

## **CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

### **2009 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**

##### Northfield Ridgeline/Scrag Mountain parcels

- A conservation easement was negotiated with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) to protect most of the newly-acquired land straddling the ridgeline. In addition, the earlier easement covering the original Scrag land was updated so that one easement now protects both areas. Our thanks to Liza Walker of VLT, and our Selectboard for their interest and leadership roles in this achievement.
- Through the assistance of the VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation, Washington County Forester Russ Barrett has conducted a forest inventory analysis on the Scrag lands, and prepared a draft Forest Stewardship Plan. We are most appreciative of Russ Barrett's help. Combining this plan with the Natural Communities and Forest Bird Habitat surveys, the Commission will prepare a draft management plan for the area. As part of the process, at least one public hearing will be held to receive input from the townspeople and other interested parties.

##### Wu Ledges Municipal forest

- Further work has been done regarding mapping of trails, to include a site visit for the purpose of identifying a specific boundary line and trail location. Negotiations are pending with the Mad River Riders regarding trail maintenance.
- Acquisition of additional land and easements are also pending.

#### **Participation in Valley-wide Initiatives**

There were two meetings of the three-town (Waitsfield, Fayston & Warren) Conservation Commission Summit, where members of the conservation committees in each town made presentations regarding local projects. The group considered the meeting useful and informative. Waitsfield will host the next Summit, scheduled for March, 2010.

The Forest, Wildlife and Communities group, whose purpose is to build landowner and community awareness and appreciation of the Valley's

natural assets. A list of proposed non-regulatory strategies/activities has been developed, and weekly outreach was conducted at the Farmers' Market to share information from the Arrowwood natural heritage inventory and unified map showing data for all three towns.

A new initiative has formed within the FWC group. As part of outreach to new landowners, a Welcome Wagon program has been developed. This is a pilot project, with the Mad River Valley as one of two sites statewide. The purpose is to contact new owners of parcels of land over 25 acres or so in size, with a short letter informing those owners of organizations which can provide natural resource management services. Those who respond to the letter will be visited by a trained local resident to discuss forestland ownership and stewardship, and a welcome bucket (a sap bucket) will be provided to them. The bucket will contain many items, such as brochures and small books, as well as a small container of maple syrup. The Welcome Wagon project is being managed primarily by the VT Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, with an early summer startup time.



Students on Snowshoe for Hunger hike to the Wu Ledges, Jan. 2009 (Photo courtesy of WES)

Additionally, the Commission:

- Heard a presentation by Friends of Mad River regarding flood and erosion control, and aquatic and terrestrial invasive species;
- Met with the Planning Commission in the interest of the two Commissions gaining a better understanding of one another's work and areas of overlap; and

- Provided support to the Friends of Mad River riparian tree-planting project, and to the Town/VT Land Trust Hartshorn Farm conservation project.

Within the Commission, Member Tom Gardner relocated out of the Valley, and we thank Tom for his good interest and services.

The Conservation Commission has nine positions, and we currently have two vacancies. There is always room for good ideas, and we would like to fill these two seats. Working with our natural resources provides its own unique rewards – some practitioners in this field say they don't have a job, rather they are responding to, and appreciating a calling. If you harbor a similar perspective, consider joining like-minded colleagues.

Leo Laferriere, Chair  
Elizabeth Cadwell  
Ted Joslin  
Spencer Potter

Phil Huffman, Vice-chair  
Paul Hartshorn  
Chris Loomis



Students at the Wu Ledges, Showshoe for Hunger, Jan., 2009

(Photo courtesy of WES)