

Vermont Environmental Report

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL, A NON-PROFIT CITIZENS' CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION SUPPORTED BY MEMBERSHIP DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS. VNRC, 26 STATE STREET, MONTPELIER--VERMONT, 05602; (802) 223-2328. CHAIRMAN: DAVID R. MARVIN; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: SEWARD WEBER; EDITOR: NATHANIEL FROTHINGHAM.

The Appalachian Trail and Private Land: A Conflict in Land Use?

The Appalachian Trail, a scenic mountain trail, follows the Appalachian Mountains from Georgia to Maine. In Vermont, it shares the path of Vermont's Long Trail from the Massachusetts border to a point just west of Gifford Woods on Route 100, a distance of 90 miles. There, the Appalachian Trail leaves the Long Trail and heads east, entering New Hampshire at Hanover. The Long Trail continues north up the Green Mountain crests to the Canadian border.

Increasing popularity and use of the Appalachian Trail is causing two basic problems for the private landowners over whose land the Trail passes.

The first problem is coping with the increasing numbers of hikers who use the Trail. Hikers, according to some estimates, have increased threefold since the sixties. Aside from literally wearing out the Trail in places (with subsequent erosion damage), some of these hikers have very different attitudes from the rather small group of dedicated hikers who used the Trail in past decades. Some of them are not as aware that the Trail exists in large part because of the generosity of landowners who have volunteered the use of their land. Many of today's hikers are day trippers, not really hikers on a long trip, but casual picnickers and partiers. More hikers, too, means more pressure on the clubs who caretaker the Trail to provide copious shelters, signs, and blaze-marks, with sometimes unfortunate consequences for the landowner.

The National Trails System Act of 1968, with its provision for National Scenic Trails, has created the other problem for landowners. The Appalachian Trail was the first trail set aside as a National Scenic Trail, and the Act provides for Federal acquisition of a corridor 200 feet wide along the Trail where it passes over private land to ensure its natural quality. The government has taken no action in placing restrictions on the use to which the private land in question may be put. The money to pay for these purchases is not now available and may never be, but some of the potentially affected landowners feel deeply threatened by the National Trails System Act. They feel that their simple act of trust back in the 1920's and 1930's—their agreement (or the agreement of those before them) with the Appalachian Trail Conference clubs to allow the Trail to cross their land—has been betrayed by an accumulation of public demands and regulations they never foresaw.

Mr. J. J. Johnston's land lies to the east of Route 12, just north of Woodstock, and it carries a full mile of the Appalachian Trail. Mr. Johnston is a forester and a maple-sugar maker; he manages his forestland well. He is proud of his work and of his land, and he expects his children to manage his land as he did. He likes the Trail too and wants it to remain on his land, unlike his neighbor to the east who, because of the threat of Federal restrictions, wants to remove the Trail entirely. Mr. Johnston wants the Trail, provided