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NEWS NOTES

vermont natural resources council

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97 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602
The Vermont Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

(Editor's Note: No, you didn't miss the December issue of News Notes. It didn't happen because the Christmas mail rush caught us by surprise. We decided to skip to early January, when, we speculated, members would have more time to read anyway.)

FORD SPURS CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS

The Ford Foundation has announced a program of grants to assist municipal conservation commissions in up to 150 communities in New England, New York and New Jersey in their efforts to protect the environment.

A sum of \$385, 000 has been set aside by the Foundation for the program. Each commission will receive up to \$5,000 for such activities as the preparation of open-space plans, small-scale reclamation work, and the writing of ordinances and land-trust documents.

In announcing the grant, a Foundation spokesman said: "The municipal conservation movement has been one of the most positive responses to the growing local concern with environmental problems. With roots deep in their own communities, these commissions are helping to generate informed citizen opinion on the need to protect the environment and to guide the community's response in such areas as highway location, waste disposal, and land preservation."

Under the program, commissions may apply for grants of up to \$5,000. Amounts over \$1,000 will have to be matched by the municipalities on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

Activities that might be supported are the preparation of maps, aerial photographs and surveys, or the acquisition of technical publications. Funds could also be used

to obtain the services of consultants including lawyers to prepare land trust documents, easements, title searches, and local ordinances; contractors to provide equipment for reclamation work; and surveyors and planners to help prepare open-space plans.

More than 800 municipal conservation commissions have been organized in the Northeast since the movement began in Massachusetts in 1957. They are established by town ordinance on the basis of state enabling legislation and serve as environmental consultants to town officials. Each commission consists of from three to nine members appointed by the mayor or other appropriate town official. They serve for terms of up to five years without pay.

The conservation commission movement has not taken hold in Vermont although there are scattered across the state a handful of local groups involved in the kinds of activities that conservation commissions typically perform. The Vermont General Assembly has never passed the enabling legislation that sparked the formation of conservation commissions in neighboring states. Despite this it is generally believed by knowledgeable observers of municipal government that cities and towns in Vermont have the authority to establish conservation commissions without a special act by the General Assembly.

"VERMONTERS ON VERMONT" AVAILABLE

An EPIC booklet summarizes an opinion-attitude survey on environmental problems in Vermont, will be available later this month. Members wishing a copy may obtain one by sending ten cents to EPIC, 97 State St., Montpelier