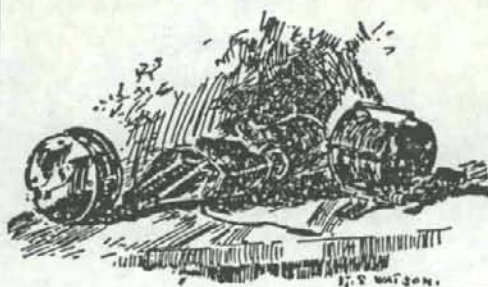


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Vermont Environmental REPORT

Fall, 1986

Published by the Vermont Natural Resources Council

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Subdivision map (cover and lead story) shows a classic "spaghetti lot" subdivision pattern, with lots extended to provide road access and still be large enough to avoid environmental review. Plan prepared for Properties of America, Inc. by Truline. Masthead design by Laughing Bear Associates.



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The Vermont Natural Resources Council is a non-profit environmental organization working to promote the wise use of Vermont's natural resources. The Council does legislative lobbying, research, and educational work on a variety of issues including forestry, agriculture, water, energy, hazardous wastes, and growth management.

VNRC is the Vermont affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

The Vermont Environmental Report is published quarterly by the Vermont Natural Resources Council, 9 Bailey Avenue, Montpelier, Vermont 05602. Phone: (802) 223-2328.

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FROM THE FRONT OFFICE

Our name means a lot of things to a lot of Vermonters, but let me concentrate here on the word Council. Our set of bylaws, originally approved on October 1, 1966, had as one of its primary objectives to "promote the coordination of activities and interests of individual members and member organizations."

Right now there are some fifty organizational members of the Council, and serving on the Board of Directors are six representatives from these organizations.



VNRC has long served as a forum for like-minded groups to join together to address common issues and opportunities. And more recently, VNRC has formed or joined coalitions representing a wide variety of interests to be more effective on specific issues. We are very active in the Ottauquechee Coalition and the Current Use Tax Coalition, for example, and new examples include the Vermont Rivers Alliance and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition (both of which are described in this issue under "Vermont Perspectives").

From any vantage point, the effectiveness of VNRC in future years will be based on at least three factors. First and foremost is and should be our active, ongoing environmental advocacy and conservation education efforts. The second factor will be the continued excellent service to our general membership and maintenance of strong relationships with member organizations. And third should be creative arrangements with organizations (member and non-member) to fight for those natural resource matters which VNRC's membership and Board of Directors determine to be of high priority.

In this day of increasing competition for use of Vermont's air, land, and water resources, we as the broad-based conservation community must be united in our efforts to take actions which are compatible with our basic Vermont values and traditions.

Sincerely,

R. Montgomery Fischer
Executive Director, VNRC

How Long is the Long Trail's Future?

By Preston Bristow

The Long Trail, in the eyes of most Vermonters, is something of a given. It's a Vermont institution that has always been there, running the length of the state along the top of the Green Mountains, and always will be. But quiet, radical changes are at work in the mountains. The Long Trail today is threatened by land sales and development to a degree never experienced before in its over 75-year history.

Most of the Long Trail is already secure in public ownership. Between the Green Mountain National Forest, various Vermont State Forest holdings, and a section of concurrent Appalachian National Scenic Trail, 198 miles of the 265-mile Long Trail are permanently protected. The remaining 67 miles, however, all in northern Vermont, are where the problem lies.

As a result of a long slump in the timber products industry, half of the privately-owned land which the Trail crosses is known to be for sale, and many remaining owners indicate that they would readily entertain any serious offer.

In addition, areas of the Trail which traverse Vermont's recreational and rapid growth areas are also threatened. One private landowner plans to build a house on land crossed by the Trail at the crucial Jonesville junction, and has asked that the Trail be closed. The aluminum-sided building and radio broadcast tower that were erected near the Trail are other well-publicized examples



Photo by Lou Borie.

of Trail disruption; the structures went up on Robbins Mountain, several miles north of Camel's Hump. Other land that the Trail crosses is also on the market, with rumors of possible development.

The Green Mountain Club, a non-profit group whose small staff and 4,100 members maintain and enjoy the Trail, went to the Vermont legislature last year for help. Even though money was tight, the legislature appropriated a \$50,000 challenge grant for state acquisition of Long Trail lands. For each state dollar appropriated, the Green Mountain Club must raise three dollars in matching funds.

Money to enable state purchase of Long Trail land or easements will help preserve the very profile of the Green Mountains themselves. Contact the Green Mountain Club at PO Box 889, Montpelier VT 05602.

Preston Bristow chairs the Long Trail Protection Fund, is past president of the Green Mountain Club, and is a staff member of the Ottawa-Quebec Land Trust.

A New Planning Tool for Fragile Areas

An excellent new planning tool—the first of its kind in the U.S.—is now in the hands of Vermont town clerks and regional planning commissions. Thanks to the Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, Vermont's sensitive natural areas have been mapped to show every town's wetlands, winter deeryards, and areas in which endangered plants and animals make their homes.

The project is the result of over a year's work, and includes information collected by the Conservancy over the last ten years. Every town is mapped, with overlays pinpointing different sensitive areas. Rare and endangered species are marked on the maps, but not identified—in order to protect them further.

All towns which contain fragile areas have received town maps, and regional planning commissions have received regional maps. Other information sources such as libraries have also received copies.

The maps are provided only as an informational service and have no legal bearing on where municipalities will zone for development. But according to the Nature Conservancy's Marc DesMeules, some developers and planners who are aware of the problems of development in sensitive areas already consult the Conservancy on their regions. "Now that the information is consolidated into one source," says DesMeules, "we hope all towns will be taking these factors into consideration." SC

New Water Bill Prompts New Rules

The signing of new water quality legislation last spring has launched a wave of regulatory changes by Vermont water resources agencies. Two major regulatory documents are affected by the bill. One document that will undergo revision is the Water Quality Standards, which are written and administered by the citizen-staffed, five-member Water Resources Board; and second, the Department of Water Resources (one of three regulatory departments within the Agency of Environmental Conservation) has undertaken revisions to the Environmental Protection Rules.

The Water Quality Standards are policy directives used to guide

the Department of Water Resources in their regulation of discharges into Vermont's waterways. The Rules, on the other hand, include specific site and engineering standards for the building of sewage treatment and disposal facilities.

Recognizing the mandate in the new bill for broadsweeping changes, the Board and Department entered into a work-plan agreement to bring the Standards and Rules systematically up to date by early in 1987. VNRC staff, with the help of VNRC's newly-formed Water Resources Task Force, has been closely monitoring the changes and providing comments to the Board and Department.

In early September, the Department issued a set of "Interim Administrative Procedures," with which to process the discharge permit applications which had been on hold until the bill and new rules were formulated. The interim procedures are a temporary measure, to hold until changes to the Environmental Protection rules are formally adopted.

VNRC, in meetings with Department officials, conveyed several concerns on the interim procedures. Of particular concern is the use of a 10 to 1 dilution ratio. Using this ratio, it is as-

sumed that if pollutants are added to a stream at a ratio which, during the month of lowest stream flow, is equal to ten parts stream-flow to a maximum of one part pollutant, then the aquatic biota will not suffer unduly and the health risk is negligible. The 10 to 1 dilution ratio was the cornerstone to a House water quality bill last year; the bill was defeated, primarily over debate stirred by this proposed ratio.

With its interim procedures, the Department chose to set up a two-track system for permitting new discharges of sewage effluent. A person applying for a discharge permit has the option of using either track, but if the system cannot meet the first test, it must go through the second, more specific testing in order to qualify for a new discharge permit.

The first track utilizes the 10 to 1 dilution ratio as a presumptive test for meeting other biological and design criteria. The second track is known as the site-specific test. This testing involves a more comprehensive analysis of stream chemistry, disposal site conditions, and monitoring.

The Department of Water Resources plans to introduce their final changes to the Environmental Protection Rules to the legislative committee by December.

In mid-September, the Water Resources Board submitted a series of amendments on the Water Quality Standards to the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules. VNRC had already vigorously protested the Board's interpretation of one section of the new water bill.

The section in question is one of four new standards for gaining an indirect discharge permit for Class B waters. The standard requires that "the discharge will not significantly alter the aquatic

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biota in the receiving waters." The standard was heavily debated during last year's legislative session.

Clean water advocates maintain that when the bill passed, the "significant alteration" standard was intended to provide, outside of any management objectives, an indication of the change in stream ecology as a result of the proposed discharge. The Board in its amendment, however, described "significant alteration" as not only a biological measurement but also a judgement based on the management objectives for the receiving waters.

In testimony to the Legislative Rules Committee, VNRC Associate Director Eric Palola asserted, "This standard is important to the conservation community because it says that a biological evaluation is just as important as the decision about how society wants to use the waters."

Following a report by a subcommittee of legislators, environmentalists and developers, who all agreed that the Board had misinterpreted the bill, the Rules Committee unanimously rejected the Board's amendments in late November. Since the rules Committee's opinion is only advisory, the Board has the option of affirming their proposals. The Board has since re-written two of the three areas of contention, the last one relating to the use of the "significant alteration" standard which the board applied to certain direct discharges. This action has created considerable controversy and stirred calls from the governor and legislators to abolish the Board or curtail their authority. EP

● STOP! ●

If one of your New Year's resolutions is to write to friends more . . .

see page 27.

Making Headway on Bicycle Paths

Bicycle enthusiasts won a small but significant victory this fall when the Vermont Agency of Transportation decided to take a serious look at right-of-way acquisition for a bicycle path along the proposed Chittenden County Circumferential Highway (CCCH). Grassroots lobbying and local support resulted in re-evaluation of the Agency's "definitely no" position. Right-of-way acquisition costs are historically the major obstacle in the bike path planning process; but state transportation planners are another obstacle, often refusing

to take bike path planning seriously.

The Chittenden County Circumferential Highway District, faced with mounting pressure, finally asked the Burlington Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to submit a study outlining the costs for design proposals for a regional bike path system. The MPO was formed by federal mandate to monitor and make recommendations on the use of federal money in the "Greater Burlington Metropolitan."

"The CCCH bicycle path has the potential to provide a key component in a regional bike path system, possibly connecting to Burlington's newly completed bike path and the northern connector bike path," says Peter Owens, landscape architect and planner active in Chittenden



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County transportation planning. "A regional bicycle path is not only a prudent use of public money," adds Owens; "it also represents responsible land use planning by responding to the needs of the general public."

Many issues are yet to be resolved before Chittenden County residents enjoy a bicycle commute to work or play. The MPO has agreed merely to study the possibilities of a bike path for the Highway District. Funding for right-of-way acquisition will have to be pulled from the State Transportation Agency's budget. Bureaucratic antipathy has, however, been challenged. If public pressure continues to increase, a regional bicycle path could be integrated into the Chittenden County Transportation network. SM

Good News on Killington Suit

There was progress and some good news this fall on VNRC's federal lawsuit against Killington Ltd. and Sunrise/International Paper Realty.

VNRC, along with the Connecticut River Watershed Council and the Natural Resources Defense Council, filed the suit in July of 1985 in an effort to prevent a violation of the federal Clean Water Act. The Council contended that three sites chosen for spray disposal of sewage effluent were inappropriate due to steep slopes and shallow soil.

On October 30, rulings on several issues came down from the U.S. District Court. First, it was decided that the environmental groups do indeed have standing in the case, due to the harm that operation of the spray ef-

fluent system could cause to the Ottauquechee River.

The court also denied Killington's motion to dismiss the case. Killington had contended that no suit could be brought against them because their spray effluent system was not actually in use; but Killington did in fact use the system after the suit was filed. Sunrise's motion to dismiss, entered with similar arguments, was sustained, since Sunrise had not used their site.

Perhaps the court's most important ruling on the case was its decision that, to the extent that a discharge of pollutants can be measured in the receiving waters, an indirect discharge such as that from spray effluent systems does in fact require a federal discharge permit. This is a precedent-setting legal opinion, and is the fundamental issue the Council sought to have addressed through the suit.

The district judge is reviewing the opinion of the magistrate at this time. Depending on the judge's decision, testimony on the actual technical merits of the case may begin, or, if the decision is upheld, there may be an opportunity for settlement. SC

A Coalition on Conservation and Housing

A unique coalition of Vermont environmental and affordable housing interests gathered this fall to lay the groundwork for passage of a new land acquisition program in the 1987 legislature. Known as the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund, the proposed program would set up a statewide private/public partnership for securing specific properties which are noted for their nat-

ural resource or agricultural values, or for their ability to serve low-income housing needs.

The newly-formed Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition now includes such organizations as VNRC, the Ottauquechee Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Affordable Housing Coalition, and the Vermont Community Action Project Directors' Council. The Coalition has identified several needs for such a fund. Similar to a land trust, the fund could assist in agricultural land retention, affordable housing, provision for recreation opportunity, wildlife habitat, historic preservation, and the protection of community integrity.

The proposal has two parts: first, the creation of a quasi-public board made up of government and citizen members to administer the fund; and second, the creation of the fund itself. The Coalition has backed an increase in the current property transfer tax, to be paid by both buyers and sellers of real estate, as a potential funding source.

In a project summary sent to the Kunin administration, Coalition members emphasized, "A property transfer tax increase would link the source of revenue for the fund to its purpose, but bonding or appropriations from existing general fund revenues are also workable possibilities." Governor Kunin announced in October that she would support legislation to create a similar proposal; Kunin's funding proposal for the project includes a capital budget appropriation.

Under legislative authority, the new board would allocate monies for certain key parcels of property as they became available and fit the criteria of the fund. The Board would be required, whenever possible, to use the fund to stimulate or assist other private or public efforts which are compatible with the fund's goals. EP

New Proposals for Solid Waste

Vermont's solid waste management options, as well as the goals we need to set in order to alleviate our current garbage problems, were outlined in a draft report released this fall by the Governor's Advisory Committee on Solid Waste. The report was written by the Agency of Environmental Conservation and other state staff members, and sets out options for state solid waste management plan revisions; new legislative initiatives; and local actions required for a successful solid waste management program.

Many of the people involved in Vermont's solid waste debate agree that the recommendations—numbering more than fifty—are excellent and long overdue. Others argue that recommendations for the implementation of public sector programs is premature, however, and that the state should first specify which levels of government will be involved in the various approaches.

The Advisory Committee has yet to grapple with the difficult issue of state versus local control of solid waste management. Education, technical and financial as-

sistance, and research and development are addressed by the report; but finding funding sources for the implementation of the various proposals is an issue that must be resolved before the Advisory Committee moves ahead. Funding ideas that are likely to be included in the Committee's final recommendations include a tax on waste generators and/or a packaging tax.

Legislative action to fund the programs will also be required. The Advisory Committee recommends a \$50 million, ten-year grant and loan program to fund closure of landfills and the construction of new facilities. There is discussion that the funds should be targeted for municipalities, and environmentalists argue that regional solid waste planning should also be discussed. The

funds would be conditioned to ensure compliance with the state's Solid Waste Management Plan and with state environmental regulations.

The Advisory Committee hopes to resolve these issues by the end of the year. Public hearings or meetings will be scheduled on the Solid Waste Plan, giving local citizens an opportunity for comment. SM

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see page 27.

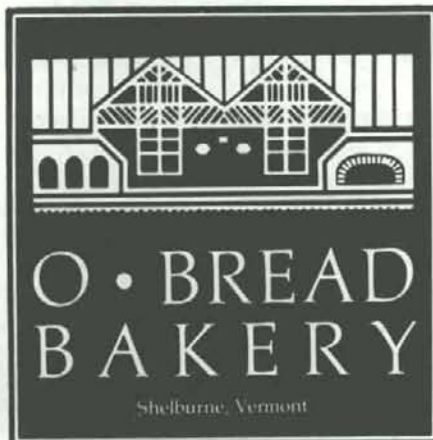
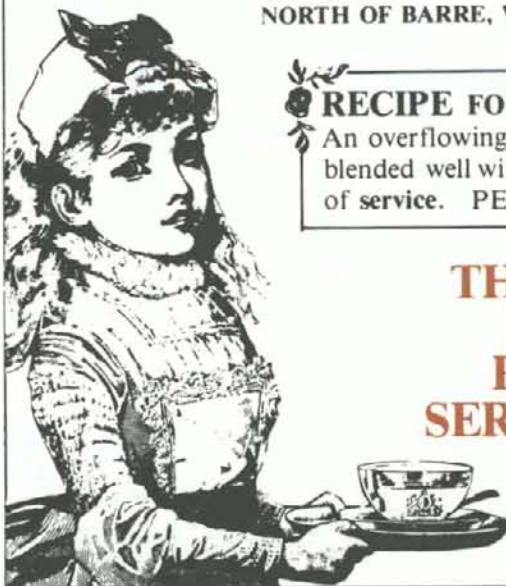
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We don't want to be the bearers of bad tidings, but the fact is that tax time is sneaking up fast. Along with this gentle reminder, though, comes good news: this year will be your first chance to use your Vermont tax form to contribute to Vermont's Non-Game Wildlife Fund.

Look for the loon symbol on your state tax form; with the simple new check-off system, you can support non-game species. Created through legislation passed last year, the fund will be used by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to advance research and education on Vermont's non-hunted wildlife species. The program will be described in a feature article in the next *V.E.R.*; for more information, contact Diane Jay at Fish and Wildlife, 244-7331. SC

New Protection for Vermont Rivers

United in their position that river resources are one of the lifelines to Vermont's continued ecological vitality, sports groups and conservationists joined this fall to form the new Vermont Rivers Alliance.

The Alliance includes VNRC, the American Rivers Conservation Council, the Connecticut River Watershed Council, Trout Unlimited, government representatives, canoe companies, and

many other sporting and conservation groups. With each meeting, the coalition expands to include other interests, and is working to develop an information network to heighten public awareness of river issues.

Governor Kunin, in her four-point proposal for environmental protection this fall, called for a state rivers policy to "resolve conflicts before the opportunity to decide is foreclosed by some permanent man-made change." The governor proposed the creation of a river basin advisory committee to develop a rivers management plan. The proposals were welcome news to Vermont rivers advocates, who agree that the existing rivers statutes are often inadequate.

Recent changes in the Federal Power Act (FPA) and the Public Utilities Regulatory Policy Act (PURPA) have bolstered the Vermont Rivers Alliance to push for a state rivers policy. The amendments, signed into law in October, create an ideal opportunity for Vermont and other states to deal with hydro development.

For over half a century, the Federal Energy and Regulatory Commission (FERC) and its predecessor, the Federal Power Commission, have conducted hydro dam licensing with a "power first, environment last" approach. Too often, FERC has used its preemptive authority over states to allow recreational and scenic river areas and wildlife and fish habitat to be compromised.

The new law amends the FPA to provide that FERC give "equal consideration" to energy conservation, as well as to protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife, recreational opportunities, and other environmental concerns.

States now have the authority to protect a "state protected waterway" from hydroelectric projects built with PURPA incen-

tives if the state determines that the "unique natural, recreational, cultural or scenic attributes" of a stream would be threatened.

A state's protective action will only be effective, however, if completed before a license or exemption application is accepted for filing by FERC. For this reason it is urgent for Vermont to identify and list those stretches of rivers which will be protected by the state.

The Vermont Rivers Study, released in June, will undoubtedly be useful in examining Vermont's options. The 236-page study was a joint effort of the National Park Service and the Vermont Agency of Environmental Conservation (AEC), and presents a comprehensive inventory of selected river-related natural, physical, and cultural resources.

The Alliance is also examining Vermont's river-related laws, in order to address the deficiencies in the regulatory system. "In general [Vermont laws] provide little more than policy statements at worst, or at best, they simply place such things as dams or stream alterations under a permit system," says Ray Gonda, Vermont Chair of the Appalachian Mountain Club. "The net effect is a piecemeal treatment. There is no requirement in the law to address the cumulative impact of number of hydro projects or other stream alterations . . . and no prohibitions of them anywhere in the law."

The AEC is planning a series of statewide public forums to discuss the Vermont Rivers study and to seek ideas from public and private interests. The discussions from each of these six forums will be summarized in a paper which will be presented to the governor for her consideration. Vermonters interested in the future of Vermont's rivers will want to watch for announcements of the forums. SM

VNRC Questions Sugarbush Sewage System

Sugarbush's existing sewage disposal system has been cited many times over the past several years for pollution violations to Rice Brook, a tributary of the Mad River. But VNRC was willing to argue this September that Sugarbush's system should not be shut down—as long as proposed improvements were built on schedule.

VNRC requested party status in an Act 250 hearing before the District 5 Environmental Commission over the sewage disposal issues. The Act 250 hearing was requested by Sugarbush Valley Inc. for approval of potential improvements to their sewage system.

Sugarbush entered the hearing emphasizing their need for a permit to correct pollution stemming from both the treatment plan and erosion from a nearby parking lot; but company representatives said that they were uncertain of whether improvements would actually be made.

The Council also raised a larger concern over whether Sugarbush's proposal was in conformance with Vermont's new water quality bill passed in the last legislative session. A specific section of the new bill, upon its signing by the Governor, grants discharge permits to existing sewage systems as long as they are operating in compliance. This "automatic permit" cannot be granted, however, if an existing system is currently violating water quality standards.

At the hearing, William Brierley of the Department of Water Resources told the Commission that the system did not satisfy state water quality standards—

and yet, also testified that Sugarbush's existing system was "grandfathered" under the new bill.

In a letter to the District Commission, VNRC argued that "the Department has not, in this situation, followed legislative intent," and that "... this conflict should be recognized in the [Act 250] permit conditions and the Commission should retain oversight for the construction of this system and future expansion or alteration of treatment facilities."

In response to the Council's position, Sugarbush attorney John Ponsetto replied, "The Sugarbush system is an existing indirect discharge. It must be considered 'built', but in need of modifications to comply with water quality standards."

Clarifying the Department's position, Commissioner Jonathan Lash later wrote to VNRC explaining, "... we conclude that with respect to the existing system at Sugarbush we currently have an enforcement problem and on the basis of our previous efforts to obtain compliance from that system, we conclude that full compliance will require construction of an entirely new system."

VNRC has encouraged the Environmental Commission to specify a date by which system improvements must be in place, as

an Act 250 permit condition, since a previous clean-up order from the Department to Sugarbush was partially ignored.

A revised enforcement order was signed at the time of the Act 250 hearing, to the agreement of both Sugarbush and the Department. The new order was to be the basis on which the Act 250 Commission would grant a permit for system improvements.

In a new twist, however, Sugarbush has decided to appeal the enforcement order to the Water Resources Board—thereby changing the circumstances by which evidence was submitted at the Act 250 hearings.

The District Commission is deliberating on permit conditions; but now that Sugarbush has challenged the clean-up order, a decision may have to await a more lengthy appeal process. In the meantime, the Department is contemplating more immediate enforcement actions. EP

WOW!

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see page 27.

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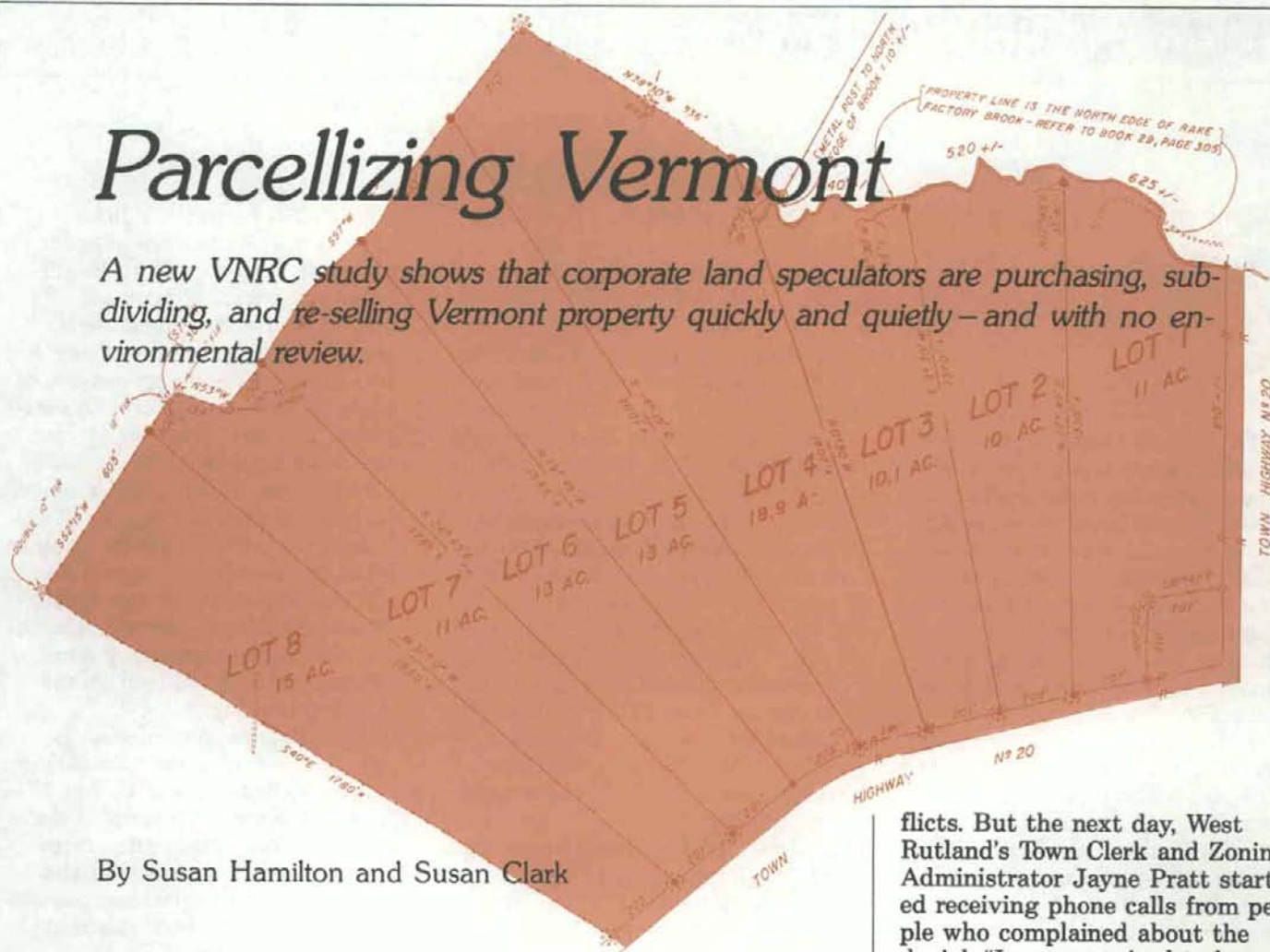
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Parcellizing Vermont

A new VNRC study shows that corporate land speculators are purchasing, subdividing, and re-selling Vermont property quickly and quietly – and with no environmental review.



By Susan Hamilton and Susan Clark

Susan Hamilton is a second-year law student in the J.D. program at Vermont Law School. This article summarizes the highlights of research which she completed as a VNRC intern this summer.

The form of land subdivision researched by Hamilton does not require any state permits, and as a result, the state has little record of the activity. Information from Vermont's Land Gains Tax returns might be useful; however, certain information on the returns is confidential, and funding for statistical monitoring of the Land Gains Tax was discontinued in fiscal year 1977.

For these reasons, Hamilton's method of research included reviewing property transfer tax returns, maps, and deeds, for detection of subdivision activity. This research was supplemented by many interviews with state, regional and local officials, realtors, academicians, representatives of

land companies, and concerned Vermont residents. Wherever possible, on-site review of the land considered in the report was conducted.

Hamilton's full report, "Corporate Land Speculation in Vermont: A Profile of Causes, Environmental Impacts, and Case Examples of the Rapid Subdivision of Rural Vermont Land" is available from VNRC for the cost of copying and postage.

On May 23, 1986, a chunk of land a little over 175 acres in size was sold in West Rutland. The land was a mix of forested property and farm land, but the new owners clearly had no intention of managing the property for forestry or agriculture. Within two weeks, a map of subdivisions was drawn up; the map was filed at the town clerk's office on June 9.

On June 10, the town denied the site plan due to zoning con-

flicts. But the next day, West Rutland's Town Clerk and Zoning Administrator Jayne Pratt started receiving phone calls from people who complained about the denial. "I was surprised to hear them say that they had purchased these lots already," says Pratt. "Northeast Country Properties must have been in quite a hurry to sell those lots," she notes, "if they were selling them before any subdivisions were approved."

In June 23, the company submitted another map, and the site plan was approved the following day by the Planning Commission. Pratt refused to sign the plan, however, on the grounds that the Class 3 road leading to the site would have to be upgraded and maintained if the subdivision were developed. "We simply hadn't budgeted for that kind of upgrade, and we couldn't afford it," she explains. "The whole thing was happening so fast."

In the days that followed, Pratt received calls from Northeast Country Properties' president and attorney, pressuring her not to delay their subdivision project. On July 2, the District Transpor-

tation Administrator reviewed the road and the following day, the zoning permit was approved. West Rutland's Town Manager conditioned the permit, however, with a letter to the subdivider stating that the road would remain Class 3 and would continue to be maintained as such.

The July 3 date was just in time for Northeast Country Properties. Although only six weeks had passed since they had first purchased the property, the subdivider did not want the closing on any lots to be delayed by the July Fourth weekend.

Northeast Country Properties is by no means the only realty corporation speculating on Vermont land—and West Rutland is far from the only town affected by subdivision and quick turnover of property. In fact, a method of land subdivision has recently evolved in our state which avoids state environmental review; corporate land speculators are taking advantage of it to "parcellate" land at a remarkable rate. And it's affecting every region of Vermont.

Subdivision Sans Review

Under Vermont Environmental Board rules, a subdivision is a "partitioning or dividing for the purposes of resale a tract or tracts of land into ten or more lots." If a parcel is subdivided into ten or more lots, then, the subdivision must undergo the Act 250 review process and be examined for its potential environmental and municipal impacts. If a parcel is only partitioned into nine or fewer lots, no Act 250 review is required.

Similarly, the state's subdivision regulations apply only to lots that are under ten acres. As a result, a subdivision of nine lots, each ten acres or larger, is not subject to any state environmental review. Although the Act 250 and state subdivision reviews are designed to ensure that development occurs in an environmentally-sound manner, many developers would like to avoid review; it can be time-consuming, thus tying up money that could

finance other transactions, and may force developers to re-think plans in light of their environmental, rather than simply economic, advantages. It is not surprising, then, that the large nine-lot subdivision is blossoming throughout Vermont.

In July of 1984, Vermont enacted legislation which ensured that all subdivisions of ten or more lots (not just those of ten acres or less, as the law was previously worded) triggered Act 250 review, thus closing the infamous "ten-acre loophole." But clearly the loophole was not closed tightly enough. Subdividers still choose lot sizes of over ten acres, in order to avoid the state subdivision regulations; and speculators now must simply be more creative in order to subdivide land into only nine parcels at a time.

Getting A Piece Of Vermont

Although individuals often engage in land speculation, many corporate subdividers have been active in Vermont over the last two years; the list of these corporations includes Cersosimo Lumber Co.; Eastland; Mountain Lake Properties; Northeast Country Properties; Patten Realty Corporation and Patten Corporation Northeast; and Properties of America. The pattern of corporate land speculators is clear. Typically, a speculator purchases a 50-acre or larger parcel of land, subdivides it, and sells the lots at a profit within six months.

Many towns are worried that they may have a time-bomb within their borders, and will one day be dealing with the delayed impacts of rapid growth.

Patten Realty Corporation, operating out of Stamford, Vermont, follows this pattern. According to Patten's 1986 Annual Report, the typical length of time between their closing on a parcel and the date the last lot is sold is one to twelve weeks. The turn-

over of total corporate inventory is rapid: eight times per year.

The speculators keep close tabs on large tracts of land in New England. Several of the town clerks contacted by VNRC reported that Properties of America, another corporate land speculator,

Clearly, the "ten-acre loophole" was not closed tightly enough.

was in the process of reviewing their towns' grand lists, looking for parcels of fifty acres or more. Patten also claims to stay in contact with every real estate broker and large property owner in its market areas. And Patten guarantees a high demand for its properties through aggressive marketing techniques; in 1986, the corporation spent \$1.6 million in advertising.

Not surprisingly, most corporate land speculators aim to sell land not to Vermonters, but to out-of-staters who are used to and can afford higher land prices. Property chosen by Patten is located within a two-to five-hour drive of major population centers such as Boston, Hartford, or New York City; advertisements for the property appear in the Lots and Acreage section of the city newspapers.

According to Patten's Annual Report, their typical customer is 38 years old, has 1.2 children, has an average annual income of \$46,000, and is a resident of a major metropolitan area. Out of a 23-lot sample of land sold by Properties of America, purchasers' addresses broke down this way: Massachusetts, 11; Connecticut, 6; Rhode Island, 2; New York and New Jersey, one each. Of the twenty-three, only two parcels were sold to Vermont residents.

Through the Loopholes

Corporate land speculators use a variety of techniques to avoid environmental review and gain the largest profit from their business.

For example, since many New England farms and other tracts of land targeted for subdivision are large, and the subdivider is restricted to nine lots within a five mile radius in order to avoid Act 250 review, a cap would seem to appear on the number of lots to be created. VNRC has documented the use of several techniques, however, which are used to get around that restriction:

- A corporation may enter into a sales agreement on a piece of property, subdivide the land, but charge the subdivision survey to the seller of the parcel. As long as the parcel is divided into fewer than ten lots of over ten acres, the corporation may subdivide another parcel within a five-mile radius, and records of subdivision of the two parcels do not trigger an Act 250 review.
- A speculator may subdivide property into large parcels and then sell these parcels to individuals or corporations who intend to subdivide further. This "pyramiding down" technique is a popular and effective selling tool for land companies.

In addition to ensuring that a subdivision avoids environmental

review, these and other "creative subdivision" techniques make it extremely difficult to trace rapid subdivision accurately—much less to plan for it in an orderly fashion.

These loopholes are not the only factors that fail to discourage rapid subdivision in Vermont. Vermont's Land Gains Tax, enacted in 1973, was designed to prevent speculation by taxing the rapid turnover of land. The Land Gains Tax is "porous," however, and tax dollars as well as environmental review are falling through the cracks. (See "How Land Speculators Avoid a Big Tax Bite," this issue.)

Land Speculation: Not Without Its Price

Anti-speculation laws and environmental regulations are passed for a reason. Although the transactions are legal, manipulation of loopholes in order to make a quick profit is not without its cost to Vermont's environment—and to Vermonters.

Some of the effects are strikingly similar to the impacts felt before the closure of the "10-acre loophole." Many of the arguments against the loophole presented be-

fore its closure in the Environmental Board's position paper "Proposed Elimination of the Large Lot Subdivision Exemption from Act 250" ring true today:

- Lot shapes are distorted, in order for the subdivider to maximize road or shore frontage and still have parcels large enough to avoid state environmental review. The "spaghetti" or "bowling alley" lots are prevalent; little attention is given, in subdivision, to the natural lay of the land.
- Productive forest and agricultural land is being removed piecemeal from use. Widely-dispersed ownership makes commercial timber management and harvesting impractical. (Today's small farm crisis and whole-herd buyout have made much of Vermont's viable agricultural land even more susceptible to speculative subdivision.)
- Land subdivision reduces the availability of private land for recreation such as cross-country skiing and hunting.
- Deeryards and other special wildlife habitats are made increasingly vulnerable.

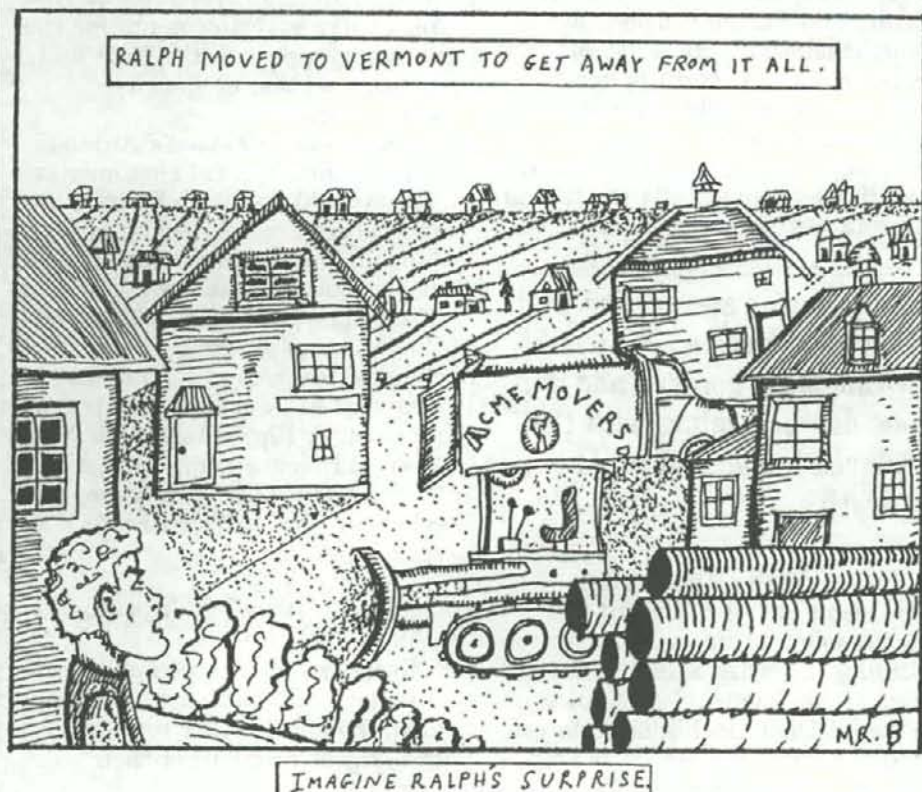
It is also clear from VNRC's research that the loophole is having an effect on the type of land that is available. Many parcels, divided into larger chunks in order to avoid environmental review, are sold to buyers who were actually looking for less land. In some cases buyers reported that they could not find parcels of land that were under ten acres.

But the effects of land speculation are felt most keenly at the local level. When a subdivider succeeds in sidestepping state environmental regulations, the full responsibility of review falls to the municipalities—whose ability to deal with review is varied at best.

In the Towns' Laps

According to the Vermont League of Cities and Towns' 1983 municipal survey, most Vermont municipalities have town plans. Many do not have town zoning ordinances, however, and far fewer have subdivision regulations.

(Continued p. 15)



How Land Speculators Avoid A Big Tax Bite

By Robert H. Daniels and Thomas L. Daniels

Taxes are on people's minds these days, and in Montpelier lawmakers and bureaucrats alike are searching for revenue sources to protect Vermont from the consequences of federal tax reform. At the same time, Vermonters hope to maintain the open spaces and scenic beauty that make the state an attractive place to live.

An overlooked revenue source with the potential to discourage subdivision activity is the Vermont Land Gains Tax. The tax, enacted in 1973, is imposed on the recognized gain from the sale or exchange of land held for less than six years. The tax applies both to sales of open land and land under buildings, but the buildings themselves are exempt from tax. The tax also exempts up to ten acres surrounding a homeowner's primary residence. The tax rates are based on length of ownership and size of profit, and generally decline the longer the land is held. (See Table 1.)

The designers of the Vermont tax sought to reduce short-term land speculation while raising \$3.5 million per year to fund the state property tax relief program. The two goals were somewhat at odds with each other, however: land speculation was needed to raise revenue, but speculation was to be discouraged.

Since 1973, Vermont's Land Gains Tax has produced about \$1 million a year. The tax has clearly fallen short of expected earnings, but not because land speculation has been discouraged. Instead, there are two major loopholes—one in administrative

procedure, and one in the law itself—that have allowed large, well-financed speculators to continue operating while paying relatively little in land gains taxes.

The Administrative Loophole

An administrative rule adopted by the Vermont Tax Department allocates only 8% of the gain to land when a condominium is sold. Although the Land Gains Tax was not aimed specifically at curbing the market for condominiums, this ruling means that the speculative building and sale of condominiums—especially near ski areas—is hardly touched.

According to Henry Ferry, Chief of Miscellaneous taxes in Vermont, "I think the state gets the lion's share of the tax under the 8% ruling, since, in a condominium project, we get 8% of

each unit sold." The last time Vermont's Tax Department informally surveyed several condominium developments was between 1973 and 1975, and Ferry concedes that "there is no hard and fast data to back up the choice of the 8% figure." Ferry emphasizes, however, that the Department has accepted this standard as a fair ratio of assets between land and buildings in a condominium project.

Still, it is clear that the arbitrary 8% ruling has cost the state many tax revenue dollars. For example, if a vacation condominium were sold for a gain of \$40,000, only \$3,200 of that gain would be allocated to the land value. The tax liability depends on the length of ownership and rate of profit. The maximum possible tax would be 60% of \$3,200—a tax of \$1,920 on a gain of \$40,000. This is barely more than the sales tax rate of 4%. In-

TABLE 1
Vermont Land Gains Tax Rates

Years Land Held by Transferor	Gain as a Percentage of tax cost		
	0-99%	100-199%	200% or more
Less than one year	30%	45%	60%
One to two years	25%	37.5%	50%
Two to three years	20%	30%	40%
Three to four years	15%	22.5%	30%
Four to five years	10%	15%	20%
Five to six years	5%	7.5%	10%

There is no tax on land held over six years.

deed, if the land gains tax rate were 30%—as it would be if the unit were bought or built for \$50,000 and sold for \$90,000 within a year—the tax would produce only \$960, for an effective rate of 2%. This is hardly a deterrent to speculative construction for quick turnover.

Because vacation condominiums have been lightly taxed relative to land, there is an incentive to invest in condominiums as opposed to open land. Moreover, the 8 percent ruling is hard to justify, because land value depends on location, not just use. If a condominium in Sherburne or Warren sells for more than a similarly built unit in Camden, New Jersey, the difference is due to location: to the value of the land. Because 28 Vermont towns contain ski areas, the gains tax might produce significant additional revenue if the allocation of profit to land on taxable condominium sales were increased.

The Legal Loophole

The legal loophole treats installment sales differently from a simple purchase for cash. If a seller can finance a buyer (much like a banker offering a mortgage), then the land gains tax is not due at the time the land is

sold, but only *pro rata* as the buyer pays off the principal of the installment note. Like a mortgage, the principal payments are low in the initial years when interest payments are high. The tax on the amount financed is deferred well into the future and there is no interest charge for the privilege of paying the tax later instead of sooner.

The speculator's wrinkle is to finance the buyer and then use the installment note itself as security for a loan from a bank or financial institution. In effect, the speculator becomes an intermediary between the buyer and the bank. The speculator pockets enough money up front to repeat the cycle of speculation, but the tax commissioner must still wait until much, much later to collect.

Let's take an example. Suppose a speculator buys a hundred acres for \$50,000, subdivides into nine 11.1 acre lots (to avoid Act 250 review), holds for three months, and sells each of the nine parcels for \$15,555: a total of \$140,000. Assume that the terms on which the speculator sells the lots are a 10% down payment, with the balance financed on a 20-year mortgage at 12%. The speculator has \$14,000 from the down payments, and can take the mortgages to a bank and use them as collateral for borrowing. If the speculator can get the bank to lend 80% of

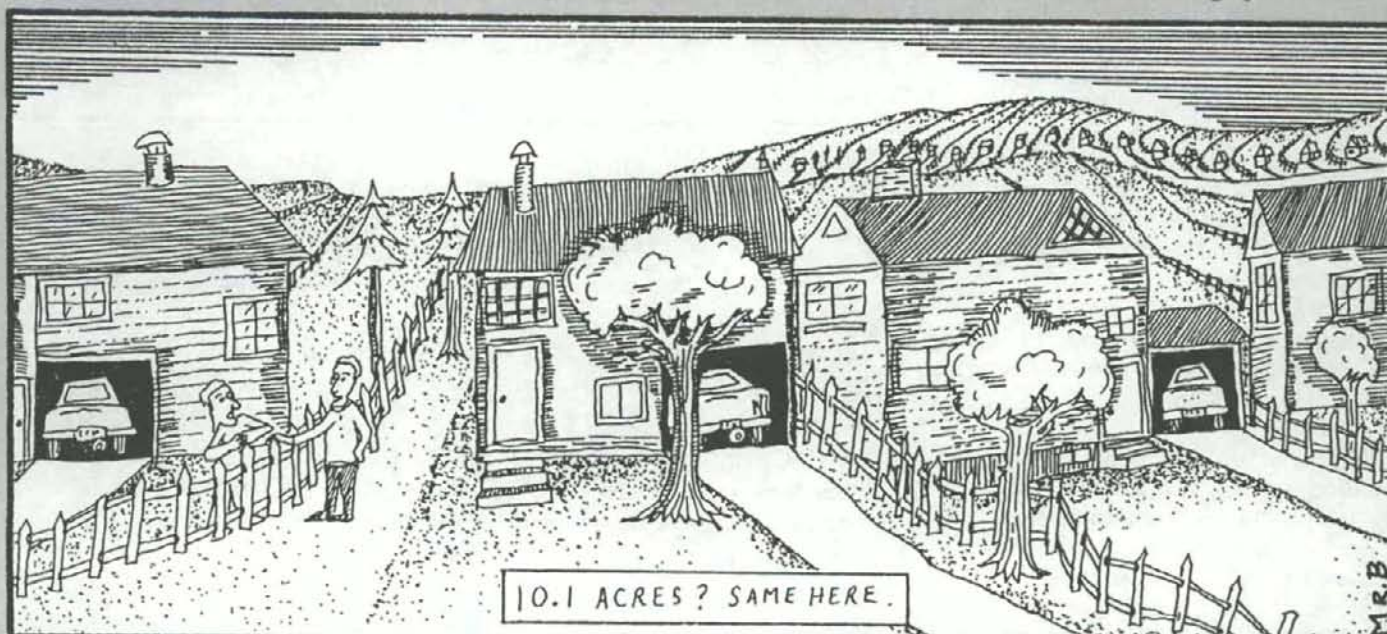
the face value of the mortgages, the speculator will have \$100,800 cash in hand, which more than covers the \$50,000 used to buy the land. The cycle can now start all over again immediately.

The speculator now has the role of a financial middleman. As the buyer makes payments, the speculator funnels them to the bank to cover the loan: the cash profit has been extracted up front. However, the Vermont gains tax is only due on the part of the down payment that represents profit: the tax on the rest of the payment is deferred. In effect, the speculator has the best of both worlds: cash now and tax later.

The size of this loophole depends on the interest rate and an interaction between the gains tax and federal income taxes. Assuming an interest rate of just 10%, the effective maximum burden of the land gains tax is about 7% if the land was held less than one year by a corporate speculator selling on a 20-year mortgage. This is far less than the 30% to 60% rates the law provides for all cash sales. Thus, as long as the speculator can use the installment sale loophole, it seems better to go for quick subdivision and turnover, rather than holding the land and having to pay property taxes and interest costs.

Although the 1986 Federal Tax Reform Act has largely closed the

Cartoons by Samuel Bartlett.



"installment sales" loophole at the federal level, the Vermont tax in this area does not automatically link to the federal treatment. A change in Vermont's tax laws is still necessary for the state to recover its share of the revenue. Currently, Vermont's treatment of gains on installment land sales allows speculators to continue to defer their tax liability into the future.

Portrait of a Savvy Speculator

It is difficult to say how widespread installment sales speculation is in Vermont. One major problem is that the funds for monitoring gains tax returns were cut out in fiscal year 1978. Another barrier is that property transfer records are not systematically organized in Montpelier.

Patten Corporation, headquartered in Stamford, Vermont is one of several firms that successfully speculates in land. Although Patten is not alone in using these land speculation techniques, Patten Corporation is publicly traded, and so its audited financial statements provide insight into how the installment sales loophole may be used in practice.

Patten operates throughout the rural northern U.S., including Vermont. It buys options on rural acreage, takes ownership when subdivision is complete, and markets the parcels within 12 weeks. It offers 90% financing to buyers, who are mostly residents of metropolitan areas, and 79% of the buyers finance with the company.

The financial statements reveal the company's reliance on the installment sale loophole. As of March 31, 1986, Patten had borrowed against almost half of its notes receivable. Their 1986 Annual Report explains:

"The determination to pledge rather than to sell notes receivable is made by the Company in part to defer income taxes . . . A portion of the Company's liquidity is provided through the use of the installment sale method of reporting income from property sales for tax purposes, the effect of which is to defer income taxes,

thereby increasing available cash."

Indeed, on a profit of \$8.7 million, Patten Corporation "provided for" state and federal taxes of \$4.2 million—taxes that will be paid someday—but it paid only \$48,000 in Federal taxes and \$158,000 in state taxes. Patten's current tax payment rate is just a little over 2 cents on the dollar, and its operating capital is just about equal to the amount of taxes it has deferred.

Meanwhile, Patten earns an average gross profit margin of over 54% on land sales. And even though it has been in existence since 1962, it only recently began an Act 250 permit process for the first time. By purchasing land in towns with weak zoning and subdivision regulations, and subdividing the land into fewer than ten lots of larger than ten acres (in order to avoid state review), Patten Corporation and similar private speculation operations can parcel up Vermont's open space and farm and forest land with little or no environmental review.

Putting the Pinch on "Parcelators"

The future integrity of the Vermont environment depends on the ability to keep land open and productive as farms and forests. One crucial ingredient is a wise tax policy that encourages socially desirable land use decisions, and provides adequate revenue for property tax relief. The land gains tax is now riddled with loopholes. If it were strengthened, it might aid the search for state revenue, discourage speculators from chopping the state into 10.1 acre parcels, and lead to better land use decisions.

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(Continued from page 12.)

Even if towns have developed town plans and zoning ordinances, the degree of review required from town to town often varies significantly.

To a large degree, the level of comprehensiveness within a locality's regulations is determined by how well-written its ordinances are, and the town's attitude toward growth and development. For example, Jay Johnstone, who chairs the Wallingford Planning Commission, says that development is welcomed in Wallingford and that the Planning Commission will cooperate in any way feasible. "We have not seen developments that have put us at a disadvantage," notes Johnstone. The consensus, he says, is that the town is capable of accommodating growth, and development improves the tax base.

On the other hand, according to Suzanne dePeyster, a lister and member of the zoning board in Sandgate, even an addition of five houses would place a strain on Sandgate's ability to provide services. The potential increase in revenue from property taxes would not, she argues, compensate for the increased costs.

Depending on the interests of the town residents, then, the relationship between increased costs and increased revenues shifts to support the particular outlook. While some Vermont towns adhere to the independent "no zoning here" approach, others have felt and are reacting to the adverse effects of uncontrolled growth. And subdividers tend to look first to those towns without subdivision regulations, or those that favor development.

If controversy does occur at the local level, the strength of local regulations may be tested. Fran Tolkatz of Properties of America emphasized that his company usually accepts a planning commission's decision. If the company feels singled out, however, Tolkatz noted that they would take legal action to appeal the decision.

Clearly, the resources available for a legal confrontation are much greater for a corporate speculator

than they are for a typical Vermont town. At the prospect of an expensive legal battle, with no direct economic return whether the town wins the case or not, many municipalities may be less than enthusiastic about pushing the enforcement of their regulations.

Although towns contacted by VNRC reported receiving varying degrees of cooperation from subdividers, many towns reported that they were not notified about a speculator's intent to subdivide until the land was actually divided and sold. Sunderland, Stockbridge, and Windham town clerks reported that the only notice they received was the filing of the deeds followed by the filing of the property transfer tax returns. As one town clerk commented, "They didn't wave any flags."

In their haste to subdivide and sell, speculators often sidestep important environmental and municipal concerns. As noted in the West Rutland example, land may be subdivided and sold in a matter of weeks or even days. But if municipalities are not informed of a subdivider's intentions in advance, they cannot inform buyers of information pertinent to the municipality and to the individual parcels.

For example, if they know in advance, municipal officials can inform a potential buyer about the town's sewage disposal regulations, and advise the buyer to have the proper tests done to ensure that the lot will in fact support a septic system. Although some corporate speculators guarantee that a lot will "perc" or will offer to buy the lot back, others do not hold out that offer, and the unadvised buyer may be left with an undevelopable lot.

On the other hand, since state review is avoided, if a town does not have regulations or does not have the resources to enforce them, a buyer is free to employ a septic system that is poorly designed or improperly situated. Vermont has many regions that contain shallow or clay-caked soils; and even when proper soils are present, building sites are often determined by views, not soils. In this way, the "nine-parcel

loophole" invites an evasion of the intent of Vermont's water quality regulations.

As the numbers of lots in a town increases, so does the demand for municipal services. Of particular concern to towns reviewed is the immediate necessity of improving roads which had previously rarely been used. In most instances, the roads providing access to the subdivided properties are Class 3; they are usually dirt, approximately 25 feet wide, and in general, towns only maintain them in the winter if someone is living on them.

Few Vermonters need to be reminded that an increase in land prices results in reappraisal—and higher taxes.

In one typical example, a Properties of America subdivision will require that a road in Peacham be upgraded. According to Town Clerk Lorna Quimby, the road was originally built for horse and buggy, and is only appropriate for one-way traffic. No one has lived on the road in years, and if an attempt were made now to plow it now, the snow would simply fall back onto the roadbed. Even if no one moves into the new subdivisions immediately, new landowners will want access to their property year-round. Peacham's selectmen and road commissioner are very concerned; the town had already set its budget well before the parcel was subdivided, and had received no notice that the parcel would be split.

The majority of these subdivisions have not yet been built on, or if they have, they do not have year-round residents. If they remain unoccupied for a long period, they may produce tax revenues without demanding many services in return. Once a property is subdivided, however, it remains subdivided; many towns are worried that they may have a time-bomb within their borders, and will one day be dealing with the delayed impacts of rapid growth.

As is evident from the ex-

perience of New England's most rapidly-growing areas, if subdivisions are developed, the character of many towns will change radically. And practically speaking, municipalities will be saddled with the burden of more road maintenance, extended school bus routes and stops, and an increase in municipal services such as fire and police protection.

Regardless of whether new subdivisions are developed, however, rapid turnover of land increases land prices—removing a substantial amount of land from the market that might otherwise have been affordable to Vermont residents. Few Vermonters need to be reminded that an increase in land prices results in reappraisal—and higher taxes. Municipalities have no choice but to reappraise and raise taxes; if the ratio between the selling price of land and the appraised value falls below 80%, a municipality's state aid to education is threatened. But as property values increase, local residents may no longer be able to afford to live in their community.

Reviewing Our Options

While the effects of corporate land speculation in Vermont are apparent, the steps we must take to deal with its adverse impacts are less clear. As we head into a new legislative session, considering the options is essential.

The jurisdiction of Act 250 and/or the state's subdivision regulations could be extended, in order, once and for all, to close the most obvious loopholes. It is also clear that municipalities need help—both financial aid and practical advice—in creating and enforcing effective town plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision regulations. And the state land gains tax is in need of a tune-up—in order to ensure that it is, in fact, the deterrent to land speculation that it was originally designed to be. Clearly, the state is being affected by haphazard land speculation and development. Vermonters must decide now which approaches will help lead us to the Vermont we want to live in in the years ahead.



Saving the Family Farm

Kirsten Seibert

"We have a crisis in America. A real crisis. It goes beyond our farms and small businesses, and loss of jobs. It's a crisis of who we are as people and what we're about as a nation!" bellowed Tom Harkin, U.S. Senator from Iowa. The audience at this fall's United Farmers and Ranchers Congress in St. Louis, Missouri was well aware of the meaning of the crisis. "We are presently losing family farms at a rate of 2,000 a week." Harkin went on, "That's half a million in the last two years."

Farm Aid

The United Farmers and Ranchers Congress was a three-day event funded by money raised by Willie Nelson's 1985 Farm Aid Concert. The Congress brought together farmers and other concerned persons from all over the country; some 1,650 delegates attended, elected from 600 caucuses around the country. Nine local caucuses in Vermont were organized by Rural Vermont, a farm advocacy organization directed by Anthony Pollina.

As working sessions to draft policy platforms began, the group's anger, frustration and

sadness quickly turned into energy to fight back. "The thing we need most is unity," said one Ohio farmer. "We all have our petty differences, but one thing we know we can agree on is that we are family farmers, we want to stay family farmers, and we need a fair price to do it."

At the Congress' opening session, this message rang clear. Representatives from each state stepped up to the microphone to introduce themselves:

"We're the fighting farmers from Kansas and we're down to the bottom line. The family farm is now or never."

"Minnesota . . . the state that was once proud of 10,000 lakes now faces 10,000 farm foreclosures."

"Tennessee . . . the land of Grand Ole Opry, beautiful horses—and broke farmers."

Jack Starr, a dairy farmer from North Troy, rose to introduce Vermont. "The Green Mountain boys and girls are present and ready to fight again," he said.

A Familiar Story

Although this may be their toughest fight ever, it is not the first time farmers have organized for fair farm policy. In the late

1800's and early 1900's, falling farm prices and rising costs triggered a succession of rural depressions—and the beginning of many farm organizations.

The first of these organizations was the Patrons of Husbandry, now commonly known as the Grange. The Grange became a leader in cooperative buying and selling, but due to organizational problems, their political activity was fading by the 1870's. As the Grange declined, however, other organizations developed to address similar concerns.

At the national level, the fruits of the farmers' political action was the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). Market surpluses, created by commodities being harvested and sold at only one time of the year, meant low prices for farmers; the CCC controlled the placing of products on the market.

In addition, a system of managing farm production was established. Supply was balanced with demand, reducing the federal government's cost of purchasing and storing surpluses. A national grain reserve was also established to prevent market prices from soaring in case of natural disaster.

According to "The Political His-

Above: "Cleared and cloudy." Photo of Hardwick field by Toby Talbot.

tory of U.S. Farm Policy" published in 1986 by the League of Rural Voters, this "parity legislation" policy was quite successful between 1933 and 1953. "Farmers received fair prices for their crops," says the document, "production was managed . . . and consumer prices remained low and stable." The number of new farmers rose, farm debt diminished, conservation practices advanced, and the C.C.C. made a \$13 million profit over the twenty year period through interest made on loans to farmers.

What was good for small farmers, however, did not neces-

needed to be lowered in order to boost exports. And supporters argued that the shift would "get government out of agriculture."

According to the League of Rural Voters document, however, "volume has never risen enough to compensate for the lower prices. Export earnings have tended to fall with lower prices, even though volume may rise." The United States tends to set world prices, forcing other countries to either match the prices we set or lose their share of the market. And other countries have increased their agricultural production to better compete on

1981 high interest rates forced land prices down, loans began to be called in, and farms foreclosed. Government policy to move farmers off the land truly began to work.

While some argue that the policy is simply triggering the loss of farms that have been mismanaged and have overextended themselves, others argue that the farm failures are a result of government policy at work. "If someone's doing a job worth \$14 and then you cut his pay to \$10, that's not poor management; that's lack of income," maintains Rural Vermont's Pollina.

The effects of this policy have already been devastating to some farm communities in the mid-west. But the impacts go beyond the loss of farms. Soil and water conservation practices may be given up on ailing farms; and abandoned farm land, although it may still be viable agriculturally, is also prime for speculation and development.

When farms fail, farm jobs are lost and support businesses, such as feed stores and equipment dealerships, go under. As seen in 1985, farm failures can also trigger bank failures: bankrupt and unemployed farmers won't pay back loans.

The Farmer Pays

The farmers at the Missouri Congress approved some one hundred and twenty resolutions. The

"If someone's doing a job worth \$14 and then you cut his pay to \$10, that's not poor management; that's lack of income."

Anthony Pollina, Rural Vermont

sarily serve the interests of some powerful corporations. For example, economic stability meant farmers were not continually borrowing from banks. Also, grain monopolies were stunted by stabilized market prices. A more even distribution of profits often meant a loss for such corporations.

In 1953 price floors and supply management were replaced by "flexible parity," giving the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to lower farm prices. Federal farm policy went from supply management to reduction in the number of farms. A 1962 report from the federal Committee for Economic Development states;

"The choices before us: (a) leak-proof control of farm production or (b) a program, such as we are recommending here, to induce excess resources (primarily people) to move rapidly out of agriculture." Similar policy continues to this day. Ron Albee, Agriculture Assistant to U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, commented "I had someone from the [Reagan] administration tell me last year that their goal is to put 100,000 dairy farmers out of business."

The basic rationale of this shift in farm policy was twofold. The argument went that farm prices

the world market. Ironically, government is now involved in agriculture to the tune of \$25-\$30 billion per year spent on farm subsidies, according to 1985 USDA figures. This is a long shot from the financial gains made under the parity legislation of 1933-1953.

Problems became more severe in the early 1970's when the federal government provided easy credit to farmers. Farmers borrowed against the increasing value of their land and struggled to stay in business through credit rather than fair prices. But in

The Terms of Farming

- **Parity:** A fair price. Parity prices are determined by a parity ratio, a statistic indicating the average purchasing power of all farm products relative to the rest of the economy. It is generally a ratio of prices received by farmers to the average costs of farm and family expenses. If farmers are receiving 50% of parity—as they presently do—then they make only 50% of what they need to sustain their families and farms.
- **Price supports:** Minimum prices which farmers must receive for their products. The minimum price is determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and guaranteed by the federal government.
- **Production base:** A set amount of production which the farmer will consistently be paid the determined parity price for.
- **Supply management:** A system by which farmers limit their production to a set amount in order to bring supply in line with demand, thereby improving the price they receive for their product.

resolutions were wide in their scope, and included calling for a fair price policy; a move to supply management; a credit policy including restructuring of farm debt; fair prices in the marketplace and not from taxpayers; an end to hunger; increased food quality standards; stricter control of farm chemicals; and improved consumer education efforts.

But one point was clearly made by every farmer: the cost of agricultural production, in Vermont as elsewhere in the country, exceeds prices received. "I come from a manufacturing family," says Barb Corwin of South Royalton, "and I know if we had worked this hard in any other business we would be millionaires by now." Ron Morrisette of East Randolph notes, "We milk about 50 head, but if my wife didn't work at the hospital, we wouldn't be able to put food on the table."

"We want parity not charity" were the words of Jesse Jackson as he addressed the Congress. And in the interests of parity, many farmers are supporting the Save the Family Farm Act.

The Save the Family Farm Act was written "by farmers, for farmers" and will be proposed to the 100th Congress in 1987. The

equal to that farmer's average production in the highest three of the past five years.

- **Annual Marketing Base:** An annual determination will be made of the percentage of change in production needed to balance supply with demand. This percentage will be applied to the production base of each farmer.

"I come from a manufacturing family, and I know that if we had worked this hard in any other business we would be millionaires by now."

Barb Corwin, South Royalton farmer

- **Support Prices:** The support price for all milk produced within the annual production base of each farm will be set at 70% of parity, or about \$16/cwt nationwide (\$17.50 in New England). The price for milk produced above this base will be set at 1/4 of the support price.

- **Transfer or Allocation of Production Bases:** Administered through locally elected Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service committees, production bases will be assigned to the farmer, will not have a monetary value, and cannot be bought and sold. Bases may be transferred with sale or lease of the farm. New or unused bases will be reallocated according to guidelines that give priority to family-sized farms and beginning farmers.

Act, however, monetary value is not placed on bases; bases are bought and sold with the farm.

A third concern often expressed is that food costs will rise dramatically. However, statistics generated by the League of Rural Voters in 1986 show that the average weekly food bill for a four-

person family would rise from about \$73 dollars to \$77. And in exchange, supporters argue that tax payers would see a \$25-30 billion reduction farm subsidy spending.

Farming from Here On In

Since returning from St. Louis, supporters of the bill have organized kitchen meetings, press conferences, and more. Support for the bill has grown, but some farmers are skeptical that the legislation will see serious discussion in Congress.

Opposition will come from many sectors, including some grain companies, banks, chemical companies, and other corporations. Bill supporters admit that the fight will be tough, and say that unity will be essential: not only unity among family farmers, but also among consumers, the business community, and local, state, and national political leaders.

Still, some farmers feel that organizing now may be their last chance. "Ten years ago there were about 2,500 dairy farms in my county. Today there are only 500—and I will be gone next year if something isn't done immediately," explains North Troy's Jack Starr. "I'm fighting because I've got no choice . . . but to lose my farm."

Kirsten Seibert was one of the 45 Vermont delegates to the United Farmers and Ranchers Congress in St. Louis, Missouri this fall. Seibert is the Planning and Zoning Administrator for the Town of Randolph.

The cost of agricultural production, in Vermont as well as elsewhere in the country, exceeds prices received.

legislation covers all commodities, establishing a system of supply management geared toward family farms and setting prices at 75% of parity in the first year. "I think the fact that this one piece of legislation covers all commodities and that support comes from all types of farmers, from all over the country, makes it worth seriously considering," says Pollina.

The specifics of the Save the Family Farm Act Dairy Program include:

- **Farmer Referendum:** Each dairy farmer will vote on whether to establish this program.

- **Established Production Bases:** Each existing dairy farmer will be assigned an established production base

Arguments against the Save the Family Farm Act vary. Opponents argue that supply management constitutes too much government control. Supporters contend that the management plan is minimal, and more beneficial, in comparison to the current policy directing farmers off the land.

Another concern relates to the production bases. Under Canada's current system, the production bases can be bought and sold separately from the farm itself. This has resulted, in many cases in Canada, in the cost of the production base alone exceeding the price of the entire farm. Under the Save the Family Farm

What's Parker's Gore . . .

and why are they trying to save it?

By Nancy Bell

Parker's Gore has been in the news a lot these days. For one thing, it is the purported home of a bull moose which became a media darling this fall when he spent weeks courting a little Hereford named Jessica.

In addition, Parker's Gore is the rallying point of over 1,000 individuals and organizations that have aligned to keep the area—although privately owned—pristine and undeveloped.

What's in Store for the Gore?

Parker's Gore was, like most gores, formed when New England was plotted in the late 1700's. Surveyors' tools were not sophisticated, and occasionally their lines would not meet, resulting in odd-shaped pieces of land that were not immediately allocated to a town.

The municipal allegiance of this 3,000-acre parcel is not in question; Mendon has long since taken the area under its wing.



Above: Parker's Gore viewed from the west, showing Shrewsbury Peak, Little Killington and Mendon Peaks. Eddy Brook cuts sharply into little Killington. Photo by Gustav Verderber.

And neither is the ownership of the Gore disputed; Killington, Ltd., and International Paper Realty Corporation (IPRC) hold the deeds. What is in question is whether development plans for the Gore are in the best interests of the surrounding communities—plant, animal, and human.

Killington, IPRC, and the Central Vermont Public Service Corporation's individual plans for the area are extensive. Construction plans include eight to ten new chairlifts, (in addition to the seventeen which Killington already has in existence); numerous ski trails; snowmaking ponds, pumping stations and pipelines; day-use base lodges; 2,000 to 3,000 condominiums; sewage treatment facilities; support systems of water, sewage, electrical distribution and roads; and a 46KV electrical transmission line to serve the growing Sherburne area.

Such growth in the area would create a dramatic change. Considering population growth alone, if 2,500 condominiums were to house four people each, there would be 10,000 people to service—the equivalent of the populations of Barre or Spring-

field. Conservationists point out that there are fewer than a dozen towns in the state that have populations of over 10,000.

Friends of the Gore

Out of concern for the scale of the proposed development, the Shrewsbury Land Trust last May launched The Friends of Parker's Gore. An unusual alliance of conservationists and the sporting community, the Friends has a growing individual membership, as well as endorsements from the Vermont Trappers Association, Barre and Mendon Fish and Game Clubs, Sportsmen's Alliance for Vermont's Environment (S.A.V.E.), *Vermont Sportsman Magazine*, VNRC, VPIRG, Ottauquechee Land Trust, Earth Bridge Community Land Trust and the Vermont Audubon Council.

Conservationists consider Parker's Gore to be an irreplaceable natural resource. The Gore contains the headwaters of three streams, hard and softwood forests, prime habitat for black bears, as well as homes for bobcats, fishers and mink.

The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife recently initiated an evaluation of the black bear habitat at the Gore. Vermont Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife Steven Wright notes, "from a fish and wildlife standpoint we would like to see the characteristics of the area maintained in their present condition."

The sub-alpine spruce/fir ecosystem of Shrewsbury Peak also provides ideal nesting habitat for several rare species of birds. The Vermont Institute of Natural Science and the Vermont Audubon Council designated the Peak as a "unique and fragile area"; but this does not afford the area any official protection.

Developing Proposals

Killington Vice President Carl Spangler has stated that Killington's plans are just "pipe dreams," as Mendon's zoning does not

allow development above 2,500 feet or on slopes of greater than 25%, which includes most of Killington's property in the Gore.

Killington and IPRC have, however, requested an Act 250 permit to build a snowmaking pond, Madden Pond 2, in Parker's Gore. The developers claim the pond is not associated with any other development. But according to a Mendon Planning Commission member, the preliminary plans for IPRC's condominiums are drawn to face a "reflecting" pond on that site.

Developing Parker's Gore is not a new idea to Killington. Between 1980-83, Killington, Ltd. (then Sherburne Corporation) submitted several Act 250 applications for lifts and ski trails in the Gore.

In both 1984 and 1985, the developers campaigned Mendon residents to change their Town Plan to allow limited recreational development on protected lands. At Town Meeting both years, however, the town voted to protect its fragile high elevations from development.

In April of 1985, Killington submitted to Mendon Selectmen a contract offering not to develop its property on the western side of Parker's Gore—which can be seen from Mendon—for 15 years. Killington said it would not require town services, and in return Mendon residents would have to agree not to "prohibit, restrict, constrain or reduce the scope of development" in the eastern portion of Parker's Gore and that the Mendon Selectmen and Planning Commission would "actively support" Killington in all regulatory processes.

Mendon has not yet publicly accepted or rejected this proposal. But lobbying from the developers is strong and steady. As one Mendon resident notes, "I imagine that we haven't seen the last of pressure on Mendon by Killington."

Alternative Futures

In the summer of 1985, Vermont Commissioner of Forests and Parks Mollie Beattie offered

to swap one third of Parker's Gore for a monetarily equal parcel of land in the Coolidge State Forest near one of Killington's condominium projects. The offer would be subject to legislative approval. Killington has thus far turned down the offer, however, saying that Parker's Gore is integral to its long-range plans.

"Our purpose in offering to swap would be to allow Killington additional development capabilities in an already developed area," says Beattie, "and to preserve land that is quite valuable to the public. The offer is still open."

The Gore is also bisected by the Appalachian/Long Trail. "Parker's Gore is beautiful terrain," says Preston Bristow, director of the National Park Service's Appalachian Trail Project in Vermont. According to Bristow, the Project has received over a hundred letters encouraging them to increase protection of the area. "There probably isn't a hiker alive who wouldn't rejoice in seeing this area protected," he adds.

With this kind of public support, it is possible that the state

and the National Park Service could join to acquire the Gore.

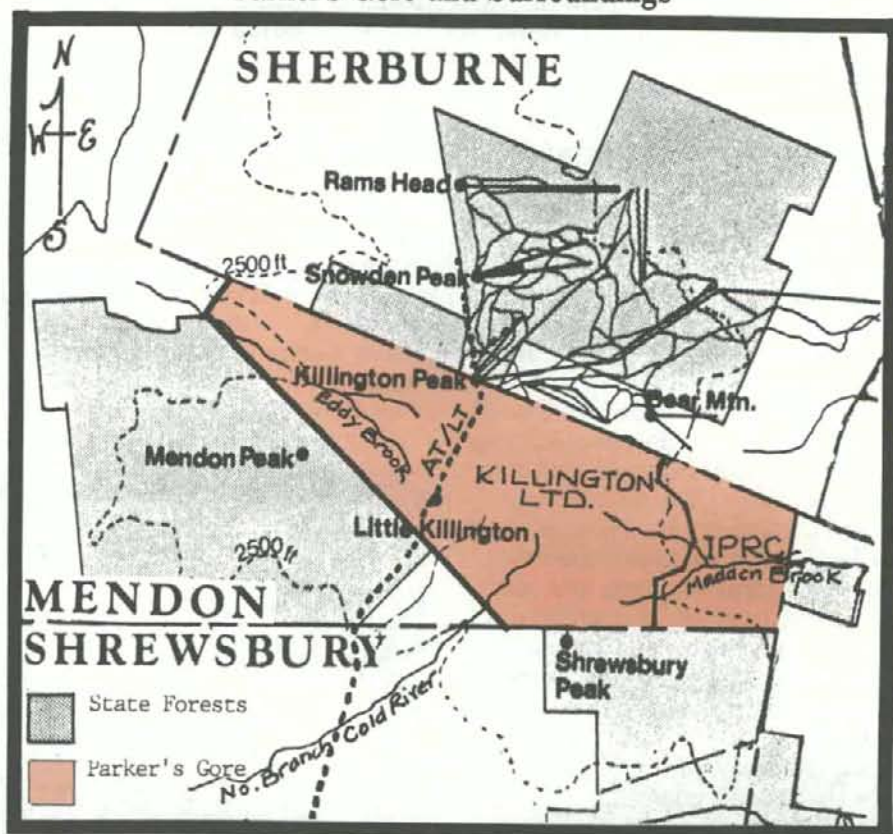
The Gore's Future

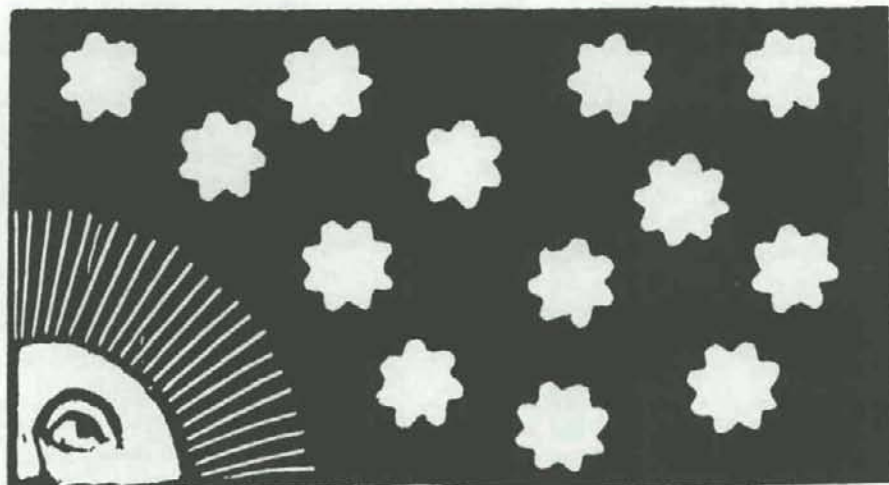
The struggle over Parker's Gore raises familiar questions with statewide implications. How do we estimate the value of wildlife habitat and wilderness experiences? What is the fairest way to compensate landowners when these widely-held public values impede their development plans? At what point do the public sector and commercial interests meet and compromise?

Much effort, communication and money will be needed to bring the private and public sectors to an agreement. But protecting this natural resource—valuable to outdoor enthusiasts, many plant and animal species, and yes, even the occasional lovesick moose—will be worth the trouble.

Nancy Bell is the Executive Director of the Shrewsbury Land Trust, and the Director of Friends of Parker's Gore.

Parker's Gore and Surroundings





Straddling the Seasons

By Mark Breen

As a meteorologist, I often find late fall to be an awkward time, at least in terms of characterizing it. For the calendar, it is quite simple. Autumn comes between September 21st and December 21st, leaving little margin for error. This, however, invites the even more unenviable task of defining autumn, which I would quickly pass on rather than get myself in trouble. But rather than calendars and seasons, let's turn to do our current meteorological surroundings and look at them for what they are. After all, for better or for worse, they will be here until winter really closes in.

The end of fall comes in one day like a forgotten chore, not exactly welcomed, but impossible to turn away. Those slate-grey skies take some getting used to, especially after such glorious October weather, (assuming this year was an exception!). The time change doesn't help, as the evenings close in faster, and even the mid-day shadows seem too long, too cold. Thermometers try in vain to appease the fickleness of the season, wandering aimlessly from warm to cold. At long last, summer's fire flickers and smolders until the sun can no longer rekindle the season gone by.

For all appearances, the weath-

er seems to have gone daft. Wherefore does the sun afford us increasingly rare glimpses, and even those not wholly satisfying? It troubled the ancient people, for they had a fear that the sun would perhaps not return. We manage to look beyond that now, at least mentally, but it's hard not to question how far things will sink before they recover. November's weather is no help.

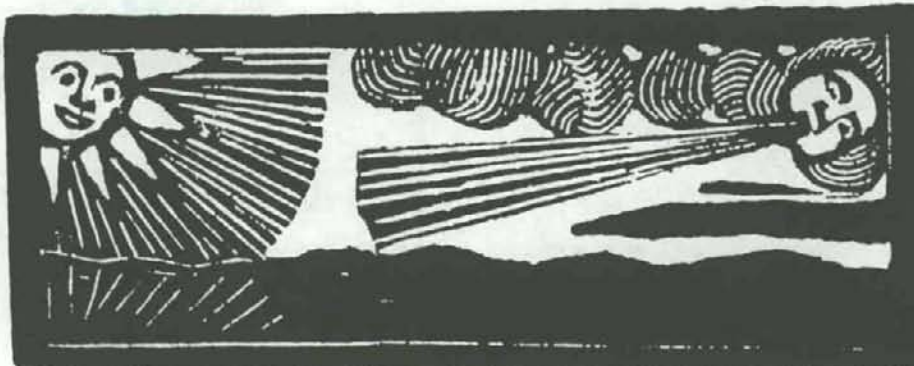
Though the sun has retreated from its northern position, it remains strong the further south you go. The result is a recharging of the warm-cold rivalry that wages a battle of storms, packed with rain and snow and wind and whatever. We experience this first hand, as the weather pattern is dominated by a strong west-to-east flow that sweeps storms in

off the Pacific, drags them across the west coast and the Rockies, then hurdles them east to send our thermometers on a roller-coaster ride.

Some storms have been moving at 50 to 60 miles per hour—fast enough to move them from the Cascades in Washington to the Green Mountains of Vermont in the course of two days. Ahead of these storms, a surge of mild, unseasonable air finds itself immediately challenged by a bluster of much colder, winter-like air behind the storm. In between the two, this malcontent expresses itself by a splatter of rain and sometimes snow, which can vary from a momentary miff, to a relentless roar.

Not every November sees such an active storm pattern. In fact, the "Indian Summer of Indian Summers" occurred back in 1950. For two days a hazy blue sky graced the region with temperatures of 80 degrees, the latest such warm readings that have been recorded. Although there is hope for mild weather, too often a sudden cold snap will dash those thoughts as quickly as the temperature drops. Some below-zero readings are possible by the end of the month; however, they are fortunately the exception and not the rule.

For many, November will always be remembered for the Great Flood of '27. The classic battle of warm and cold was enhanced by a very moist air flow that seemingly brought the ocean down upon the Green Mountains. Rainfall of 8 to 12 inches came in



only 24 hours, adding to an already-high water table, to send uncontrollable torrents of water gushing down un-dammed streams and rivers. If such a 24-hour accumulation were to be contained, it would fill a hole one mile square, one mile deep!

Also on the all-time list of late fall nemeses is the Great Eastern Gale of 1950. As opposed to the many hurricanes that have ravaged New England, this storm was not of a hurricane class at all, yet delivered the windiest conditions known to New England. A powerful storm over the New York-Pennsylvania border collided with an equally matched fair weather system over Eastern Canada. The result was a broad area of hurricane force winds from the Carolinas to the Northeast. Sustained winds of 70 to 80 miles an hour lashed most of New England that November, with wind gusts near 100 miles an hour. Perhaps it is appropriate that the Anglo-Saxons called this month "winde-monath" in Old England.

Although late fall has had its extremes in the past, it doesn't mean we're in for it this year. However, Mother Nature can be at her most, so batten down the hatches, bring in the wood and settle into the inevitable, "north winds in November bring winter by December."

Mark Breen is Meteorologist and Planetarium Director at the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury, and is one of the hosts of Vermont Public Radio's "Eye On The Sky" weather program.

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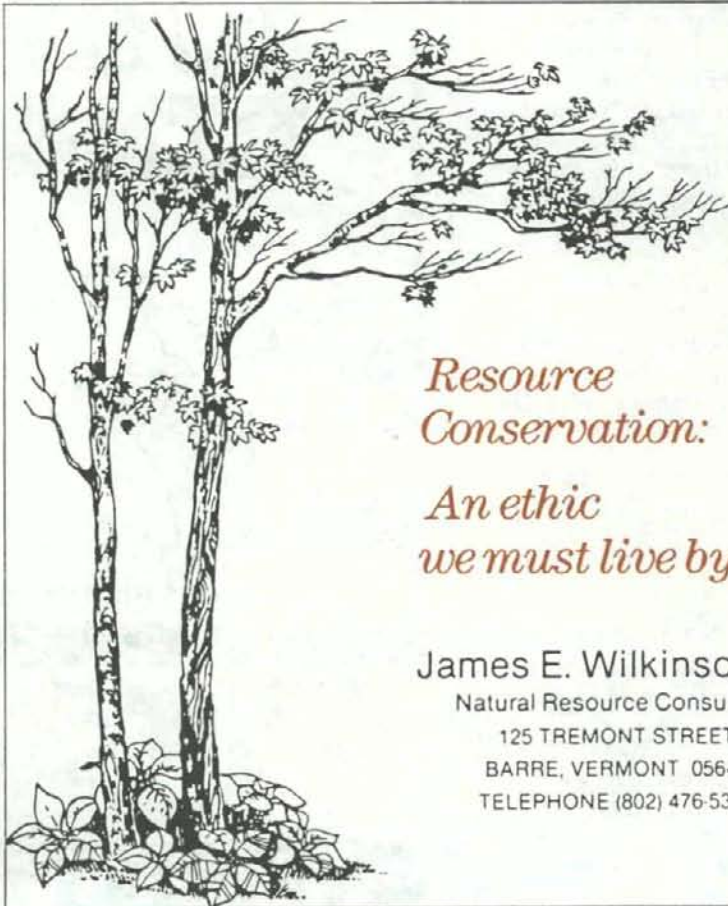
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THE COUNCIL

Welcome A-Board

The Council welcomes several new board members, all joining us this fall. Elected at VNRC's September 13 Annual Meeting from the membership at large and starting new terms this January are **Mark Breen**, Meteorologist and Planetarium Director at the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury; **William Ryerson** of Shelburne, a private consultant also associated with Planned Parenthood of Northern New England; and **Eunice Holt Van Vleck** of Middlebury, a long-time environmentalist who also serves on many community boards and committees.

Also elected were incumbent directors **Jonathan Bump** of Westminster, an attorney who also has a beef cattle operation; and **Jean R. Flack** of East Fairfield, Assistant Professor at the University of Vermont's School of Natural Resources and Environmental Program.

Elected as organizational mem-

bers were **William Downey** of Arlington, a sugarmaker and wood products producer nominated by the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association; and **Richard Kellogg**, a residential and commercial architect from Starksboro nominated by the American Institute of Architects.

Mark Roberts, a Burlington attorney, was appointed by the Board in November to fill the unexpired term of resigning Board member David Brook. Roberts is an organizational member nominated by the Lake Champlain Committee.

VNRC's Board also elected new officers at their November meeting: **Richard Mixer**, Chair; **Jean Flack**, Vice Chair; **Sarabelle Hitchner**, Treasurer; and **R. Montgomery Fischer**, Secretary.

A Double Honor

VNRC was doubly honored this fall by the NH/VT Chapter of the Soil Conservation Service of America. The SCS presented the Council with its 1986 Merit

Award, commending VNRC members and staff for both advocacy and education work. The SCS noted in its awards ceremony, "the Merit Award recognizes an innovative organization that has done an outstanding job of promoting and implementing sound natural resource conservation in concert with human needs and values."

The SCS also presented VNRC Executive Director **R. Montgomery Fischer** with an Honor Award. Fischer was especially commended for his dedication to Lake Champlain Basin conservation efforts, and leadership in Vermont natural resources management.

?!

What do Vermonters do when they're not milking their cows, making maple syrup, or jump-starting their cars?

See page 27.

New Members

VNRC welcomes the following new members who joined us between mid-July and late October: Battenkill Canoe Ltd.; Trust for Public Land; Craftsbury Academy; Baker Library Serials Sec.; Merck Forest & Farmland Center; W. Thomas Anderson; Dawn K. Andrews; Eleanor Angell; Roger C. Binkerd; Philip I. Blumberg; John A. Bock; Mrs. Ronald D. Brown; Farley Brown; Hollis Burbank-Hammerland; David Butterfield; Lois & William Capasso; Robert A. Clark; John R. Coleman, The Inn at Long Last; Sarah Cushing; Madeleine E. Davidson; William & Candy Davidson; David M. Disick; David Donath; Cornelia L. Dopkins; Paul Dussault; Terry Ehrich, Hemmings Motor News; Paul Evans; Ronald & Francine Ferris; Ruth Grandin; Beulah Gray; Ellen D. Grizzle; Elizabeth Hall; Kristen McIsten Hayden; Julius & Ingrid Held; Isabel Hoag; Barbara Hockett; Judith Hoever and Lawrence A. Quintian; Jamie & Lynn Huntington-Meath; Mrs. Keith Johnson; Susie Johnson; Brett E. Kelley; G. Kirchner; Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Kurland; Cliff Landesman; Steve Libby; James & Karen Long; Chris & Sally Lutz; Kathleen MacDonald; David Marshak and Aostre Johnson; Brent Martin; James McGlinn; Mary McCallum; John McCown; Malcolm Moore; William M. Moulton; Deborah Muller; Edward Oelsner; Mary Ormrod; Mr. & Mrs. Al Palola; Laura Paradise, Rural Housing Improvement; Kenneth Parr; Rose Paul; Jane Pearl, McIndoes Academy Library; Michelle Pinard; Klaus Postler; Shanna Ratner; David & Muriel Reisner; Robert E. Rosane; Hon. & Mrs. Kenneth Rush; Michael C. Saltz; Barbara M. Sargent; Mark Schomaker; Holly Schroeder; Jonathan Shaw; Carolyn Clinton & Sheldon Novick; J. Ford Shrodey; Carol Sigurdson; David Silloway; Alton W. Smith; Erik G. Sohlberg; John Strunk; Ruth R. Tabakin; Patricia A. Taber; Elizabeth Tannenbaum, Peter Fallon; Mr. & Mrs. Nathaniel S. Terry; Gioia Thompson; Anne P. Tobey; Timothy R. Volk, Image; Bruce G. Watson; Hilda Wendland; Thomas G. Wicker; Linus Wiles; Susan Wishnatzki; Edward B. Witte.

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THE DAILY PLANET

Thanks for Talking Back!

Thanks to all of you who filled out our 1986 Membership Survey enclosed in the the last issue. The response rate was about 2%—not high enough to base any major policy decisions on—but the many dozens of responses we did receive were well-thought-out, bursting with creative new ideas, and *truly* inspirational! VNRC was grateful to learn that most respondents felt that our advocacy, education, and membership efforts are on the right track.

It is clear from survey results that the "Vermont environmental issue of top concern" among respondents is growth management. Out of nine possible choices (plus the "Other") category, nearly a third of the respondents placed growth management as their first or second choice. Agriculture was the second top vote getter; water quality protection, nuclear waste disposal, and solid waste management followed.

Interestingly, although forest management did not show up as a top area of concern, Vermont's forests were consistently mentioned as one of the natural assets most appreciated about our state. (Vermont's foresters must be doing something right!) Also interesting was the low vote getter: concern about energy resources will, perhaps, always rise and fall along with fuel prices.

If reading these responses inspires you to add your voice to the throng, please feel free to do so! Use the survey form in the last issue, or write us a letter. We always welcome your comments, criticism, and suggestions. SC

What You Said:

Members were asked to describe the natural assets that they most appreciate in their corner of the state and to define what aspects they would like to see developed or protected. Many specific, lovely areas were named—too many to accurately sample here—but several themes developed:

“ The greenery, the forests, their accessibility, health, the air, the bog areas, public access, quiet, low noise pollution.

Environmentally-sound, non-exploitative, small, cooperatively-owned businesses that respect all life and act accordingly!

Hiking and fishing, clean streams.

The generally sound environmental controls available are a help to economics because they create a qualitatively higher level of development.

The mountains high and free of buildings; the deep river and stream valleys; the small farms which somehow survive.

As an old lady who grew up in cities living so close to others, and the land beneath my feet covered with pavement, I revel in the qualities of beauty, air, space I now enjoy and am concerned about . . . preserving these qualities.

Open fields and farming. That's what sets Vermont apart from New Hampshire.

...
Members' views of Vermont in the year 2000—and 2020:

“ Unrealistically: like it was in 1950. Realistically: like a place people respect as part of a living system.

Working farms. Well-managed forests. Signs of human activity derived from life and work on the land. Intact communities with intact downtowns. Access to open, green space. Public transportation. A rebirth of the railroads. Protected footpaths everywhere.

Somewhat along the lines of Europe . . . more clustering of residential, separated by open areas large enough to be viable for agriculture . . . Vermont becomes a greenbelt in the Montreal-Boston corridor.

I would like to see Vermont nuclear free . . . with support and education of alternative energy. Statewide recycling.

Forestation of highways!

A state having the maturity to deal both with retention of its great natural attractions and the lure of increased tax income from eager commercial developers.

It is very important!!! that Vermont keep its open spaces!!! Without them there is no Vermont.

Less "stuck on itself" than it is now—less oriented towards tourism, more towards production of "real" things such as food, wood products.

Environmental education should be on equal footing with other sciences in Vermont schools.

Act 250 is a stop-gap measure . . . it is helping, but . . . should be strengthened so we can reach 2020 without destroying all the natural amenities of Vermont.

Better local planning . . . that has an eye to the future We don't need a shopping center on every corner!

Major suburban and second home development . . . and condominiums . . . will forever change the character of the Vermont countryside, as has similar uncontrolled development along the entire east coast megalopolis.

Vermont will have to move along with the other states, but I would like to think there are still back roads not too thickly settled.

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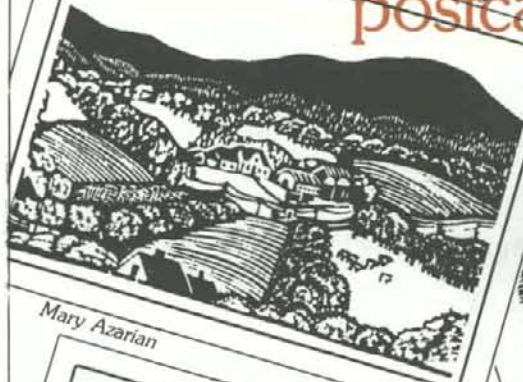
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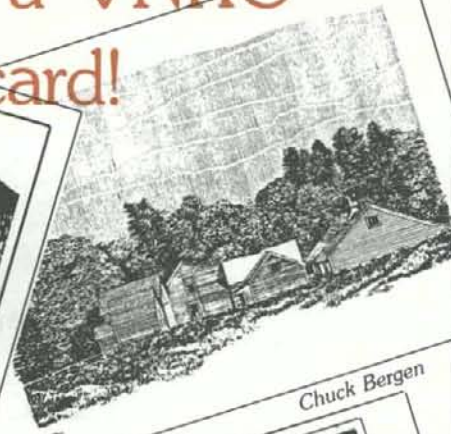
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•The New England Field Guide to Environmental Education Facilities and Resources is now available. The directory is sponsored by Antioch/New England Graduate School and the New England Environmental Education Alliance, and covers over 175 organizations including: Nature Centers, Museums, Environmental Education Centers, Sanctuaries, National Parks, State and Regional organizations. It features over 20 pieces of information about each organization: programs, facilities, membership, staffing, budgets, internships, and much more. Also fully indexed, includes cumulative statistics, and appendices.

•Finally an up-to-date resource: comprehensive and full of information. An invaluable reference for naturalists, educators, administrators, organizations, consultants, and any others interested in environmental education.

To Order: Send \$16 plus \$1.50 postage and handling per copy to: New England Field Guide, Antioch/New England, Roxbury St., Keene, N.H. 03431. Include your name and address, number of copies wanted, and make checks payable to: Antioch/NE. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

January 27-May 5

The University of Vermont's Environmental Program will offer a 3-credit course in Natural Areas Management through the Continuing Education Department. Topics will include site protection and restoration strategies, ethical considerations, hands-on practice of trail design and construction, developing management plans, and more. Tuesdays, 4-7 pm; weekend field trips may also be scheduled. For more information call Rick Paradis, 656-4055.



March 18-22

Here's advance notice of The National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association Annual Symposium to be held in Clearwater Beach, Florida. The symposium will feature rehabilitation center field trips, workshops, and speakers on a variety of topics including wildlife medicine, postmortem exams, banding, cage design, and more. Contact Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary, 18328 Gulf Boulevard, Indian Shores, FL 33535; (813) 391-6211.



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