

# Membership Newsletter

Vol. 5, No. 5

June 2008

## Vermont Woodlands Association 2008 Officers and Directors

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**VWA Membership  
Newsletter is  
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times a year.**

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## 2008 Annual Meeting

A crowd of about seventy-five members and visitors turned out for the VWA Annual Meeting held on April 4th at the Vermont Technical College. It was an information-packed morning with several presentations on forestry related issues. VT FPR Commissioner Jonathan Wood briefed us on bills before the legislature this session and the potential for passage of a bill (S.311) with changes to the Use Value Appraisal Program. Steve Sinclair, Director of Forests, showed us new forest maps and discussed characteristics that will aid in better understanding forestry trends, conditions, and problems facing Vermont. Wood Utilization Specialist Paul Frederick gave an excellent primer on the relationship between good trees, high quality logs, and high-grade timber. Patricia Ayres Crawford (profiled in the March 08 newsletter) discussed the Town Forest program in Vermont and the Brushwood Community Forest project that she has been spearheading. VWA Vice President Paul Harwood gave an overview of the Tree Farm Leadership Conference held in Idaho in late February and the very positive direction that the program is now following. Hugo Liepmann, President of Vermont Coverts, summarized his organization's activities and upcoming workshops. Executive Director Kathleen Wanner presented a comprehensive review of last year's progress that includes a significant increase in membership and the need to maintain this positive momentum. She called upon all members to help build our strength by encouraging their friends, neighbors, and family members to join.

The regular business meeting was held, following a break for a wonderful buffet lunch. During the meeting, the following members were re-elected as directors for three-year terms: Kathy Beland, Paul Harwood, Bill

Kropelin, John Meyer, Sam Schneski, and Peter Upton. Leo Laferriere was elected for a one-year term. The slate of officers was presented and passed (see sidebar left). Stan James, retiring director, was recognized for his long service to VWA and the Tree Farm program.

We had two 50-year Tree Farm anniversaries and presented new gold signs to 2007 VT Tree Farmer of the Year Richard C. Rose on behalf of the Sable Mountain Corporation and to Joshua "Bushrod" Powers for the Balla Machree Farm.

The 2008 Tree Farmer of the Year Award was then presented to the Potter family (Dave, Sue, and Nate) for their outstanding management of their 591-acre Tree Farm. County Forester Eric Hansen, assisted by Dave, presented an outstanding history of the property that has been in the Potter family for more than 150 years and of Dave's exemplary forest practices (see article, page 2).

The afternoon concluded with an entertaining and informative presentation by Ben Kilham (shown here) who is perhaps the worlds' leading expert on black bears, their rehabilitation, and their habits. Ben has been featured on several National Geographic TV programs, has published several books and DVDs, and is a truly fascinating speaker. The audience was enthralled with Ben's stories and his photos. It is probably safe to say that everyone came away a bit more knowledgeable ... and perhaps more captivated by black bears.





## 2008 Tree Farmer of the Year

It is difficult to drive on the East or West Tinnmouth Road in Rutland County without either viewing, driving by or



Put Blodgett presented Dave & Sue Potter the 2008 Tree Farmer of the Year award.

through the lands that make up the Potter Tree Farm, owned by Dave, Sue and Nate Potter, the 2008 recipients of the Tree Farmer of the Year Award. There are currently 591.2 acres of forestland and 165.9 acres of open and farmland.

Some of the land has been in the Potter family since 1820 and Dave made his first purchase in 1971. Though the first written management plan was completed in 1973, there are records of forest management activities on some of these lands dating back to 1943. It was first certified as a Tree Farm in 1980. The primary tree farm objectives are timber harvest and wildlife habitat management. The Potters also allow other uses of their property that include hunting, horseback riding, bird watching, winter recreation, and fishing on the Clarendon River that bisects the property. In exchange for hunting access, the 40-member hunting club assists with brush hogging fields and pruning and releasing apple trees. The Potters also collaborate with the local Audubon chapter for the Christmas bird count and with VINS to help with upkeep of the Breeding Bird Atlas of VT. The land is enrolled in WHIP as well as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), allowing them to set aside grassland areas for bird habitat.

During the last decade, the property has produced 15 cord of sugar maple removed with single tree selection harvest and 5500 board feet of white pine. In the past 40 years, there

have been over a million and a half board feet of timber harvested off of the farm. Roughly one million of that was white pine with the remainder in sugar maple, ash, soft maple, white birch, beech, and bitternut hickory. Timber stand improvement (TSI) occurs annually totaling at least 15 acres over the last five years. Reforestation occurs through natural regeneration. The Potters also have 1800 taps set for sugaring.

Dave has also done quite a bit of work on the property to maintain and improve water quality. He is vigilant about installation of culverts at stream crossings, has installed lengthy sections of drainage ditches and installed tile under one of his fields to improve the water quality on the property.

Dave does about fifty percent of the work himself and contracts the balance to foresters and loggers. He has an intense connection to the land and, as a past educator and current legislator, understands the value of his Tree Farm as a teaching tool for sustainable forest management. The commitment to maintaining a working forest through hard work is a testament to the rural roots of Vermont and the Potter family that has done the same for almost 200 years.

Please join us for a tour of the Potter Tree Farm on October 4th.



2008 Tree Farmer of the Year recipients, Dave & Sue Potter.



## President's Column

### FORESTRY ISSUES IN THE 2008 LEGISLATURE

One of VWA's objectives is to "represent our membership before governmental bodies" and this is a part of its slogan, "A VOICE FOR FORESTRY."

Of critical importance to many landowners is the Use Value Appraisal Program, more commonly known as "Current Use." Previous to the Program, land was taxed at its ad valorem or highest and best use (development). Forestry and agriculture simply do not earn enough per acre to pay taxes based on development value. Taxes based on UVA have enabled many of us in forestry and farming to hold onto our land.

But after almost thirty years, it was time to reevaluate the Program. The Legislature authorized a group headed by Deb Brighton for a review and analysis of the Program.

A UVA Task Force (which included four VWA members) chaired by Rep. Alison Clarkson (Woodstock & Reading) held public meetings as well as committee meetings and came up with recommendations for legislative consideration. Although many changes were considered, the committee eventually decided to make only minor changes.

Your president and board member Leo Laferriere, former Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, the present Commissioner Jonathan Wood, and several others all testified to the importance of UVA to landowners and in slowing sales for development.

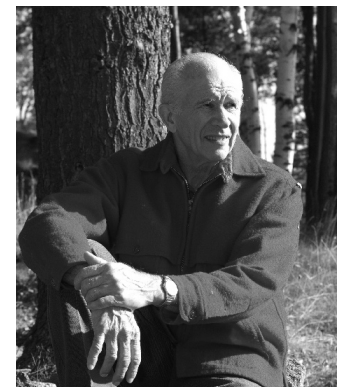
The most important change allows more than 20% of Class 4 (wetlands, cliffs, rocky hilltops, etc.) land to be enrolled with the approval of county foresters working for FP&R while still requiring that 80% of the more productive Class 1, 2, and 3 lands still be subject to timber harvesting plans. Other changes include allowing the overburdened county foresters to inspect land every ten years instead of the present five, allowing towns owning land in

other towns to enroll, and listers not having to notify landowners of minor changes in value by the UVA board.

The Senate added a \$25 fee for all enrollees to finance an updated computer system for the Tax Department to more efficiently handle the program which has just over 14,000 parcels totaling over 2 million acres. This proved hugely controversial, endangering passage of the other improvements. The House stripped the fee from the bill and a Committee of Conference agreed to have a study that "shall determine what additional funds are needed to accomplish the appropriate levels of program coordination by July 1, 2010." On this basis the bill was passed.

A year ago the House appointed a six-member Interim Committee on forestry. The committee met several times, took public testimony, and submitted five bills to the Legislature. All five carried suggested appropriations and with predicted decline in future state revenues, only one made it through the Legislature and that one, H.755, was stripped of its suggested appropriation. H.755 proposes to enact a forestry and forest products viability enhancement program, which mirrors the farm viability program that has proven so successful in helping agricultural producers with innovation, marketing, and technical advancement. A successful forest viability program would provide assistance to timber harvesters, foresters, and forest products manufacturers and, in time, deliver benefits similar to those in the farm viability program. H.755 also requires the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to investigate the feasibility of certifying state forestlands.

What results from this legislation with no appropriation is problematical. But certification is a subject of increasing importance. Maine and Minnesota have certified their Tree Farms in order to meet demands from paper



JON GILBERT FOX

Put Blodgett

Visit our website at [www.vermontwoodlands.org](http://www.vermontwoodlands.org) for information on the Tree Farm program, workshop opportunities, forestry related programs for students and teachers, and much more.

*continued on page 7, column 1*





## News from Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

# State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Program

Steve Sinclair, Director of Forests

In his 2009 budget proposal to Congress, President Bush seeks to slash the State and Private Forestry (S&PF) program of the USDA Forest Service.

The proposed cuts could not come at a worse time for Vermont, as the state's own budget projections continue to weaken. The cuts threaten the ability of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to continue providing critical services to Vermonters.

Vermont's forests are just starting to receive the credit they deserve. Our forests provide a green backdrop, a critical element of the state's 'brand,' not to mention the base of \$1.5 billion in economic activity generated by industries ranging from biomass to high quality forest products. Governor Douglas has focused on our forest resources as a major contributor to reducing climate change and creating Vermont's 'Green Bank'.

The S&PF program serves Vermonters and forests well by helping to address key threats to our signature resource. The program helps to:

- Keep Vermont's forests as working woodlands supporting local communities. As Vermont's family forest owners face growing pressure to sell, the president has proposed an 83% reduction in funding that helps them develop and implement plans for long-term stewardship of their lands.
- Safeguard Vermont's forests from the unprecedented threats posed by invasive insects and diseases. Since the early 1980s, the Forest Health

Program has seen a reduction in personnel. The nine remaining positions depend on federal funding, which the president seeks to cut by 77%.

- Improve recreational opportunities and enhance beauty in community forests and urban areas. Throughout the year, thousands of people snowshoe, hike, ride bicycles and picnic at public forests, parks and Town Greens. Trees also help to define the character of our cities by bringing a needed natural element into urban landscapes. Vermont's urban and community forestry program relies on federal funding, but President Bush's budget proposal would completely eliminate this program.

- Develop timely and accurate information about the condition of Vermont's forests through the annual collection of forest inventory data. Accurate forest inventory information is essential if landowners, the Legislature and Vermonters are to make good decisions about the use and sustainability of Vermont's forest resources. The information is also critical for companies that are considering investments in the state's forest products industries. This program, already reduced, would be virtually eliminated.

Our forests are incredibly important to Vermonters. They provide clean water, clean air, wood for the forest products industry, a place for recreational pursuits and habitat for wildlife. This is exactly the wrong time to slash federal support for forest programs in Vermont. It is not a partisan issue; it's about being responsible stewards of our forest resources.

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## News from Department of Fish & Wildlife

### Catamounts in Vermont: myth, mystery, and mystique

by Joel Flewelling, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

There have been catamount sightings all over the state of Vermont lately, although most are on the new conservation license plates. There are, however, many reports that the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department receives about actual catamounts.

Catamount is the common name used in Vermont for the North American subspecies of Puma (Puma concolor cougar) also known as mountain lion, cougar, and panther. Vermont's last known wild catamount was shot in Barnard in 1881.

Since then numerous reports of what people believed are mountain lions have arrived from all over the state. Sightings average 34 catamounts a year, many of which can be quickly disproved by the cat's description. If a sighting sounds viable, biologists visit the scene to collect evidence. Out of the 580 reports received so far, the Department has not been able to confirm a catamount in Vermont.

Photos of tracks from bear, coyote, bobcat, and housecat are commonly submitted as cougar reports—photos of actual catamounts are rare. At the scene, track measurements are taken along with detailed descriptions of the animal's head shape, ears, color, size, and nature. Most of the photos provided as evidence of a catamount turn out to be that of a housecat. Many other submitted "catamount" photos turn out to be bobcats and coyotes.

Sometimes sightings are clustered, such as in Addison County where at least ten reports have been submitted in the last few years. Once again people see the animal, but no tangible evidence has been

found to confirm the sighting. (Recently a scat sample was collected and it is currently undergoing tests to determine species.)

The Cougar Network ([www.cougarnet.org](http://www.cougarnet.org)) identifies nine catamount confirmations since 1990 in the northeast region (Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York north to Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia—none confirmed in Vermont.)

DNA tests (from hair, body tissue, and scat) on some of the nine catamounts indicated that they had different origins. In fact, some were from South America and therefore were clearly released or escaped captives. Such findings lead biologists to believe that the confirmations of North American genotype are questionable as to wild or captive. The closest known wild populations to Vermont are in Florida and the Dakotas.

Another piece of evidence, or lack thereof, is mountain lions killed along roadways. A recent study showed that when the Florida Panther population was estimated at only 20-30 individuals, panthers were still being hit by vehicles while crossing the South Florida roads. In Vermont, drivers travel some 8 billion miles annually, yet we have no reports of a mountain lion being hit. In addition, biologists in Vermont have yet to find any examples of carcass/prey remains from a puma kill.

While stories of big cats roaming Vermont's forests make for some good campfire talk, we have yet to find tangible evidence of a wild population in the state, although an escaped or released captive can't be ruled out.

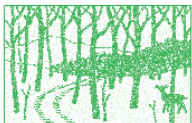


Please report credible catamount sightings to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department at 802-241-3700.

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## News from the Tree Farm Program

### 2008 National Leadership Conference

by Paul Harwood



The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) recently hosted the 2008 National Leadership Conference in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. The Vermont Woodlands Association (VWA) sponsors the Tree Farm Program in Vermont, and each state was asked to send two representatives to the conference to learn how best to administer this important program in their respective states. VWA Executive Director Kathleen Wanner and I had the good fortune to be named as Vermont's representatives and spent the last four days of February in the Pacific Northwest. Like Vermont, they've had record amounts of snow this winter, but spring seems to have arrived a few weeks earlier for them, as there was plenty of bare ground around the city at a time when our snow depths in Vermont were still measured in feet!

I have been a Tree Farm Inspector in Vermont for over thirty years and I have to admit that from my very local prospective, I have never really given the Program the credit that it deserved. It seemed to me to be more of a "feel good" program where members got to display a nice green and white sign that indicated to their neighbors that somehow they were doing right by their forest. They got a nice magazine four times a year and every five years or so, got a free visit from a nice Tree Farm inspector who reviewed their recent accomplishments, issued a usually deserved "atta-boy" and uttered "keep up the good work" as he/she pulled out of the driveway. Sure, there were "standards" that members were supposed to adhere to and inspectors were there to periodically review, but as far as I know, nobody in Vermont was ever removed because of an outdated management plan or a "less than ideal" harvesting practice. Removals almost always came because of death of the owner or sale of the property. Tree Farm numbers rose steadily and accurate records of owner's names, addresses, accomplishments, status, etc. deteriorated. The list

of Tree Farmers in Vermont reached almost one thousand!

It's now 2008 and we have entered the new age of the Tree Farm Program. I am a little ashamed to say that it took a visit to Idaho to really open my eyes to the extent of the evolution of this highly credible, national program! The standards and requirements for membership are now real, they're professional and they are being enforced! Several of the earlier Tree Farmers have already, and will continue to, "fall through the cracks" as their commitment to the Program is tested. ATFS was historically funded through contributions, primarily from the U.S. timber industry. Those funds have substantially disappeared and Tree Farmers are now being asked, in part, to financially support their own program, both at the national and state sponsor levels. Extensive, current forest management plans are now required, records of accomplishments and adherence to national forest practices standards will be reviewed and periodic inspections may no longer be free.

But rest assured, there is an absolute and necessary reason for these changes! Regionally, nationally and globally, there is a notable change in how forest products are being marketed. "Certification" has become the buzzword amongst buyers and sellers of forest products all around us. In many places there is a substantial difference between the value and even marketability of certified vs. non-certified wood products. Many buyers no longer purchase raw wood from non-certified forests. As a woodland owner interested in selling wood products in the future, you have three choices: 1) do nothing and risk receiving lower values for (or perhaps being unable to even sell) your wood, 2) seek certification of your individual woodlot from one of about three sources of certification groups (very expensive and time consuming for

*continued on page 7, column 2*



President's Column *continued from page 2*

manufacturers who have been pressured by magazine publishers to provide paper from sustainable managed forests.

In Vermont, Allard Lumber Company is an FSC-certified mill that's having difficulty finding enough certified wood to supply Copeland Furniture, an FSC-certified company that is now producing a new line with on-product labeling and made from red maple harvested within 100 miles of the factory in Bradford. Granville Manufacturing has had to cease its mass production of turned hardwood bowls because of lack of certified wood to meet the demands of major retailers. With the exception of International Paper Company's Ticonderoga mill paying a slight premium for certified pulpwood, the landowner's main benefit from certification is a market for this wood. As wood markets slow, this consumer-driven demand may bring certification (through various systems) up for speedy consideration.

Another issue was a proposal to expand stream buffers beyond the width recommended in the Acceptable Management Practices booklet. This did not pass this session, but VWA should be alert for it next year.

VWA is very appreciative of the legislative efforts by member and 2008 Vermont Outstanding Tree Farmer, Rep. Dave Potter of Clarendon who served on the Interim

Study Committee and has helped to increase understanding of forestry related issues at the legislative level.

*Put Blodgett, VWA President*

2008 Conference *continued from page 6*

individual landowners) or, 3) be a Tree Farmer in good standing and receive the benefits of "group certification" under the rigorous review of third part certification and PEFC, insuring that wood (and even carbon credits, whatever they are) coming from Tree Farms has been grown and harvested sustainably. In Vermont, I have seen only small movement toward the "certified" requirement on the part of wood buyers but I have no doubt that it is only right around the corner. We belong to a global economy, whether we like it or not, and if we want to participate in the changes coming our way, we need to be getting ready now!

Finally, there are very tangible reasons for being a Tree Farmer, far outweighing the "feel good", nice sign and interesting magazine attributes. I am ready to throw my support behind the "new" program and strongly encourage all of you to do the same. Contact your consulting or County Forester or VWA and become a "new and improved" Tree Farmer. I'm glad I went to Idaho!

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As a benefit of membership, the Vermont Woodlands Association offers a free subscription to *Northern Woodlands*, a quarterly magazine that offers readers a "new way of looking at the forest." *Northern Woodlands* mission is to encourage a culture of forest stewardship in the Northeast by increasing understanding of and appreciation for the natural wonders, economic productivity, and ecological integrity of the region's forests. Members also receive the VWA newsletter published quarterly and E-News, offering articles of interest and educational opportunities for woodland owners.

**New Member Application and/or Donation Form** (Renewal notices are sent by mail to current members)

Vermont Woodlands Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation whose mission is to advocate for the management, sustainability, perpetuation, and enjoyment of forests through the practice of excellent forestry that employs highly integrated management practices that protect and enhance both the tangible and intangible values of forests—including clean air and water, forest products, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, recreation, scenic beauty, and other resources—for this and future generations.

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- 201-500 acres..... \$60
- 501-1,000 acres..... \$70
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- Over 5,000 acres..... \$250
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