

## **CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

### **2010 Annual Report**

The Commission continues to focus on research and preparation of plans for management of town-owned properties, and also participates in Valley-wide initiatives addressing natural resource-oriented issues.

#### **Town Lands**

##### Austin / Lareau

Through the initiative of the Mad River Path Association, a plan was proposed to extend a path from the Lareau parking lot northerly into the Austin parcel. Working together, the MRPA, Friends of Mad River and the Conservation Commission developed a project addressing recreation, riverbank stabilization and invasive weed control. The new path and an information sign is in place. Old fencing which created a barrier to mowing has been removed. Knotweed control involves regular mowing, and plans are to plant trees alongside the Mad River in 2011. Our particular thanks to Michael Ware who coordinated construction work with Green Mountain Valley School volunteers, Harrison Snapp, Caitrin Noel, and the Waitsfield Selectboard for their motivation and assistance on this project.

##### Wu Ledges

A long-standing access road improvement project was completed. Over the last few decades, the trail on town land leading from private land at the end of Pine Hill Lane had become eroded, and control measures were need to stabilize the road surface and slope. Working with funds from the Conservation Commission budget, a contractor was hired and an excavator was used to reshape the road, and to install water bars and culverts. That work was followed by seeding the new soil surface with conservation mix. The road is now in good condition and should readily accommodate anticipated public uses. Thanks to volunteer Jon Jamieson, and commission members for their assistance.

##### Scrag Forest

Over the summer, much discussion arose around the issue of wind energy development on the Northfield Ridge. The Conservation Commission has not formally addressed this matter as it affects town owned land on the ridge. However, the Commission has started on the first steps toward development of a management plan for the 625-acre town-owned Scrag Forest by preparing a summary of natural resource attributes as identified in reports from Vermont Audubon, Arrowwood

Associates and Washington County Forester Russ Barrett. This summary will be the starting point in upcoming public meetings designed to foster public input into the planning process and development of a management vision for these important lands. From that process, a plan will be prepared and submitted to the Selectboard for their approval.

Additionally, the Commission has filed two applications to seek state funding for construction of a public hiking trail to provide access from the end of Bowen Road into the Scrag Forest. More on this in our next report!

### **Other Participation**

The Commission has also provided input into the Forests, Wildlife and Communities project, the Valley Trails Summit, the Mad River Valley Trails collaborative, and the Waitsfield Planning Commission as it updates the Town Plan. And we hosted the three-town (Fayston, Waitsfield & Warren) Conservation Commission meeting at the Knoll Farm. Each town gave an update regarding current projects.

### **Within the Commission**

After serving several consecutive terms, member Elizabeth Cadwell resigned to allow more time for graduate school as well as other family commitments. We thank her for her time of service and her valued continued focus on education of young people, particularly in the field of natural resources.

Peter Boynton and Mark Haberle were appointed to the Commission. They bring with them strong interests and capabilities in the field of land management, and we look forward to their participation. We have one vacancy, and encourage interested persons to attend a meeting, learn about our projects and become part of the action.

From a statewide perspective, the recently issued Report of the Council on the Future of Vermont titled “Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision for the Future,” contains the statement that “Overwhelmingly, Vermonters are united in support of the state’s agriculture and working landscape.” Unity of public opinion is rare indeed, but the quality of our environment is such that it merits support – and respect – at all levels. These levels range from accomplishment of small local projects started by few with little resources, to larger undertakings with multiple sources of assistance. But they all have a common start – a good and valuable idea which can contribute to the well-being of our community, our

region, the nation and ultimately our planet. Projects can be very doable at the local level. Involvement is not an expenditure, but rather an investment – an investment in the quality of our lifestyle. We encourage your participation.

Leo Laferriere, Chair  
Peter Boynton  
Paul Hartshorn  
Chris Loomis

Phil Huffman, Vice-chair  
Mark Haberle  
Ted Joslin  
Spencer Potter



Sign at Wu Ledges

(Photo: Jack Byrne)