



Woodlands *for* Wildlife

Volume 27 June 2011

Releasing Apple Trees for Wildlife

By James Stack, Class of 2008f

On a cloudy, cold day in March, 17 pairs of snowshoes ventured into the forest to learn the hows and whys of releasing and pruning wild apple trees. As part of our WHIP contract, my partner, Ron Theissen, and I hosted a workshop sponsored by Vermont Coverts.

Fourteen eager landowners were joined by Sam Schneski, Windham and Windsor County Forester, Aaron Hurst, Vermont Forest Parks and Recreation State Lands Forester, and MaryBeth Adler, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Habitat Technician.

Winter timing was chosen to make sure pruning was before apple trees began to flower to prevent “shock” to the tree. Workshop topics included tree and area selection, release techniques and guidelines, basic pruning methods, and long term maintenance.

An important wildlife food resource, wild apple trees grow best in full sunlight. Normally, the trees are first established as an orchard in a clearing or as wild trees, from seed dropped by bird, along forest edges. Later, as forest invades the site and shades the trees, or “crowding” results from branches competing for space, the trees lose vigor and fruiting is limited.

A few simple steps can improve growing conditions, flowering and fruiting, and provide food and cover for a variety of game and non-game wildlife species.



Once all the necessary tools were organized (chainsaws, chaps, helmets, pole pruners, hand saws, loppers and hand

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Use Value Legislative Update

By Jamey Fidel, Forest and Biodiversity Program Director and General Counsel, Vermont Natural Resources Council

The Current Use Program was in play again during the first year of the 2011-2012 legislative session. Recall that several years ago there was a legislative mandate to find \$1.6 million dollars in savings from the Current Use Program. At that time, the House and Senate passed a bill that would have found these savings. However, the approach taken was not favored by Governor Douglas, and he vetoed the bill. This left things unsettled as far as how to build in long-term stability to the program.

Last summer and fall, a revitalized Current Use Tax Coalition (CUTC), made up of a variety of stakeholders, including Vermont Coverts, developed a proposal

for finding savings while making important improvements to the Current Use Program. Many aspects of the CUTC's proposal were rolled into a bill sponsored by Rep. Alison Clarkson (H.237). This bill passed the House with a strong voice vote, but due to limited time the Senate did not take up the bill. The Senate will likely take up H.237 next year.

The most important provisions in H.237 include changing the Land Use Change Tax or development penalty, and promoting several studies to look at issues of interest. In order to strengthen the development penalty and deter short-term enrollment and the parking of land, H.237 would adjust the penalty to 10%
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Creating a Neighborhood of Conserved Land and a Working Farm over 48 Years

By Bob Lloyd, Class of 1997

In 1963, my two college roommates, their spouses, my wife Sue and I decided we would like to own some land together. We had done much camping and canoeing as a group, enjoying simply being outdoors — hiking, building fires, cooking, dealing with the adversities of weather and insects and making music.

After an extensive search, just by luck we found and bought a piece of land in Tinmouth. The agent said that it might be as many as 700 acres. It turned out to contain 450 acres, but the price was right: \$8,000. Each family paid a third.

Over the course of the next 12 years, the group used the land lightly, entirely for recreation. A neighboring farmer ran a

thirty-head, free-range beef herd that kept the fields open.

In 1969, Sue and I — both teachers — decided we would spend our long summers in Tinmouth with our three young sons. We built a cabin and started making connections with the community.

In 1975, a neighbors' 850-acre farm was forced onto the market by a family dispute. With the help of two “angels” interested in the preservation of open land for wildlife, we bought it, promising the neighbors that we would do our best to keep the land farmed. While our other owners came to Vermont sporadically and continued to enjoy the recreational aspects of the land — it is a beautiful

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Releasing apple trees

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pruners), we headed to a forest site with a group of 10 wild apple trees.

Last fall, before the workshop, we had released five of these trees and Sam and Aaron would critique our work and use these trees for pruning.

On a nearby site, we also found a lone tree, a perfect example of a still healthy apple surrounded on all sides by different aged trees. It was decided to focus on the south side of the tree where there would be the greatest exposure to sunlight.

Clearing this area required only a small saw for younger trees, and a chain saw for larger ones. While this was not a "Game of Logging" course, the basics of that workshop were covered and demonstrated on three larger trees.

After completing this work, we discussed if we had cleared enough space. What is enough? Shocking a wild apple tree can also happen by permitting too much sunlight to reach an exposed tree accustomed to shade. It was decided the clearing was sufficient.

Girdling is one option

Several competing (non-apple) trees were "girdled," using an axe on a smaller tree and chain saw on a larger pine to interrupt the flow of sap. In a year or two these trees would no longer produce leaves, allowing more sunshine. A consideration of girdling is where a tree might fall, as we did not want it to injure the apple tree or create a potential danger on any path or trail.

The clouds began breaking up allowing blue sky and warming sunshine, a process similar to what we would expect from our having released the apple tree.

The next step was to begin pruning. Typically in deeper woods our apple trees presented twisted stems, rotten wood, sapsucker excavations and long branches reaching to find an opening in the canopy. Where to start? We began by identifying dead branches for removal. A rule of thumb is never to cut more than one third

of the live tree in order not to shock or kill it.

This process generally includes looking to see if any major limbs should be removed. These were cut of close to the branch collar.

Selective pruning

One tree had two large competing leaders in a sharp "V" which could split from ice. They were removed using a pole saw. Keeping within the one third limit, it is better to under cut than over cut.

Hand pruners were used to remove smaller suckers. It was now time to examine the buds to identify potential fruit-bearing buds, or flower buds (there are leaf buds, which produce leaves, flower buds, which produce a flower or cluster of flowers, and mixed buds, which can produce both leaves and flowers). The more we pruned, the more likely we were to be removing the fruit, so we became selective on any further cutting using pruners to remove the thicker stems.

As most of the clouds gave way to a blue bird sky, workshop participants began working on different trees. They asked Sam, Aaron and MaryBeth many questions; the answers would be helpful when this group of landowners returned to their forests to help bring the wild apple trees on their land back to healthier fruit production for wildlife. While Ron and I were the hosts, as participants we found ourselves learning a great deal, and this knowledge increased our excitement about the prospect of attracting more wildlife to our woods.

[Note: This article also appears in the Woodland Owners Association's current newsletter.]

Two hundred years ago, apples were growing on hill-farm orchards and lake-side slopes throughout Vermont. In 1791, to encourage the growing of apples trees, the Town of Braintree paid a bounty of sixpence for each apple tree transplanted into orchards of at least 25 trees. In addition to apples for eating, large quantities of apple cider were made and distilleries provided apply brandy.

Use Value Legislation

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of fair market value of the parcel being developed if land has been enrolled less than 12 years. However, there would be a tiered approach for land that is enrolled for a longer period of time. The penalty would be 8% for land enrolled for 12-20 years, and 5% for land enrolled more than 20 years. Under the provisions of H.237, landowners would have an "easy out" opportunity to withdraw land before the new penalty kicks in.

The change in the development penalty would potentially increase revenue by approximately 3 to 3.5 million dollars, after a couple of years. The new revenue would be shared between the state and towns. This would provide stability to the program, which is seeing increased enrollment every year.

H.237 would also create a formal study to examine the existing formula for reimbursement payments ("hold harmless payments") to municipalities. Part of the task would be to determine if the payments are equitable and appropriate in light of the proposed changes in H.237. The legislation also calls on interested organizations and individuals to create working groups to study issues which are of interest to the legislature. For example, whether there should be incentives for allowing recreational access; the extent and degree of over-assessment of enrolled or conserved land, and the eligibility of agricultural parcels of fewer than 25 acres and the feasibility of developing productivity standards for such parcels. Even though H.237 did not pass the Senate, the CUTC will study some of these issues over the summer.

Several provisions related to current use did pass the House and Senate in other bills. The property transfer tax for lands enrolled in current use will now be 1.25%. The revenue from the property transfer tax will be used to support the electronic administration of the program, a move that was supported by many stakeholders. The other provision, which will be

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Sue and Bob Lloyd
photo courtesy Vermont Life

Creating a neighborhood

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place, Sue and I took the initiative to find tenants to keep the farm in operation.

Matters came to a head in 1978. In order to build equity, the tenants wanted to own the farm rather than rent. The “angels,” who had no interest in the farming operation, became impatient with participating in management decisions. Sue and I became concerned with the complexities and inequities of joint ownership, now that the other owners were sharing the tax burden of our cabin. We all also felt somewhat overwhelmed by the responsibility for the future use of such a large amount of land.

Together, the two purchases amounted to 1300 acres, laboriously de-fragmented from what had been over thirty-five ownerships in the 1790s. How to maintain the functional coherence of the land and at the same time allow diverse uses by a variety of owners?

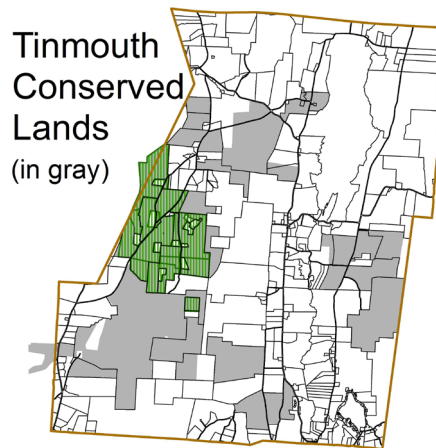
Over the next two years, innumerable discussions, consultations and explorations led to a coordinated set of decisions. In 1980, we:

- harvested timber to pay for a land survey of all the property
- placed a conservation easement on

all the land with the Ottauquechee Regional Land Trust (later to become the Vermont Land Trust) and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (FP&R)

- sold two hundred protected acres to the tenant farmers
- used the money from that sale to buy out the two “angels”

established a “land condominium,” under which each owner holds a ten-acre lot in fee simple together with an undivided interest in the remaining, common land, a share which an owner could sell without destroying the structure of the whole.



The Lloyd property (darker gray) was the second in Vermont to be placed under a conservation easement with the Vermont Land Trust. The parcel is now one of 16 conserved lands in Tinnmouth.

Subsequent years have seen significant developments:

- sorting out with two towns the appraised value of conserved land
- entering the land in the Use Value program
- successful lawsuit by the VLT and FP&R against the farmers for violation of their management plan and accepted forestry practices
- default by farmers on their U. S. Government mortgage
- redemption of the farm by Sue and Bob
- sale of farm to new owners

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President’s Message:

Vermont Coverts Cooperators have a continuous desire to learn more about forestry and wildlife. One of the best methods to spread knowledge is through workshops. However, some workshops we want to attend seem to be at the other end of the state or require a full day or are scheduled at an inconvenient time.

Your Council has decided to launch a partial solution — Vermont Coverts Monthly Webinar Series. On May 19 at noon, Professor Thom McEvoy made the first webinar presentation regarding basic forestry and wildlife relationships. On June 15, Emilie Inoue, State Survey Coordinator (Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey), Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets will be the guest presenter. The presentation will cover the background of the emerald ash borer, identification, ash identification, purple traps, and more.

Invitations to the June 15 webinar will be emailed from the Executive Director, Lisa Sausville. Registration is required and participation is limited to 100 attendees. Arrangements are being tested to archive the presentations for replay by anyone who is not able to attend.

An attendee will need high-speed computer access and a speaker on their computer. Optionally, the attendee without speakers or a headset may call into the webinar to hear the presentation. Currently, GoToWebinar software is being used but Adobe Connect Pro is being tested for future use. The use of this software and attendance at the webinar is free to all attendees. Attendees may ask questions or make comments during the presentation by typing in the chat or question panel.

So, grab a sandwich, a drink, then sit back and enjoy Vermont Coverts’ luncheon webinars in the comfort of your home, office or library. After the webinar, take your new knowledge and head for the forests and wildlife.

Trevor Evans



Woodlands for Wildlife

Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.
PO Box 81, Middlebury, VT 05753

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VERMONT COVERTS: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

Executive Director: Lisa Sausville
Lisa@vtcoverts.org 802-388-3880

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

For additional calendar information visit www.vtcoverts.org

Fern and Fern Allies Walk

Saturday, July 9, 9 am to 12 noon, Granville, Vt, property of Coverts Cooperators Toni and Pastor Dick Hotchkin. World-renowned pteridologist Dr. A. Murray Evans will lead the walk. The land is rugged, so wear appropriate clothing and protective footwear. To provide some idea of participation, contact Lisa at VT Coverts, or Pastor Hotchkin at rhotchkin@hotmail.com or 781-2701, if you plan attend.

Managing a Woodlot for Timber and Wildlife

Saturday, Aug 27, Sheffield, Vt, property of Al Robertson. Topics to include pond construction, trail layouts for European harvesting techniques, tree selection for harvesting, early successional forest 10 years after Hurricane Floyd, and working with NRCS EQUIP and WHIP programs. Contact Lisa at VT Coverts for schedule and directions.

Use Value Legislation

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revisited next year, is that any parcel with municipal development permits or state wastewater and potable water permits in place for two years or more will now be

removed from the program and assessed the current development penalty.

Stay tuned as current use will be in play yet again next year.

Creating a neighborhood

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- sale of one condominium share to new owner
- fifteen other conservation easements placed on land in Tinmouth, bringing total conserved acreage in town to over 5,000 acres

these sometimes threatening and always complicated operations.

Sue and I love Vermont — the way it actively lives in its landscape, its ever-present sense of the past shared by even the most recent newcomers, its caring communities, its inclination toward environmental responsibility, economical living, parsimonious speech, social tolerance and justice. Our spirits have been buoyed by these values for many years. In return, we have been glad to serve its future.

The keys to land use stability in our case have been the shared values of the owners, which have persisted now for almost fifty years, kept management decisions amicable, and held us steady through