



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

A newsletter of Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

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NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Rich Chalmers, *Class of 2005 Spring*



A huge thank you to everyone who made our annual fund drive this past winter such a success. We blew past our annual drive goal, bringing in \$52,000, the largest amount in Coverts' history. This is a strong endorsement of our mission-based programming and recognition that we are on the right

track. Your generosity and passion for woodlands and wildlife make all of this possible.

We have been busy. We recently completed work on a new strategic plan which confirmed the soundness of our overall direction and provided a detailed path for the next five years. In a nutshell, more outreach and awesome programming, leading to more opportunities to learn about and improve wildlife habitat and the ecosystems around us.

If you are looking for ways to make this happen, you have come to the right place. The Coverts e-news and events calendar are bursting with programs, from bears and beaver to invasive control and forest management, that give us a chance to learn more about how to make our woodlands more wildlife friendly. Many of these are in cooperation with partnering organizations.

An excellent example of this is Douglas Tallamy's *Nature's Best Hope*. The Vermont Coverts book club has been discussing this book. This led to a Coverts collaboration with other member organizations of Land Ethic Vermont, to host a talk by Tallamy online. I encourage you to read the book (see Cooperator John Hawkins' book review on page 3) and watch the talk (link in the box).

Tallamy's message is inspiring and motivating. We as individuals, with the right information, doing small things together, can have a huge positive impact. It's a very Coverts-like concept.

Along those lines, I recommend another recent Vermont Coverts-Land Ethic Vermont collaboration: a presentation by Jane Sorensen on Landscape Design for Pollinators (link in box). There is a lot you can do to support these critical members

of our ecosystem. Jane provides concepts and resources valuable for all levels of experience.

All this programming takes financial support (thank you again) and people to make it possible. We are very happy to announce that Laura Farrell has just joined Vermont Coverts as our new Outreach Specialist.

Laura brings a great deal of experience and enthusiasm to Coverts. We look forward to the many things we can accomplish with her on the team.

We encourage you to get out and enjoy the coming spring. Watch for the returning birds, check out vernal pools and other wetlands, look for bear browse on the fresh clover and be awed by carpets of ephemerals. We also hope you will keep an eye on the e-news and join us for one of our in-person or online programs for opportunities to learn, connect and plan for the future.

Thank you for all you do in support of wildlife, and I hope to see you at a workshop soon.

Rich Chalmers
President



Nature's Best Hope
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ-UwOkuz4s>



Landscaping for
Pollinators
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8q1S-rxlmt0>

VERMONT YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS GETS IT DONE

Bill Anderson, VYCC Forest Project Manager



Getting projects accomplished on the landscape is often a limiting factor for landowners. Working with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps may be a way to get some of that work done.

The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) is a non-profit organization based out of Richmond, Vermont whose mission is “To take action and build community by working and learning together with the land”. Since 1985 the VYCC has provided programming for young people to work in the outdoors and gain valuable skills and experiences.

The VYCC is composed of two main program areas: Food and Farm, based out of the Richmond campus and the VYCC Conservation Program that operates throughout the state and the northeast. The Conservation Program consists of numerous AmeriCorps and Pro Crews that camp out all season and complete a variety of conservation focused work projects in four different project initiatives: trails, build, water quality, and forests.

In 2019, the VYCC piloted its Forests Project initiative. This Initiative aims to help landowners manage healthy and resilient forests while facilitating corps members’ skill development and knowledge in the areas of chainsaw use and maintenance, tree and plant identification, use of pesticides, and silvicultural practices. Additionally, corps members have the opportunity to work alongside numerous professionals in the forestry field through their work with partner organizations.

An aspect of the Forests Project Initiative that is unique to VYCC is that these crews complete work on privately held land. The VYCC is able to offer project planning and development services and can work with

a landowner’s consulting forester to ensure the landowner is getting the best possible environmental outcome from their project.

For 2023 the Forests Project Initiative will be running two crews. A Pro Forest Crew which is composed of five corps members that come into the program with prior experience in a conservation related field, and an entry level 8-person AmeriCorps Crew. The Pro Crew begins their season in mid-April and runs until the end of October and the AmeriCorps Crew begins their season in mid-June and operates until the end of October.

Both crews receive Game of Logging chainsaw training levels 1-3 prior to the start of their field season with the Pro Crew taking Level 4 as well. Additional pre-season training includes leadership skills, Wilderness First Aid (all Pro Crew members and AmeriCorps leaders), tree and plant identification, map skills, brush cutter, pesticide use, and hand tool training. They also have the opportunity to receive project specific training from licensed foresters, federal and state land managers, and non-profit partners.

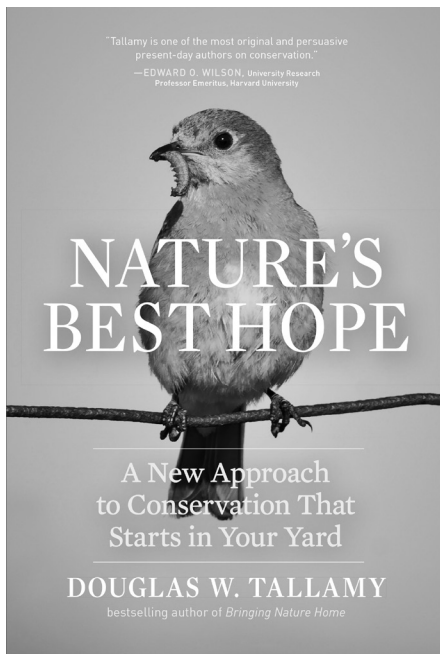
Previous VYCC forest crews have completed a variety of projects such as invasive species control, hazard tree removal, early successional habitat improvement, crop, mast, and apple tree release, canopy gap formation, tree planting, tree fence installation, pre and post commercial thinning, timber stand improvements, trail clearing, and forest road improvements. Some other project areas the VYCC is interested in exploring are single and group selection harvests and firewood harvesting.

For the upcoming 2023 field season the VYCC still has availability for the Pro and AmeriCorps Crews. Availability is currently in June, July, August, and September of this year and can be for any of the previously listed project types. Crews are booked on a weekly basis with the landowner providing a priority ranked list of tasks that will fill out the crews work week. We have some Coverts Cooperators working with the crew this year through the Women Owning Woodlands program.

If you are interested, weekly rates range from \$7000 to \$9000 and vary by project type and level of project development. NRCS funds can be used to hire the VYCC crew. Additionally, VYCC is already planning for the field season of 2024 and can work with landowners to develop their project, plan with their forester, and navigate funding opportunities.

For additional information about VYCC forest crews please reach out to Bill Anderson, VYCC Forest Project Manager, at bill.anderson@vycc.org or at 802-448-0536.





BOOK REVIEW OF NATURE'S BEST HOPE

*John Hawkins, Class of
2016 Fall*

Douglas Tallamy starts this book, which may be one of the most important you can read, with a quote from E.O. Wilson, "Conservation biology...[is] a discipline with a deadline."

When we consider climate change, we usually hear that the work that needs to be done is large scale and it seems impossible for a single person to feel like they are making a difference. This is a book that gives the individual a way to do something about the effects of climate change in their own yard – it empowers us, and we can see results.

After showing how our National Park system, founded with good intentions (and here we need to acknowledge that this land was taken from its original inhabitants by force) to preserve wild places and biodiversity is both too small and too fragmented to make a difference today, Tallamy introduces the idea of the Homegrown National Park to address this shortfall.

The idea is simple. If all homeowners agreed to convert half of their existing lawn to native plant communities, we would effectively create the nation's largest park system, 20 million acres.

Lawns, and the invasive landscaping plants that frequently accompany them, destroy wildlife connectivity and cause the collapse of native ecosystems and their services. 85.6% of the land east of the Mississippi is privately owned so many of our wildlife corridors MUST be on private land. Lawns have replaced over 40 million acres of diverse plant and animal communities in the US (an area the size of New England) and we're adding 500 square miles of new lawn each year.

As we know, invasive plants are bad for the environment in many ways. Most insect herbivores are plant specialists and when their food/plant of choice is forced out by invasives, they disappear. This then depletes the population of local birds which depend on a steady and ample supply of insects to raise their young.

We have known since the 1950's (Robert MacArthur) that ecosystem productivity and stability is related to the

number of species present: the more species, the greater ecosystem stability.

Restoring insect populations is critical, as without insects there would be environmental collapse (just imagine if nothing ever decomposed). Without humans, nature would recover very quickly – the Cuyahoga River and Chernobyl are two recent examples of nature roaring back after our interference was eliminated.

To effectively restore insects, we need to focus on those which provide the most energy to the food web (caterpillars) and those whose presence is vital to the survival of the entire ecosystem (the pollinators, primarily native bees) by planting native species and eliminating the invasives.

As an example, nesting Chickadees consume 350 to 570 caterpillars per day depending on the brood size and it requires several thousand caterpillars to raise a clutch. Just think about that the next time you see a flock of chickadees at a birdfeeder.

How to know what plants are native to your region given that invasives have driven so many species out? With support from the US Forest Service, Tallamy's research assistant created a huge database which has become the basis for both The Native Plant Finder from the National Wildlife Federation (www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder) and Audubon's Plants for Birds (www.audubon.org/native-plants).

Trees and weeds also turn out to be an important part of the effort. Goldenrod and asters, weeds that we spend lots of effort on eliminating, are vital to our pollinators (many bees specialize on goldenrod pollen, there are 181 species of caterpillars that goldenrod hosts and 109 hosted by asters). Oak trees are another keystone to this effort (long lived, draw lots of carbon from atmosphere, protect against soil erosion, and are the best contributor to the food web as they host 100's of species of caterpillars).

Will it work? As noted above, given a chance, nature restores itself quite quickly. Tallamy offers 10 concrete steps we can all take to make Homegrown National Park a reality;

1. Shrink the lawn
2. Remove invasives
3. Plant keystone genera (backbone of local ecosystem)
4. Be generous with your plantings
5. Plant for specialist pollinators
6. Network with your neighbors
7. Reduce light pollution by using motion sensor night lights, set mowing height at 3" - 4", and install bee "housing" – what he calls a "conservation hardscape"



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VT Coverts Hires Outreach Specialist

Vermont Coverts welcomes Laura Farrell to our staff as the Outreach Specialist. Laura is a wildlife and landscape ecologist who thinks a lot about how animals move across landscapes co-inhabited by humans. She knew Vermont was where she would end up before traveling 5 of 7 continents. She is really happy to be settled back here to raise her daughter. Whenever possible she likes to read, hike, and watch

the seasons unfold in the woods, bake, garden, travel, and enjoy lazy days with the dog and family. Laura went through the Cooperator Training last fall and is now excited to be part of the staff furthering our mission.

Book Review of Nature's Best Hope

continued from page 3

8. Create caterpillar pupation sites under your trees
9. Don't spray or fertilize

Personally, I stopped mowing goldenrod and asters along with several acres of fields and orchard and saw a dramatic increase in pollination of my food crops. I'm now ready to start replanting natives. You can get all the information mentioned, inspiration, and much more by visiting Tallamy's website, <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>.