

Bulletin

VNRC HONORS ITS 35TH YEAR

*Vermont's
Environmental
Guardian Since 1963*



The first year in Vermont state history when humans outnumbered cows was 1963, according to a chronology prepared by the Vermont Historical Society.

Perhaps then, it should come as no surprise that 1963 was also the year that gave birth to the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC).

During the coming year, we will be celebrating our 35 grand—and sometimes tough and gritty—years of protecting Vermont's environment. We hope you will join us in appreciating the many accomplishments of our organization: Many important environmental protections in Vermont have come from the devoted work of VNRC members, volunteers, activists, and staff.

Let's celebrate together!

SKI AREA SPRAWL

When to Say "No!"

By the turn of the millennium (if not already) Vermont will be one of the most desirable places to visit in our nation. Many millions of visitors will come to Vermont to enjoy its natural and cultural bounty.

But Elizabeth Courtney, VNRC's Executive Director, cautions, "With the advent of renewed mountain resort growth comes the concern: When is too much of a good thing no longer a good thing?"

As a region, Vermont is accessible,

beautiful, rich in natural and cultural heritage, available to visitors from all over the world as a recreational and spiritual resource.

Likewise, many of this nation's most cherished places are dramatically degraded from over use, poor planning and ill-guided land use policy. In some instances, the resource may have been protected, but the surrounding areas have been so carelessly developed that the experience of getting there significantly detracts from the experience of being there.

Is Vermont potentially vulnerable to the same issues plaguing many of our nationally recognized treasures?

For the past ten years, VNRC has been involved with state and Killington officials in the negotiations that led to the complex package of land swaps and ski area expansion plans. Even though VNRC has been supportive overall of the land swap, VNRC has always been very up front about two major areas of concern: Any agreement has to have adequate water quality protections as well as careful attention to future growth plans at the Killington base area. Killington has responded to VNRC's concern over the water quality issue in the Ottauquechee River by investing in access to the Alpine Pipeline. Killington is to be commended for this effort.

Because VNRC wanted to reserve the right to express

concerns about these issues as the process unfolds, we chose not to endorse the land swap package back in 1996. Though VNRC endorsed the concept, we want to remain in a position where we could continue to watchdog Killington's future growth plans on behalf of Vermont's environment.

Many Vermonters are probably unaware that Killington's plan authorizes the ski resort to construct a chair lift, known as Lift #4, and associated ski trails in a very steep, pristine watershed area between the two ski mountains.

It is also not widely known that Lift #4 is *not* a necessary component of the interconnect between the two ski areas and is unrelated to the land swap, which gives state owned lands to Killington in exchange for the Parker's Gore bear habitat. This lift is a development that anticipates significant new growth at Killington.

"Although we have consistently endorsed the land swap, recognizing the environmental benefit of preserving this prime bear habitat and the economic benefit of allowing Killington and Pico to interconnect, we question the wisdom of allowing Killington to build Lift #4," Courtney remarked. "We remain deeply concerned that the proposed Lift #4 can only damage what is a unique and pristine high-elevation watershed potentially leading to excessive growth in the region."



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The Vermont Natural Resources Council, Inc., is a nonprofit environmental organization founded in 1963 to protect Vermont's natural resources and environment through research, education, and advocacy.

VNRC is the Vermont affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

VNRC membership includes a subscription to the *Bulletin* (published three times a year) and the *Vermont Environmental Report* magazine (published twice annually). For an individual membership, send \$35.00 to VNRC.

The *Bulletin* is printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink. However, please recycle this issue by sharing it with your family and friends!

VNRC will remain vigilant in monitoring the Killington expansion and the oversight provided by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

In addition, VNRC is seeking support to implement a multi-year project to establish criteria for evaluating ski area master plans and the long-

term cumulative effects of these plans. Vermont's communities and Vermont's pristine streams and watersheds deserve no less.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION DEBATED AMONG CONSERVATIONISTS *VNRC Hosts Summit*

Fourteen Vermont organizations sent 32 representatives to attend the 2nd Annual Conservation Summit on December 16, 1997, sponsored by the Vermont Natural Resources Council. Implicit in the name of the event, the goal was to confer on the environmental issues that would be "priority" issues, and determine who would be working together during the coming Legislative Session.

Like last year's Summit, the group will be summarizing its chief goals for the 1998 Legislative Session in a *10 Point Environmental Agenda* that will be distributed broadly in January.

There were several new issues discussed at the Summit, which will be added to the *10 Point Environmental Agenda*. For example, attendees expressed great concern about the arrival of "factory farms" to rural Vermont. Currently, there exists a coalition of groups that is examining the economic and environmental effects of factory farms on surrounding farms and the local community.

Anthony Pollina, from Rural Vermont, elaborated on his group's concerns about factory farms, noting that to protect Vermont from this form of agriculture there would need to be increased technical and financial assistance to small family farms generally, along with some regulatory reforms.

VNRC will work with Rural Vermont, VPIRG, the Lake Champlain Committee, National Wildlife Federation, Conservation Law Foundation, and others to make sure Vermont's working landscape is on a scale appropriate to Vermont.

Another issue to be added to the *10 Point Environmental Agenda* is telecommunications towers. VNRC will continue with its work on telecommunications towers that began last January. (See *1998 Legislative Platform*, page 5, and the VNRC research paper noted on page 4 of this *Bulletin*.)

The agenda will be signed by organizations that attended the Summit, including: VPIRG, Rural Vermont, Lake Champlain Committee, Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, Preservation Trust of Vermont, Vermont Planners Association, Friends of the Earth, Citizen Participation Network, National Audubon Society, Conservation Law Foundation, Vermont Land Trust, Vermont Institute for Natural Science, Vermont Citizens Forest Roundtable, Vermont Population Alliance, Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions, Green Mountain Forest Watch, and the Green Mountain Club.

If you would like to receive a copy of the *10 Point Environmental Agenda*, contact Lisa Smith or Steve Holmes at VNRC.



Lisa Smith

Ann Cousins of the Preservation Trust (left) of Vermont catches up with Sharon Murray from the Vermont Planners Association.

CELEBRATION OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Members Meet at Button Bay

New Executive Director, Elizabeth Courtney, kicked off her leadership of the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) with her public address before members at the VNRC Annual Meeting held at Button Bay State Park on September 27th.

Courtney discussed sources of rapid change in Vermont that are affecting land use patterns—telecommunications, electric power, and transportation—and described how VNRC would take the lead on these issues. She noted, "We must insist on implementing the growth center concept in order to restore our down-towns and to guide smart growth in mountain resorts."

She conceded that VNRC would have its work cut out for itself. Nevertheless, Courtney views the situation positively, "We are ideally

Storyteller Mac Parker lures a young attendee from the audience.



positioned to lead the state—and yes, we are ideally positioned to lead the nation in innovative and effective resource protection."

In closing, Courtney shared with the audience an excerpt from a favorite poet, Mary Oliver:

*And doesn't everything die at last and too soon?
But tell me
what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?*

*"I would ask all of us here at VNRC,
And doesn't everything change at last and too soon?
But tell me
what is it we plan to do with our one wild and precious Vermont?"*



Prof. Barry Doolan from UVM enthusiastically describes the geological history of Button Bay before the group's hike.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

Mary Ann Carlson, Arlington: A former Vermont State Senator, Mary Ann brings a background of political action, teaching learning disabled children, running a country inn, and holistic psychology.

Mark Naud, Charlotte: A lawyer, Mark brings a background of water resources protection, environmental law, and public interest work. (Mark received VNRC's "Outstanding Volunteer Award" in 1996.)

Brendan Whittaker, Guildhall: A forester, Pastor, and vegetable grower, Bren's many conservation roles include chair of the District Act 250 Commission in Rutland County and Secretary of the Agency of Environmental Conservation.

Peter Zilliacus, Shelburne: A gourmet chef and former country inn operator, Peter was instrumental in convincing Gov. Deane Davis of the need for a law like Act 250 and served as chair of the District 2 Environmental Commission.

CITIZEN ACTIVIST AWARDS

Lifetime Achievement Award (Posthumous)
to Joe Bivens

Lifetime Achievement Award (Posthumous)
to Ferdinand "Nundy" Bongartz

Outstanding Volunteer to Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund

Outstanding Volunteer to Eileen Hentcy

Outstanding Volunteer to Patsy Highberg

Outstanding Volunteer to George E. Little, Jr.

Grassroots Leadership Award to Darlene Palola

Policy Leadership Award to Sen. Cheryl Rivers



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BIG STRIDES

But Challenges Still Remain

What is our progress in conserving the Northern Forest? What remains to be done?

The Northern Forest Alliance, of which the Vermont Natural Resources Council is a member, recently published a report, *The State of the Northern Forest*. The report chronicles the work, changes, roadblocks, and options as they relate to sustaining the Northern Forest.

Contact Lisa Smith at VNRC for your copy of *The State of the Northern Forest* at (802) 223-2328.

THANKS FOR YOUR YEAR-END GIFT

On behalf of the Board of Directors and all of the staff at VNRC, thank you for your support. You have been instrumental in helping us to protect Vermont's rivers, forests, lands, and communities—we appreciate your special year-end gift.

Our best wishes to you for the New Year!

TOWERS CONTINUE TO MULTIPLY

Find Out More with VNRC's Report

VNRC published its report, *Telecommunications and Broadcasting Transmission Facilities in Vermont*, in August, 1997, in an effort to

help citizens and decisionmakers better understand the complex legal, environmental, public health, and aesthetic issues.

State jurisdiction over telecommunication tower siting is threatened with federal preemption by a proposed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rule. According to Steve Holmes, VNRC's Deputy Director for Policy, "This is a disturbing level of federal meddling. There needs to be a way for us to plan for these tower locations in Vermont, and Vermonters need to lead the way."

Find out more about the issues. Call Kathryn Mathieson at VNRC to obtain your copy of VNRC's report at (802) 223-2328. (There is a \$6.00 charge for members and \$10.00 for nonmembers.)

ACTIVIST TRAINING SESSION

On Saturday, January 24, 1998, from 10:00 AM to noon, there will be an activist training session at the Green Mountain Club visitor center located on Route 100 in Waterbury Center. The session will serve as a follow-up to the annual Northern Forest Alliance Activist training conference held in the fall; its focus will be a letters to the editor campaign.

For more information, call Lisa Smith or Jim Northup at VNRC.