

CONSERVATION COMMISSION 2011 Annual Report

As a primer describing our work, the Conservation Commission is composed of up to nine appointed members, with responsibilities regarding the natural resources of the municipality, and lands within the municipality which have historic, educational, cultural, scientific, architectural or archaeological values in which the public has an interest. It may make recommendations regarding acquisition of land and receive appropriations, gifts (to include land or other property) and grants for the purposes of carrying out its responsibilities. It may assist other elements of town and regional government on matters affecting the local environment or the natural resources of the municipality. It may also prepare and distribute relevant information, and encourage through educational activities the public understanding of local natural resources and conservation needs.

Regarding administration of municipal lands, properties and other rights, the commission is charged with management of 793 acres of public land in three parcels located adjacent to Scrag Mountain (Scrag Town Forest), alongside the Mad River (Wu Ledges Town Forest) and alongside Brook Road (Woliner Parcel), plus easement monitoring on 10 acres behind the Valley Professional Center (Dowdell / Baked Beads).

Our primary focus has been on the Scrag forest, through construction of a public access trail and development of a long-range management plan. Funded by a grant from the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and a generous contribution from the Entrust Foundation, a small group of VT Youth Conservation Corps personnel have partially prepared a trail leading from the trailhead at the end of Bowen Road to a point joining an old logging road on private land. In 2012, this project will be finished, to include construction of a small bridge over Folsom Brook. Upon completion, this route will replace a former path on land now closed to public use. Many thanks to commission member Peter Boynton for his organization of this activity and to landowners Mark and Polly Kiesel for enabling the VYCC workers to use their property.

Our vision statement for Scrag reads: *The Waitsfield Scrag Forest is a remote, public forest valued by the residents of Waitsfield and the broader Mad River Valley Community. Our vision is to conserve these lands for scenic, educational and non-commercial, non-motorized recreational purposes, and to maintain its value for forestry, watershed*

protection and habitat and biodiversity conservation. The long-range planning process is being managed by the commission with the assistance of Kristen Sharpless, a local consulting ecologist. Findings of three prior analyses conducted by VT Audubon, Arrowwood Environmental, and the Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation Washington county forester Russ Barrett are being consolidated to form a description of the property and its attributes. We have developed proposed management policies and guidelines, and are preparing for a public meeting in February. Upon receipt of public input, we will revise the draft plan and forward it to the Selectboard for their approval. We look forward to finalizing this plan and starting its recommended projects.

A note regarding the effects of spring and summer storms on town-owned lands:

- * On the Scrag forest, tropical storm Irene caused the main trail (an old logging road) leading up to the beaver pond to be severely eroded at its lower elevations. This road was last used for logging operations in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time, little was done regarding erosion control and subsequently the road slowly deteriorated. While still usable as a hiking path, its condition is very unsatisfactory, and we intend to accomplish needed repairs as part of a future timber sale operation.
- * On Wu Ledges, heavy rains in May caused blockage of a newly-installed culvert, and we thank Jon and Amy Jamieson and Charlie Goodman for their work in restoring the site to a functioning level. Irene caused very little damage to the road system, and necessary repairs were made using only hand tools. Frontage along the Mad River however was substantially altered by the rushing high water and associated debris. The Austin Walk trail between the river and Route #100 was promptly restored by the Mad River Path Association, and their work was part of a valiant and much-appreciated volunteer effort throughout the Valley. We commend the Path Association for their sense of responsibility and diligent follow up.

As demonstrated by the response to Irene's flooding, volunteers are an integral part of our quality of life here. Community service is an ongoing need, beyond that caused by unusual weather events. If you like working in, and for, the great outdoors, we have a vacancy in our group. Motivated members are always appreciated – and our future projects are fine opportunities to participate.