



Thirty Years of Organic Family Forestry

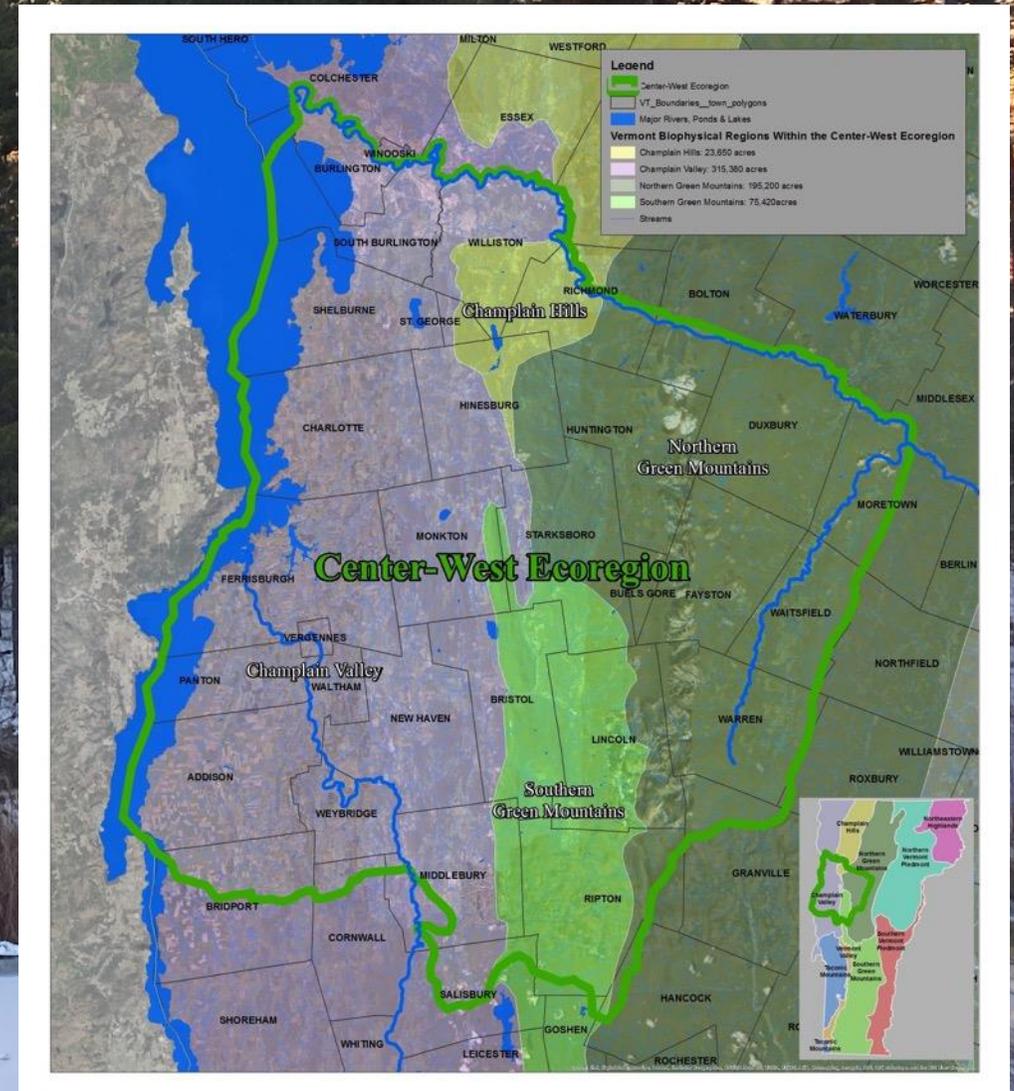
In Vermont's Center-West Ecoregion

by David Brynn
Executive Director
Vermont Family Forests

The Center-West Ecoregion—Our home grounds

*“Find your place on the planet. Dig in,
and take responsibility from there.*

– Gary Snyder



Three-decade quest

1. Honor the spirit & intention of Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program.

Government

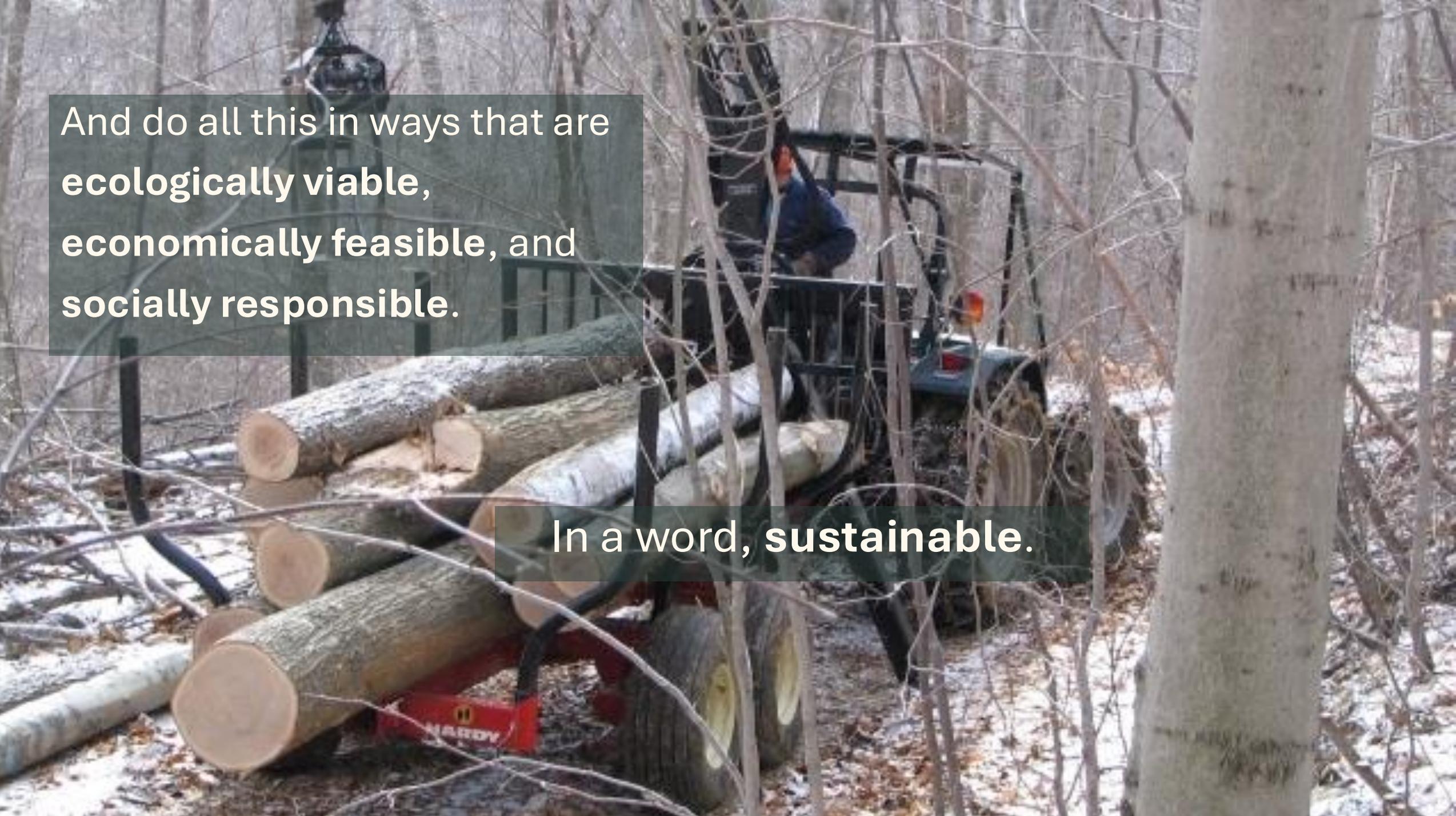
2. Care exceptionally well for the land community.

- Maintain water quality,
- Enhance native wildlife species richness,
- Optimize atmospheric carbon sequestration & storage,
- Promote flood and drought resilience.

Ecological Commons

3. Honor & achieve the ownership objectives of Vermont's family forest landowners.

Private

A logging skidder is shown in a forest, carrying a large load of cut logs. The skidder is a tracked vehicle with a blue cab and a red front loader. The logs are stacked on the skidder's bed. The forest is filled with bare trees, suggesting a winter or late autumn setting. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and some snow. The skidder is moving through the forest, and the logs are being transported to a processing area.

And do all this in ways that are **ecologically viable**, **economically feasible**, and **socially responsible**.

In a word, **sustainable**.

A photograph of a dense forest in winter. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow, and the trees are mostly evergreens, some with snow on their branches. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The quote is centered in the middle of the image.

*If it isn't complicated,
it isn't conservation.*

How it started

A photograph of three men standing in a forest next to a red tractor. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and a blue cap. The man in the middle is wearing a green vest over a plaid shirt and a light-colored cap. The man on the right is wearing a blue jacket over a plaid shirt and a dark cap. They are all smiling. The tractor is red and has a large, treaded tire in the foreground. The background is a dense forest with green trees.

As County Forester, I saw the constraints for landowners and the land in the existing system.

“Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal.” – Aldo Leopold

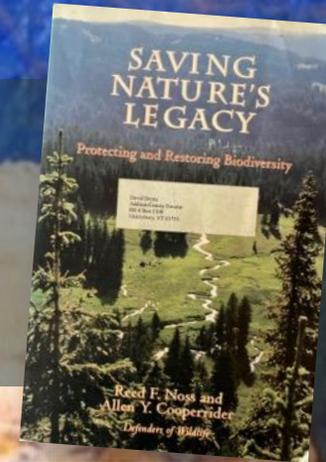
“The two great ruiners of land are ignorance and economic constraint.” – Wendell Berry

Epiphany in the Grand Union dairy aisle

Reed Noss presentation in Montpelier.

Saving Nature's Legacy: Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity.

- Work from headwaters down.
- Allow natural processes to accomplish restoration.



Vermont Family Farms milk.

If Vermont Family Farms, why not Vermont Family Forests?

If Vermont Family Farms milk, why not Family Forest® lumber?

And that's how we began.

Initial meeting with 40 local forest landowners, known at that time as NIPFs. Together we explored the idea of an organization that was truly different from Tree Farm.

Our founding mission:

To conserve the health of the forest community and, when appropriate, to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefits.

**VERMONT
FAMILY
FORESTS**



**SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY
FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY**

Our current four-part mission

Observe, understand, & preserve forest ecosystem health;

Practice forest-centered conservation that is holistic & adaptive;

Support careful management of local family forests for ecological, economic, & social benefits;

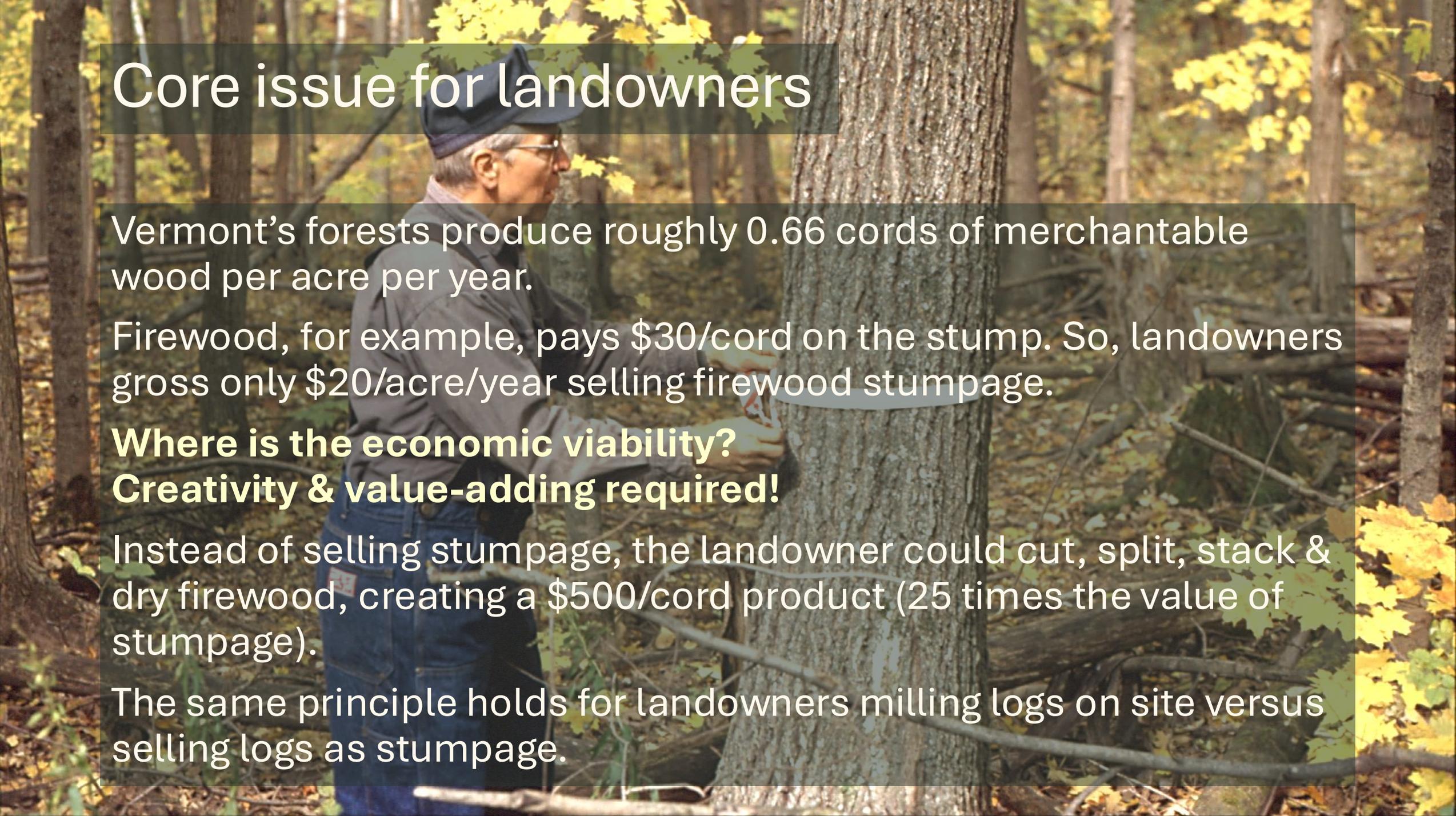
and **Foster** a forest culture focused on community well-being, ecological resilience, & the quest of an optimal land ethic.



Today, we'll focus on the **practice** of forest-centered conservation

	Industrial Forestry	Family Forestry
Focus	Timber	Water, Wildlife, Carbon, Forest ecosystem health, Recreation, Aesthetics, Firewood, Timber
Guiding Philosophy	Wise Use— forest resource management	Forest Health First— forest ecosystem conservation
Timeline	Cutting cycle	Stewardship cycle
	15-25 years	Annual - a few years
Maturity age	Economic (short)	Ecological (long)
Parcel size	Large	Small
Access to forest	Periodic	On-going
Access design	Skid trails, ditches, culverts	Forwarding paths, lines of grace, broad-based dips, unditched

Core issue for landowners

A man wearing a dark cap, glasses, and a dark jacket is standing in a forest, measuring the diameter of a tree trunk with a diameter tape. The forest has many trees and some yellow leaves, suggesting an autumn setting.

Vermont's forests produce roughly 0.66 cords of merchantable wood per acre per year.

Firewood, for example, pays \$30/cord on the stump. So, landowners gross only \$20/acre/year selling firewood stumpage.

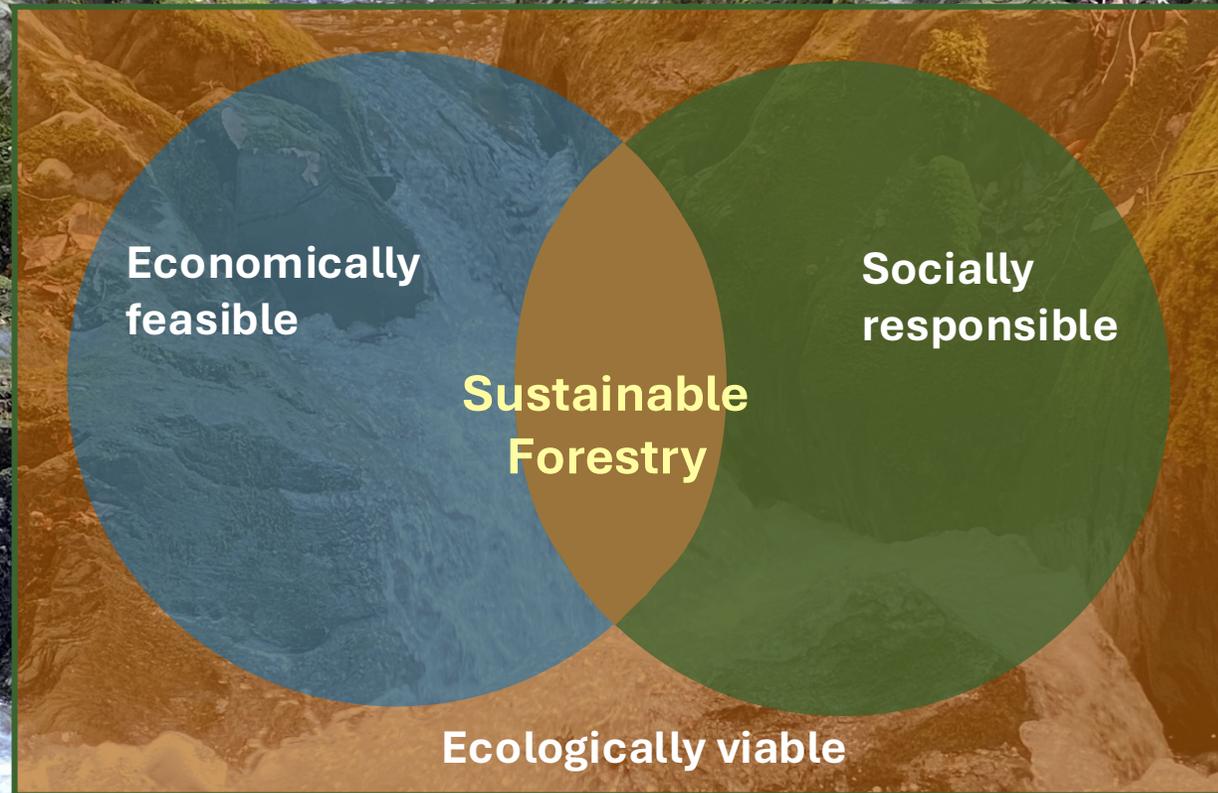
Where is the economic viability?

Creativity & value-adding required!

Instead of selling stumpage, the landowner could cut, split, stack & dry firewood, creating a \$500/cord product (25 times the value of stumpage).

The same principle holds for landowners milling logs on site versus selling logs as stumpage.

VFF's Strategies for Manifesting Sustainable Forestry



“Without ecology, there is no economy or community.” – Justin Brande

Silviculture & Access Practices

- Practice uneven-aged management by area regulation.
- Grow high-quality timber: stocking upper A-B density.
- Create a portfolio of what the forest is willing to yield.
- Let more wood rot in the forest.
- Carry high basal areas and maintain intact canopies.
- Grow and hold large old trees.
- Employ light crop tree release: flag the crop, fell or girdle the crap.
- Avoid synthetic pesticides.
- Create Lines of Grace: (7% grade, 5% of forest maximum)
- Slow, spread, and sink storm flow.
- Monitor water quality and Optimal Conservation Practice compliance (Water quality tests reflect forest health, just as blood tests reflect your body's health.)

In sum, silviculture should support landowner objectives well beyond timber.

Timber Sale & Logging Practices



- Employ VFF's Lump Sum Plus method in stumpage sales.
- Log under frozen winter conditions.
- Use non-petroleum bar and chain oil.
- Use precision felling techniques: Game of Logging directional felling.
- Avoid externalizing costs—don't have off-site impacts.
- Bunch logs with dozer, horse, or other.
- Use small forwarders or forwarding trailers to move logs to landing.
- Mill more lumber on site.

In sum, wood should pay its way out of the forest.

Marketplace Practices

A man in a dark shirt and jeans is operating a yellow forklift in a lumber yard. The forklift has 'CK' on its side and a 'WOOD' logo on the back. In the background, another man in a light shirt stands near a large stack of lumber. The scene is set in a well-lit industrial or warehouse environment.

- Reason globally, act locally.
- Avoid undifferentiated commodity markets.
- Go direct, avoid brokers.
- Dip beak in forest product value-adding.
- Prioritize local markets.
- Work with architects more.

Applying the Ideals: VFF Demonstration Projects

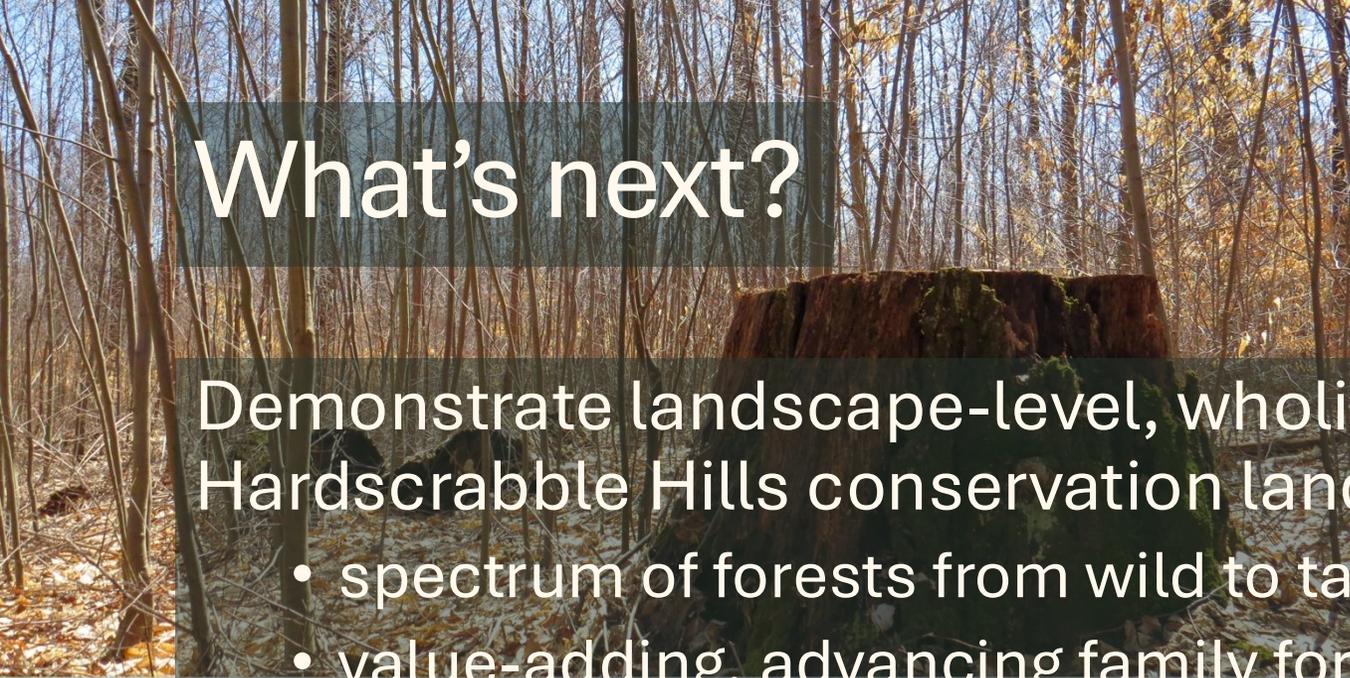
- FSC group certification: first in the world
- UVM Rubenstein School
- Middlebury College McCardell Bicentennial Hall
- Green Mountain Club headquarters
- Shelburne Museum English barn
- Family Forest® flooring
- And many more...



What's next?

Demonstrate landscape-level, wholistic conservation in the Hardscrabble Hills conservation lands.

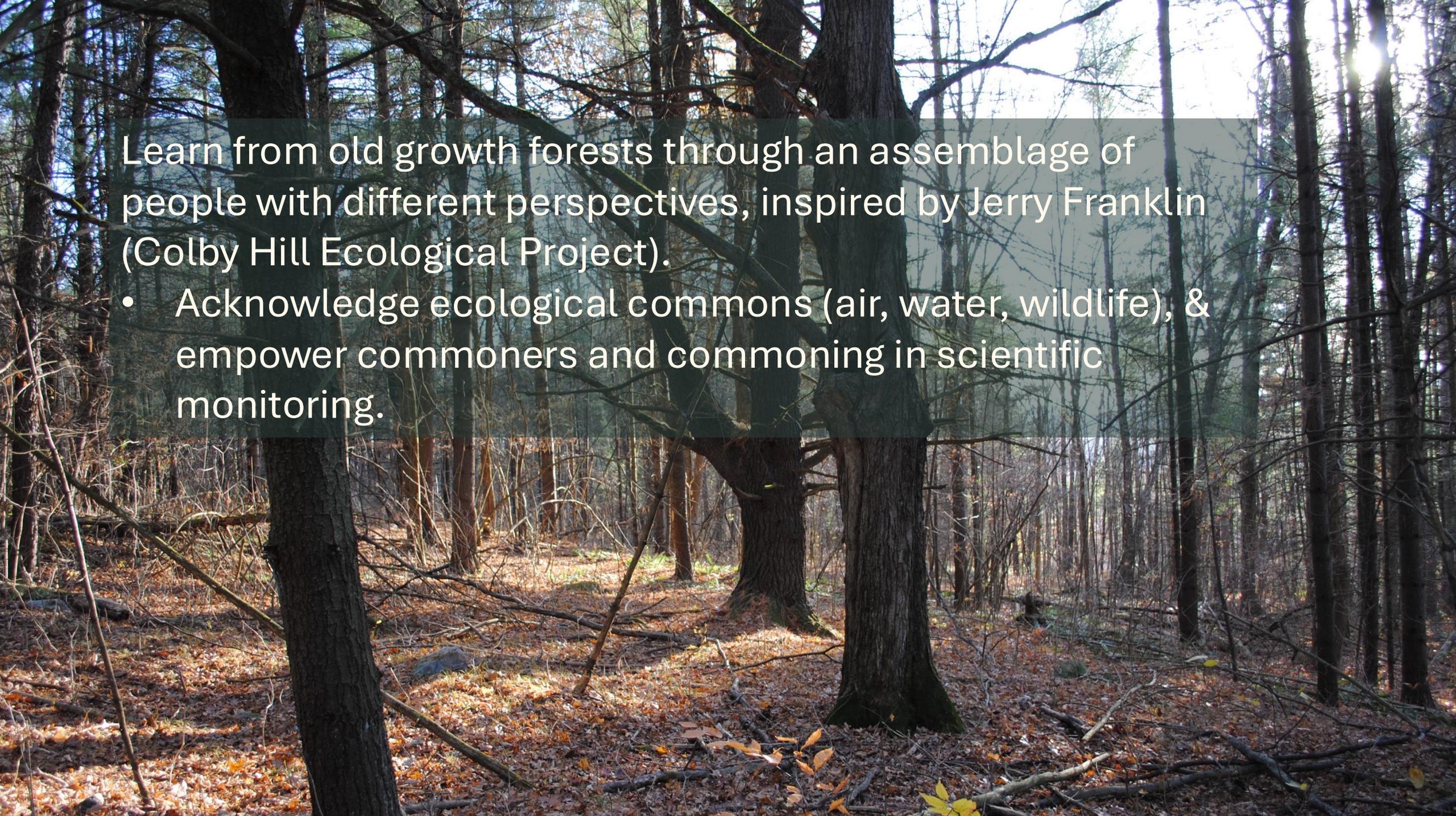
- spectrum of forests from wild to tame
- value-adding, advancing family forestry
- lines of grace; slow, spread, & sink storm flow
- ecological monitoring (both academic and commoner/citizen scientists)
- Natural Forest Returning Ground



Explore the model of Norwegian family forestry.

- Landowners are the industry (cooperatives)
- Hytte as VFF ADU (Minimize borrowed capital, Optimize land and labor)





Learn from old growth forests through an assemblage of people with different perspectives, inspired by Jerry Franklin (Colby Hill Ecological Project).

- Acknowledge ecological commons (air, water, wildlife), & empower commoners and commoning in scientific monitoring.

Continue to empower family forest landowners—

- Family Forest Conservationist Training in 2026

And more... stay tuned!



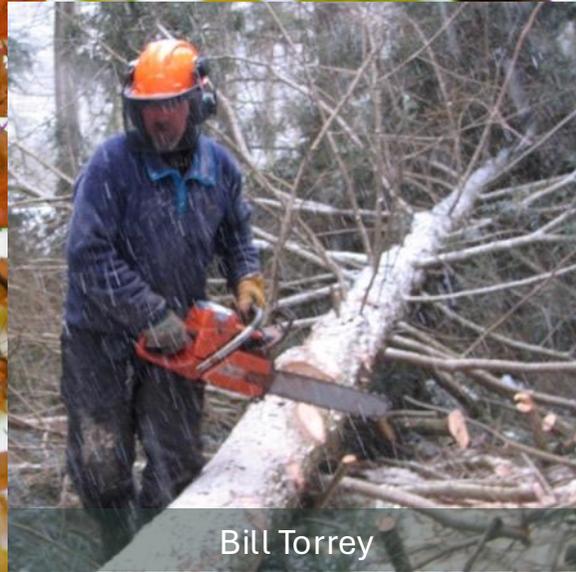
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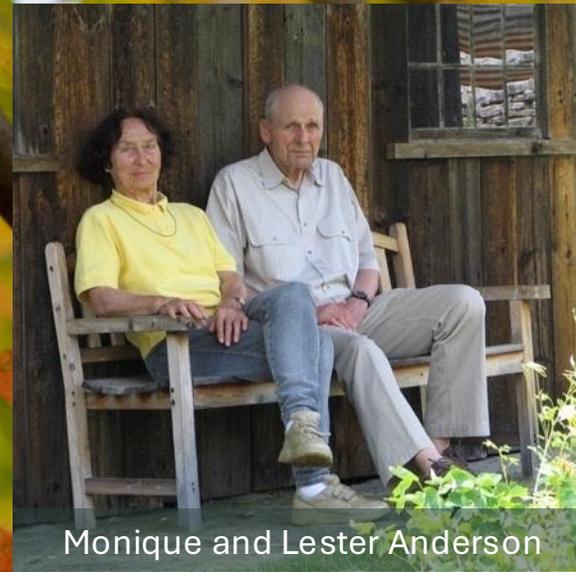
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And all the rest...

Thank You ~ and May the Forest be With You!



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