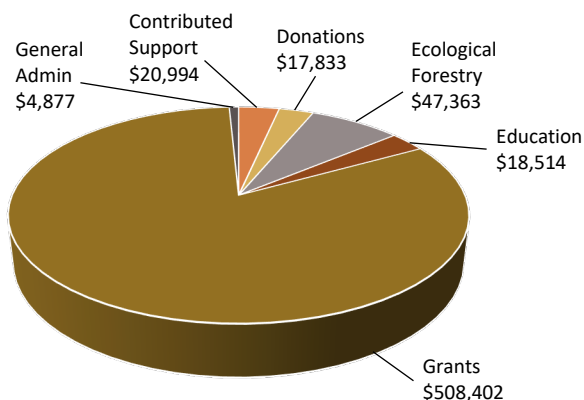


After Dick died on February 13, 2022, we received more than \$2,500 in donations in his memory. We will put that money toward a specific project in Dick's name. If all the details align, that project might be Dick's Path, described left. But whatever the project, it will reflect and honor Dick's immense heart and spirit.

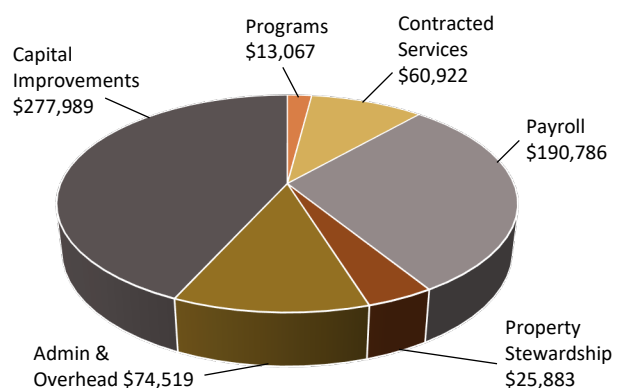
Financial Report

January 1 – December 31, 2022

Income (\$617,983)



Expenses (\$643,166)





Gratitude

Individual Donors

Cliff Adams
Marcia Adams
Bridget Asay & Mark Di Stefano
George & Paula Bellerose
Jo Bergedick
Kathleen Bushey
Aubrey Carpenter
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Marita Bathe Schine
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Kathleen Sullivan
Linda Thodal
Kathryn Tilton
Vermont Woods Studios
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Partners

Addison County River Watch
Collaborative
Addison Independent
American Endowment Foundation
Coca-Cola Matching Gifts
Colby Hill Fund
Growald Family Fund
International Business Machines
Kimball Office Services, Inc.
Lake Champlain Maritime Museum
Lewis Creek Association
Lintilhac Foundation
Little Hogback Community Forest
Lynne M Miller Family Trust
Mount Abraham Union High School
Northeast Wilderness Trust
Northeast Woodland Training
Scenic Valley Landscaping

Shoreham Carpentry Company
Silloway Computer Services
The Watershed Center
Town of Bristol
Town of Lincoln
United States Forest Service
United Way of Addison County
University of Vermont
Vermont Community Foundation
Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife
VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Vermont Youth Conservation Corps
Vermont Heavy Timber Company
Vermont Land Trust
Vermont Master Naturalists
VT Reptile & Amphibian Atlas Project
Wells Mountain, LLC

Vermont Family Forests' mission

is to observe, understand, and preserve forest ecosystem health; practice forest-centered conservation that is holistic and adaptive; support careful management of local family forests for ecological, economic, and social benefits; and foster a forest culture focused on community well-being, ecological resilience, and the quest of an optimal land ethic.

Staff

Callie Brynn, *Conservation Mapping Specialist*
David Brynn, *Executive Director and Conservation Forester*
Sandra Murphy, *Forest Community Outreach and Rewilding*
Dechen Rheault, *Homestead Caretaker*
Ralph Tursini, *Conservation Forester*

CHEP Research Associates

Jim Andrews
Greg Borah
Marc Lapin
Peter Meyer
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Kristen Underwood

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