

Vermont Woodlands Association and Vermont Tree Farm Program

A VOICE FOR HEALTHY FORESTS

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MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER



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Kathleen Wanner

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Mission Statements:

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. VWA objectives are to communicate the benefits of working forests, recognize exemplary actions of woodland owners and managers, provide educational opportunities, and represent its membership before governmental bodies.

The **American Tree Farm System**, first organized in 1941, is the Nation's oldest certifier of privately owned forestland. Tree Farm members share a unique commitment to protecting watersheds and wildlife habitat, conserving soil, and providing recreation; and at the same time producing wood products on a sustainable basis. The Vermont Woodlands Association strives to educate, train, and support private forest landowners in sound management practices concerning wildlife, water, wood, and recreation. We do this by managing and enhancing the American Tree Farm System® Program in Vermont.



NEWS FROM VWA

2019 Annual Meeting Highlights

by Kathleen Wanner, Executive Director

By most accounts our annual meeting held on April 6th was a success. The lineup of speakers seemed to have appeal to a variety of audiences. Our hope is always that there's something for everyone. The day began with updates from our partners at VT FPR and included an introduction to Danielle Fitzko, our new Director of Forests. Danielle comes to the position from Urban and Community Forestry so has been our long-time partner. Deputy Commissioner Sam Lincoln provided an up to the minute overview of his efforts on Worker's Compensation for logging contractors. You can expect to see ongoing communications from the department on how landowners and foresters can navigate new systems to help ensure safety in the woods. The policy update from the Deputy Commissioner indicated that there is still much work to do in certain areas, especially Act 250 reform.

With increasing concerns about fragmentation and biological diversity in the face of climate change, Vermont Conservation Design's BioFinder is a tool that helps identify priority areas. Eric Sorenson from VT F&W walked through this great tool available online. A simple google search will get you there. Anyone curious about markets appreciated Charles Levesque's presentation that had some hope for the future. We heard from Dave Wilcox about the soon to be released new AMPs for Water Quality Manual and Christine McGowan previewed the Forest Products Summit (which was again excellent!).

John Nininger, our keynote speaker, captured the audience with his presentation on building the Mousilauke Ravine Lodge with some ginormous logs. It was an incredible feat of engineering that resulted in an absolutely stunning building. And, of course, we can't forget that our own Put Blodgett supplied many of the long timbers from his Bradford Tree Farm.

Tree Farm gets its moment to shine at the annual meeting with awards for Outstanding Tree Farmer and Tree Farm Inspector. This year's recipients, respectively, were Alan Robertson and Ryan Kilborn. Although it's not a prerequisite, both are active members of the Tree Farm Committee. Our Outstanding Tree Farm Inspector is chosen by a point system and Ryan racked up some impressive numbers with many initial and recertification inspections, articles for the newsletter, serving on boards and committees, and so much more. He is definitely an example of the service we seek from foresters.

These were the highlights but I'd also like to mention the concerns. Our attendance was low this year with about ninety people present and we are honestly not sure why. We know that timing will never be perfect for everyone but we try to go with less busy times for those who work in the woods. Early April, either before or after Easter, has proven best... except if that happens to be the 2nd Saturday which is also opening day of trout season, or



if sugaring is not yet over, or if there's an ice or snow storm, OR, OR, OR... Then we wonder about the cost. It's expensive to put on an annual meeting and we try to feed you well. This year we lowered the price to \$30 thinking that might have been an issue but we actually had fewer people than at the previous \$40 rate. Maybe it's the agenda. Our audience is mixed with landowners, foresters, and other resource professionals so what appeals to one may be too technical or not technical enough for others. And how do we attract the general public without making it all about entertainment. Whether you did or didn't attend this year, let us know why or why not. If you have suggestions for next year... SAVE THE DATE, April 4, 2020... pass them on.



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Forestry Issues in the 2019 Legislature

by Put Blodgett, *President*

To meet our newsletter deadline, this is being written on May 6 and the following could be changed before the Legislature adjourns. There were at least 21 bills introduced that had an effect on forestry, some major, some minor.

The most major of all is the updating of Act 250 after 50 years of existence.

For 50 years logging below 2500' elevation was exempted from Act 250. The new bill lowers the elevation to 2000', adding half a million acres to the jurisdiction of Act 250, overwhelming District Environmental Commissions and adding delay, complexity and expense to harvesting operations. Ridgelines above 1500' would come under Act 250, adding considerably more acreage to its jurisdiction. Obviously, this is to control the development of wind farms. While many would prefer to see our ridgelines unencumbered, Vermont has a goal of becoming less dependent on coal, oil and gas and increasing its use of renewables—a difficult choice.

The proposed update includes “Repealing the exemption for farming, logging, and forestry when those activities take place in critical resource areas.” “Critical resource area” means a river corridor, a significant wetland as defined under section 902 of this title, land at or above 2,000 feet and land characterized by slopes greater than 15 percent and shallow depth

to bedrock. As one licensed forester pointed out “The definition for ‘critical resource area’ still includes lands at any elevation characterized by shallow to bedrock soils and slopes over 15%. This encompasses probably 80% of the land I work on (and likely many consultants), meaning an Act 250 permit would be required for logging jobs on these lands?” The bill contains no definition of “shallow” or “forestry.” Are volunteer members of District Environmental Commissions prepared to handle this? Will consulting foresters and landowners be able to deal with it?

This 81-page bill is still a work in progress and will be carried over to the next session.

H.190—“This bill proposes to establish the Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance to advise the General Assembly regarding the management of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State in a manner that serves the interests and values of all of the people of the State.”

Since its inception in the late 19th century, the Fish & Wildlife Department has overseen the conservation of wildlife on behalf of Vermont citizens. This work was largely supported by hunting and fishing license fees throughout most of the 20th century. As Vermont's population doubled during the past 50 years, the number of hunters and anglers has steadily decreased, not only as a



Put Blodgett

percent of the population but in actual numbers too. But, the Department's responsibilities range far and wide beyond hunting and fishing related work. These include conserving and managing almost 200,000 acres of public wildlife lands for public enjoyment, protecting critical wildlife feeding and nesting habitat threatened by poorly-planned development, endangered species protection, conservation education programs, and providing law enforcement for all of the State's environmental laws and regulations. It is clear the Department cannot and should not be supported by hunters and anglers alone. The study committee that H.190 would establish would be charged with identifying funding mechanisms that reflect the larger, broader public interest in wildlife beyond hunting and angling that include photography and viewing.

The study committee is being charged to:

‘analyze whether the purposes and guiding policy of the Department reflect the current values of the public regarding the management of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals, including whether Vermont statutes, rules, and policies are consistent with 21st century wildlife governance principles’ and:

‘identify additional opportunities for increased participation by all members of the public in the governance of fish, wildlife, and

fur-bearing animals of the State through proposed changes to the structure, culture, or operation of the Department or the Fish and Wildlife Board.

To accomplish these goals, proponents seek to restructure the current rule and regulation authority of the Fish and Wildlife Board by amending its regulatory authority status to that of an advisory panel and its membership criteria to 'represent the diversity of the people's values.' First, the authority to regulate fish and wildlife matters was vested in the board by the legislature some 25 years ago to address just that concern. By rendering the board to an advisory capacity, decision-making would be regressively sent back to the legislature. Second, requiring board membership that is representative of the diversity of the people is a nebulous dictum. How does one determine if representative value quotas are being met? Currently the governor has the duty and authority to select any citizen willing to serve on the 14-member board the governor feels is capable of upholding the duties and responsibilities of board membership. Creating a mandated membership spectrum is an unnecessary step.

VWA fully supports broad-based funding approaches for the long-term health of the State's Fish and Wildlife

Department and for Vermont citizens to engage in a democratic decision-making process for our valued wildlife heritage. H.190 has good points to consider, but requires modification should it reach the legislative floor next year.

H.541—Revenue Bill. Reduces percentage of the capital gains exclusion from 40% of certain assets to either 30%, or a total gain of \$450,000, whichever is less. Also increases the state exclusion for estate tax from \$2,750,000 to \$5,000,000 by January 1, 2021.

S.96—An act relating to the provision of water quality services (cleaning up state waters). The Governor, House and Senate all have identified differing sources of funds to make up the requested \$15,000,000 which will have to be reconciled.

H.82 corrects an oversight and adds parts and accessories for timber harvesting equipment to the sales tax exemption for logging equipment.

H.514—Miscellaneous tax provisions: No later than October 15, 2019, the Department of Taxes shall make recommendations to the Current Use Advisory Board for rulemaking to address the application of the land use change tax when land is withdrawn from current use and subsequently only a portion of the land is developed.

S.160 and H.525 both address problems in agriculture but also cover forestry subjects such as: Green Mountain State Forest Carbon Pilot Project, Vermont Forest in Carbon Markets, Logger Safety, Value-added Forest Products Financial Assistance, and Appropriations for Logger Safety and Value-added Forest Products Assistance. What forestry features will survive in a combined bill is unknown at this time.

From Jane Clifford, our legislative eyes, "At this point there seems to be agreement on forming a summer committee of House and Senate legislators to work on language for a wetlands bill."



Welcome New VWA members

Many thanks to all who have decided to join VWA. Our Voice for Healthy Forests is stronger because of you. No matter how you found us, we appreciate that you did. Every member makes a difference.

Amos & Jennifer Doyle, *Chelsea, VT*
 Steve Engle, *Peacham, VT*
 Alison & Matthew Dickinson, *Ripton, VT*
 Sarah Harding, *Evanston, IL*

Nina Otter, *Moretown, VT*
 Bruce & Doreen Jones, *Rochester, VT*
 Fred Glanzberg, *South Royalton, VT*
 Carolyn Casner, *Plainfield, VT*



NEWS FROM VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS, PARKS & RECREATION

Vermont Native Plants vs. Invasive Plant Look-a-likes: Invasive Porcelainberry vs. native grapes

by Elizabeth Spinney, Invasive Plant Coordinator, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation

The growing season is in full swing in Vermont forests—spring ephemerals are blooming, tree buds are bursting, and the swaying strands of various vining plants are still visible. These trellis’ of wild grapes and Virginia-creeper reminded me of one invasive plant we should all be looking for: Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* (syn: *glandulosa*)). Also known as “amur peppervine,” “creeper,” and “wild grape” it is widely planted as an ornamental plant, but is now recognized to be highly invasive in habitats like forests and forest edges.

The presence of this species in the US was first recorded in the late 1800s as a landscape and ornamental plant. This deciduous woody vine, which can reach heights over 20’, originates from Japan and China. The leaves have serrated margins and are heart-shaped to deeply lobed. Other identifiers include the presence of obvious lenticels (gas exchange pores in the bark—think of the spots on a cherry tree), as well as solid white centers to the vine (pith). The best time to identify it is in the fall, when you might spot the colorful fruits as they transition from speckled robin’s-egg-blues to deep purples. Those various colors are a result of a

change in pH of the fruit as it ripens. The primary mode of spread is through wildlife and human activity moving the seeds in the fruit.

Porcelainberry can be found in disturbed habitats and in landscaping, the shores of lakes and rivers, marshes, forests, and forest edges. This species belongs to the grape family (*Vitaceae*), along with Virginia-creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and the

native grapes (*Vitis* spp.- summer grape, fox grape, river grape). The native grapes like fox grape have a brown pith and lack obvious lenticels.

As one of the common names suggests, it can be confused for the true wild grapes (*Vitis* spp.). Those dark colored fruits, the twining vining nature of its growth, and the leaf shape all assist in this confusion.



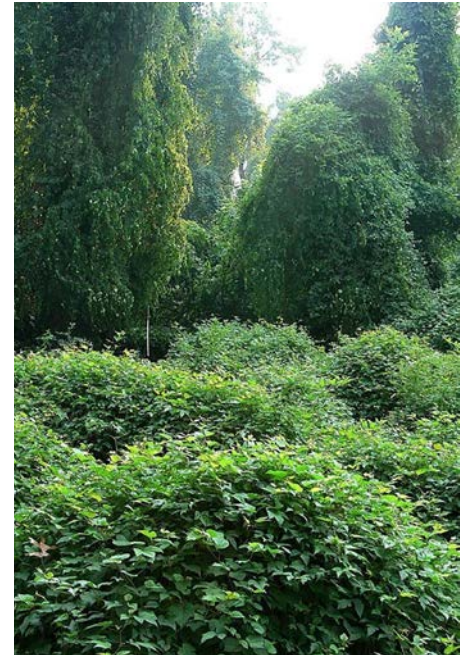
Leaves and colorful fruits of an invasive Porcelainberry. Mature leaves are deeply lobed. Photo- N. Loewenstein, Auburn University, Bugwood.org

While widely distributed as an ornamental plant, it has only been officially recorded to have escaped and spread in natural habitat in New England in the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and New York. It is not currently recorded in natural habitat in Vermont, and therefore it is considered an early detection species of concern.

Its ability to grow in a variety of conditions (light, soil, temperature), and hearty root system mean vines can persist when escaped from an ornamental planting. Rapid and

dense growth of this plant means that Porcelainberry can smother other understory vegetation, and even climb and overgrow trees. The environmental impact it's had in other New England states has led to its listing on the unofficial Vermont Watchlist (https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Quarantine_WatchListUpdate-2017_November.pdf).

If you find porcelainberry growing outside of an ornamental planting in Vermont, please report it to VTinvasives.org. <https://vtinvasives.org/get-involved/report-it>



Colorful fruits of the native summer grape, range from pale greens to deep blueish-purple.) Photo- J.H. Miller & T. Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, Bugwood.org

To learn more about Porcelainberry, check out www.VTinvasives.org and these additional resources:

- <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/ampelopsis/glandulosa/>
- <https://www.eddmaps.org/distribution/viewmap.cfm?sub=78266>
- http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_010236.pdf
- https://www.fws.gov/delawarebay/Pdfs/Porcelain-berry_Fact_Sheet%20.pdf
- <https://www.invasive.org/weedcd/pdfs/wow/porcelain-berry.pdf>
- <https://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/subject.html?sub=3007>
- https://www.bbg.org/news/weed_of_the_month_porcelain_berry
- https://www.nybg.org/files/scientists/rnaczi/Mistaken_Identity_Final.pdf



Infestation of Porcelainberry. Photo- S. Manning, Invasive Plant Control, Bugwood.org

Information and Guidance to a Successful Timber Harvest



Timber harvests come with a lot of questions—some answers you need to know, some you don't. To help you answer those important questions about your woods, the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation has created the **Landowner Guides to a Successful Timber Harvest**. They're simple and concise guides that handle topics including: Overview of a timber harvest, Water, Wildlife, Economics, and Working with Foresters and Loggers. Download the series or just the booklets that pertain to you at VTCutwithConfidence.com.

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Adapting Forests to Climate Change - Healthy Forests are Not a Luxury

by Keith Thompson and Joanne Garton

The two dry summers of 2016 and 2017 marked a challenging time for trees. Lack of water, high temperatures, and dry soils added to the growing list of environmental stressors that often tax Vermont's forests. Sometimes, stress can trigger development of larger-than-average seed crops, and by most reports, the maple seed crop of 2017 was massive. All over Vermont, maple seedlings sprung from the moist soils that followed snow melt this past spring.

However, most of Vermont remained in moderate drought this summer. Some foresters reported that large numbers of first year seedlings had withered and died. In Essex and other Northern Vermont counties, at least 4,500 acres of overstory maples were killed, with some patches hundreds of acres in size. The compounding stresses of forest tent caterpillar defoliation and drought stress, coupled with the loss of energy used in producing large seed crops, likely resulted in heavy crown dieback and mortality of these trees.



Fortunately, the maple tree deaths of 2018 were not widespread. The resulting landscape, however, is a reminder that chronic climate-related stresses are having real impacts. Vermonters depend on our forests for all kinds of benefits, from clean water and wildlife habitat to maple sap and sawtimber. In this real time of climate change, we also count on forests to store carbon. Vermont forests are estimated to capture more than half of the state's annual emissions. By providing so much for Vermonters, healthy forests are critical in our efforts to slow, and adapt to, climate change. As such, healthy forests are not a luxury; they are a practical imperative.

Compared to 50 years ago in Vermont, winters are warmer and shorter, summer days are hotter, and storms are more intense. The degree and rate of climate change is expected to increase. These changes will affect where certain plants can grow, and where animals thrive – or don't.

Part of the solution to climate change is to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and in Vermont, trees and forests do it best. Because 76% of Vermont's forests are privately owned, some of the most important work we can do right now is to help private landowners sustain and enhance the potential of their forests to absorb and store carbon. This contribution to the climate change solution depends on a lot of healthy forest, a landscape that shouldn't be taken for granted.

For decades, foresters, biologists and researchers have been collaborating to understand how to moderate the vulnerability of forests to climate change and improve forest health. For individual landowners, helping forests adapt to climate change could include actions like:

Retain Connected Forests

Reduce or eliminate the conversion of forest to non-forest conditions and avoid dividing blocks of forest into smaller pieces.

Reduce Stressors

Limit forest stressors like invasive plants, root damage from management activity, excessive deer browse or others.

Reduce Vulnerability

Address conditions that make forests susceptible to damage, such as the dominance of a single species, large numbers of pest-susceptible tree species (think ash trees and their pest, the emerald ash borer), overcrowding among trees, and the lack of regeneration of climate adapted tree species.

Provide Refuge

Protect habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species or currently common species that we may lose as the climate changes.

These recommendations are applicable across the landscape but the specifics of how they are achieved on a given property will depend on the characteristics of the forest and the

goals of the landowner. Fortunately, there are many “right ways” to help forests adapt to climate change and many resources available to help. The four goals identified above came from Increasing Forest Resiliency for and Uncertain Future written by Paul Catanzaro, Tony D’Amato, and Emily Silver Huff. This is a solid resource for landowners and foresters that distills the current thinking about what threatens forest health, what supports it, and what activities promote it. It also provides a process for considering these actions on your specific land. With easy-to-understand lists and helpful graphics, it puts the ideas behind forest resilience in one readable place.

A more in-depth resource is: Creating and Maintaining Resilient Forests in Vermont: Adapting Forests to Climate Change, published by Vermont Department of Forests Parks and Recreation. This report covers specific strategies to adapt forests to climate change, including a species-by-species summary of how trees are expected to respond to climate change. This resource provides a level of detail that can help in developing site specific recommendations.

Forests owned and managed by private landowners are part of the solution to Vermont’s biggest challenges: flooding hazards, Lake Champlain water quality, maintaining a vibrant rural economy,

providing world-class outdoor recreation, keeping our residents healthy, and addressing climate change. But our forests can only be part of the solution to the extent that they are healthy and able to adapt to the changing climate. For this reason, we need to make sure that the management we do on our own land supports, and does not undermine, forest health. By adapting our management, we can help our forests, and ourselves, adapt to a changing climate.

More information about forests and climate change can be found at: https://fpr.vermont.gov/forest/ecosystem/climate_change.



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Committed to promoting and strengthening the long-term conservation and management of Vermont’s natural resources.

VWA Consulting Foresters are licensed by the State of Vermont and meet all continuing education requirements.

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* Tree Farm Inspector

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Visit the website for complete forester contact information:

www.vermontwoodlands.org

Keep Every Cog

by John Buck, *Wildlife Biologist*

One day this past spring, while taking a break from pulling taps, I stopped to watch some newly arriving hermit thrushes forage their way through the leaf litter. The snow cover was still deep and persistent throughout most of the forest but the thrushes had found some scattered patches recently revealed by the retreating snow cover. Whether they were preparing to stake out their respective territories or were simply refueling for the next day's flight I couldn't tell. But, I found myself watching them from the base of an old spruce bole with multiple holes inscribed by the various resident woodpeckers and this reminded me of another flying forest resident. Although the northern flying squirrel can't actually sustain flight as we know it, it is an accomplished glider that can skillfully and effortlessly 'fly' from tree to tree.



Gliding is achieved by stretching the patagium between their wrists and ankles to create an air foil. A patagium is a web of skin found between the animal's limbs or digits. The latter is the case which allows bats to fly (bats actually do fly, the only mammal to do so). The squirrel steers and brakes by a combination of tail direction and flexing its patagium. Whether looking for food or fleeing from a predator, being able to move quickly some distance from tree to tree would give the flying squirrel an advantage over other forest competitors and predators. Those Vermont predators would include the woodland hawks such as northern goshawk and Cooper's hawk, great-horned owl, barred owl, grey and red foxes, bobcat, and fisher. The ecological importance of the flying squirrel is yet to be fully understood. But, the fact that a notable flying squirrel predator of the Pacific Northwest is the Northern Spotted Owl, itself a federally threatened species, provides some indication of a complex link.

Being small and nocturnal has made it more difficult to learn about the squirrel's biology. What is known about northern flying squirrel reproduction indicates courting and mating begins in March and may continue until late May. A gestation of about 40 days leads to the birth of single litter of between 2 to 4 young. Litters as small as 1 and as large as 6 have been recorded depending on habitat quality. Newborns are poorly developed at birth but leave the nest in just 40 days and are totally weaned after two months. Care for the newborn squirrels is done without the aid of the

male. Litter mates may remain with the mother for another month and then they are off to learn the world on their own. Flying squirrels are sexually mature by their first birthday.

Northern flying squirrels are different from other more familiar forest squirrels such as the grey and red species and even its closely related cousin the southern flying squirrel. For example, these related squirrel species are dependent on seed abundance each year to support their respective populations. However, the northern flying squirrel has a far more diverse diet feeding on berries, moss, fungi, seeds, and buds. And even in abundant nut years will seek out these other foods. Research has indicated a link between the northern flying squirrel's diet and the subterranean fungi naturally found in mixed older aged forests and forest health (Weigl, P.D. 2007. The Northern Flying Squirrel *Glaucomys sabrinus*: a Conservation Challenge, *Journal of Mammalogy*, 88:4,897-907).



Northern flying squirrels are not the only fungi eating species in the forest, but their propensity to forage on the ground and high degree of mobility greatly assist the dispersion of fungal spores. The dispersed inoculated spores then grow into new fungi, the mycorrhiza of which aid in nutrient and water uptake and general soil fertility of the trees they associate with.

Northern flying squirrels are not well understood. A small nocturnal forest rodent isn't one to catch the human eye as quickly as a larger more charismatic species. Thought to prefer the older-aged conifer forests of Canada and the northern United States research indicates the squirrel also fares well in mixed deciduous-conifer forests as well as the intervening young forests too. However, as the eastern forests were extensively cut over in the 19th and early 20th centuries it is likely that much of the northern flying squirrel's habitat was lost. It's Appalachian range likely decreased too.

Clearly, the ecology of this relationship is more complex. However, it does point to the fact that many parts are involved with creating and maintain a healthy forest, many of which are not completely understood. This further highlights the importance of Vermont's contiguous and continuous forest cover and the role it plays in sustaining the dynamic and intertwined ecological forces involved.

Aldo Leopold, the revered and iconic forest biologist and writer said many years ago, "The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant, "What good is it?" *If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of eons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.*"



Maintaining a healthy, functioning forest ecosystem for the generations to come is a big challenge on many fronts. But, it will be the most important outcome of our collective land management decisions.



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Extension Forest Business and the Business of the Forest

by Chris Lindgren, Forest Business Educator, The University of Vermont Extension

You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.

- A. A. Milne

Go out on a limb, that's where the fruit is.

- Jimmy Carter

To understand the business of the forests we have to leave our corner of the forest and go and see what others are doing in their corners. I have been doing just that. The University of Vermont Extension has been growing Forest Business, a business planning and coaching program, for 4 years. During this time I have been visiting many corners of the forest. My aim is twofold:

1. Work with forest business owners and managers to develop business plans and strengthen, planning and financial management skills.
2. Understand these skills needs in the context of continuing education for forest business owners and managers.

Odds are if you are reading this you are involved in the business of the forest. What is the business of the forest? It's what do you do! What do you do? Depending on your corner of the forest, and where along the value chain from forest to consumer you operate, you are going to answer the question differently. We can use an understanding of business to dig into what it means to be a forest business, to understand the business of the forest. To some it is crass and simplistic to boil the complex systems known as

forests (and the value created) down to a business proposition; they are correct. Whether that value-add is maple syrup, saw logs, table tops, clean air and water, spectacular views and recreational opportunities, a BTU, or wildlife, the economy of the forest is vast, with, innovation, exchange, and value creation ongoing. The participation of humans in these processes is fragmented and represents but a sliver of the whole economy of the forest. Yet simple models can facilitate understanding of complexity. This is where a business plan or a business model comes in. A business plan helps understand value creation in a forest economy. A plan helps businesses understand risks and make decisions about which limbs to go out on. This in turn will help a business profit from the forest economy. To understand the business of the forests we have to leave our corner of the forest and go and see what others are doing in their corners.

This work has led to the development of business skills workshops and the publication of Small Business Planning for Loggers, a business planning template.

You can find the template at: <https://tinyurl.com/LoggerTemplate>.

There is much more work to do. There are many corners of the forest that I have yet to visit, many forest businesses I have yet to discover, many owners and managers whose needs for business and finance education I have yet to understand. To further our understanding of how Extension Forest Business can help you reach

your business goals we are surveying as many forest economy participants as we can. Visit our corner of the forest and share your thoughts on business and finance educational needs for the forest economy. Help out Forest Business and complete our educational resource assessment survey —5 minutes really— at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LVNWHGG>. This questionnaire will help Extension develop Forest Business programming to best address the needs of forest economy participants. At the beginning of this article I asked you, “What do you do”? Couple this question with, “who are you?” and you have the start of a business plan. I will leave you all with 5 questions that are the heart of business planning.

1. Why am I doing what I am doing and what do I want to be? (Mission and vision)
2. What assets are on hand? (Natural assets, fixed assets, financial, human, knowledge, skill, etc.)
3. What assets am I missing? (Investments needed? Relationships to develop.)
4. How have I or can I make money? (Built on mission, vision and assets)
5. How have I or can I make enough money in a given time period? (To justify continuing operations, growth, or investment)

Make your plan today by addressing the 5 questions above. Want some help or a review of your plan? Contact Chris Lindgren: christopher.lindgren@uvm.edu.



NEWS FROM THE VERMONT TREE FARM COMMITTEE

VWA and the Tree Farm Program- Working for you in Washington!

by Al Robertson, VWA board member and Tree Farmer

VWA again participated in the American Forest Foundations semi-annual Washington Fly-in to talk to our representatives about forestry issues that concern us all. On May 1st Kathleen Wanner and I, along with Dr. Faith Campbell, an expert on invasives who has been helping us with our legislative efforts, visited with staffers in all three of our legislators offices- Congressman Welch and our two senators, Pat Leahy and Bernie Sanders. We've been doing this now for over ten years and the effort has been very productive.

Past successes include two iterations of the Farm Bill and many smaller bills that have resulted in either new legislation, or legislative efforts to fix bureaucratic rules that stand in the way of our continued efforts to promote good forestry in Vermont. This year was no exception. On the agenda we discussed:

- Disaster Recovery Aid- Both aid to help landowners and changes to the tax code to help accurately value timber losses.
- The Forest Recovery Act- an effort to help forestland owners who have suffered extensive woodland damage from natural disasters (Held up in the Senate over the level of funding for disaster funding for Puerto Rico)
- Appropriations for the Landscape Scale Restoration program in the

USFS (passed in the Farm Bill, but not funded)

- Fixing the definition of BIOFUELS as now written by the Environmental Protection Agency with respect to renewable energy sources. Right now "biofuels" include crop wastes and planted forests but not natural forest wood, meaning all the low quality wood available in our Vermont forests is not legally considered renewable energy sources by the Feds.
- Lastly, and most important, we discussed the re-introduction of the legislative effort we have been working on to deal with invasives. In conversations with Mr. Mark Fowler, Congressman Welch's point man on the issue, we are

very hopeful that a more robust version of last year's successful bill will be introduced including the grant program for endangered tree species, a program to fund the re-introduction of successful tree research in the field, and more emergency funding authority for APHIS to help them deal with newly discovered invasives before they can do significant damage. By the time you read this we hope to have the bill in hand and will begin looking for support from other states to insure passage and funding!

We are also working several issues locally in Vermont (see the President's article) and will provide updates on the 2019 session as available.

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NEWS FROM THE VERMONT TREE FARM COMMITTEE

Al Robertson, 2019 Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year

by Kathleen Wanner, *Tree Farm Program Director*

Each year Vermont recognizes a Tree Farmer for exemplary stewardship. What are the qualities that define exemplary stewardship? You need look no further than our 2019 awardee Al Robertson who joins a very select group of Tree Farmers in the state and the nation.

Al's Tree Farm, known as Pfläzlerwald, is 60 acres in Sheffield purchased in 1979 and under active management for the last 32 years. It was part of an 800 acre parcel and hindsight being what it is Al wishes he had done whatever it took to buy it all. He lived in Maryland at the time of purchase and wasn't able to spend much time here until moving to Portsmouth NH in 1983. That's when he started working every weekend on his land. And since he didn't know much about forestry, he concentrated on trails. This actually helped his later management strategy.

Al's stewardship ethic was born from his many years in Germany while serving in the Air Force, hence the name. Pfläzlerwald, or its slang PFALZ emblazoned on Al's license plate, comes from the Palatinate Forest of southwestern Germany, designated as a nature park. His management is consistent with Dauerwald, or "back to nature" concept for permanent, perpetual, and continuous forest. All



harvesting is done from a permanent trail system and utilizes single and group tree selection. The result is an ongoing conversion to an un-even aged stand with annual harvesting of Spruce, Fir and Cedar and hardwood firewood. An average harvest is approximately 5,000 bf of Spruce, Fir and 10 cords of firewood. Al also plants trees – about 200 annually – to improve quality and resiliency in the face of climate change. History is helping the conversion. The parcel had not been logged in 50 years and "accidental" early development of the trail system as a first priority has

aided selection and harvest activities. This is a long term proposition and the full conversion is still decades away...

It would be hard to find a more active Tree Farmer in Vermont. Al has been on the tree farm committee and VT Woodlands board for nearly two decades. He is a regular participant in the American Forest Foundation's National Leadership Conference and



bi-annual visits to Capitol Hill. He helped to organize an AFF forest tour in Germany, France, and Switzerland in 2016 and has welcomed foresters from these countries to his Tree Farm in Sheffield. He was an early member of AFF's National Public Affairs Committee, is currently on the board of the National Woodland Owners Association, and a member of the State's Private Lands Advisory Committee.

There are not many people who could match Al's land and community based efforts. If you hear the words bachelor, only child, engineer, retired military what comes to mind? This is what drives Al's razor sharp focus, passion, commitment, and tenacity. During his annual walk in the woods, visitors get to see his extensive system of trails, innovative bridges, "corduroy," and water bars made from old guard rail sections that have been replicated by many a tree farmer. If you stick around after a walk you may get to taste Al's famous - or infamous - apple cider made from his well-tended orchard of ancient varietals. Then there's his home, a 7-story silo that without a doubt has the best views in Sheffield.

If all that Al does today is remarkable, his meticulous planning for the future is also extraordinary. The Pfälzerwald Tree Farm is conserved through Vermont Land Trust to ensure that it remains intact in perpetuity. But that's not all... As someone who has no heirs to inherit the property, the Tree Farm will become the Robertson Memorial Town Forest, named for his parents, and managed by a board of directors. This resource that he has tended with such care and devotion will be a community asset for all to enjoy into the future.

This September 14th Al invites you all to come for his Tree Farmer of the Year tour of Pfälzerwald. These full day events offer lots of educational walks, informal networking, presentations, and great food and beverage – think cider! So, save the date and be on the lookout for additional information coming soon.



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Maple Business Programs Supporting Forest Land Owners

by Mark Cannella, Associate Professor, University of Vermont Extension

Vermont has a long history of syrup production and we see many paths for small and large scale maple sugaring that satisfies the goals of the producers and forest landowners. Recent high profit potential merged with the special lure of sugaring has been irresistible. The business environment and land ownership patterns continue to shift, however, and new relationships are evolving. Maple producers and woodland owners are asking for current information about the economics of modern maple to guide their decisions. Woodland owners may be planning for their own operation, establishing a business partnership or responding to a rental request for their sugarbush. In all these cases the involved parties want to have a solid understanding of potential income, costs, risks and opportunities that impact maple development.

Maple Finances

The University of Vermont established the Maple Benchmark program in 2013. Industry leaders anticipated that the record syrup prices from 2009-2012 would inevitably drop. The maple benchmark program emerged to support producers with cost analysis education that would help their business planning. Four years of annual benchmark reports are now available to the public with new reports added annually. (These reports are available online at the UVM Farm Viability website <http://go.uvm.edu/maplebizuvvm>)

Several key benchmarks have emerged that can assist with maple development plans.

Investments: Contemporary maple businesses are making significant investments in tubing system installation and sugarhouse processing technology.

The average investment (not including the purchase of forest lands) is \$45 per tap. A 5,000 tap maple enterprise will have \$225,000 invested in tubing system, equipment and buildings in addition to land ownership costs.

Major expenses: The largest economic expense is employee and owner labor. Many Vermonters support their livelihood from a maple business and they need to pay themselves for their time. A good deal of planning is required to match business scale, budgets and workloads to be successful. Investment depreciation is often the second largest expense. This means that a maple business generating high cash income needs to reserve a good deal of cash for future repairs and replacement.

Lease and Partnership Resources Coming
New and unique business relationships are developing as enterprises expand and new start-ups join in. Maple operators are looking to lock in at least 15 year leases and often more. Landowners are thinking about their short and long term goals for the property too. Will the tubing systems be removed? Will sugaring impact forest health? Should I charge \$1.00 per tap like my neighbor?

Flat tap rents are not the only mechanism for woodland owners and operators to form business relationships. Numerous lease structures have

been used in the agricultural community to share profits and share risk. There are also different ways to establish business partnerships for forestland owners and maple operators to share their skills and resources.

In 2018, UVM Extension began a three year project to build a maple leasing educational library. The library will include several standard leasing templates and legal resources to assist with entity set-up for multi-party relationships. The same project will also produce updated silvicultural guidelines with input from regional foresters and maple specialists. These new resources will provide a framework for the long term sustainability that will keep our people and woods working together for decades to come.



Allies in the War on Emerald Ash Borer: Studies suggest birds may help regulate populations of invasive insect

by Steve Hagenbuch, *Audubon Vermont*



Adult emerald ash borer beetle Photo: vtinvasives.org

It was only a matter of time. The emerald ash borer (EAB), an insect native to China, eastern Russia, Japan, and Korea, was found in Orange County Vermont in February 2018. First discovered in the US in southeastern Michigan in 2002, this small beetle is responsible for killing millions of ash trees in North America. While there is currently no proven solution to stopping the EAB, research conducted in the upper-midwest suggests that forest birds may have an important role to play in the fight against this exotic invader.

Adult EAB beetles lay eggs on the bark of ash trees. When the eggs hatch, the larvae bore into the bark and begin feeding. This disrupts the movement of nutrients and water within the

tree, girdling it and causing the tree to die. Fortunately, Vermont's forests provide habitat for a variety of bark-foraging birds, such as woodpeckers and nuthatches. When these birds are working their way up and down the trunk of a tree they are often searching for an insect to eat including, as it turns out, emerald ash borer larvae.

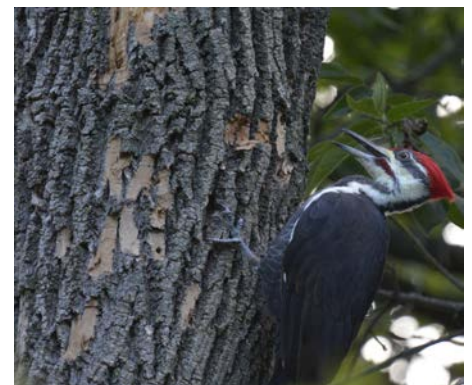
A 2013 study conducted in Ohio (Flower et al) provides valuable insights into the interactions between forest birds and emerald ash borers. Results of the study show that in a forest impacted by EAB, bark-foraging birds forage more heavily on ash trees than non-ash trees, and that they prefer to forage on ash trees that show signs of health decline, presumably due to EAB impacts, instead of foraging on trees that were more visually healthy. This would suggest that the birds use visual clues to identify which trees are infested. The study also reports that a sampling of 46 ash trees shows that birds significantly reduce the densities of EAB larvae by upwards of 85%. So, although the trees that the birds foraged EAB from are past the point of saving, there may be up to 85% fewer adults able to eventually emerge from the trees and fly to infect more ash trees.

What does this all mean for Vermont? One fact rings clear - native bark-foraging birds are going to be allies in

the fight to reduce the impacts of EAB on our forests. These allies include Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown Creeper. We can't expect that these birds will eradicate EAB or prevent its spread to other areas of the state. What they will likely do is to provide a measure of control on the EAB populations. And at this point let's take any help we can get on the war against EAB.

To learn more about what you can do to support bird allies in the battle on EAB on your land visit <http://vt.audubon.org/conservation/landowners>

To learn more about emerald ash borer in Vermont, including an up to date known distribution, go to <https://vtinvasives.org/invasive/emerald-ash-borer>





VERMONT TREE FARM INSPECTOR'S LOG

Kathy Beland, Tree Farm Forester... and More!

by Kathleen Wanner

Kathy Beland is both a colleague and a dear friend. Her most recognizable characteristic is her laughter and as I often tell her... she's much too easily amused. Kathy readily admits that she's a sucker for a good "pun." But she also says that laughter is much less tiring than tears. I suspect she's right. Being able to keep a sense of humor can definitely help us wear the world a bit lighter.

If you're a tree farm forester, Kathy is also recognizable as the one who trained you. I think it would be fair to say that as our training facilitator, she has trained virtually everyone since 2013. This is a tree farm task that she takes on routinely and without complaint. She does, however, sometimes ask that you come to her home, which is also her office, rather than have to travel. What you may not know is that this has been a strictly volunteer endeavor. You may also recall that Kathy was honored as the National Outstanding Tree Farm Inspector of the Year in 2014 because of her incredible commitment to Tree Farm. It would be impossible to find another forester who has consistently given so much to the program.

As close as Kathy and I have worked together and for as many years, I must admit that there were many things I didn't know. So I asked... Kathy recalls that the best days of childhood were when mom and dad would say "let's go to the woods." She lived in Maryland farm country but there were places

around where you could spend time in the woods, hiking and enjoying the surroundings. Sunday afternoon family outings were often spent in the woods around Camp David.

But even with such a love of the woods, her forestry education was not the original plan. Kathy intended to study agriculture or horticulture at the University of Maryland but found the size of the school overwhelming. So she retreated to Allegany College in Cumberland where she received an Associate's in Forestry. Just out of school, she was hired to be the Park Manager by the town of Sykesville in MD, except there was no park. Her role as manager was to develop a park from open space through a town grant. After two years she went to work for Maryland Forest Service as a forest technician. This is where she had her first introduction to Tree Farm and where she began a 35-year history of dedicated action.

Marriage and a desire to move north brought Kathy and her husband Tom to Vermont in 1986. Shortly after arriving, Kathy was hired by Mark Skakel who had a consulting forestry business in Rutland. She and Mark worked together until 2001 and during those years, she earned her share of the business through blood, sweat, and tears. The old business was abandoned and Not Just Trees, Inc. was launched as a new business partnership in 2001; however, Mark soon decided he preferred to

Instead of hearing from Kathy Beland in this issue, you're going to hear about her. She has been dealing with some very difficult family health problems and unable to write her usual "Trekki" focused column. We do ask that you keep Kathy and her family in your thoughts and prayers.

teach forestry so gave up consulting. Frank Hudson joined NJT, Inc. in 2001 and became a partner in 2002. The company manages about 17,000 acres in Rutland, Windsor, and Bennington Counties in a management style that encompasses many forest values.

When I asked her the very best thing about being a forester, she quickly said, "the smell of the woods." It seems that leaf mold, flowing streams, fresh air... take her back to childhood where the world of the forest was so different than the fields, where she could breathe so easy. Kathy lives in Clarendon where she has a 10 acre woodland that she "manages for invasive control." But this is also where her kids grew up and where they come home to, with grandkids in tow, where Kathy can share the things she loves ... listening to the birds, fishing, walks in the woods.





Woods, Wildlife, and Warblers: A Pull-up Party

by Kathleen Wanner

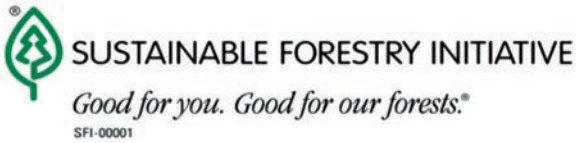
It's a crazy idea, I know, but it's been rattling around in my brain for about a decade. It actually began as a seed of an idea in a parking lot conversation with Bob DeGeus and Tom Hark... if you know them, no need to explain; if you don't it won't help anyway. So, the idea... in a play on Green Up Day, how about Pull Up Day? This, of course, is in connection with invasive species and how it will truly take a village (or a county, a state, a nation) to deal with our invasive species problems in our forests today.

Enter Woods, Wildlife, and Warblers... on May 11 we launched a "mini pilot" to see how well this idea would work. We identified two landowners willing to serve as the "test" locations, one each in Windham and Rutland counties. Then, we enlisted the aid

of a forester, gathered materials and tools, and invited neighbors to join us for an Invasive Pull-up Party! While the turnout was small – about 6 people in each location – we did yeoman's work. Everyone learned a lot about identifying invasive species, using a weed wrench, and the power of people to tackle problems together. Our team in Rutland County, where I worked for the morning, pulled about 500 stems of honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, burning bush, buckthorn... By my accounts, it was a success! Everyone left with a bit more knowledge and pumped about pulling up invasives.

To learn more about Woods, Wildlife, Warblers or to sign up for the regular e-tips, visit the website at vtwoodsandwildlife.org.





NEWS FROM SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

Vermont SFI® AIV Legislative Day

by **Bill Sayre**, *Chair, Vermont SFI* and **Ed Larson**, *SFI VT Coordinator*

The annual SFI® AIV Legislative Breakfast took place in the Vermont Statehouse Cafeteria on March 21, 2019. Approximately 20 members of the forest products industry arrived to meet and greet Legislators and share their thoughts and concerns about what is going on in Vermont's working forest and the industry. Close to a hundred members of the Vermont House and Senate stopped by for coffee to say hello and listen to what is on our minds. Members of the forest products industry included logging contractors, sawmill and papermill owners and managers, foresters and landowners.

A new addition to our day took place mid-morning after the breakfast portion. SFI booked time in the Ethan Allen Room located by the cafeteria and we invited Legislative leaders in to discuss issues of the day. Speaker

of the House, Mitzi Johnson joined us for a good 20 minutes of back and forth conversation. We covered issues such as Act 250 and wetlands as well as information sharing on the status of the industry. We also met with Senator Tim Ashe, the President Pro-Tempore and Senator Bobby Starr, Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture. We celebrated last years session in which positive laws were passed including right to practice forestry and some economic development incentives such as sales tax exemption for logging equipment. We also discussed other opportunities to further promote our industry such as addressing workers' compensation costs.

After spending the morning in the Statehouse, SFI held a stakeholder roundtable luncheon meeting at AIV's conference room. Deputy Commissioner Sam Lincoln joined us to

report on his activities in the statehouse and with the workers' comp and logger safety initiative.

Project Learning Tree

PLT is an education curriculum for primary school teachers and other educators that brings the forest into the classroom. About two years ago, the American Forest Foundation turned over the management of PLT to The Sustainable Forest Initiative. At the same time, the State's Dept of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) that administered PLT was in a transition, so it was an opportunity to revisit the program and explore reinvigorating PLT in a comprehensive fashion. We began with a core group which included the SFI VT Implementation Committee, Vermont Tree Farm Committee, FPR and a national PLT representative.

Last fall the PLT Core Group held a stakeholder meeting to generate more support, seek additional partners, facilitators and venues for training sessions. Several organizations attended including UVM Extension, State Departments of Education, Agriculture and FPR. We also had other non-profit organizations that provide education services to Vermont youth on outdoors and the natural world such as Shelburne Farms and VINS. As a result of this meeting we created an expanded Steering Committee that adds a number of individuals from those that attended the stakeholder meeting. We are now

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looking to recruit facilitators and seek ways to regionalize the program with a number of regional home bases to support facilitators and educators.

We are also happy to report, that Rebecca Roy, is returning as PLT Coordinator. She was the past coordinator and did a great job. Now that we are reinvigorating the program and are promoting the expanded use of trained facilitators, we are looking to grow participation.

Summer Forest Policy Task Force meeting

We will soon start planning for the summer SFI/AIV Forest Policy Task Force meeting. We anticipate it will be a July meeting so stay tuned for more information soon. It is always a very informative day long session on forest economic, ecological and social issues

and challenges. Each of the last five forest policy task force meetings earned six CE SAF credits for forest licensing and six LEAP CE credits.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) is a sustainability leader that stands for future forests. SFI® is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting forest sustainability and supporting the links between sustainable forests and communities through carefully targeted research, direct leadership of critical initiatives, and partnerships that effectively contribute to multiple conservation objectives. Nationwide, Forests certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard cover more than 285 million acres/115 million hectares. Millions more acres benefit from the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard. SFI's Forest Management, Fiber Sourcing and Chain of Custody

Standards work to ensure the health and future of forests. Through application of these certification standards, SFI's on-product labels help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions. SFI Inc. is governed by an independent three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally. Learn more at sfiprogram.org.

SFI Vermont works closely with others involved in the forestry sector, trade associations, educational institutions, safety program leaders, State and Federal Government Officials and lawmakers.

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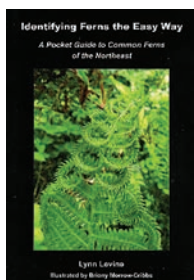
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VWA BOOK REVIEW

Identifying Ferns the Easy Way: A Pocket Guide to Common Ferns of the Northeast



by Allen Yale, *Tree Farmer and TF Committee Member*

How many times have you walked in your woods and, seeing a fern, thought: “I wish I knew what that fern is called.” Now

author Lynn Levine and illustrator Briony Morrow-Cribbs have provided a guide to help you identify twenty-seven ferns common to the northeastern United States.

When I began to write this review, I checked my bookshelf and found that I already had three references for fern identification. One, Parker’s *How to Know the Ferns*, had over two-hundred pages and first published in 1899. The second, *Common Ferns of Vermont*, was produced by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources in 1995. The last was a single sheet the size of a playing card printed on both sides. This last one was encapsulated in plastic. In my opinion *Identifying Ferns the Easy Way* has distinct advantages over the other three.

The best identification guides lead the observer from the specimen he/she is observing systematically through the guide until they have reached the best identification. Levine does an excellent job of helping the observer narrow down the choices until they reach an identification. Most ferns manifest as single stem or stems growing from the root. The upper part of the stem has leaflets coming off the stem, sort of like the leaflets on the compound leaves of an

ash tree or butternut. Levine has divided ferns into five groups. Twenty two of the twenty-seven ferns illustrated in this booklet have this feature. So how does one tell the difference? If these leaflets have fairly smooth edges, they are called “once-cut.” If the leaflets have cuts into the edges, or subleaflets, it is known as “twice cut.” If these subleaflets are again cut, into subsubleaflets, it is “Thrice cut.” This accounts for three of Levine’s groups. Levine’s fourth group which she calls “three parts” the stem has two side stems. Her fifth group is for ferns that do not fit into any of the previous four groups. This she calls “unique.”

Once one has determined which group the specimen belongs to, one then proceeds to the “silhouettes” section. (pages 10-17) Here ferns arranged by group with a silhouette for each fern in that group. In the largest group, “twice-cut,” she has divided them into those which grow in vase-like clusters and those that do not.

From your guess of the silhouette, then proceed to the pages listed under the silhouette to the pair of pages which provide text and a more detailed illustration of the particular fern. The text identifies where it grows, further tips on identification, other ferns with which it may be confused (with reference to pages where these are found), and interesting notes.

This guide provides a well-organized system for helping identify ferns.

What makes it especially helpful are the excellent illustrations by Briony Morrow-Cribbs which are key to the usefulness of the guide that they assists one move from step to step on the journey of identification. Included are several examples to let the readers judge for themselves.

If I had one criticism, the booklet’s subtitle refers to it as a “pocket” guide. While it will fit in the rear pocket of your jeans, or the side pocket of your jacket, I wish it was slightly narrower so that it would fit in the breast pocket of a shirt.

Why should a woodlot owner learn to identify ferns? The species of a fern in a specific location often is an indicator of other conditions of that place. Some ferns are found in wetlands (Crested Wood Fern), while others favor less wet soils (Christmas fern). Some indicate calcium rich areas (Maidenhair Spleenwort); others rich shaded soils, often with calcium bedrock (Maidenhair fern). Besides, it just adds another layer of enjoyment to your woods walks knowing how to identify ferns.

Once the snow melts and the ferns have reappeared, I will again head into my woodlot to try to sharpen my fern identification skills.

Allen Yale is a member of the Vermont Tree Farm Committee who is looking forward to “rambling” through his woodlot in Derby looking for ferns now that the snow is gone.

Ski the Trees, Protect the Forests

by **Christine McGowan**, Forest Program Director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Skiing backcountry terrain in Vermont is hardly a new idea. Originally a mode of transportation for Vermonters stranded by unpassable, snow-covered roads, skiing in the woods dates back to the early 1900s when visitors from Norway introduced the novel idea of strapping long, wooden slats to your boots to move more easily through the snow. Vermont's steep, mountainous terrain and plentiful snowfall proved the perfect natural conditions for the sport to thrive and a winter tourism economy was born, bringing with it rope tows, chair lifts and resorts.

Despite the growth of Vermont's ski industry, however, there remain those who prefer to "earn their turns" in the woods, choosing old logging trails over busy resorts. In recent years those numbers have increased, to the point that illegal trail cutting has caught the attention of public land managers charged with managing Vermont's forest health.

"Recent surveys taught us that a number of backcountry skiers still do not believe that clipping lines is a concern; collectively, however, it can negatively impact forest health," said Holly Knox, a recreation program manager for the Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts in the Green Mountain National Forest. "Even minimal clipping can impact the forest understory in structure and composition; as forest structure is reduced, stands can become highly susceptible to wind throw, insect and disease affliction, and other events that can dramatically affect the forest."

Knox and others, however, see managing backcountry skiing as more of an opportunity for Vermont's forests than

a threat. "Forests can be managed for multiple uses including recreation if we balance ecological, economic and social concerns," said Knox. With the sport growing but still in its fledgling years, leaders in both the forest and recreation industries are looking at collaborative efforts in communities such as Rochester, Willoughby and Readsboro as potential models for increasing access to the backcountry, while simultaneously protecting and restoring the environment on which the sport depends.

Silviculture with Skiing in Mind

With a report by the Winter Wildlands Alliance predicting that "undeveloped skiing" will be one of the top five growth activities over the next several decades, Michael Snyder, a forester, avid backcountry skier, and the Commissioner of Vermont's Forests, Parks and Recreation Department, is considering the state's role in expanding access to the sport. "Managing forests for recreation is not new," said Snyder. "Cross-country skiing has co-existed with forestry for decades. What's new is taking an intentional approach to managing the woods specifically for backcountry skiing."

For starters, Snyder is aiming to develop a handbook for foresters that will outline considerations for silviculture treatments specific to backcountry ski zones, such as restoration of past illegal cutting, conservation of wildlife habitat, planned timber harvests for stand improvement and regeneration, safe and accessible parking areas, and the opportunity for logging trails to be used for uphill skin tracks. The most coveted backcountry terrain typically includes steep, higher-elevation areas not

TOURS, MEETINGS, & WORKSHOPS

Visit vermontwoodlands.org for additional information about these and other opportunities

LEGACY PLANNING WORKSHOP

Saturday, June 8,
8:30am – 12:00pm
Manchester Community Library

WORKING LANDS DAY

Wednesday, June 12,
12:00pm – 2:00pm
Intervale Center

WOODS, WILDLIFE, WARBLERS

Friday, June 14,
8:30am – 12:00pm
Whitehall, NY & Fair Haven, VT

WOMEN OWNING WOODLANDS PARTNER MEETING

Thursday, June 20,
11:00am – 3:00pm
Extension Office, Barre

FOREST BIRD WEBINAR

Thursday, June 27,
11:00am – 12:00 pm

TREE FARM TOUR

Saturday, August 24 at 11:00am
Pfälzerwald Tree Farm, Sheffield

SAVE THE DATE TREE FARMER OF THE YEAR TOUR

Saturday, September 14
Pfälzerwald Tree Farm, Sheffield



Angus McCusker, one of the founders of the Rochester/Randolph Area Sports Trail Alliance (RASTA) backcountry skis in Brandon Gap's Bear Brook Winter Access Area. Photo by Erica Houskeeper.

suitable for logging, but a comprehensive plan would take into account the lower-elevation timber harvests below those lines. Glade skiing terrain, which might be spread over dozens of acres, also requires different considerations than a single, point-to-point cross-country or mountain biking trail.

Snyder is also considering a pilot program on state lands and looking to existing projects as models. “As a skier and a forester, I can’t help but look around the forest and think about what could be,” said Snyder. “Especially when we look at these new backcountry ski zones through the larger lens of economic development in rural areas and in conjunction with forest management.”

According to a 2013 study on the Economic Importance of Vermont’s Forest Based Economy, forest-based recreation is one of Vermont’s most valuable assets, annually contributing \$1.9 billion and 10,000 jobs to Vermont’s economy. Established trail systems, such as the Kingdom Trails in Burke, have demonstrated the kind of economic impact forest recreation can bring to rural areas, both in the form of tourism and forest industry jobs, and Snyder is optimistic that towns with emerging backcountry zones could see an economic boost as well. “A well-planned backcountry zone in Vermont’s smaller, more rural areas, such as Willoughby, Westmore, Averill, Montgomery, or Plymouth, for example, might be enough to move the economic needle,” he said.

Brandon Gap, A Model for Collaboration

If the Brandon Gap backcountry zone is any indication, Snyder is onto something. One of the state’s first backcountry ski zones and part of the Rochester/Randolph Area Sports Trail Alliance (RASTA), Brandon Gap had 3,628 skier visits during the 2017/2018 ski season, generating \$2.1 million in sales at local restaurants, bars, lodgings, gas stations, and retail shops. On February 18, 2017, an epic powder day, the area saw 171 visitors who generated just under \$200,000 in sales. The economic impact study, which was conducted by the SE Group, also estimates that visitor spending correlates to 34 new, full-time equivalent, tourism-related jobs. The numbers, however, only tell part of the Brandon Gap story.

“The underlying reason for creating these backcountry zones is enjoyment for all,” said Angus McCusker, one of the founders of RASTA. “We have this incredible resource in the green mountains and we love to ski. Every few years, a logging operation would come through and leave a perfect trail, but as the understory grew back we’d have to find a new spot. We thought, ‘let’s get organized and do this right so the trails will last.’” McCusker and others hosted Vermont’s first backcountry forum in 2013, inviting a panel of foresters, private landowners, and state and federal officials (including Michael Snyder and Holly Knox) to gain an understanding of how best to proceed.

“Working closely with land managers, such as the USFS, gave us insight and the opportunity to work with a team of scientists including biologists and silviculturists who look at the forest through a different lens,” said McCusker. “It gave us all a much better understanding of the impact we have on the overall health of the forest.” Working within a comprehensive forest management plan, RASTA organized a volunteer day in the Braintree Mountain Forest, a popular backcountry area, to

trim low branches and clear out some understory growth. “A lot of people came out,” recalled McCusker, “and one of the foresters commented that we were providing free timber stand improvement or ‘TSI’. I realized we were working within their plan to manage the forest for long-term health and also achieving our own objectives.”

Dutch Hill, Reopening Vermont’s Lost Ski Areas

Further south, in Readsboro, a similarly collaborative effort has reopened the Dutch Hill Ski Area. Originally a lift-served ski area that opened in 1944, Dutch Hill had been closed to the public since 1985. Like RASTA, The Dutch Hill Alliance of Skiers and Hikers (DHASH) worked with staff from the Green Mountain National Forest to develop a forest management plan that included re-opening the Dutch Hill trails, restoring areas that had been damaged by unregulated off-road vehicle use, and enhancing wildlife habitat. The area was reopened to the public for hiking, skiing, splitboarding, and sledding in 2017.

“Old trails were in various stages of reverting back to forest and in some places, non-native invasive species had moved in,” said Jeff Tilley, a silviculturist and forestry program leader with the Green Mountain National Forest. “Working with recreation interests, we formed an interdisciplinary team that looked holistically at how the landscape could be managed, improved and restored.”

Among the main components of the plan, the forested areas of Dutch Hill are now being actively managed for wildlife habitat, timber production, and the maintenance of open, grassy areas for hiking and skiing. Timber production is not a primary focus, however, Tilley is planning a harvest to remove approximately 2 million board feet of primarily low-grade wood appraised at around \$70,000. The harvest will be offered as a stewardship contract, where the purchaser will exchange work for the wood, and all revenue will be reinvested in



A logger works to clear trees in Southern Vermont. Photo by Erica Houskeeper.

restoration and regeneration treatments on the site, including erosion control, soil stabilization, interpretive signage, and wildlife openings. Timber harvests create jobs in the region with estimates varying from 22 to 32 full-time jobs per million board feet, according to Tilley.

“The project is an opportunity to demonstrate how sound, sustainable forestry can not only be compatible with backcountry recreation, but can provide opportunities to enhance it as well.” said Tilley.

Backcountry ski enthusiasts are hopeful that Dutch Hill can serve as a model for the state’s “lost ski areas,” small and mid-sized ski areas that have been closed for decades. According to the New England Lost Ski Areas Project, there are more than 120 lost ski areas in Vermont, including eight that have been reopened for winter recreation.

The Future of Backcountry Skiing in Vermont

What might the future of backcountry skiing in Vermont look like in the next decade? McCusker thinks we are “pretty damn close” to the dream of vibrant, community-based backcountry zones that provide access to a sport once

considered renegade. He notes projects being discussed to introduce beginner terrain, the creation of a hut-to-hut system, and an effort to introduce more youth to the sport. More access to the backcountry, however, remains his primary goal. “The true backcountry experience is spread out, not limited to small, condensed areas and more terrain means more un-skied powder, which is what many backcountry skiers are really after out there.” McCusker would like to see more people getting out into the woods, away from lift lines and resorts. “It’s a purer experience that helps people learn to be better stewards of the land. Resort skiing is prohibitively expensive for a lot of people, but the backcountry is free and accessible to everyone.”

Michael Snyder agrees. “Where we can develop and leverage our natural, recreational assets for economic growth, we can also bring health, wellness, and a sense of community to rural parts of Vermont, all while maintaining a healthy working forested landscape,” said Snyder. “Skiing in the forest is part of our tradition and culture and, let’s face it, Vermont winters are still too long not to get out there and enjoy it.”

For more information on backcountry skiing, check out the Catamount Trail Association with its grassroots chapters and program areas such as the Vermont Backcountry Alliance.



Angus McCusker, one of the founders of the Rochester/Randolph Area Sports Trail Alliance (RASTA) and Holly Knox, a recreation program manager for the Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts in the Green Mountain National Forest, skin the hills of Brandon Gap. The two have an easy rapport and share a passion for back-country skiing and the wilderness. Photo by Erica Houskeeper.

AN INVITATION TO OUR MEMBERS

We welcome your submissions for the VWA and Tree Farm newsletter. If you have a story to tell or news of interest to share with other landowners, please send along so we may consider for future editions.

We can accept articles, photos, or news tidbits via email to info@vermontwoodlands.org.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR FOREST?

Work with a consulting forester to manage as best as possible in these difficult times. With the complexity of the problems facing us, it is imperative to have professional help, just as we do for our medical, dental, legal and accounting needs. Also, your consulting forester’s assistance is needed to make sure forest management is allowed if you should ever decide to put your property into a conservation easement.

HOW CAN YOU HELP VWA?

Introduce a friend, neighbor, or family member to VWA. Membership really matters!

Attend a workshop or walk in the woods to learn from and network with others.

NEW MEMBER APPLICATION (Note: existing members will receive an invoice)

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.

ANNUAL DUES INVESTMENT (check one)

Landowners

- 0 -100 acres..... \$40
- 101-200 acres..... \$50
- 201-500 acres..... \$60
- 501-1,000 acres..... \$70
- 1,001-5000 acres \$100
- Over 5,000 acres \$250
- Friend/Supporter \$40

Natural resource professionals

- Individuals..... \$50
- Firms and crews..... \$100

Wood products companies & equipment suppliers

- Individuals..... \$50
- Firms and crews..... \$100

- VWA Accredited Consulting Foresters** \$160
(Subject to VWA acceptance. Call for details.)

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Address _____

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Telephone _____ FAX _____ Email _____

Woodland town(s) _____ County(ies) _____

Woodland acres _____ Tree Farm member? _____ Enrolled in the Value Appraisal Program? _____

Forester _____

Please make checks payable to Vermont Woodlands Association and mail with the completed form to: VWA Treasurer, PO Box 6004, Rutland, VT 05702-6004.

MEMBERSHIP BONUS!

Northern Woodlands



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.

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Even in our crazy chaotic world, you can always find something to truly celebrate and a giving community is cause for celebration. A work day at the home of Kathy and Tom Beland brought 30+ people together to cut, split, and stack wood, mow the lawn, rototill the garden, clean up from winter debris... and anything else that needed to be done. Kathy and Tom have touched many lives in their community of friends, neighbors, and colleagues who answered the call for help as they navigate difficult health issues. Lots of love and hugs to all who took up the gauntlet... or the axe, shovel, spade...



How many men does it take to get a tractor stuck in the mud? And to get it unstuck? If you can identify any of these characters (above and to the left), let us know and win a VWA hat!

