

VNRC

Vermont Environmental Report

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LOCAL ACTION RISING:

VERMONTERS MAKING BETTER CHOICES FOR
OUR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

Winter
2006-2007



Blake Gardner

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e-mail: abgphoto@sover.net

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IT TAKES A WHOLE COMMUNITY

By ELIZABETH COURTNEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In our work here at VNRC, we are all too often reminded of Dave Brower's admonition that our victories tend to be temporary while our defeats are usually permanent. We develop a sneaking suspicion that there will always be another poorly planned development or polluting enterprise over the horizon to undue what successes we have just secured.

We thought we had accomplished our mission in 1995 when we stopped a Wal-Mart from developing in a St. Albans Town cornfield with our victory in the Vermont Supreme Court. But low and behold, 11 years later in 2006, the project is back. Progress in the permitting process with developments across

the state requires constant vigilance to ensure compliance with permit conditions. A successful legislative initiative, such as last year's growth center bill, can yield a good law but implementation and enforcement of it can be another matter.

The Greek myth about Sisyphus comes to mind.

Punished for exposing the truth about Zeus' rapacious behavior, Sisyphus was forced, for eternity, to push a boulder up a mountainside every day, only to have it roll down again each night.

But what if we had another reality? What would it take for us to be able to savor more lasting accomplishments?

What if we were to shift our focus to define success as a function of the health of the whole community and of Vermonters' connection to the land? We might have a very different measure for how we approach our work, and how we define, describe and evaluate our success. We might have a community, for instance, that creates a local solution to its need for inexpensive goods. We might find businesses that make natural resource conservation integral to their strategic planning. We might find town plans with serious dedication to protecting the valuable resource lands (farms,



forests, wetlands and wildlife habitat) outside of the growth areas.

Earlier this fall, I had the privilege of attending a leadership retreat at the Center for Whole Communities at the Knoll Farm in Fayston, Vermont. The Center was founded in 2001 by Peter Forbes and his wife and business partner Helen Whybrow when they were selected by the Vermont Land Trust to become the stewards for the 400 acre Knoll Farm, a Land Trust property previously owned by

Ann Day, a long-time and dedicated member of VNRC.

The mission of the Center is to help create a more just, balanced and healthy world by exploring, honoring and deepening the connections between land, people and community. The Center aspires to create a land movement that integrates conservation, health, justice, spirit and relationship.

In retreat with 20 other leaders of not-for-profit groups from around the country representing issues as varied as livable wage, access to food, clean and abundant water, social equity, open space, affordable housing, energy independence, healthy forests and more, we replicated what Peter and Helen referred to as a whole community. Through our weeklong dialogue, we were able to see how our individual areas of focus can cause us to be divided because of myopic strategies, tactics and language. Yet when we work together, we have more lasting and satisfying victories.

With this issue of the *Vermont Environmental Report* we hope to help connect the dots for Vermonters about the relationship between communities, people and the land. Understanding how conserving farm and forest land can allow us greater access to healthy food, reinvigorate a viable farm and forest products economy, and help Vermonters develop greater energy independence is an essential step in developing a collective conservation ethic that meets a broad cross-section of needs and concerns in Vermont.

If Sisyphus had only had a whole community behind him, he would have been a lot further along by now.



Whole Communities Retreat at the Knoll Farm earlier this fall



HELP PROTECT VERMONT: THINK LOCAL FIRST

By CHRIS MORROW

One of the benefits of working in a bookstore is that I get to read books long before they actually get published. I am currently reading Bill McKibben's new book (due out in March) *Deep Economy*. As usual, Bill has written a

clearly articulated, compelling book — this time about the benefits of thinking and acting on a local scale. He points to climate change and peak oil as the compelling forces behind this proposed

shift. We need to move towards localism to both stave off the worst effects of these circumstances, but also as a way of coping with them.

But even without the looming changes brought about by our reckless use of energy in the last century, I find there are compelling arguments for a 21st century localism, for shifting much of our purchasing of goods and services to locally-owned, independent businesses. This is not simply a self-serving agenda — there are clear arguments backed by substantial data to support this notion.

As a way of preserving the character and prosperity of Vermont's economy, community networks and natural landscape, a group of citizens — including local business owners, professionals, non-profit leaders and government

representatives — have formed a new organization called Local First Vermont (www.localfirstvermont.org). Our mission is to preserve and enhance the economic, human and natural vitality of Vermont communities by promoting the importance of purchasing



from locally-owned independent businesses. We envision a robust and sustainable economy fueling vibrant communities, built on a cornerstone value and practice of “buying local first.”

We are not advocating for the removal of all corporate stores from Vermont. We don't want to shut down the internet. We are simply advocating for people to look locally FIRST when they are ready to purchase a good or service. It is in every Vermonter's best interest to do so. Why? Here are five of the many reasons:

1. Keeping dollars in the local economy: Compared to chain stores, locally-owned businesses recycle a much larger share of their revenue back into the local economy, enriching the whole community. This “multiplier effect,” which has been proven by at least three comprehensive studies (see website), has a powerful impact on the health of local businesses and the tax base.

2. Local character and prosperity: In an increasingly homogenized world, communities that preserve their one-of-a-kind businesses and distinctive character have an economic advantage. Being a tourist state, this is especially important.

3. Local decision-making: Local ownership ensures that important decisions are made locally by people who live in the community and who will feel the impacts of those decisions.

4. Environmental sustainability: Local stores help to sustain vibrant, compact, walkable town centers which, in turn, are essential to reducing sprawl, automobile use, habitat loss, and air and water pollution.

5. Jobs and wages: Locally-owned businesses create more jobs locally and, in some sectors, provide better

wages and benefits than chains do.

In Phase 6 of the Vermont Job Gap Study (www.vtlivablewage.org) it was estimated that Vermont residents and businesses exported cash to the tune of \$16 billion a year for goods and services — over \$26,000 for every Vermonter. We can divert a significant portion of this amount to local businesses. When we do, it will serve to strengthen the roots of the tree of health — economic health, community health, environmental health. Feed the Roots – Think Local First!

Chris Morrow, owner of Northshire Bookstore in Manchester Center, chairs the steering committee of Local First Vermont (of which VNRC was one of the first supporting non-profits). For more information about the organization and this season's “Think Local First” campaign, go to www.localfirstvermont.org.

“Our mission is to preserve and enhance the economic, human and natural vitality of Vermont communities by promoting the importance of purchasing from locally-owned independent businesses.”

— Chris Morrow

VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL I·N·D·E·X



- Number of Vermont organic farms in 1996 **150**
- Number of Vermont organic farms in 2006 **400**

- Vermont Voter turnout in 2002
(last mid-term election) **56%**
- Vermont Voter turnout in 2006
(percent of eligible voters voting) **60.7%**

- Estimated number of steps taken by participants in the
September walk for global warming organized by
Bill McKibben, VNRC and others **23,112,572**

- Number of cars in the US for every driver in 1973 . . **0.8**
- Number of cars in the US for every driver in 2003 . . **1.2**

- Average car gas mileage in the US in 1985 . . **27.5 mpg**
- Average car gas mileage in the US in 2005 . . **27.5 mpg**
- Change in the miles per gallon in the past 20 years **0**

- Square feet of Wal-Mart stores in Vermont in 1994 **0**
- Square feet of Wal-Mart stores in
Vermont in 2006 **295,000**
- Square feet of Wal-Mart stores in
Vermont in 2010 (existing & proposed) **717,000**

- Number of species listed on Vermont's
Threatened and Endangered Species List **195**
- Number of species for which recovery plans
have been approved **4**
- Number of these species removed from the list
due to conservation efforts to recover them **3**

- Since 1996, estimated acres of regulated wetlands
lost in Vermont **106**

- Year the Agency of Natural resources was initially
required to update Vermont's 17 basin plans **2000**
- Revised deadline set by the Legislature for
the ANR to update Vermont's basin plans **2006**
- Current number of basin plans implemented **0**

- Compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) sold in
Manchester during their six-month-long challenge
to reduce energy consumption **Over 40,000**
- Estimated savings annually in energy costs . . **\$267,800**
- Estimated savings in energy costs over the
8,000-hour-long lifetime of the CFLs . . . **\$1,713,920**
- Reduction of carbon dioxide emissions
over the lifetime of the CFLs **7,772 tons**
(the equivalent of taking **1,345** cars off the road)

- Acres of wilderness in Vermont
on November 30, 2006 **59,000**
- Acres of wilderness in Vermont on December 1, 2006,
signed into law after years of advocacy by
VNRC and others **101,000**

- Contribution to become a VNRC member
and help make a difference in the protection
of our beautiful state **\$35**
- Number of friends to share the *VER* and other
VNRC information with . . . **As many as you can!**

VERMONT PERSPECTIVE



VNRC CONVENES UNPRECEDENTED FOREST ROUNDTABLE

VNRC is currently conducting a roundtable discussion with over 60 experts in the state to identify the causes of forest fragmentation and parcelization and create workable solutions for landowners, municipalities, and state government to adequately plan for appropriate forestland conservation. The roundtable includes many diverse perspectives including consulting foresters, professional planners, government officials, landowners, sportsmen, and representatives from the forest products industry, conservation groups, biomass energy and other important interests.

The roundtable is designed to address issues that relate to parcelization and fragmentation including trends in the real estate market, forestland valuation, property tax policy, land use and conservation planning, family and estate planning, landowner incentive programs such as the Current-Use Program, and the viability of the forest products industry. The goal of the roundtable is to bring diverse perspectives together to share views on the causes of parcelization and forest fragmentation. The roundtable will develop a final set of recommendations to address the rate at which forestland is being developed

and fragmented in the state.

Materials from the roundtable proceedings can be read by clicking on the forest roundtable link at the bottom of VNRC's homepage – www.vnrc.org.

GROUNDWATER ACTION CONTINUES

VNRC's campaign to address large groundwater withdrawals in Vermont took significant steps forward this past summer. The Governor appointed a Task Force as required by H.294, the groundwater law that VNRC was instrumental in enacting in the 2006 legislative session.

VNRC is the only statewide environmental group on the Task Force. The other members of the Task Force include representatives from a business group, a municipal entity, and the agricultural community, as well as a citizen and four legislators.

Representative David Deen and Senator Diane Snelling are co-chairs of the Task Force, which has met three times. The October meeting focused on whether groundwater should be declared a public trust resource. The Task Force heard testimony from law professors, the Attorney General's office, Agency of Natural Resources and a former lawmaker from New Hampshire who was involved in the drafting of New Hampshire's groundwater law, which declares groundwater to be a public trust resource. All the witnesses agreed that declaring groundwater to be a public trust resource will not result in a taking of property, and that currently

groundwater in Vermont is not owned by individuals. At the November meeting, the Task Force heard from Vermonters who have experienced problems as a result of groundwater withdrawals.

VNRC strongly believes that groundwater is a vital resource that exists to benefit all Vermonters, and that no individual can own the groundwater. Any comprehensive groundwater program must be built on this premise. The testimony that the Task Force heard supports VNRC's position, and revealed the misunderstanding believed by many Vermonters that they actually own groundwater.

All Task Force meetings are held in the State House and are open to the public. This is the beginning of the hard work it will take to create a comprehensive groundwater program in Vermont. It is vital for VNRC members to follow the progress of the campaign and to let your representatives and the Governor know how important this issue is to you. Please see our website — www.vnrc.org — for their contact information.

FIGHTING FOREST FRAGMENTATION IN HALIFAX

As part of our Forest Conservation Campaign, VNRC is representing six landowners in Halifax who have filed suit in Windham County Superior Court to challenge forestland development in two rural locations in town.

The landowners filed the suit against a Halifax Board of Selectman decision to reclassify two recreational trails to Class 4 roads to facilitate subdivision development in areas that are rich in forest resources. The recreational trails are popular for skiing, hiking, horseback



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riding, snowmobiling, hunting, and mountain biking and are located in core forest areas for bear and other wildlife habitat.

One trail, Josh Trail, climbs through rugged northern hardwood forest and is located adjacent to a Class 2 wetland and Deer Pond Brook, a tributary of the Green River that drains a 2,700-acre watershed. The other trail, Bell Trail, has traditionally been managed for timber resources and includes important Vermont Association of Snow Travelers snowmobile and recreational trails.

The case represents the first time a lawsuit has been filed over the reclassification of a trail to a road in Vermont. VNRC is concerned that real estate pressure in Vermont will promote additional cases where developers are asking select boards to reclassify trails to meet local zoning ordinances that require frontage along public roads.

In this particular case, road frontage would promote a 500 percent increase in the amount of subdivision that could occur along the trails. According to Jamey Fidel, VNRC Forest Program Director and legal counsel in the case, “this case will set an important legal standard for the manner in which recreational trails can be reclassified to roads to facilitate subdivision development.”

The Judge and three Commissioners are currently scrutinizing whether the trail reclassification will be in the “public good, convenience, and necessity” for the inhabitants of the town. VNRC recently argued that the Halifax Town Plan, public opposition to the reclassification, and unacceptable wildlife habitat, water quality, recreation and forest management impacts dictate that the trails should be left alone and not developed for additional

homes, driveways and utilities. A ruling is expected sometime this winter.

NPDES STORMWATER DECISION

The Vermont Supreme Court recently ruled on the appeal of the victory that VNRC and Conservation Law Foundation had won in its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater petition before the Vermont Water Resources Board (WRB). VNRC and CLF petitioned under the federal Clean Water Act that discharges to stormwater polluted waters in several Chittenden County streams are required to have federal NPDES permits. Federal permits have more stringent requirements for impaired waters and provide more opportunity for public review and enforcement of the permits.

Chittenden County business groups and the Vermont ANR appealed the WRB decision, attacking on numerous grounds. The Vermont Supreme Court rejected all of the arguments raised by the business groups and ANR. However, the Court ruled that ANR must determine which stormwater discharges are contributing to the existing water quality standards violation, based on a scientific analysis. Accordingly, the Court reversed the WRB decision on the petition pending the ANR review.

While VNRC is disappointed that the WRB decision was overturned, we are confident that ANR’s science based review will properly identify the stormwater discharges that require NPDES permits, and ANR will then address those discharges as required by law.

PLANNING TOOLS FOR FORESTLAND CONSERVATION

VNRC is working to develop creative new planning and zoning strategies to promote forestland conservation in Vermont. VNRC is currently reviewing local strategies in the state and developing new planning templates for municipalities to reduce the effects of forest fragmentation and parcelization. VNRC is available to assist municipalities in the following ways:

- Work with local municipalities and residents to identify and map priority forestland resources and create a vision for forestland development and conservation in the community;
- Review the strengths and weaknesses of existing municipal planning and zoning strategies to conserve forestland and reduce the impacts of forest fragmentation and parcelization in rural resource lands;
- Develop new templates for municipal zoning bylaws and town plan policies that adequately identify and conserve important forestland parcels and forest resources such as wildlife habitat, watershed functions, recreation resources, timber production areas, etc.;
- Develop and/or strengthen subdivision regulations to adequately review the impacts of proposed development to forestland resources and ensure appropriate consideration of impacts that may not be covered under state review of development projects;
- Develop incentive based policies for landowners



“This case [in Halifax] will set an important legal standard for the manner in which recreational trails can be reclassified to roads to facilitate subdivision development.”

— Jamey Fidel, VNRC Forest Program Director

VNRC played a significant role in passage of the legislation, working closely with our colleagues on the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative. The law sets up several implementation milestones that we are paying close attention to and weighing in with research, education, and advocacy.

This summer, VNRC submitted extensive comments on the Interim Procedure for Primary Agricultural Soils Mitigation Benefits to the newly established Planning and Coordination Group. The law mandated this group, overseen by the Chair of the Natural Resources Board’s Land Use Panel and the Commissioner of Housing and Community Affairs, to provide growth center designation application assistance to communities and coordinated staff support to the expanded Downtown Board. The expanded Downtown Board will make the decisions on designating new growth centers.

The Interim Procedure was the first work performed by the Planning and Coordination Group, and it was very important to VNRC that the process adopted was consistent with the law, particularly that the definition of growth center was as strong as contemplated in Act 183. Although there were some who advocated for a looser definition of growth centers, arguing that it would make it easier for more communities to receive designation, VNRC recommended, and the Planning and Coordination Group and expanded Downtown Board agreed, that the letter

and developers to cluster development and maintain rural settlement patterns in town. Assist towns in designating growth centers if applicable;

- Inform municipalities of state and federal landowner assistance and incentive based programs designed to keep forestland and wildlife habitat intact and viable.

If your municipality is interested in receiving planning assistance for forestland conservation, please contact Jamey Fidel, VNRC Forest Program Director at 223-2328 ext 117 or jfidel@vnrc.org.

VNRC APPOINTED TO FISH AND WILDLIFE FUNDING TASK FORCE

Last legislative session, VNRC worked hard with Representative Steve Adams (R), Chair of the House Fish and Wildlife Committee, to pass legislation to set up a task force to study sustainable funding options for the Fish and Wildlife Department (FWD). Over the summer, Governor Douglas appointed a nine-person committee to develop a report on legislative recommendations for funding the FWD. VNRC Executive Director, Elizabeth Courtney, was appointed to the committee.

The task force is expected to have a draft set of recommendations by early January, which will go out

for public comment before being sent to the appropriate legislative committees. VNRC is hopeful that the task force will create momentum for new funding mechanisms to help the FWD better manage and conserve important wildlife resources.

VNRC is also participating in a new *Wildlife Partnership* that the Northern Forest Alliance has assembled to bring diverse wildlife interest groups together to support the recently enacted State Wildlife Action Plan (see *Spring 2006 VER*) and new funding options for the FWD. One funding option available to Vermonters today is to purchase a new conservation license plate. The State recently unveiled the “Catamount” plate, and the design features a cougar alongside a mountainous lakeshore. The goal is to raise awareness and funds for nongame wildlife and watersheds. To purchase a plate, go to www.vtfishandwildlife.com/support_plates.cfm.

IMPLEMENTING VERMONT’S NEW GROWTH CENTER LAW (ACT 183)

VNRC’s efforts were integral during the 2006 legislative session in passing the Growth Center Law (Act 183). The law is a fitting companion to Act 200, Act 250, and the Downtown Law. It is designed to unite planning, regulation, incentives, and state investment policy to guide future development to designated growth centers in order to bring vitality to existing communities and enhance environmental quality in the countryside.



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and spirit of the law was to be upheld.

Essentially the Interim Procedure will allow a community which has not received a final growth center designation to have a temporary grant of the Act 250 agricultural soils mitigation benefit for development projects within the community going through the Act 250 process. The developer of a project would be eligible for a reduced ratio of conserved land to developed land from 3/1 or 2/1 to 1/1. That is, the developer would be responsible for conserving one acre of farmland for each acre impacted by development.

The Planning and Coordination Group is currently working with consultants on preparation of a municipal growth centers planning manual and implementation checklist that will guide communities as they seek growth center designation.

Another aspect of the law began to take shape in late October, as the Growth Center Study Group (on which VNRC has a seat) was convened by the Secretary of Agriculture. By January 1, 2007, the Secretary of Agriculture is to present to the Legislature a work plan and budget for options and recommendations for agricultural and other land conservation policies for the future to be developed by this six-member working group.

THE PETERSON DAM, ONCE AGAIN

For decades, VNRC has fought to address the impacts of the Peterson Dam. The Peterson Dam is part of the Lamoille River Hydroelectric Project (LHRP), which consists of four dams. The Peterson is the LHRP dam closest to the confluence of the Lamoille River and

Lake Champlain. Because of the poor placement of the Peterson, miles of some of the most significant aquatic habitat in Vermont were destroyed, and species such as sturgeon, once abundant in Lake Champlain, were decimated. The biologists for the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources have concluded that the only way to restore this habitat and bring the LHRP into compliance with minimum state water quality standards is to remove the dam.

In 2001, VNRC, ANR, Trout Unlimited, Central Vermont Public Service (the owner of the dam) and the Town of Milton (where the dam is located), entered into a comprehensive settlement agreement (CSA) to end decades of litigation that required the Peterson to be removed in 20 years. The CSA is contingent on CVPS obtaining approval from the state Public Service Board (PSB) to pass future costs of dam removal on to ratepayers. After over a year, a PSB Hearing Officer issued a preliminary ruling that states while there are unquestionable environmental benefits to removing the Peterson Dam, the benefits do not justify the PSB altering its longstanding policy against granting future rate recovery. VNRC and ANR objected to the preliminary ruling and the PSB itself held oral argument in October to hear the objections. A final decision is expected soon. If the PSB does not grant the rate recovery, the CSA will terminate.

VNRC has several legal options if the rate recovery orders are not granted. However, we are still hopeful that the PSB will reverse the preliminary ruling, grant the rate recovery and keep in place the plan to remove the

Peterson Dam and restore some of the most significant aquatic habitat in Vermont.

WATCHING OUT FOR WETLANDS

VNRC is the only statewide environmental group appointed to a formal investigation into wetland regulation in Vermont that the Water Resources Panel has initiated. The investigation was prompted by changes to the Vermont law that were made in the so-called permit reform legislation of 2004, as well as court decisions that have called into question the legality of the Vermont Wetland Rules that have been effect since 1990.

The most significant issue of the investigation is how to determine which wetlands Vermont protects through its regulatory program. Currently, wetlands on maps created by aerial photography in 1987 are protected in Vermont. The maps are very flawed and as a result anywhere between 30-40 percent of important wetlands in Vermont that should be protected based on their scientific values are not protected by ANR under Vermont law.

VNRC has formed a coalition of other members of the investigation (e.g. private consultants, conservation commissions, regional planning commissions, regional environmental groups and private wetland consultants) and as a result of significant advocacy efforts has convinced the Water Resources Panel to base wetland regulation on the scientific value of wetlands, rather than outdated, incorrect maps. ANR and the traditional business community strenuously disagree with VNRC's position, and the Panel's decision, because



The Peterson Dam

they like the certainty that regulating wetlands that appear on maps provide. It was a significant victory for VNRC to convince the Panel to move away from the use of jurisdictional maps, as this will result in the regulation of an additional 30-40 percent of significant wetlands in Vermont.

The investigation has now turned to implementing the Panel's decision. Legislation will ultimately be proposed to alter Vermont law to ensure that wetland regulation is not tied to maps. VNRC will be actively engaged in this issue in the Legislature.

KEEPING WAL-MART OUT OF CORNFIELDS

VNRC is making steady progress in its attempt to force a proposed Wal-Mart out of a St. Albans cornfield and into the downtown. After years of litigation, VNRC forced Wal-Mart and the Town to void local zoning permits that the Town issued to Wal-Mart in 2004. VNRC argued that conflicts of interest on the Town zoning board invalidated the permits. Board members are supposed to

VNRC has formed a coalition . . . and as a result of significant advocacy efforts has convinced the Water Resources Panel to base wetland regulation on the scientific value of wetlands, rather than outdated, incorrect maps.

be impartial, yet one Board member wore a hat that read "St. Albans Needs Wal-Mart" to a hearing, and another Board member signed a pro-Wal-Mart petition and submitted it to the Board. In September, an Environmental Court Judge agreed with VNRC that this conduct violated the due process rights of the Northwest Citizens for Responsible Growth (NWCRG), the local citizen group that VNRC is representing. The Judge's decision forced the Town to void the permits. VNRC and the NWCRG are pleased that the permits will be voided. However, VNRC is frustrated that we may have to expend the resources to fight the battle yet again, and that we may still not get a fair hearing in St. Albans.

In Act 250, after a full week of hearings this June, the

Act 250 Commission ruled that Wal-Mart's economic impact evidence was deficient. Wal-Mart supplemented its evidence, and a hearing took place on November 15th. VNRC's expert – UVM professor Jane Kolodinsky – reviewed Wal-Mart's filing and testified that their evidence still is flawed and does not meet the Act 250 criteria.

VNRC addressed a wide range of issues at the June Act 250 hearings including stormwater, traffic, economic impacts, impacts on the City of St. Albans, impacts on adjoining farms, impacts on rare, threatened and endangered species and compliance with Town and Regional Plans. We are hopeful that the Commission will deny the permit.

INTERVENING IN STRATTON PLANNING PROCESS

VNRC remains engaged in the implementation of the Stratton Master Plan. We recently intervened in a project that would have increased discharges to one of the polluted waters at Stratton. As a result of our intervention, Stratton agreed to take steps to minimize and offset any additional loading of sediment to the polluted waters (VNRC actually appealed the stormwater permits for the project before a settlement between VNRC, Stratton and the Stratton Area Citizens

Committee—a long time local citizens group—was reached.) VNRC has also obtained party status in the Stratton Master Plan proceedings in order to protect VNRC's interest in assuring that water quality and wildlife habitat is not degraded as a result of the continued expansion at the resort.

VERMONT FAIR TAX COALITION HOSTS INTERNATIONAL EXPERT ON GREEN TAXES

VNRC, working in cooperation with the Vermont Fair Tax Coalition (VFTC) and the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics, was able to bring an internationally renowned expert on green revenue systems to Vermont on October 27th. Dr. Anselm Gorres, President of Green Budget Germany (GBD) was one of the featured speakers at the annual Global Conference on Environmental Taxation held in nearby Ottawa, Canada October 22-24. Dr. Gorres graciously accepted our invitation to speak twice in Vermont to the state's leading policy makers. In the morning, Dr. Gorres spoke at Vermont College on "The Implementation, Impact and Future Development of Germany's Ecotax Reform," and in the afternoon he addressed an audience at the University of Vermont on "A Green Budget for Vermont?" Green



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Budget Germany is a non-governmental organization established in 1994 to support the development of an Ecological Tax Reform (ETR) in Germany. Since the implementation of ETR in 1999, GBD has focused on improving the ecotax reform and lobbying for further environmental fiscal reform, both in Germany and abroad.

Since 1998, the VFTC has sought ways to modernize our state revenue structure to promote economic efficiency, encourage sustainable development practices, and address crucial environmental issues such as climate change by using financial incentives that tax reform can provide. The Coalition's unique partnership, which has served as a national model for other states working on fair tax issues, has helped Vermont make gains in this area, including the following :

- A new energy efficiency law with a key provision requiring Vermont to meet a renewable portfolio standard, or RPS;
- Creation of a clean energy fund used to develop in-state renewable energy financed by a tax on storage of nuclear waste in the state;
- Passage of a mining waste tax;
- Repeal of the sales tax exemption for non-agricultural pesticides;
- Sales tax exemption for solar hot-water heaters and off-grid systems;
- A comprehensive financial incentive program for

downtown development;

- A significant financial commitment to the "Clean and Clear Water" initiative for the clean-up of Lake Champlain and other waters;
- A change in the corporate income tax — "unitary combined reporting" — which represents a tax shift that benefits in-state businesses and residents and sustainable land use and puts a heavier burden on out-of-state "big box" retailers like Wal-Mart.

In 2007 the VFTC will be working to advance the following:

- Establish a motor vehicle fee-bate system for energy efficient vehicles or gas guzzler tax;
- Create financial/tax incentives for hybrids and bio-diesel vehicles;
- Further promote and expand "Efficiency Vermont" — Vermont's award-winning energy efficiency utility;
- Strengthen the RPS law;
- Implement the new growth center law through sufficient appropriations and other financial incentives;
- Increase tax credits for the downtown program;
- Implement policies that direct new state infrastructure in locations that do not induce sprawl;
- Enable independent community impact studies of large scale retail developments;
- Strengthen the Housing and Conservation Trust

- Fund;
- Expand and increase the bottle bill;
- Enhance the current use program.

INSURING STOWE SETTLEMENT HONORED

VNRC continues to track the implementation of the Stowe Mountain Resort Master Plan to ensure that the settlement agreement that VNRC entered into with SMR is honored. We recently commented on the impact of SMR development on water quality at the resort, as several streams have now been identified by ANR as impaired.

HELPING COMMUNITIES TAKE CHARGE OF ENERGY CONSUMPTION

The Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network's work to establish energy and climate action committees in Vermont communities is rapidly gathering momentum. As energy prices soar and the days grow hotter, more citizens are embracing the VECAN model of developing and implementing energy saving, greenhouse gas reducing strategies at the town level.

Along with partner groups Alliance for Climate Action, New England Grassroots Environment Fund, Sustainable Energy Resource Group, and Vermont Energy Investment Corporation and other efficiency and renewable energy leaders, VNRC is helping to facilitate and advance forward-thinking strategies to address the most pressing challenge of our time — climate change.

While much great work

is underway across Vermont on energy issues, VECAN is helping to fill a vital niche. By serving as a resource 'hub,' where the spokes of Vermont's energy 'wheels' are increasingly connecting, VECAN is linking concerned Vermonters to the tools, models, and organizations that will help their communities implement cost-saving, energy-reducing, green power-generating measures.

Eighteen communities from Burlington to Brattleboro are already hard at work on local energy committees. These groups serve as important models for other towns. By strengthening connections with these committees and helping establish new groups, VECAN serves as a network for concerned citizens to share lessons learned, highlight successes, work through challenges, and identify key needs and opportunities.

To establish an energy and climate action committee in your town, download VECAN's 'Town Energy and Climate Action Guide' on VNRC's web site at www.vnrc.org. This manual provides step-by-step instruction for committees to form, and information about resources that will help them thrive. Please feel free to contact VNRC's Johanna Miller at 802-223-2328 or jmiller@vnrc.org with any additional questions.

VNRC, NWF & OTHERS JOIN SUPREME COURT BATTLE

On November 29, the U.S. Supreme Court heard the first-ever case involving global warming. The case, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, et al v. United States Environmental Protection Agency, centers

on a 2003 EPA decision not to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles as pollution. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) filed an amicus brief on behalf of itself, VNRC and 72 other sporting and conservation organizations, state fish and game departments, professional fish and wildlife societies, zoos and aquariums and religious organizations.

The ruling could have far-reaching implications for how the United States addresses its contribution to global warming. The crux of the case involves whether or not greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks should be regulated by the EPA under the Clean Air Act due to their contribution to global warming.

“Vermont’s healthy ecosystems and wildlife habitats are the foundation of our economy,” said Elizabeth Courtney, VNRC Executive Director. “Greenhouse gases threaten the health of our communities, the maple industry, ski industry, hunting, fishing and agriculture. If we do not act now to address this problem, we will lose a generation of work to protect Vermont’s natural resources.”

The NWF brief outlines some of the most relevant scientific research to date on how global warming already is affecting wildlife, and is expected to affect wildlife in the 21st century. Some species, like the golden toad, already have gone extinct from changes in climate; others, like the polar bear, could be victims if current climate trends are not changed. In 2004, research published in the science journal *Nature* estimated that as many as one-third of species in some places are likely to go extinct due to global warming within about

50 years.

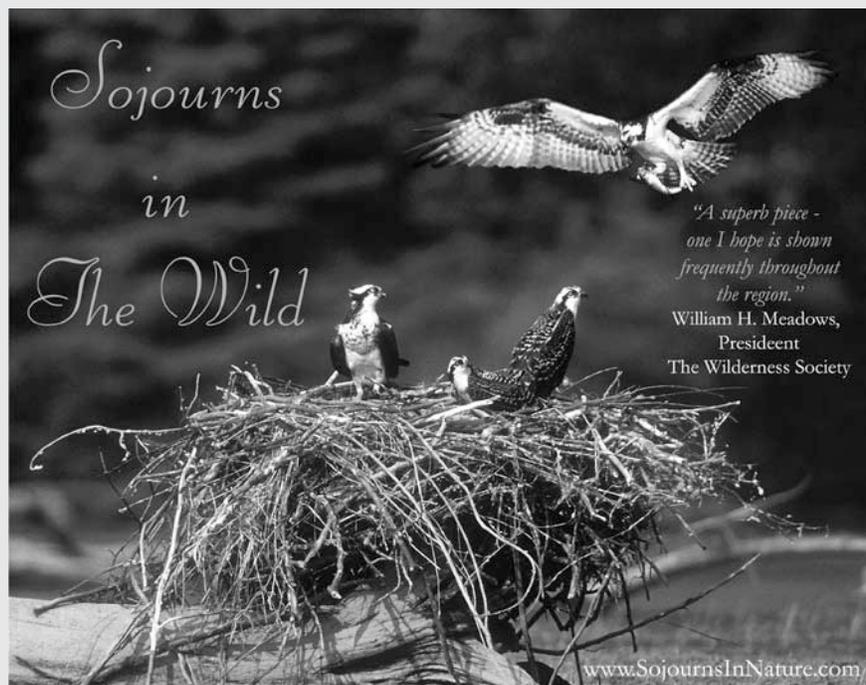
“Wildlife species are often the early indicators of what’s happening to the planet,” John Kostyack, lead National Wildlife Federation counsel said. “We believe the court will benefit from the mounting body of research on the effects of global warming on wildlife. It’s clear that global warming pollution is harming the environment, and in turn will harm the economy. The EPA has a responsibility to regulate the pollution that is causing global

warming. The good news is, the technology to make low-emission vehicles exists now, so auto manufacturers should be able to make them widely available.”

WHITE RIVER BASIN PLAN REJECTED

VNRC and a coalition of interests (e.g. regional planning commissions, other environmental groups, Trout Unlimited, and local

environmental groups) after months of advocacy convinced the Water Resources Panel to reject the White River Basin Plan filed by ANR and require ANR to base water plans and classifications on scientific data. VNRC continues to track ANR’s implementation of the Panel’s decision. We are hopeful that the decision will result in the protection of Vermont’s high quality waters as required by state and federal law.



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“Imported Cars Are Not Foreign To Us”





Preparing for the Perfect Storm

The Rising Tide of Local Action

By KATHERINE QUIMBY JOHNSON

When winter storm warnings go out, people stock up on drinking water, non-perishable food, candles, and batteries and prepare to hunker down until the weather clears in a day or so. The warnings have already been posted for a different kind of storm that's headed our way, a "perfect storm."

In the years ahead, peak oil, climate change, and the suburbanization of the countryside will have an impact on each and every one of us. The high price of oil and gas will drive up the cost of commodities coming from a distance, the effects of climate change will threaten forest health, agricultural crops and water resources, and suburbanization will continue to destroy valuable farm and forest lands. A different storm, one that won't pass in a matter of days, or even weeks or months, demands different preparations. If we are to weather the changes to come, we need to work to protect and restore the natural resources that feed and shelter us, and support the local businesses that use those resources sustainably.

The work of the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) over the past 43 years has helped give Vermont the jump-start on storm preparations. Thanks in part to VNRC's efforts, Vermont still has healthy working landscapes and its forest lands are less fragmented and its communities more intact than those in other regions of the country. But there's still plenty left to do. VNRC will continue to strengthen the network — the connections that exist between people in a community and between communities and the land that sustains them — so that Vermont is prepared to weather what lies ahead.

"While Vermont's rural landscapes are beautiful to behold, we're not interested in saving farms and

Opposite: Red Hen Bakery co-owners Liza Cain and Randy George



“By preserving and building our local businesses, we promote character, specialness. Who wants to live in or travel to a place that looks the same as everywhere else?”

— Chris Morrow, owner of the Northshire Bookstore

forests just so we can look at them,” Elizabeth Courtney, Executive Director of VNRC, explains. “We are talking about using Vermont’s natural resources to sustain the local community and nurture the local economy.”

SHOP LOCAL: COUNTER SPRAWL AND SUBURBANIZATION

Vital working downtowns and growth centers can help maintain the working agricultural and forest landscape. When downtown areas thrive, there is less incentive for commercial developers to locate new businesses on agricultural land. “Downtowns and village centers are a key part of the character of Vermont,” says Paul Bruhn, Executive Director of Preservation Trust of Vermont. However, he says, “we have had out-of-town development, so maintaining downtowns is a challenge.”

Maintaining and supporting an existing downtown is one reason why VNRC has joined forces with Preservation Trust of Vermont in opposing the construction of a Wal-Mart outside of St. Albans. “This project would go two miles out of town in a well-tilled, well-used cornfield,” says Stephen J. Holmes, Sustainable Communities Program Director at VNRC. He explains that VNRC has offered to support the construction of a Wal-Mart in downtown St. Albans. “We sent a letter offering alternatives, one of them being to build a 75,000 square foot store downtown. Wal-Mart basically slammed the door in our face and said ‘we’re not interested.’”

That’s contrary to a partnership that worked to the benefit of downtown Rutland. Back in 1990, a group of downtown merchants formed the Downtown Rutland Partnership. They coordinated their hours of operation and focused on activities and practices that would be of mutual benefit. According to Courtney, who helped develop Rutland’s 1991 City Plan, when K-Mart left the Rutland Plaza, the Rutland Partnership looked for a new anchor. Wal-Mart was identified and, after

negotiations with Preservation Trust of Vermont, the Rutland Partnership, and VNRC, the project spent a mere eight months in the permitting process.

Wal-Mart’s presence in downtown Rutland has been crucial for more than a decade. “Wal-Mart ensures that downtown Rutland serves the entire community,” Bruhn says. “A mix of locally owned businesses, franchises, and national chains is important to a healthy downtown.” Such a mix of business types serves all local income groups as well as tourists.

Locally owned businesses are a key component in the downtown mix. For any number of reasons, including the fact that money spent in these establishments recirculates in the local economy more times than money spent in other types of businesses, “local first” campaigns have sprung up around the country over the past six or seven years. This year, with the founding of Local First Vermont (LFVT), the Green Mountain State joined the movement. VNRC has supported LFVT from the beginning, helping to elevate and advance the mission of the business coalition that shares its goal of sustainable, economically vibrant communities.

“We’re promoting the value of local independent businesses to consumers, to government, and to business,” says Chris Morrow of Manchester’s Northshire Bookstore, a founder of LFVT. “We’re looking at improving communities through promoting a strong local and independent business sector,” Morrow says. “By preserving and building our local businesses, we promote character, specialness. Who wants to live in or travel to a place that looks the same as everywhere else? An element of LFVT is about protecting the natural and business landscape that tourists find attractive.”

EAT LOCAL: KEEP WORKING FARMS WORKING

However, that landscape, beloved by tourist and native alike, is vanishing. Vermont is losing its best farmland. In years past, farmers from the hardscrabble Northeast Kingdom could look with appreciation and a touch of envy on acre after acre of level hay and cornfields in Williston and South Burlington. Chittenden County had some of the richest, most productive agricultural land in the state. Now those fields are covered with tracts of houses, parking lots, and shopping plazas. But if our remaining working farms are to remain in production, farmers need to be able to earn a living. One way to help keep agricultural land working is to buy food that has been grown and produced locally.



That's the whole point of a localvore challenge, when participants pledge to eat only locally grown and produced foods for a specific period, most often a week. The outcome of Central Vermont's 2006 localvore challenge offers a prime example of the benefits supporting local agriculture brings to the working landscape.

In August or September, when most Vermont localvore challenges are held, farmstands provide plenty of fresh produce, and local dairy and meat products are readily available. Artisanal bread bakeries have become reasonably common in Vermont, but locally grown wheat is harder to come by. "Red Hen Baking baked what they called a Localvore Loaf," Robin McDermott, a Mad River Valley localvore, recalls. Those loaves were supplied to localvores in the Champlain Valley and Montpelier as well as to McDermott's group in the Mad River Valley. But, McDermott says, "each loaf came with a full page letter explaining why it was denser than the usual Red Hen loaf and why it couldn't be made year round." There is simply not enough local wheat available to make year-round production feasible.

Red Hen Baking is dedicated to organic ingredients and high quality grains. Much of its flour is grown and milled in the midwest, according to Randy George, co-owner of Red Hen Baking. However, the bakery does purchase approximately 5,000 pounds of flour annually from Ben Gleason of Bridport, one of about five wheat growers in the state. Gleason grows about 30 acres of the hard wheat that is best suited for breadbaking and mills the wheat himself, which lets him set a competitive price. His simple mill also leaves the bran in the flour, which is what resulted in that density of the Localvore Loaf.

In search of the amount of flour he would need to bake the "Localvore Loaf" year round, George says, "I called the only person growing wheat in Vermont that I had never spoken with." Tom Kenyon grows 200-300 acres of soft wheat suitable for pastry flour on 1,000 acre Aurora Farms in Charlotte and currently sells it on the commodity market, where he must compete with midwestern farmers. Kenyon is interested in making the switch to hard winter wheat, has talked about producing 25,000 pounds of wheat for Red Hen next year, and has the potential to grow more.

However, because of the scale of his operation, he's not interested in milling his product himself. So now George is putting together a group to fund a mill, one that could remove some of the bran. "As a baker, it would be pretty neat to be able to grind your own flour," he says. He also sees economic benefits, "It could at least yield wheat



with a price that's the same as what is grown in the midwest, and then there's the marketing."

"It's a total win-win-win situation," McDermott exults. The various localvore groups have not only contributed to keeping farmland open and working, they have also encouraged a farmer to expand production and inspired a move to bring a working flour mill back to Vermont. Courtney commented, "after a generation of letting the local industry that feeds a community vanish, Vermonters are awakening to the need to reestablish that vital system of support."

The lack of milling facilities highlights one of the conclusions drawn by Ela Chapin of Plainfield, in a thesis written to complete her master's degree in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University. Her study of the role planning might play in a sustainable food system in Central Vermont identified a dearth of in-state food processing and distribution resources as the main bottleneck in the Vermont food supply. How acute the issue is can be demonstrated by the impact of the fire at Fresh Farms Beef in Rutland on Boyden Farm's Vermont Grown Meat. The Cambridge farm, which sells both retail and wholesale, not only lost inventory, but also spent weeks searching for a slaughterhouse and processing facility that was USDA commercial certified and could handle the amount of product raised on what was once the family dairy farm. Although the Boyden Farm is

George Schenk, owner of American Flatbread, grinding wheat berries.



“After a generation of letting the local industry that feeds a community vanish, Vermonters are awakening to the need to reestablish that vital system of support.”

— Elizabeth Courtney, VNRC Executive Director

once again supplying retail outlets and restaurants, Lori Boyden, who operates the farm with her husband Mark, says that it will be six months to a year before individual customers can once again place bulk orders.

One of the challenges for any farmer is matching growing conditions and crops. That’s one reason Marie Frey is part of Northwest Citizens for Responsible Growth (NWCRG), a grassroots organization that, like VNRC, is opposed to the construction of a Wal-Mart in a cornfield outside of St. Albans. Frey, who owns and operates the Hudak Farmstand and Greenhouses with her husband, is acutely aware of the agricultural value of their particular piece of property. “We’re blessed to be in this location. We’ve got this phenomenal soil and it’s like there’s this microgeology. We seem to be spared the worst winds and storms.” Twenty-five acres of vegetables rotate around the 150 acre property; they are grown for a strictly retail operation. “That causes us to be sure we have some of everything,” Frey explains. “There’s a responsibility local growers have to provide local

food.”

Sue Prent, another member of NWCRG, supports local farms for the most essential of reasons. “If we lose local farms,” she says, “we’re endangering food sources.” The replacement of diverse varieties with monocultures not only results in crops that are increasingly susceptible to disease and insect infestation, but in depleted nutritional value. Prent concludes, “Local food sources and the ability to grow diverse food crops is one of the most important issues for the 21st century.”

There are also practical implications to dependency on food trucked clear across the country. Rising fuel prices and “peak oil” are on the mind of Frey’s husband Richard Hudak when he says, “It would make more sense to have regional supplies of food and regional food storage and growers.” Hudak has also considered the issues of processing and distribution. “We need less technical, less tenuous ways to store food,” he says. “We have such faith in high technology, which relies on electricity—it’s like riding into a box canyon in a John Wayne movie.”

POWER LOCAL: CHOOSE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Hudak’s energy concerns are right in line with national polls conducted by Democratic strategist James Carville, which indicate that “energy independence” is the top national concern. Those survey results are not news to members of the grassroots organization Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN), which is helping to create a network of local food and energy resources.

ACoRN was founded in 2005 to develop sustainable essential resources, both food and energy, so that Addison County will be prepared for “an energy-constrained future.” According to Will Bates, one of the group’s project coordinators, “Our main direction is starting to create a renewable energy co-operative.” To that end, ACoRN is working with a local farm on a biodiesel project that would involve both growing the corn and having a biodiesel processing plant that would produce fuel for heating and for farm use. ACoRN is also discussing the implementation of a micro-hydro project at the falls in downtown Middlebury and the establishment of a retail outlet offering renewable energy products such as solar panels and biomass burners, and energy efficient appliances. ACoRN emphasizes cooperative ventures because when consumer demand is pooled, purchases can be made in bulk, which makes energy conservation more affordable for the average homeowner and small business.

Barre Farmer’s Market





“This unique, solutions-oriented approach embodies the independent, self-reliant and resourceful character that has long defined Vermonters and that will be essential to protecting and growing the Green Mountain State’s rural economy,” says Johanna Miller, VNRC’s Outreach Director. “That’s why VNRC is proud to support and help elevate ACoRN as an existing local model.”

“By cultivating new opportunities for farmers, energy producers, and entrepreneurs in Addison County, ACoRN has seized on another great way to strengthen and safeguard their local landscapes,” Miller noted. “ACoRN’s grassroots solutions will no doubt prove immensely beneficial as energy prices rise, markets remain unstable, and oil supplies continue to dwindle. Keeping the county’s fields fertile and the energy supplies generated locally will add stability and security to the region. Relying on friends and neighbors for food and power rather than unknown, far-off sources makes a lot of sense and helps strengthen communities in so many ways.”

ACoRN is exactly the sort of initiative VNRC had in mind when it joined with several leading energy organizations to form the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN). With VECAN’s support, many communities have organized local energy committees that are working with other municipal groups, from select boards to businesses, on the development of plans that will save both energy and money. Many of those plans will take advantage of the resources at hand, from local hydropower and methane from cows and landfills to wood and biomass—low quality wood waste.

BUILD LOCAL, FURNISH LOCAL: KEEP THE FOREST INDUSTRY HOME GROWN

Wood is one material Vermont has in abundance. More of the state is covered in trees now than was the case even 30 years ago. However, while the connection between buying local agricultural products and preserving Vermont’s farmland is easy to see, especially when the point of purchase is a farmstand or on-site market, unless the wood in question is firewood, the connection between buying wood products and preserving the local forest isn’t as readily apparent.

All the same, “Where do you get your material?” is a question Mike Rainville, chair of the Vermont Wood Manufacturer’s Association and head of Maple Landmark in Middlebury hears frequently. “It’s an innocent question,” Rainville says, “but it tells me that people are looking to know that it’s

local.” But maple from, say Michigan, looks much like maple from Vermont once it has been made into cabinetry, chairs, or turned bowls.

Of equal importance is where the wood is shaped into a final product. If wood harvested in Vermont travels perhaps as far as China to be made into furniture, before being brought back to the Green Mountain state for sale, is the finished piece a local product?

The “Vermont Quality Wood Products” brand was created in response to those questions. The brand stands for the producer’s commitment to quality design, environmental sensitivity, and customer satisfaction and is one result of efforts by the Vermont Forest Products Council to stem the loss of jobs in the forestry industry statewide. According to Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, who was involved in the council, “We had strong support from both Senators Patrick Leahy and James Jeffords for obtaining the highest end value for wood products.”

The two senators worked in complementary areas. Leahy focused on the identification of Vermont woods and their uses. For consumers, the most useful product of the collaboration between the senator’s office and a number of forest industry organizations was the Vermont Wood Resources Manual, which provides information about wood products grown and manufactured in Vermont.

Jeffords obtained a \$1 million earmark for the marketing of the “Vermont Quality Wood Products Brand.” Those funds have supported a presence at the industry’s major trade show, the Las Vegas Market, as well as the annual Vermont Fine Furniture and Woodworking Festival, an annual design contest, and a buyer’s guide. According to Costello, there is also an effort to get branded products into inns and other tourist accommodations, as well as shop visits for tourists, similar to the Open Studio weekend held for Vermont artists.

One beneficiary of the branding effort is Woodnet, the six-year-old non-profit whose 140 members, mostly one- and two-



The “local” chicken at the Waitsfield 4th of July parade.



“Keeping Vermont’s forestland intact has multiple benefits; local timber, local jobs, and a source of wood for renewable energy. As VNRC continues to work on maintaining the integrity of Vermont’s forests, we need to focus on ways to reduce rural sprawl for the benefit of both our environment and the local forest economy.”

— Jamey Fidel, VNRC Forest Program Director

person shops, try to buy local wood whenever possible. “We work together to buy materials and to market,” says chair Bob Bouvier, who makes custom furniture. Vermont MapleWood Gallery in Stowe is Woodnet’s retail outlet, offering what Bouvier calls “high visibility and a high-end market.”

Woodnet also has the distinction of holding the third group Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Chain-of-Custody certificate in the world. According to Bouvier, some 30 members offer products made from FSC-certified wood, including everything from timbers and millwork to cabinetry, furniture, and accessories. In order to be FSC certified, wood must come from a woodlot that is managed for sustainability, including the sustainability of

Bob Gasperetti works in his furniture studio in Mt. Tabor.



the local ecology and wildlife habitat.

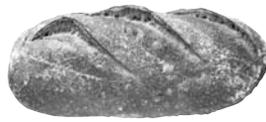
For Rainville and the other approximately 100 members of the Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association, having a supply of locally produced lumber is at least in part a matter of economic common sense. “One of our key concerns is that resources maintain their availability,” Rainville says. “We also have long-standing partnerships with our suppliers. I’ve had one key supplier for 27 years. That means that my supply needs are met.”

The members of Woodnet and the Vermont Wood Manufacturer’s Association (some businesses are members of both) turn out quality products. However, for many people, quality and the assurance that a product has been made in Vermont from wood grown in Vermont is not their first concern. Jonathan Wood, Commissioner of the Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation, puts it succinctly. “The public wants cheap wood. We’re never going to build stuff as cheap as in China or Vietnam.” Wood has seen a dining set with some solid mahogany pieces that came from one of the big box stores, all for a price of several hundred dollars.

David Brynn, Director of the Green Forestry Education Initiative, says that issues of price and value go beyond Vermont’s borders, “Nationally we have a cheap timber and cheap food policy. The best way to get the price right is to connect local customers with local forces,” Brynn maintains. “We talk about maximizing production and consumption when we should be talking about optimizing production and consumption. The only way to make that change is to develop discriminating local customers.”

In addition to contributing to global issues such as the destruction of the rainforest and the exploitation of child labor, when customers buy imported cheap wood products from “big box” stores there’s a local ripple effect that includes the environment.

Bell-Gates Lumber in Jeffersonville, where Wood worked as Log Buyer before his appointment as commissioner, closed in 2002. They couldn’t operate at a profit and compete with cheap imported lumber. At about the same time, Green Crow Lumber in nearby Underhill shut down and Killington Wood Products in Rutland closed in 2003. In addition to the employees who lose their jobs—30 in the case of Killington Wood Products—truckers lose customers and loggers and landowners lose markets. “What happens then is that woodlots get sold for housing and when that happens, we’re losing our natural resource capacity,” says Costello. “I’m pleased that the VNRC has picked up the issues around



SUPPORTING VERMONT AGRICULTURE GROWS THE LOCAL ECONOMY

by Jennifer Grahovac

In the summer of 2003, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture launched its “Buy Local” program. The message of the advertising was to introduce the economic impact buying locally grown foods has on Vermont’s agricultural economy. By shifting just 10 percent of weekly food purchases to “locally grown” food purchases, Vermonters can add over \$100 million to the Vermont agricultural economy.



Not only is it important that consumers are purchasing locally grown products, but Vermont businesses are also supporting local Vermont agriculture by buying and using these products.

You’ve heard it before, “buy local and support our local farmers.” The fact is most people really do want to support their farm neighbors and keep their money local. But just how can one person make any sort of difference? Well, if there are many of us who make small changes, then our individual small changes can turn into something big!

THE 10 PERCENT DIFFERENCE

That’s where “the 10 percent difference” comes into play. If Vermonters shifted an additional 10 percent of their food purchases to locally grown food products, they would add more than \$100 million to Vermont’s agricultural economy each year.

Just think how easy it would be to shift 10 percent of your weekly food purchases to buying more Vermont grown foods. For example, if your weekly food budget is \$70, that means making \$7 of your total food purchased Vermont grown products. This would be easy to accomplish shopping at almost any supermarket in Vermont.

In the summertime, this becomes even easier. Shopping at one of the many Farmers’ Markets or Farm Stands located throughout Vermont would give you access to 100 percent locally grown foods!

LOCALLY GROWN IS MORE THAN JUST FOOD

Vermont has a vibrant agricultural community that produces a wide variety of products. Consider buying locally grown and processed wool, or look for the “Locally Grown” label on your horticultural purchases at local nurseries and greenhouses. During the holidays, buy real Vermont Christmas trees and wreaths. It’s really quite easy to Buy Local!

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The best way for you to participate is to look for and buy locally grown agricultural products at grocery stores, country stores, farmers’ markets, farm stands and restaurants. If your neighborhood store doesn’t carry Vermont products, ask them to do so.

IT’S JUST THAT SIMPLE

To identify locally grown products look for the “Buy Local” signs or the Vermont Seal of Quality logo on products or in stores. Buying food products at farm stands and farmers’ markets is an almost certain way to know that you are getting locally grown food. And, as a benefit, you get to meet the farmers themselves!

To find listings of many places to purchase locally grown foods visit the Vermont Agency of Agriculture’s web site at www.vermontagriculture.com. There you’ll find listings of Vermont Farmers’ Markets, Farm Stands, Pick Your Own Operations, Vermont Country Stores, Supermarkets, Delis, and Restaurants.

Jennifer Grahovac works for the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. Please call her with questions at 802-828-3828.

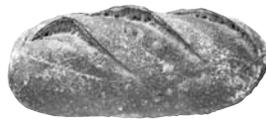
parcelization. Land values and parcelization—the consumption of land—is the biggest challenge to the forest industry.”

According to Jamey Fidel, VNRC Forest Program Director, “when we buy local wood products we help to support a local economy that relies on keeping Vermont’s forests as forests. Keeping Vermont’s forestland intact has multiple benefits; local timber, local jobs, and a source of wood for renewable energy. As VNRC continues to work on maintaining the integrity of Vermont’s forests, we need to focus on ways to reduce rural

sprawl for the benefit of both our environment and the local forest economy.”

THE FUTURE STILL HOLDS PROMISE

Climate change, peak oil, sprawl, and suburbanization are combining to create a “perfect storm,” one that threatens to overwhelm us with its global magnitude. But taking action locally is a solution within our grasp. We have a tremendous opportunity to help Vermont maintain and enhance its historic settlement patterns and working farm and forest lands, while strengthening its economy.



LEARNING LOCAL SELF RELIANCE FROM THOSE WHO KNOW IT BEST

We asked Curtis Koren to share her experience helping younger Vermonters to see what other cultures can teach us about local self-reliance. She takes us to India where the people of Ladakh have for centuries practiced a sustainable way of life that integrates the economy and the natural landscape.

What can Vermont teenagers learn from Ladakh, a former Buddhist Kingdom in the Himalaya that is now part of India? Vermont Intercultural Semesters (VIS), an affordable semester program accredited as a program of The Sharon Academy in Sharon, Vermont, has found that their experience of living with their Ladakhi peers at a very special boarding school for some three months is a truly transformative one, and that the learning goes both ways.

Ladakh (like Vermont) is somewhat ‘off the beaten track,’ situated on the boundary between the peaks of the western Himalaya and the vast Tibetan plateau. The relatively small scale populations in both Ladakh and Vermont often means: strong community connections; a will to

maintain traditional ways of doing things that work; and the capacity to manage development and change to benefit local peoples and their futures.

VIS courses for the accredited high school spring semesters in Ladakh offer students a challenging, integrated, immersive cross-cultural learning experience. The VIS Academic Program is place-based, designed to take advantage of being in Ladakh. Vermonters live with Ladakhi teenagers and teachers at the SECMOL (Students Cultural and Educational Movement of Ladakh) boarding school on the Indus River. There, they maintain the solar-powered school, and delve into such topics as environmental ethics, globalization, sustainability and ways in which landscape can shape character as well as politics. With buildings heated by the sun, photovoltaics providing electricity, composting toilets, and organic farming practices, the SECMOL campus is an ideal setting to study these topics. As part of the VIS Environmental Science course, students build solar-powered greenhouses, a nomadic tent, a rickshaw, and on other hands-on solar projects. Independent study projects also lead to learning about Ladakh and Vermont. In past semesters, several Vermonters have focused on renewable energies, such as building a methane digester for SECMOL; examining micro-hydro power as a viable energy solution for Ladakh; exploring the effectiveness of solar power for Ladakh and Vermont; and designing a solar home that would be appropriate for a Vermont climate.

In Ladakh, students consider the natural and human history of their host sites as a path to heightened understanding of other ways of life, and a renewed perspective on their own. The following are some excerpts from their observations about learning from Ladakh:

“Living in a culture so completely different from my own, and with kids my own age from that culture, I was able to see a way of living that I can deeply respect, and also ways of changing my own life.”

“Living a life that isn’t characterized by excessive possessions and is instead based on necessity taught me how much I really need and want. It was purifying to be away from all my stuff.”

*Elisabeth Holmes,
VNRC’s Steve Holmes’
daughter, with a
Ladakhi friend.*





*VIS students with
Ladakhi peers.*

“I learned about the mountains and the earth. I spent a lot of time outdoors, and experienced many things in the natural world I wouldn’t have experienced in Vermont: the rocks of a high mountain desert, the crisp thin air, the dryness, the mountains, the cold elements of the earth I didn’t know existed taught me about elements of myself I didn’t know existed.”

“I don’t know if I’ll be able to come back and defile a gallon of clean water, which is so essential to people and in some places so scarce, every time I use a toilet. Composting toilets make so much more sense!”

And this, from an email message sent by a VIS parent who visited her son in Ladakh, spring ‘06:

“Where most Americans would visit and find the culture backward and third world, our kids love and respect this culture. The Ladakhis produce everything they need; there is no pollution, waste, or obesity. There are no jails or mental institutions; the village takes care of its own. These are gently, beautiful people. I am very thankful I was able to visit. A week there has changed me; I can only imagine how it has changed our kids.”

For more information, please see www.vermontis.org.



Curtis Koren is the director of the Vermont Intercultural Semesters and lives in Brookfield.



Solar panels provide energy to Ladakhi people.

TAKE ACTION!



We each have tremendous power to make this a better world; a brighter, more prosperous, more beautiful place for all. We can do that by pushing for sweeping policy reforms, institutional restructuring, or political leadership. These are significant endeavors that will, if successful, help realize a healthy, more sustainable, future. Or, we can do that by being intentional in our purchases and our practices — keeping the things we truly value in life at the forefront of our minds as we move through each day — and aligning those values with our actions.

How do we do that?

Take small steps. Be deliberate. It will add up. The power of individual action, exemplified by people who believe that a better world is possible, will make a big difference. Outlined below are 10 suggestions we offer as important steps we each can take to realize that better world. If you already take them, pass these suggestions on to your family, friends and neighbors. Encourage them to do the same. Start a chain reaction. Begin by:

1. Calling Efficiency Vermont today.

Efficiency Vermont has helped Vermonters reduce their annual energy costs by over \$24 million. Let them help you cut your energy use with a home energy audit or rebates on energy efficient products and appliances. Contact them at: info@

efficiencyvermont.com or call 1-888-921-5990.

2. Turning it down or turning it off.

- Keep your thermostat at 68 degrees or lower. While asleep or away, turn it to 55. (For each degree you turn down the thermostat, you can save up to 5 percent on your bill.)
- Turn off lights, appliances and computers when not in use.
- Close shades and blinds at night to reduce heat loss.
- Aim for energy consumption to occur during off-peak hours. Using large appliances from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. (peak demand hours) strains the power grid.

3. Supporting local agriculture.

Farm stands and farmer's markets are two ways to buy local food, but a farm may offer a "CSA" (Community Supported Agriculture), allowing you to "buy in" to a weekly share of vegetables during the season.

Try to add just one new local food to your home menu a week by finding a nearby farm or seeking out locally grown foods at your community grocery.

4. Patronizing restaurants that buy local.

Many Vermont restaurants offer local food on their menu. Make a point to support the ones that do. Check these websites for lists of restaurants that buy from Vermont farmers: www.VermontLocalvore.org, www.eatlocalvt.org, and www.vitalcommunities.org/Agriculture/agsearch.cfm.

5. Using local, sustainably harvested wood.

Vermont SmartWood certifies our local landowners, resource managers and providers for adherence to social and environmental standards. Check the list of local woodworkers, cabinet-makers and lumber suppliers at www.smartwood.org or call 802-892-7786.

6. Drinking the water from your tap.

The commodification of drinking water by big corporations is a growing concern. New state legislation is beginning the process of securing this resource. Be a part of this effort by drinking from your faucet instead of using bottled water. Public water is vigorously monitored for safety, while commercial water is not.

7. Shopping downtown.

Support your local downtown merchants rather than driving out to the big box stores. This helps keep your neighbors in business and helps curb emissions.

8. Driving less.

Look for daily alternatives to driving, such as walking, biking or taking the bus. Vermont Rideshare can help match commuters with people needing rides. Call 1-800-685-RIDE or visit their interactive website www.vermontrideshare.org/carpooladds.htm.

9. Getting active.

Let the world know that you take these issues seriously enough to take action. How? Participate in local government and civic groups. A healthy, working democracy relies on public engagement. Also, get outside! Make time to go skiing, hiking, biking, take a walk on a forest trail, or stroll your neighborhood. Remind yourself why you care so much and are willing to work hard to protect this great state.

10. Support local nonprofit organizations.

There are many talented, committed people hard at work on these issues in the nonprofit community. Support the efforts of VNRC and others who are working to safeguard the Vermont we love. 

There are many ways — and reasons — to get involved. To ensure that our forests, wildlife and habitat are healthy and prosperous, please join VNRC and TAKE ACTION!

NEWS & NOTES



FAREWELL PAT AND WELCOME JAKE

Pat Berry, a valuable staff member of VNRC for the past six years, has recently resigned to take a position in the development office of Middlebury College. Many of you had the opportunity to work with Pat at the State House as he worked to advance VNRC's legislative priorities. We wish Pat well in his new adventure.

Jake Brown will be taking up the reins in early December. Jake joins VNRC with a solid background in journalism and media relations. He began covering news in Vermont, including following developments in the state Legislature, in 1992. Jake was most recently editor of the *Vermont Environmental Monitor* newsletter, and has written extensively for the *Montpelier Bridge*, the *Vermont Property Owners Report*, and the Washington, DC-based



Jake Brown

Daily Environment Report.

"I'm eager to reach out to Vermonters of all political orientations, in all corners of the state to find common sense solutions to the challenges facing a rapidly-changing Vermont," Jake said.

Brown is a 1987 graduate of Middlebury College and in 1991 earned a Masters of Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law School in South Royalton. Welcome Jake!

CLIMATE ACTION MARCH SUCCESS

This past Labor Day weekend, VNRC helped bring together hundreds of farmers, scholars, business owners and other concerned citizens to participate with author Bill McKibben in a five-day walk from Ripton to Burlington to raise awareness about global warming. The goal of the walk was to catalyze specific action from state and federal leaders to move toward a clean energy



Elizabeth Courtney and Bill McKibben speak at the final rally global warming walk in Burlington.

future. A global warming pledge was presented which would include supporting an 85 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, the rapid phase-in of 40-mile-per-gallon cars, and the national plan to receive 20 percent of our power from renewables by 2020. Both Bernie Sanders and Peter Welch signed the pledge, along with many other candidates.

VNRC SERVES ON NUMEROUS BOARDS

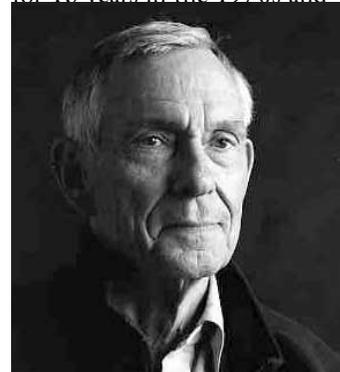
In the past few years, VNRC staff member's expertise has been recognized by the Governor by appointing us to serve on a number of committees. VNRC is the only voice representing the environment on the Groundwater Task Force, which is working to ensure the long-term protection of our drinking water. VNRC staff have been appointed to serve on the Fish and Wildlife Funding Task Force, which hopefully will create momentum for new funding mechanisms to help the FWD better manage and conserve important wildlife resources. We are also serving on the Climate Change Commission to help advance statewide strategies for energy conservation, alternative

energy sources, and carbon reduction and sequestration.

VNRC'S VALUABLE BOARD

VNRC is lucky to have a committed group of volunteer board members to help navigate our road ahead. Leading the helm for the past four years was Dale Guldbrandsen from Arlington, who stepped down this past fall once his six-year board term limit was reached. Dale brought a great deal of passion and thoughtfulness to VNRC.

Seward Weber also stepped down from the board this fall. Seward, who served as VNRC's executive director for 13 years in the 1970s and



Seward Weber

80s, brought vital insight to our organization. His early commitment laid the foundation and building blocks for VNRC to accomplish many significant objectives in Vermont. Both Dale and Seward have been very valuable additions to our team.

New board members joining us include Chuck Fergus from East Burke, Pete Land from Burlington, and Wayne Fawbush from Montpelier. We are looking forward to gaining insight from their perspectives and expertise.

THANK YOU PAUL

H. Paul Berlejung is a December 1974 graduate of the University of Louisville School of Law. His first eight years were with the City of Louisville; the next 25 as a civilian with the US Army; with the last seven at Fort Belvoir, Virginia where he was the business, contract, fiscal and ethics attorney for 26,000+ civilian and military personnel. He retired from the federal government on June 1, 2006. He and his wife are building a house "off-grid" on an abandoned farm that she bought 40 years ago. Paul is assisting VNRC with work relating to the Stratton Master Plan, the proposed St. Albans Wal-Mart, and the forestland development proposals in Halifax.

JOIN THE LOCALVORE CHALLENGE!

The Localvore Challenge is an event where people pledge to eat foods grown and produced within a hundred miles of their homes. You can try for a few days, a week, a month or more. The next Vermont Eat Local Challenge begins in January, and the organizers hope it will provide Vermonters with a fun challenge to consume local dairy, meats, eggs, vegetables, and more. It's a great way to find out more about where your food comes from, and how it arrived at your table. The Localvore Challenge has a very helpful website (www.vermontlocalvore.org) to help guide people through the process.



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Save the Date!



February 15, 2007

Please join the Vermont Natural Resources Council, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, Rural Vermont, Vermont Alliance of Conservation Voters and Vermonters for a Clean Environment for the annual **Citizen Action Day** at the State House in Montpelier.

Join your friends and fellow Vermonters to call upon legislators to enact laws that will ensure that Vermont remains a healthy, prosperous, beautiful place!

For exact details of the day, please go to www.vnrc.org for more information or contact Johanna Miller at 802-223-2328.

• Obtain lobby training around the issues •

• Meet your representatives • Have fun •

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AT LONG LAST, WILDERNESS SECURED

After a long and wild ride, the New England Wilderness Act was signed into law by President Bush on December 1. The new legislation designates approximately 42,000 new acres as wilderness to be managed in a natural state and establishes the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area on the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). VNRC has campaigned for a long time to support these designations as part of a balanced approach to managing Vermont's 400,000-acre national forest.

Vermont's Congressional Delegation worked hard to pass the New England Wilderness Act, which also designates additional wilderness in New Hampshire. The Senate originally passed legislation to establish 48,000 acres of new wilderness in Vermont. Unfortunately, the unanimously supported Senate version of the bill got stuck in the House of Representatives after Governor Douglas wrote a letter to Republican leadership opposing the bill.

The Governor's letter prompted so much public and editorial page criticism that the Governor quickly accepted a deal that had previously been offered to him. The compromise removes 6,100 acres from the bill in the northern section of the rugged Glastenbury region of the GMNF. The exclusion of this magnificent part of the forest is disappointing.

On the positive side, the legislation establishes two new wilderness designations in important areas like Glastenbury



Mountain and the Romance/Monastery Mountain area, which will now be called the Joseph Battell Wilderness. Battell historically owned much of the land on the northern half of the national forest along the spine of the Green Mountains and intended it to be managed as wild forest.

The passage of the New England Wilderness Act is a testament to the overwhelming public support for more

wilderness in Vermont. In the multi-year public planning process for the GMNF, nearly 90 percent of comments called for more wilderness. Opposing viewpoints tried to create a false debate by pitting wilderness against supporting rural, working lands. However, much of the land now designated as wilderness is in high elevation roadless areas that are not slated for timber management according to the Forest Service final management plan. VNRC believes a healthy mix of uses in the forest, including sustainable timber harvesting, diverse habitat management and quiet backcountry recreation and wilderness are essential and can be accomplished on the GMNF.

Wilderness provides an enduring legacy for all Vermonters, and VNRC is thankful to Senators Jeffords and Leahy and Congressman Sanders for working hard to secure it. Passage of the New England Wilderness Act leaves the appropriate legacy for our esteemed Senator Jeffords, who has been a relentless voice for conservation in Vermont and the nation. 