

CONSERVATION COMMISSION 2008 Annual Report

With land ownership comes with the responsibility of learning about the land and understanding its attributes and the dynamics of short and long term change. Stewardship requires developing strategies to manage real and potential change in ways that support the long-term integrity of the ecosystem.

Management objectives and strategies include the human factor and citizen interests regarding education, recreation, resource management and all the benefits associated with well-considered planning and accomplishment.

Much of the Commission's work to date has been directed to becoming more familiar with the town-owned properties, the resources they contain and the opportunities they present.

For both the 125-acre Wu Ledges and the 589-acre Scrag lands, we now have natural communities surveys and forest bird habitat assessments. The natural communities surveys identify distinct groups of naturally-occurring forest vegetation. The bird habitat assessments evaluate the current woodland condition in terms of elements suitable or unsuitable for a variety of native birds. The natural communities surveys were funded primarily through grants from the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. The forest bird habitat assessments were provided at no cost by Audubon Vermont, and we are most grateful to Audubon for their expertise and fine assistance.

All of these works will be consulted as we prepare management plans for these properties. Remaining to be developed are forest inventories, that is, the vegetation distribution patterns, their species makeup and measures of quantity and quality. All the research will form the basis for management plan development, and the public will be invited to participate.

Trails mapping has been accomplished for the Wu Ledges property, and the Commission is working with the Mad River Riders regarding trail maintenance. Further on recreation trails, the Commission is working with the Mad River Planning District and the Mad River Path Association to establish paths on Town lands along the Mad River and by the Town pond at the Big Picture Theatre.

We are also working with the Vermont Land Trust to revise the existing protective easement on the Scrag lands and to develop a protective easement for most of the newly-donated lands on and east of the Northfield ridgeline.

All these projects have received the support and participation of Commission members. Mark Grosby first proposed that a Conservation Commission be formed – after five years, he stepped down as Chair and member in 2008, and we are most grateful for his services, motivation and direction. Member Kate Williams was elected to the Selectboard, and moved to that post after Town Meeting day. Thanks to her for her interest and good contributions. Through his interest in giving back to the community (his own words), Tom Gardner has joined the Commission and we look forward to his assistance.

Much remains to be done and, if you like the outdoors, here's a place for you. We meet once per month and currently have one vacancy. We encourage Waitsfield residents who have an interest in conservation to inquire about our projects and consider applying to serve on the commission.

Respectfully submitted,

Leo Laferriere, Acting Chair
Phil Huffman, Vice Chair
Elizabeth Cadwell, Secretary
Tom Gardner
Paul Hartshorn
Ted Joslin
Chris Loomis
Spencer Potter



Farm fields and Scrag Mountain

Photo: Abigail Cane