



Women and Our Woods Vermont is a collective of partners committed to connecting women with information, resources, and support needed to make informed decisions regarding their land.



Women and the Woods We Love

Stories and lessons from women
who love and manage forests



wowvt.org

How did Women and Our Woods-VT come to be?

Women make up a growing and increasingly important segment of Vermont's landowner population. They are responsible for key land-use decisions across nearly 1.6 million acres of the state's forests, helping to sustain essential public benefits such as clean water, climate change mitigation, wildlife habitat, and forest products. National trends suggest that women's ownership of forestland will continue to rise.

Despite this progress, women remain less likely to participate in forest management activities, often due to limited access to information and support. In 2005, to help bridge this gap, the Women Owning Woodlands Network or WOWNet was launched at Oregon State University to empower women as forest stewards and provide the resources, knowledge, and community they need to succeed.

Vermont's history dates to 2012 with the first weekend retreat for women woodland owners, followed by formal designation of Women and Our Woods-VT (WOW-VT) in 2019. WOW-VT empowers, connects, and equips women landowners and woodland enthusiasts to engage confidently with the woods and one another.

Since its launch, WOW-VT has engaged more than 500 participants through women-centered workshops, field walks, peer learning, and networking events tailored to identified interests and experiences. Staff and mentors support landowners at every stage — from new landowners navigating first decisions to longtime stewards planning for the future. Programs create welcoming spaces to ask questions, build skills, and strengthen connections.



By addressing common barriers such as limited access to information, professional networks, and technical training, WOW-VT expands opportunities to participate fully in managing their woods. Through this growing network, Women & Our Woods Vermont strengthens the capacity of women across the state to sustain healthy, resilient forests for generations to come.



WOW-VT is:





Meet Vermont's women landowners

Owning forestland in Vermont can be deeply rewarding—but it can also feel daunting at times. It brings both the duty and the chance to nurture the land and help it flourish. Vermont's Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT) has gathered case studies highlighting women at different points in their stewardship journeys, along with in-depth stories of those who own or manage woodlands on their own, with partners, or alongside family members. While each path is unique, these women are united by a strong commitment to caring for their land and sustaining its health.

Highlighting stewardship journeys

The fourteen case studies offer a brief history of how these women came to manage land, and the activities they have undertaken to support their forests. Some women, like Alyssa and Melita, manage their land independently. Others, like Carolyn and Julie, share that role with a partner.

A few are seasoned landowners with years of forest management under their belts, like Barbara and Jessica. Some take a hands-on approach with tools in hand, like Lina and Diana, while others lead the work through consultants and contractors. They share advice for others and the resources they most value.

Deeper stories of connecting to the land

We selected eight women with unique connections to the land, ranging in age from 30 to over 90. Sam's exuberance of youth sits alongside Julie's decades-long connection to her land. Kathy is a forester, and Catie and Judith are married to foresters, but they each relate to the land differently.

These women share their passions, struggles, and favorite tools for working the land. Most, like Ann and Marli, find sanctuary in escaping to the woods every chance they can get. And one woman, Jenna, makes her living from the woods. All share a commitment to caring for their land with purpose.

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Thank you

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SOMETHING SWEET

"It's a big network with a lot of moving pieces, and, you know, every season, something comes up. There's always something new and exciting."

Jenna is the 4th generation in her family to live on the land known as Baird Farm in North Chittenden, VT. The Farm that now encompasses 585 acres of forest, field, and sugarbush, has been in the family since 1918. Jenna's great-grandmother made maple syrup on a very small scale, had a few milk cows, and ran a guesthouse in the old farmhouse. Great grandma taught her dad, Bob, how to sugar on the stovetop in the house. Jenna does like to poke a little fun at her dad. "According to Bob," she says, "he started sugaring at the age of two — or was that one." Jenna's parents actually met at the farm when her mom, Bonnie, was working at the guesthouse during summer breaks. Family history runs very deep on the Baird Farm, as does knowledge about the sugaring industry and the land handed down through generations.

Much like forestry or any endeavors connected to working the land, maple



JENNA

sugaring is a male-dominated world. Jenna notes that this is beginning to change for the better, but remembers early workshops and conferences where the men were working together and learning while the women were preparing and serving the food for lunch.

Jenna and partner Jacob both went off to college after high school and then traveled for about six months as part of "WWOOF," World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. They acquired a wealth of knowledge and experience on farms around the world, but they quickly realized that they needed jobs. After living and working for a year in Eugene, Oregon, Vermont beckoned, and they returned home in 2015. As it happened, Bob's

farmhand was aging and he needed help. So, Jenna and Jacob went to work. It was actually her first experience working in the woods and although it's very physical work, she loved it.

You would think with the long history of sugaring on the farm that Jenna would have grown up "in the family business." She loved the sugar house and would sometimes accompany her dad when he tapped or looked for vacuum leaks, but Bob never pressured his children to be involved. Jenna actually worked for a farmstand up the road, Woods Market Garden in Brandon, Vermont from the time she was in sixth grade.

Ownership of the sugaring business has been a transition for the couple, occurring in several stages. Initially, they both worked for Jenna's parents. After a few years, they were interested in owning the retail maple business so it was split off from syrup production. At this stage, they were buying syrup in the drum from her parents, bottling, and retailing it. The next step was owning the entire maple business — production and retail — so the two businesses were again combined and are now owned by Jenna and Jacob. In essence, they lease the land from Bob and Bonnie who still own it and have a conservation easement through Vermont Land Trust. "They make a lot of the woods' decisions but we have a lot of conversations and are almost always on the same page about everything," Jenna says. Conservation is a priority for the family. "When we returned we were like 20-something and my Dad was skeptical that we could make a living here," says Jenna, "but we worked really hard at marketing, had to figure out what worked for us, and we've done it!"

Although they don't own the woodlands, Jenna and Jacob's livelihood depends upon the woodlands and sugaring business. Jacob focuses more on the woods and production; Jenna manages the retail side. But they make business decisions together. Most of Jenna's time is spent working the retail end of the business now, but she comes by her love of the land and of working outdoors through her father. "My dad's very, very passionate about land conservation."

Today, Jenna talks about the complexity of producing and retailing maple syrup. She and Jacob manage everything, from tapping the trees all the way through to packing and shipping the maple syrup. The sugaring operation is supported by 14,000 trees, spread across 240 acres of Baird Farm land and other land leased from neighbors. "It's a big network with a lot of moving pieces, and, you know, every season, something comes up. There's always something new and exciting." Technology continues to change the industry, requiring new investment and new skills.

They are certified organic maple producers and also certified through the Vermont Sugar Makers Association's Sugarhouse Certification program. Jenna and Jacob pushed for organic certification when they

returned in 2015.

Although it requires regular inspections and a forest management plan for the woodlands, the pair believes that it differentiates their business and adds safeguards that are good for the forested landscape, too. Inspectors often choose to show up in the height of the sugaring season, so finding those hours to devote to the inspection can be challenging when the sap is running. "But," says Jenna, "they are passionate about having a sugarhouse that is up to those high standards."

The family thinks about succession planning. Jenna has a sister who lives in New York City and while they have different lifestyles, they share a history on the family farm and include her in conversations. They understand that the key to maintaining good relationships is being really open about everything. Jenna and Jacob have no plans to go anywhere and have taken advantage of available in-state resources. They worked with Mark Canella from the Maple Benchmark Program and Sam Smith from the Farm Viability Program for assistance in building the maple business. Jenna says, "Our advisors are kind of like our 'Farm Therapists'." They've helped us a lot and we're still getting advice when we need it." Bob and Bonnie have completed an Estate Plan that will provide for the Farm to

remain in the family for another generation.

Jenna speaks about the need for farm diversification. "Don't put all your maple trees in one parcel," she says. She and Jacob think a lot about global warming and seasonal changes that can impact sugaring. "When your job and livelihood depend on the weather at a specific time of year, the fluctuations can be quite worrisome." Seasons can be boom or bust, and that calls for some real strategic thinking in terms of how much syrup you need to carry over from one season to the next, especially when your income is derived from forest products. But the couple is totally invested in expanding product offerings and growing the retail business. "It is a lot more work, but we really enjoy it," Jenna offers. They have one employee who works in the woods and the bottling room, allowing Jenna more time to focus on expanding markets, especially restaurant accounts.

"Agritourism is also a big part of the farm plan," says Jenna. People love to visit and learn about the process. Farm tours are available Wednesday through Sunday and can be scheduled on the website. This saves Jenna a lot of time emailing back and forth with people, but she still gets those occasional groups that just show up. This might call for a shorter tour and a tasting, but there's always a way to accommodate. Many "tasters" remember this Vermont experience and become long-term customers.

Yearround, there is work to do in the woods, from replacing tubing and trunk lines that come down off the mountain to drilling and placing new taps. It's important to get the new holes in the right location so that vertical scar tissue doesn't block the flow of sap.

Jenna has a "tree cookie" with tap holes in the Sugarhouse that she received as a Christmas gift – her Christmas Cookie – that's a great demonstration piece for what the tree looks like inside. "There are trees out there that my great-grandmother tapped that we still tap, which is kind of neat," says Jenna. Although there have been past harvests, as the maples age or get unhealthy, they are left to finish off their life in the woods. Introduced species also require attention, but all removal must be done manually because of the organic certification. The lines in the woods are all above ground, but anything in the fields is buried, along with miles of underground lines to the pump stations, eliminating the need to collect and truck sap from anywhere on the farm. Although Jenna uses "we" to describe most of the work, she quickly explains that when it comes to the excavator, that's strictly Bob's bailiwick, even though Jacob might be itching to use it.

The retail side of the business has customers across the country and around the world, although Jenna readily admits that international shipping can have its challenges. During ski season, there are lots of visitors from the northeast; foliage season brings them from much further away. "One of the main goals is to establish relationships with customers. "They are not just any customer. We encourage folks to follow us on social media and subscribe to the newsletter. If anyone reaches out on Facebook, I respond," says Jenna.

Although Jacob spends more time on the land, Jenna describes her relationship with the woods as "generational," based on all the time she and her family members have spent there. "You become familiar with certain trees and with certain areas, like

the twin elms on top of the hill."

Jenna's sister got married in the open field near those trees, so it's a very special spot. And the property has no shortage of spectacular western views across the mountains. Walking up the hillside, taking a break to enjoy the panoramic view of the farm and Middle Road is an experience that runs deep for the whole family. This land that supports their business is food for the spirit that has nourished this family for generations.



Jenna handing out maple syrup samples.



CROP TREE RELEASE

ALYSSA

Alyssa’s property is an important wildlife resource that connects to almost 50,000 acres of unfragmented forest. Its variety of fruit-bearing trees are prime sources of forage for wildlife that pass through the land. The forest contains important habitat for bats and flying squirrels, along with warblers and other migratory songbirds.

As a wildlife biologist, Alyssa long wanted to put into practice the advice she often gave to private landowners. She grew up with her parents on 100 acres in Belvidere, VT and dreamed of buying her own land to manage and give back. After years of hard work, she was able to achieve her goal a few years ago, buying just over 40 acres in Bolton where she now lives with her daughters. Just before she bought her land, she had helped convert a private landowner’s parcel into a State Park. She was inspired by the landowner’s commitment to sharing his land with the public and wanted to do the same. Today, a former portion of the Long Trail crosses Alyssa’s property. She aims to manage recreation with supporting wildlife and restoring the forest that previous owners had heavily logged. She also harvests the firewood needed to heat her home from the land (which she cuts, bucks, and splits on her own).

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

40.9 acres (7 managed in project)

LOCATION

Bolton, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Crop tree release with canopy gap formation
Woods road rehabilitation



Alyssa’s daughters are growing up exploring the forest and helping their mom manage the land.

Alyssa started actively managing her land within months of buying it. Developed in partnership with Charlie Hancock of North Woods Forestry, Alyssa’s forest management plan identifies her goals of managing for wildlife, forest health, sustainable timber production and responsible public use.

Alyssa secured funding through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to pay for her management plan. Her next focus was improving the woods roads that run through the property. Significant erosion on the main road was impacting water quality. She received funding through NRCS and the Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to restore these roads.

As a youth member of Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC), Alyssa knows the impact of hands-on training for students

interested in forestry careers. She jumped at the chance to partner with WOW and VYCC to complete a crop tree release in a seven-acre area. Crop trees grow food that supports local wildlife and humans while providing timber and other forest products. Charlie Hancock identified high-quality trees to retain and competing trees for harvest. He selected small groups of trees to create gaps in the canopy. These gaps allow young trees and shrubs to grow. Several trees were girdled and will slowly decline. Girdling creates cavities and peeling bark that bats and flying squirrels need to raise their young.

When Alyssa thinks about her land in the future, she imagines a diverse forest ecosystem. She wants it to be resistant to disease while managing for old growth characteristics, where possible. She wants to find the right balance between public recreation and wilderness. And most of all, she wants to continue to set an example for her daughters of how to live with and from the land. She wants to see them appreciate the wildlife around them and the opportunities to spend time out in nature every day.



On the left, the girls build fairy houses in the woods. On the right, they help pull the aggressive Japanese Knotweed.

PROJECT PARTNERS

North Woods Forestry

Charlie Hancock has helped develop and implement the management plan.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

A crew completed the crop tree release and canopy gap formation on the property.

Vermont’s Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT)

WOW-VT secured a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Alyssa received funding from NRCS’s EQIP program to restore the woods road.

Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Alyssa received funding from the RCPP to restore the woods road.

CROP TREE RELEASE

An uncommon Oak-Black Birch Talus Woodland, the largest ash tree in the state, and a large Dry Transition Hemlock Forest set this woodland apart. It stands within a high-priority interior forest block and a priority connectivity block, meaning that it is critical for wildlife habitat and migration.

40 years ago, Carolyn and her husband Greg first bought the house they live in with 46 acres of land surrounding it. They began acquiring adjoining parcels to bring their total woodland to 228 acres. Their goal was to ensure that connected forest blocks in this critical wildlife corridor would remain conserved and undeveloped. Large areas of forested land are critical for many animals including moose, bobcat, black bear, ovenbirds, and hermit thrushes. They also want their land to support human recreation. Carolyn has been active on Putney Mountain Association’s Land Acquisition Committee. The Association owns and stewards 926 acres of conserved land along with 30 miles of hiking trails from Prospect Hill to Putney Mountain, continuing along the Windmill Hill Ridgeline.

Carolyn and Greg enrolled their land in the current use program, working with Dan Healey of Long View Forest Management to create a Forest Management Plan. Carolyn appreciated Dan’s broad view of forest management, considering timber management alongside her goals of protecting wildlife, promoting recreation, and preserving unique habitat. Carolyn has also participated in workshops from the Agency of Natural Resources, the Vermont Woodlands Association, Long View Forest Management, the Vermont Land Trust, and the three-day training from Vermont Coverts.

CAROLYN

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

228 Acres (3.2 managed in the project)

LOCATION

Dummerston, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Beech suppression - 2 acres

Crop tree release - 1.2 acres



One of the scenic vistas overlooking the forest on Carolyn’s property.

In September 2023, Carolyn teamed up with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC), WOW-VT and Carolyn’s forester Dan Healy to complete a demonstration project on the land. Their goals were beech control and crop tree release, both of which Dan had included in her forest management plan. The VYCC crew cut American beech sprouts in a 2-acre area where they were crowding out other desirable species. In another 1.2 acre area, the crew removed trees that were competing with healthy “crop trees.” For Carolyn these were trees that produce food for wildlife or are straight and defect-free for sawtimber. This work was funded by the US Forest Service as a WOW Demonstration Project.

Carolyn is committed to ensuring the forest is healthy for years to come. But she knows it’s a slow process. Forest management projects always take longer than expected because of wet weather, worker availability, and in the case of VYCC, extra training for the workers. Carolyn’s goals are to maintain the trail network and protect critical habitat for wildlife. She also wants to protect the cultural resources – a small historic farmstead with cellar holes and other farm infrastructure. She wants to continue the work that VYCC started to ensure that her land will always be a haven for humans and wildlife alike.



Black bears pass through this land, which is part of an important wildlife corridor.



The property hosts a huge white ash, believed to be the largest of its species in Vermont.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Long View Forest Management

Long View Forest Management created and is helping implement Carolyn’s Forest Management Plan.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

VYCC is a non-profit organization that provides young people with skills and experience implementing conservation and restoration practices. A crew from VYCC completed a crop tree release and beech control on the property as part of a partnership with WOW-VT.

Vermont’s Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT)

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

CROP TREE RELEASE

CAITLIN

The Folsom Brook property is a valuable forest within a patchwork of agricultural land and residential developments. It provides forested and riparian habitats for wildlife to travel between two larger, high priority forested areas to the east and west.

Robert and Jacqueline Rose gifted the 98-acre Folsom Brook property to the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) in 1997. As a VLT Forester, Caitlin

has been managing the Folsom Brook property since 2015. Caitlin is licensed by the State of Vermont and is endorsed by Audubon, having completed bird-friendly forestry training and demonstrating practical application on managed land. Her first couple of years at the property focused on manual control of introduced species, such as honeysuckle, buckthorn, multiflora rose, and burning bush. In 2018, she updated the forest management plan with guidance from Audubon Vermont.

In 2020, Caitlin secured cost-share funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to continue controlling introduced species and implement a crop tree release with canopy gap formation. The 7-acre parcel was a former pasture, resulting in soil compaction, low soil organic matter, and introduced earthworms. During a crop tree release, individual trees are 'released' from competition for light and space by removing the surrounding trees on 2-4 sides.

In August 2022, Caitlin chose 30 crop trees per acre, including black cherry, which are a great food source for migrating songbirds; straight and defect-free red maples; and wild apple trees. Caitlin also identified eight areas to create small canopy gaps, where poorly-formed red maples were clumped or where young spruce and fir trees were growing in the understory. In the gaps, all trees 2" in diameter were marked to be cut. These gaps create space for young spruce and fir trees to grow or to let in sunlight for new red maple and ash seeds or aspen roots to sprout. The project also aims to increase the understory and midstory canopy layers, which are important for providing nesting, perching, foraging, and protective cover for birds.

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

98 acres (7 acres managed in project)

LOCATION

Waitsfield, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Crop tree release with canopy gap formation

In the fall of 2022, a Vermont Youth Conservation Corps crew cut the trees marked around the crop trees. Trees were girdled if their removal would have damaged other trees. Girdled trees were left to become standing dead trees, or snags, providing habitat for yellow-bellied sapsuckers, barred owls, and other wildlife to nest in the holes that develop. All tree tops and trunks were left on the forest floor. This allows for the slow decomposition and release of organic matter. It also protects the soil from erosion and young trees from being browsed by deer while providing birds with places to nest and forage. By increasing age and species diversity, and vertical and horizontal structure, this work also increases the ability of the forest to respond to climate change.

This project has given Caitlin the opportunity to practice her craft and provided the next generation of woods workers with the opportunity to learn forestry techniques. Given the increase in sunlight, Caitlin will have to monitor and remove new introduced species as they establish. In the spring of 2023, Caitlin treated 12 ash trees (9 female) with an insecticide that kills emerald ash borer (EAB). EAB is a non-native insect that threatens the survival of all native species of ash.

PROJECT COSTS

ACTIVITY	ACRES	NRCS FUNDING	COST
Introduced species control	12	\$2452	\$52 for glyphosate & buckthorn blaster
Crop tree release	7.3	\$2537	\$5000 for VYCC



Before and after photos of the crop tree release.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Vermont's Women and Our Woods

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

Trains young adults to work on projects related to water quality, forest health, recreation and agriculture.

Audubon Vermont

Provides technical support and guidance for enhancing habitat for priority forest birds.

Natural Resource Conservation Service

Provided financial support to pay for the VYCC crew and introduced species control.

KEEP IT WILD

"I don't think that men are often asked why they own forestland. I get asked that a lot."

Marli has a comfort in the woods that few women enjoy. For her, it's a place of solace, security, and safety. The woods are her home away from home. She readily admits that she is more leary of people than anything she could find in the woods. Marli actually owns two woodland parcels: one in Guilford where she lives and another in Eden. She made her first Eden purchase in 1997 and recalls that during the closing in Newport, she had pneumonia and a fever of 104. "It was about a year later that I returned, stood at the gate and thought, 'What have I done? I have no idea what to do here.'" Then she met Joe, who hailed from this area. The locals all knew about the sale, the beautiful pond, and potential house site so were curious to know what she planned to do. Marli's quick response to Joe's question, "Keep it wild!"

Fast forward through the next ten years. Marli and Joe got married and because of his connections to the town and money Marli inherited from her



MARLI

grandfather, they acquired additional property as it became available until they owned 530 acres by 2006. "It was fun with Joe. He knew all about tractors and chainsaws. I knew about wildlife habitat improvement," she says. When it comes to the forest, Marli's first love is wildlife. She studied biology in college and wanted to become a conservation ecologist. Unfortunately, at the time she was in a very abusive relationship, both physically and mentally, and it sidetracked her dreams.

Marli's connection to and ethic about caring for the woods did not come from her upbringing as a city girl in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Rather, she has an innate caring for the planet as a whole and her forest management is an extension of that. She

recalls as a child running out of the house and sleeping under a tree because she loved the outdoors and it felt so safe. When asked where her deep conservation ethos came from she said, "I don't know that there's an answer to that question, really. Joe used to ask himself that same question. He grew up in a family where the forest was for hunting, logging, and four wheelers but with no long term management objectives. Yet he had such a different ethos. He wanted to improve it and protect it from development."

When she was twelve, her family moved to Seattle and later, Marli continued north to Fairbanks, Alaska where her son was born. Life was hard in Alaska and it prompted Marli to make a big change. In 1986, she ventured back east to live in a home her father owned in Guilford, Vermont. With all of her family still in the west, this was a very dramatic move. However, Vermont soon became Marli's true home where she has planted her roots. Marli's home in Guilford has a 40-acre woodland that she has carefully tended over the last four decades.

Marli and Joe did not stay married but they remained good friends until his recent death; Marli is now the sole owner of the Eden property. The land is in a trust and is conserved.

Eden is a bit of a rough and tumble town so Marli is not as comfortable here without Joe. "I'm not scared of the forest but I was actually a little scared to come up here alone because of the resentment toward us for prohibiting four wheelers," she says. Over time, it's gotten more comfortable for Marli as she says, "She's learned to evade people." But property damage has been an ongoing issue. Even while Joe

was alive, and working on the land, people would drive their ATVs around the gate and help themselves to whatever they wanted, including Joe's tools, and brush for making Christmas wreaths. Marli and Joe always welcomed hunters, horseback riders, hikers, and wildlife enthusiasts.

Marli has professional help in managing her land. Since wildlife habitat was her main interest when she started, she worked with a forester who favored wildlife and knew how to create habitat. They had a big harvest with a goal to improve habitat. "Joe used to call this place Noah's ark. There are beavers and bears and there was a northern goshawk that nested." Marli had an encounter with that goshawk who swooped aggressively at her while she was out walking. As she sped up to escape, she realized that she was heading right toward the nest. After the harvest, she noticed more little mammals running around. An Audubon employee came up and did a bird survey and found all "12 responsibility" bird species. "It's just results like that that make me so happy."

Today, Marli is still working with a forester. Her main objective is still wildlife habitat. She goes on to say that the forest doesn't need to make money to have value to her, but she feels that its economic value needs to be

recognized for society to value forests. And, she also recognizes that to achieve her wildlife goals, timber harvests are needed to generate income that funds some non-income producing wildlife work.

As an absentee landowner, Marli faces particular challenges. There was a dirt road that went across the property connecting two county roads. Locals were in the habit of using it as a shortcut. Also, since the property seemed unattended and had a road, many four wheelers would take advantage and use it as “a big four wheeler park.” She tells a story about meeting a pick-up truck on one of her dirt roads and stopping to talk to the driver. His response, she says, was “Oh, you own this. I didn’t think anybody owned it.” Sadly, Marli gated off the road due to vandalism. “When you ask people not to use motorized vehicles, they just bash the gates, or they chainsaw a trail around the gate. It turned into this whole class warfare thing. And of course, I was the lady from “New York” who bought this and didn’t understand anything.”

Today, Joe’s cousin Shane has become the caretaker for the property and spends a lot of time there. He does the mowing, the trail work, maintains the fences and other required maintenance. He even put in an outhouse with a tank.

A regular presence on the land helps with access issues because it doesn’t sit idle for long periods of time.” And Shane has done a better job of keeping people off the property. “He feels like he’s protecting his cousin’s interest as well as his own ability to hunt on the land.” Shane’s wife and son also enjoy the land, working, hunting, and recreating with him.

Joe was partnered with Marli when it came to working on and envisioning the future of the property. “So, I was really hopeful that Joe and I would be doing landscaping or trails for people and working out in the woods together. We did a lot here. And also Joe, this was his heart.” They did plant hundreds of little trees: mountain ash, viburnum, some black walnut, and black oaks. Some have survived but the deer got to many of them.



Marli leading a cordage workshop.

They did a ton of apple tree release on the 200 or so apple trees. This work was part of a project funded by a Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program — or WHIP — grant offered by Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Marli has considered selling the Eden property since Joe’s passing. Between Joe’s death, the difficulty keeping motorized vehicles off, and the distance from her home, the thought of selling has crossed her mind now and again. On the other hand, things have been better since Shane has started keeping an eye on the property. And the land holds many special places. “There are fields that we cleared and a beaver pond with a beautiful spring. So many quiet places that are tucked away from the noise of traffic.” But the pond that sits in the center is still the heart of the property. “And the fall foliage is amazing,” says Marli.

As an owner of multiple properties in two regions of the state, Marli has worked with more than one forester. In Guilford, she had a female consulting forester, one of very few in the state for many years. She remembers liking the fact that she was a female but also credits her with being a good businesswoman who helped her through the timber harvest, taking full charge of hiring the logger and writing the contract. When asked if she has experienced gender bias, Marli offered, “I don’t think that men are often asked why they own forestland. I get asked that a lot.”

A chainsaw is not Marli’s favorite tool. “There’s a lot to using a chainsaw, and it’s not just about strength; I’m just not that spatially aware. But I have a Stihl

straight blade pruning saw that can cut through six inches.” It’s not a power tool, just hand held, but Marli finds it useful for lots of cleaning-up kind of jobs. She also has a billy goat, or DR brush mower that she uses for bigger jobs. And she bought a pick-up truck that helps with a lot of hauling. “I pulled a lot of bittersweet in Guilford,” says Marli, and “Frankly, hands are the best tool. After a rainstorm, especially if you’re in forest soil, the roots grow horizontally and you can peel them up, rather than breaking them off.” Marli shows distinct pleasure in mentioning these “trophy roots with all the little white ones still attached.” But, on her Guilford property she also had to tackle honeysuckle and buckthorn that had been growing forever. She mentioned a big long, iron lever that works on buckthorn where there’s a central root and you can get under it to pull it out. Even with careful pulling, Marli finds this to be agonizing work that requires constant monitoring to keep all the sprouts from growing again. She got a really good handle on the introduced species in Guilford; and then the people around her started getting sick and needed her attention. Marli breathes a sigh of relief that the Eden property is fairly free of introduced species. “It’s primarily just the knotweed there,” she says.

Marli gets her information from a variety of sources. "I do a lot of Internet browsing. There are wonderful articles and videos, many of which are made in Vermont." She also has several different Facebook groups, like for native plants and basketry, and tons of books. "I think being on the VWA board was incredibly valuable because I learned a lot about who's who, what's what, and different organizations," Marli says. She also served on the Windham Regional Woodlands Association board and her local conservation commission. On the flip side, she remembers being in the minority on the board as either the only woman or one of two women. "It could have been gender discrimination or just that I had different ideas but few people talked to me. I did OK though because I'm used to being the only woman in the room."

Marli reflected on her first introduction to Women and our Woods back in 2012 where the experience of being with and other women woodland owners was very inspiring. "One woman was too scared to go onto the land; another had just lost her husband," says Marli. "It was incredible to share stories with other women and hear their experiences. It was inspirational." Everyone views the world differently and has different

experiences. That's what resonates with Marli. She has a science background but a big heart and her approach to forest management makes room for both. She can enjoy the beauty of the forest or the softness of the Sphagnum moss that cries out to be petted while still managing her land to protect what she cherishes. She does, however, recognize that our lifetimes are very short and the ability to protect anything is pretty limited. "So, you just do the best you can. That's all you can do," she says.

When asked what she would recommend to other women thinking of buying property, Marli says "I think if you really just want to appreciate nature, you should go to a state park. It's hard to own land and you really have to be willing to join in as a force of nature." Marli finds that there is sometimes a "party line" about how you need to manage your land and it may not resonate with all women. "Spend time observing, reading, attending forestry events and walks in the woods. There's so much teaching and learning available in Vermont," she says.

The woods are a refuge for Marli, a place to escape the world and some of its accompanying heartbreak. With a somewhat philosophical bent, Marli reflects on her own experience,

"What's beautiful is getting old, seeing things change and seeing things familiar, and seeing that the trees are doing that with you."

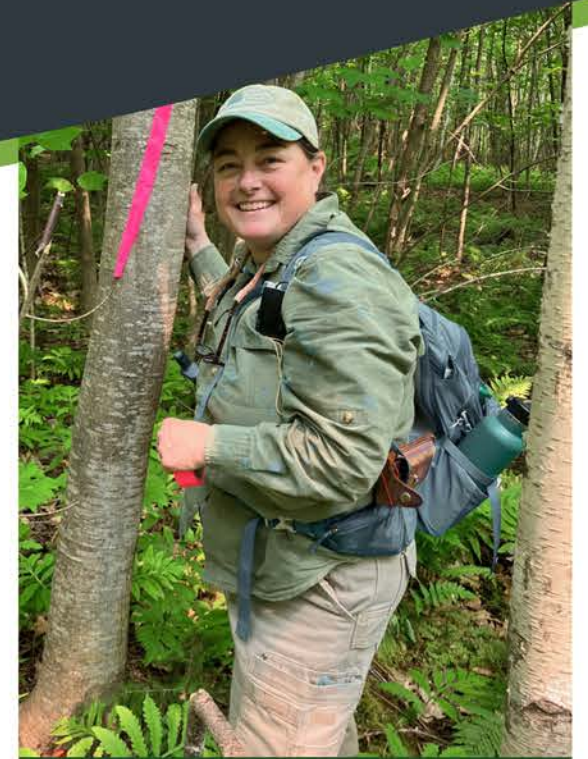


THROUGH THE EYES OF A FORESTER

"If you have a chance to own woodlands and to take care of it, it's a feeling like no other, being a land steward."

"Go outside, now!" That's what Kathy remembers so clearly of her childhood in Westminster, Maryland. Her dad was a dairy farmer until he sold the farm when she was about six years old. "Although the animals were gone, it was still pretty rural and I spent a lot of time in the fields, in the woods, and climbing trees." Kathy always thought her future would be in agriculture, horticulture of some kind. But then when the time came and she visited College Park, home of University of Maryland, everything changed. "I'm not a large pond person. I'm a small pond person," she states.

There was one certainty however; Kathy would never spend her life at a desk indoors. She started looking at different schools, and forestry seemed very interesting. Her county had the first female forest technician at the Maryland Forest Service and she became Kathy's mentor. And, she attended Allegany Community College (now Allegany College of Maryland), which had the only forestry program in the state at that time. As fate would have it, she met her husband Tom there and together they wound up in Vermont in 1986. They arrived with about \$300 and no firm jobs yet, but did find a small apartment in Pittsfield. After a few weeks of housekeeping at a local hotel, Kathy knew she would never do that



KATHY

again. "People are terrible," she said, and so she sent letters to the consulting foresters around the state.

As luck would have it, Kathy was offered a job in her county, where her job interview was a day of marking timber. She has spent the ensuing four decades working as a consulting forester with private landowners. You might think that Kathy has a distinct advantage in woodland ownership and forest management since she's a licensed forester — and you'd be partly right. She will readily admit that it gives her knowledge but "that doesn't mean

that it isn't hard work. Knowledge doesn't get the work done!" And, Kathy has done a lot of work on the 10-acre woodland that she and Tom purchased in 1987, and where they built their home.

A big part of the attraction for this parcel was the view, good enough to make the new landowners overlook issues with the class 4 road that barely had a culvert. The road had also been a "party road" and Kathy recalls that it took "years to pick up all the beer cans and bottles that had been discarded on the property." Not only that, the land was transitioning from pasture to forest and covered in buckthorn. She and Tom had to cut buckthorn before they could even blast a hole in the ground for the house.

But there were also big, big 250 year old sugar maples scattered around the property, "the grandpappies" of what grows today. There was also ash and pockets of paper birch that grew quickly, in fact enough paper birch that Kathy and Tom dug and sold saplings. Kathy and Tom managed this land together for thirty years, creating garden space, building a playhouse cabin for the kids, making trails, and cutting trees as needed. Today, Kathy is the sole land manager, joining that growing group, widowed woodland owners, after Tom's passing in 2019.

Foresters often ask landowners what their vision for their property is, so it might be assumed that foresters who are also landowners would begin their ownership with a vision. But that was not the case. Since the land was still transitioning from pasture to forest, Kathy and Tom waited to see what came in, what chose to grow, and what it was going to turn into. In the meantime, they did put trails in, and they began to have ideas of what they wanted to do, "but then we had kids." And now everything has changed. The view that they bought the property for is gone, and a young forest stands in its place. But, alas, introduced species are persistent. Kathy still invests an enormous amount of energy dealing with the buckthorn that remains a problem, along with other species that have joined the mix.

What is really important to Kathy now that everything has changed, "is just having a place that's my own, that I can take care of; that I want to take care of. I still love the view. There's still a view, it's just not what it was." She also loves sitting on the screened-in porch listening to the woods at night in the summer, and watching storms come in. And, there are special places, now that time has passed. "There's a big maple that died a long time ago at the bottom of the hill, and it's just decaying in place. From some points on the trail, you can actually see right through the middle of it. It's a neat spot." So neat in fact, that she used the tractor to move some stones to make a stone bench there. Then there is the little cabin she and Tom built with the kids. It's falling apart now, but she'd like to fix it up for the grandkids. "Really I think the whole place is special." That is why Kathy finds it so extremely frustrating to work hard at something, one specific task, that can get derailed because the roadside

mower ignored her signs requesting no mowing to minimize spread of parsnip, which was almost eliminated. "So next year it's going to be parsnip. I guarantee you it will," she laments.

She and Tom took care of the property together but Tom did all the work that involved the tractor and other heavy equipment. So the transition, even though she is a forester, was very difficult. He did all the mowing and Kathy had never even driven the tractor before he died. "He gave me a lesson when he was sick. It took a lot for me to feel comfortable, confident enough to feel like I could just do what I needed to and not feel like I was making things worse. Because I'm sure I did that a lot." She had to find out what worked for her property maintenance-wise. "Tom mowed everything he could.



Kathy's family sitting on rocks.

I do not do that. I did it the first summer and then I thought, 'I am not doing that again.'" Another thing she has chosen not to do that Tom did is cut trees down. "I don't have a desire to do that. I've done it. Don't care. It's hard. If it goes the wrong way, then you have a mess. And I just don't even want to think about that. I don't mind cutting it when it's on the ground, but I don't want to take trees down anymore." So she relies on her son-in-law, or for jobs that are beyond his skill set, she calls in a professional logger. Also, she promised her children she wouldn't be running a chainsaw when no one was around. And most times, no one is around.

Then there's the learning curve about what to do when. Like when to put chains on the tractor for the winter. Not to mention handling equipment maintenance. Kathy says she's fairly knowledgeable and can usually come close to figuring out what is wrong or broken. "But just because I have knowledge about what's wrong doesn't mean I want to fix it. And some of it is just too heavy. Like taking the mower deck off. I can't do that, there is no way I can do that." To get things fixed, she relies on a 'neighborhood network' which she has had to develop because Tom did all the repair work too. "I have some farmer friends down in Clarendon who I send pictures of

whatever broke. I say look, this happened. They go, 'Okay, I can come up on Monday.'"

Kathy's favorite tool is her tractor with the backhoe attached. She finds she can handle almost anything between the two. "Today, there was this wad of vines that I didn't want to cut through. So I turned the tractor around, unhooked everything, and just dug it out. So there!" As far as hand tools go, she says her favorite is her mini chainsaw. "Because when you can't get it with a pair of loppers, it's nice to be able to just cut it off."

As far as the challenges Kathy faces in taking care of her woodland, there are the previously mentioned introduced species. It's not only the constant battle of keeping them under control, but also the challenge of the pure physicality of the work. She had been in the woods pulling grape vine and oriental bittersweet on this particular day. "It needs to be done so you just do it but it's exhausting. Tomorrow morning I'll be slow to wake up and move because pulling grapevines and bittersweet from trees is hard, just very hard." A personal challenge she faces is trying to enjoy the woods without working in them. She likes to listen to the birds and loves doing photography but admits that it's easy to get distracted when she notices something that needs to be

done. "It's hard for me to walk by something and not want to do it, not want to take care of it right away."

When talking about her successes on the property, Kathy immediately refers to all the work she's done controlling introduced species. She talks about how, even though her property may be surrounded by these species, controlling them on her property makes it more special to her. She also mentioned the success she's been having in restoring native woodland plants in one place on her property. The project began when she noticed leeks had sprouted in an area where there had been a tiny marble quarry excavation. She decided she would clean the site up and move her May apples down there and some blood root. "And there's trillium there. I started moving all these other plants down there so it's really cool. I think the fun part is seeing all those plants slowly come back; because it was pasture, it takes a long time sometimes for those plants to re-establish."

Kathy doesn't have a written management plan guiding all her work, per se, because it is such a young forest but she does have a map, and guidelines in her head. She also has a running plant list and wants to start a bird list. Her biggest fear for the property is that in some parts of her ten acres the trees are 90% ash. "And it's going to be gone. Then I'm starting the buckthorn world all over again. That's why I'm so adamant about killing this stuff." She jokes that if the buckthorn resurgence happens that is when she is going to move away. When asked if her future really would include a move away from the property, Kathy said it depends. "If my daughter and son-in-law come back to Vermont, I'll probably stay. But if they don't I won't. I want to have a support system you know. Not that I don't have friends, but

it's not the same [as family]."

Often, female landowners find that they like working with female foresters; they feel that they are heard, that their concerns are more validated. Kathy has seen this world from a different perspective as a female forester in a male-dominated profession. From Kathy's early forestry education until today, female foresters are still in the minority. And in her early career with the Maryland Forest Service, she felt that the female foresters and technicians were always "being tested." It wasn't overt, and nobody would have admitted to it. But, the females did more work, wrote more plans, enrolled more Tree Farms because they had to! Females had to outperform everyone to gain even a little recognition. It's not the same today. Kathy is respected by her colleagues for the work she does with landowners and in the woods. Though she does note "some landowners find it easier - both men and women - to work with a forester of their own gender."

Even professionals need help sometimes, and Kathy has a mix of on-line and individuals she turns to when she's looking for resources or help. "I have the crew of people that work the Rutland Fair forestry building, on the Fair committee. Those are people I can turn to for anything. I could say, Lisa and Shane, could you come help me do this? And they would be there in a heartbeat, you know. And I've joined Facebook groups just to get information, whether it's a native plant group or birding ones, they're fun." She spoke about how when she was a young professional the resources just weren't there the way they are today. "I think now there are more places for women to be able to reach out and get help and get guidance and advice. There's so much available

now. I think women are more apt to reach out because it's there."

As for advice to other women woodland owners that could make their journey easier, Kathy says she's not sure any of it is easy, but the basics are if you buy woodland, hire a forester and get advice. She recommends taking as much advice as you can get. "That's really it. Expect there to be a lot of hurdles, but if you have an opportunity to buy land, buy more." Kathy wishes she had a hundred acres and could sell timber. She actually has two veneer cherry trees on her ten acres, just growing straight, clean, clear, and tall. "Just gorgeous," she says. The kids are under strict orders to guard those trees. "Do not even breathe on them!" she says with a laugh. "If you have a chance to own woodlands and to take care of it, it's a feeling like no other, being a land steward."

INTRODUCED (INVASIVE) SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Opening onto Lake Champlain, Melita’s property has been farmland, a productive apple orchard, and a summer camp over its history. Today it features sprawling old hardwoods and a regrowing example of the clayplain forest, the original forest type in much of the Champlain Valley.

Melita loves working in and around beautiful landscapes. She has made it her business as a landscape gardener. When it comes to her own land, however, she doesn’t view it as business. Melita purchased a little over 100 acres on the shores of Lake Champlain in 2019. Her goal is to restore old agricultural and recreational land to its natural forest. She wants to take the time to understand the land and the big-picture vision for its future. As the child of beef farmers, she wants her land to support local farms. It is also important to Melita that her restoration work supports water quality in Lake Champlain, provides habitat for local wildlife, and protects fragile or unique natural communities. Melita sees this work as her legacy and she’s happy to take her time and get it right.

When Melita bought this property, aggressive introduced species had already started taking over the abandoned apple orchard and agricultural lands. Bush honeysuckle and common buckthorn, two introduced species that have become common in Vermont, are well established on the property. Other species, including multiflora rose and Japanese barberry, are present in lower quantities. Common treatment for introduced species typically involves the use of pesticides.

MELITA

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

106 acres (4 managed in project)

LOCATION

Shoreham, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Tree planting
Introduced species management
Patch cut



Melita Bass stands in front of the hayfield she aims to restore to clayplain forest.

Given the proximity to sensitive waterways, Melita does not want to use any pesticides on the land. Instead, she and her forester, Kathleen Stutzman of Vermont Family Forests, are focused on manual and mechanical removal in targeted areas and protecting and repopulating native plants.

Melita worked with NRCS to complete a 4-acre patch cut to create habitat for Golden-winged Warblers. These threatened songbirds thrive in the dense brush that grows within a few years from a patch cut. In 2021 and 2023, Melita worked with WOW-VT and VYCC to complete a demonstration project. Melita selected a 4-acre parcel of hayfield sitting on the lakeshore to restore to clayplain forest. The VYCC crew planted 350 native trees, which will help stabilize the lakeshore and promote water quality. The crew then returned to remove buckthorn along Lake Champlain, and create an environment for native species to repopulate.

Melita’s advice to other women landowners is, “Take time to learn about the land; take time to plan.” She will do just that and continue to work with VYCC to manage introduced species and get to know the land as she works towards her vision of restoring this beautiful property.



Before (above) and after (below) VYCC planted 350 trees in the former hayfield.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Vermont Family Forests

Melita worked with forester Kathleen Stutzman of Vermont Family Forests to develop and help implement her forest management plan.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Melita received funding from NRCS to create habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler and pay for the native trees planted by the VYCC crew.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

A crew from VYCC planted 350 trees and controlled introduced species on the property as part of a partnership with WOW-VT.

Vermont’s Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT)

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

INTRODUCED (INVASIVE) SPECIES MANAGEMENT

JULIE

Julie and her husband Steve call their land “grandchild paradise.” A beaver pond and a swimming pond create havens for humans and wildlife amidst the 270 acres of mixed hardwood and softwood trees and forested wetlands.

Julie and Steve make a strong land management team. Julie is the visionary and Steve is the implementer. She manages two businesses around landscape architecture and design. She sees the possibilities in the land and helps identify strategies to implement. Steve puts those ideas into action. A leadership training and team development consultant by trade, he loves getting out on the land whenever he’s home. Whether he’s hiking, skiing, doing trail work, or running the chainsaw, the woods are where he spends his free time. The couple bought the property together almost 20 years ago. Despite looking for a 5-acre parcel, they fell in love with a 206-acre parcel of land on a perfect autumn day. They added on a second parcel recently, bringing their total property to 270 acres.

The couple enrolled the land in the Current Use program. Since 2010, they’ve worked with Andrew Sheere and Dan Healey at Long View Forest Management to create and implement their forest management plans. They learned a lot from their first harvest, a single and group tree selection in 2013. They chose to leave the treetops and non-profitable logs in the forest rather than having the crews take them away. This saved money, provided shelter for wildlife, and protected saplings from

PROPERTY ACREAGE

270 acres

LOCATION

Westminster, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Single tree and group selection (112.3 acres)
Introduced species management (3 acres)



Julie & Steve’s property is used year-round by humans and wildlife.

browsing deer. But it also changed the nature of the woods and made it more difficult for Julie and Steve to access their land. On the positive side, Julie now sees wildlife coming back into the woods. And she can see the bones of the land better. Understanding the land’s structure better helped the couple develop new trails across the property.

Unfortunately, the harvest also worsened an existing problem with glossy buckthorn, an introduced species spreading across Vermont. The buckthorn took advantage of the newly sunlit areas to spread and multiply. Honeysuckle, another introduced species, has also established on the property. As a result, managing those species is one of their biggest priorities for the coming years. In 2023, in partnership with WOW-VT, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps completed a demonstration project on the land. They picked one small area that buckthorn, and some honeysuckle, had overrun. Over approximately three acres, they treated cut stumps with a wetland-approved pesticide and pulled other plants out manually.

Now Julie and Steve want to listen to the land. They know the introduced species will continue to be a challenge. They’re reluctant to use too much pesticide since their land is upstream of many other properties and waterways. They’re also thinking about how they can conduct future harvests to avoid making the problem worse in the future. At the end of the day, they want to maintain their goal of keeping the land protected and used as a family haven for generations to come.



The beaver pond (below) and the swimming pond (above) offer beauty and habitat for wildlife passing through the property.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Long View Forest Management

The foresters at Long View Forest Management worked with Julie and Steve to create and implement their forest management plan.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

A crew from VYCC completed a demonstration project at the property in partnership with WOW-VT.

Vermont’s Women and Our Woods

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

INTRODUCED (INVASIVE) SPECIES MANAGEMENT

CAITLIN

A fourth-generation family farm is now managed by the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) to ensure the land will be conserved for generations to come. A portion of the land is still actively farmed, and VLT has worked to control introduced species and improve the health of the forest and wetlands.

Button Farm is on both sides of Route 7 in Colchester. The farm has been in current owner Gene Button’s family for four generations, since 1895. Gene cares about keeping the land undeveloped and healthy, so he worked with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) to conserve it in 2002. In 2012, Gene conveyed a remainder life interest for the 97 acres east of Rt 7 to VLT. VLT and Gene jointly own the land until Gene’s passing, at which point VLT becomes the sole owner. Since 2020, Allaire, an ecologist with VLT, has been working to restore the streams and wetlands on the

property to improve water quality and protect against flood damage. The agricultural land is leased to a New American farmer growing n’thori (African eggplant.) Most of the remainder of the land is forested and managed by Caitlin, VLT’s Forester.

In 2022, VLT completed an inventory of introduced species found at Button Farm. The inventory found eleven species present on the property, ranging from established populations to sparse occurrences. Introduced species outcompete native plants for space and resources and typically provide low-quality food and habitat for native wildlife and insects. They can even harm humans directly. For example, poison parsnip causes a painful rash. Caitlin is following an integrated pest management strategy, which uses manual, mechanical, and chemical options where appropriate.

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

130 acres (77 acres managed in project)

LOCATION

Colchester, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Introduced species management



An aerial view of Button Farm and the surrounding forest.

The plan helps ensure that new aggressive species won’t be introduced to the property and requires ongoing monitoring to ensure management is working. The plan relies on two commonly used methods to treat the introduced species, cut-stump and foliar applications. The cut-stump method involves sawing the plant off at the base of the stem and chemically treating the stump with herbicide. The foliar treatment involves spraying the entire leaf surface area of the plant with an herbicide.



Button Farm showing introduced species (brown stems) that had been chemically treated in 2023.

In August 2022, a Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) crew came to the property for a week to help manage introduced species in four distinct areas. They used the cut-stump method in areas far from wetlands and farm fields. Near the wetland, they manually removed individual plants and dug up poison parsnip in the hayfield. The crew dried the parsnip plants in the sun before disposing of them to prevent any spread. In 2023, VLT secured funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to continue managing introduced species. VLT brought in Redstart Forestry to manage 77 acres over 3 years, using the two application methods described above along with the mechanical removal of a 3-acre patch of densely infested barberry, buckthorn, honeysuckle, and bittersweet.

The work of managing introduced species is never complete. Once Redstart’s contract is done, VLT will assess the success of treatment and determine how to move forward. Even when a species appears to be gone, land managers should monitor the land annually. Regular monitoring and removal of plants can help keep introduced species in check over the long run.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

VLT received funding from NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to pay for introduced species work from 2023-2025.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

A crew from VYCC completed introduced species work on the property in partnership with WOW-VT.

Vermont’s Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT)

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

Redstart Forestry

Redstart Forestry is helping manage introduced species at Button Farm over a three-year period.

A PART OF ME

"Like I said, every time I walk out there I learn something, I see something I didn't see before and it feels like this place just becomes more a part of me and I become more a part of it every time."

Judith lives with her husband David on their 217 acres of land, about 190 of which are forested. Much of the property is covered by a conservation easement. Judith has a deep connection with their land based on her interests. She is a birder, a wildlife enthusiast, an avid observer of nature, a sheep farmer, and a sometime beekeeper. So when she looks at the land, she sees it as an array of habitats for its animal and plant occupants. Her husband David is a professional forester with many years of experience. It would be easy to think, given those circumstances, that he is all about growing trees and she is only interested in the animals living on the land and in the forest. While that may be true to an extent, they see things more holistically. They see their interests and goals as mutually inclusive and that their individual objectives help to create a richer landscape. However, making



decisions does take a lot of conversation when they're negotiating specific projects.

Judith's connection with their current ownership grows with every walk and every project. Her connection to nature and love of being outdoors was fostered in her childhood. "I grew up riding horses and spent a lot of time outside. When I was a kid, I used to go with my friends out into the woods. You know, out like playing in the streams, finding crayfish, doing all that kind of stuff." Before Judith met David, she lived in Lincoln, Vermont, and had ten acres of mostly wooded land. "It was pretty scruffy but there are some things about it that I loved, like out in the back right at the edge of my property line there were these massive beech trees, massive. I

remember at one point, one of them was used by barred owls as a nesting spot." She also talked about her past and current woodlands providing a place of respite and sense of peace. She mentioned that her work has always been people intensive. "At the end of my day, what I want to do is go someplace where there are no people. So, you know, come home, get the dogs, go for a walk out in the woods." Judith says she finds something new every time that she's out there. "A couple of years ago, I was walking out on the backside of our land and found this massive sugar maple. I mean, it was spectacular, and it felt like a coup to me because David didn't know it was there."

Judith also talked about how it was important to both her and David to foster others' connection to their land as well. They have about eight miles of trails and they encourage their community to use their property. "People walk here. They walk their dogs. They ride their horses. They snowshoe. They cross-country ski. And we've really just made it accessible for people to do that. We don't advertise it or anything like that, but the locals know. There's a group of people that we allow to hunt here every year. One family has been hunting here for a couple of generations, which is pretty awesome." She feels that it's nice for people to have access to the property and feel a connection to it. One local family has been particularly involved with the property. They are an example of the kind of relationship Judith and David want people to have with their place, and that they want to have with their neighbors. "Calvin has done a lot, like probably 75 or 80 percent of the excavation and land clearing here and all that kind of stuff. He hunts here every fall with at least one of his sons. And, you know, he

really takes an interest in the place. He caretakes it for us, in that, if he sees something that he thinks isn't right, he'll let us know. That's the kind of relationship we want people to have with this place and that we want to have with our neighbors."

When thinking about the vision for the future of the land, Judith talked about short term, medium term, and long term goals. In the short term, she is working to expand her sheep operation. In the medium term, they are both working really hard to improve wildlife habitat on the property. Two years ago, on Mother's Day, they planted about two hundred different wildlife plantings, including three or four different kinds of dogwood, beech plums, and highbush cranberries; plants that are all geared toward wildlife habitat both structurally and food-wise. "We've done early successional clearing to improve songbird habitat. We leave a lot of standing dead trees and down trees, things like that, again for bird habitat and other little creatures too." In the long term, Judith says that David is managing for high quality veneer grade timber. And they also have a lot of other interests and things that they want to do like working towards a climate resilient forest. Of course, all of their work is being guided by their management plan, which is founded on their vision and objectives. Also part of



Judith and her dog Blaze.

their long term consideration is future ownership of the land. Judith says, "We've talked about it a lot. Our kids aren't really interested in taking this on, but there are plenty of other young couples out there that would be." Ideally, she and Dave would like to see a young couple or a young family end up with it. People who had an interest in both the farming side of it and the forestry side of it. "In a few years, we will begin to work actively to find people who want to take this on."

Whether it's engaging on short, medium or long term goals, a lot of work goes into their woodlands. Judith talked about who did the work. "David does a huge amount of it. I do some of it, and Calvin does some of it too. And,

you know, we all have our own individual skills that we bring to it. I've done a lot of stone wall rebuilding on the land and things like that. Her favorite tool is her tractor which she brought to their relationship. "I've had it for a while, and it's just a great machine. You can do a lot with a tractor that you can't do easily without one." Last year, she bought an electric chainsaw for herself and loves it. "Oh my God, it's awesome. It's light, you know, it's much lighter than a gas-powered saw. And I love it. It's surprisingly powerful and I can get a lot done with that. I get a lot done in terms of clearing brush or it's useful when I'm pruning apple trees, all those kinds of things. So the chainsaw, the tractor, and, you know, standard hand tools, loppers, and such."

Judith doesn't have many concerns about being out in the woods alone. However, she does worry about accidents when working alone in the woods, whether that's her or David. "Our land goes back. As I said, it's 217 acres, and it goes way back in places where there's no cell service. So if there's an accident of any kind, you know, it's a pretty vulnerable situation." Judith says if you are working in the woods, you need to do what you can to safeguard yourself. "Like wearing the right safety equipment, like a helmet and the face protection and the chainsaw pants and all that kind of stuff." She thinks that some women are uncomfortable in the woods because they don't know what to expect. "I've been with people who are afraid of things, like a bear is going to get them. The reality is that wildlife mostly doesn't want to have anything to do with you. I don't know if for some women it's about a heightened awareness of being uncomfortable in an urban setting and then they carry that with them if they go out into the woods. I don't know."

Judith cited the slow incremental accumulation of knowledge and connectedness to the place as her biggest accomplishments. "Like I said, every time I walk out there I learn something, I see something I didn't see before and it feels like this place just becomes more a part of me and I become more a part of it every time." She says that a lot of her knowledge about the woods and trees and things like that has come through David. But she will also watch webinars and participate in programs such as those put on by Vermont Coverts or Women and Our Woods. Even just talking to woodland owners and other people has helped her increase her knowledge. Judith has extensive networks she can reach out to when she has a question or needs help, a network they will turn to when it comes to figuring out how to identify potential future owners for their land. These networks are a result of her being active in various organizations such as Vermont Woodlands Association, Vermont Coverts, Women and Our Woods, Vermont Land Trust, Vermont Sheep and Goat Association, and the Northeast Border Collie Association. "You know, David and I don't always agree on what needs to be done here, and so it's



Judith's sheep under an apple tree.

good to have enough knowledge of my own, so that I don't feel like I need to defer to him. Like the sumac out here, David was very much in favor of just kind of cutting all of that down, and I want to leave it, because the birds feed on those cones, especially in late winter."

As for challenges, Judith works full-time, is an equine massage therapist part-time, and has her sheep farm. She finds that there is just not enough time in a day to do everything she'd like to do. She finds that physical strength is becoming an issue too. "I mean, I'm pretty fit, I'm pretty strong, but I'm also 62, and my strength is not the same as it was 10 years, 20 years ago, so that is a challenge. Ten years ago I rebuilt a big section of stone wall over the course of a couple of weekends. I could not do that now, I don't think, not as easily and not without a lot of ibuprofen." But she would tell other women to just get out there and do whatever they're capable of doing. "Even if as you're getting older things sort of get ratcheted down by degrees, you can still do something. Go out walking or whatever. Just stay connected to your place."

What Judith doesn't list as a challenge, which some other women have, is paternalistic or sexist attitudes. "I wouldn't really say that I personally

have come across that. There is a difference, as I said earlier, in the way people treat me, because if they see me with David, they kind of assume that I'm an extension of him, so that can be tricky to navigate. When we're having work done here, people will automatically go to him, but I think that that has more to do with his history in the field." If she were hiring a forester though, she says she would want to work with a woman. Not because she expects paternalistic, patronizing, sexist attitudes from male foresters, though she acknowledges that can be out there. "I want to work with somebody who's going to be respectful of me and not be sort of patronizing. 'Honey, go sit down, I'll take care of this.' I don't think so, next." But because "women are underrepresented, so my inclination is always going to be to vote with my wallet where I can. And if we want more women to be involved in the woods, that would be where I would want to put my money, too."

To other women, Judith would give the following advice. "Don't rush into doing anything until you're comfortable with your place and have some idea of its cycles. It's better to take a slower, measured approach. At the same time, when you are ready, allow yourself to try things and make mistakes. Try something and if it doesn't work say, 'Oh, I would have liked in hindsight to

have done that differently', but don't beat yourself up about it. It's not the end of the world. Just be kind to yourself and try different things and see what resonates with you. Mmm, but do get rid of the introduced species." She also encourages other women to get involved. "Show up, be seen, ask questions. Assume that your presence, your questions matter. Just get out there and learn what you can, figure out what matters to you, and do it."



Sunrise over Clover Hill Tree Farm.



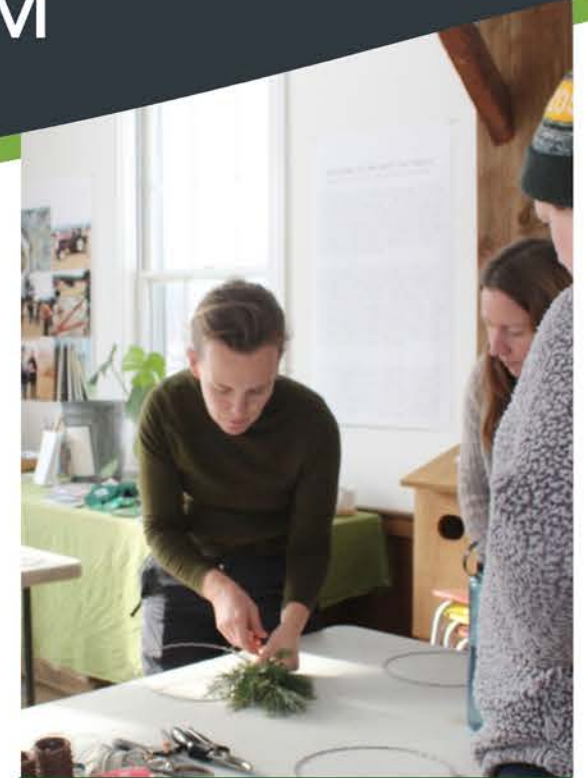
FAMILY ON THE FARM

"I love the sense of community, the way woodlands afford me a chance to talk to other people about a common thing."

Catie describes herself as chronically curious. Her curiosity and the bounty of the forest make it an endless resource of educational opportunities and family fun. Although she always loved being outdoors, Catie did not grow up with the woods as her backyard. She moved often between the Montpelier, Vermont area and Florida. But her grandfather was a dairy farmer, so she was no stranger to working outdoors. In fact, she met her husband Mark while working on an educational farm and relates that their early dates were "work dates" on a neighboring flower farm. They would take additional weekend shifts to be together outdoors.

When they married, Mark already owned a 60-acre woodland in Leicester. The property included a small cabin with no running water or electricity, where they lived while clearing a house site and building the house, and all while Catie was pregnant. The couple moved into their home a month before their oldest daughter was born. They now have three children — two girls and a boy — who have grown up on Foxglove Farm with the woods as their backyard.

Together, Catie and Mark are a dynamic team. Their



CATIE

relationship with the forest is partly economic since they sugar and sell maple syrup. But, for Catie, it's more than that. It's her outdoor classroom for their homeschooled children. "It's kind of a sneaky way to keep the kids engaged in learning," she says. A recent lesson involved making bar graphs and next is "minnow catching" and recording all the data for the project. "And what's great is that they are so excited because they get to be outside." And Catie gets to spend time with them. That quality time was a big driver to launch their sugaring operation as a family endeavor.



Catie and her family.

Catie's superpowers include how to research things and talk to people, which she has used to find information about and understand their woodlands. There's a bit of humility in this kind of learning, being willing to admit that you don't know. "Maybe I should have learned this already but didn't so now I need to figure it out," she says. Her children have learned from her that asking questions, researching, and talking to other people is a very powerful way to learn. Rather than teach them "hard facts," she has taught her children how to think. Catie's degree is in philosophy so critical thinking and alternative education styles are definitely in her wheelhouse. The forest is her alternative "infrastructure." There are trails they use, a bridge at the beaver dam, special places they gravitate to. "I love

the bridge area with the water just trickling underneath. It's so peaceful," Catie says. There's also a lean-to that's a great place to host other home-schooled students. The family has hosted events with up to 50 kids. Catie just loves the "energy of all those kids playing wildlife biology tag in the backyard." She is open to public school classes, but it hasn't happened yet.

The children are aged 13, 12, and 10, so most groups are in that age range, although sometimes younger siblings tag along. Catie recalled a tour led by Steve Hagenbuch of Audubon who talked about different habitat for birds that included "snags." She mentioned how the kids repeated the word "snag" a bunch of times and that these three year old twins went dancing down the trail making up a little song about snags. "They had learned about snags! Some kids can sit down and write a paper and it will be great. Some kids will sing a song and that's great. The end goal is the same. They learned," says Catie. Home schooling, with the forest as classroom, has allowed Mark and Catie's children to discover and further develop their own strengths through deeper engagement.

Although the woods provide an educational opportunity, there's more than that for Catie. "I love the sense of community, the way woodlands afford me a chance to talk to other people about a common thing." She attends woodlands' events for the interaction with other woodland owners, for the sense of community and connection! The family attends the Northeast Organic Farmers Association annual conference for the child-friendly programs. "And the kids look forward to it every year!" she says.

"There is huge potential for all groups to include programs for children."

Catie believes that child-friendly programs would help to change the optics of many events and address both a gender and age bias. Catie and Mark are young compared to the average Vermont landowner, and they want their children involved. For them, land ownership is a partnership that should include both parents and their children. "If the children have to stay home, that usually means that mom is home too. So if there were more opportunities for children, there would be more female participation, more mother engagement," Catie states. She thinks that child-friendly programs could encourage young families to up their level of participation or help grandparents get their grandchildren engaged. Catie is pretty passionate about this idea. "The thought just keeps percolating that we need to get our kids to the table, at least interested in joining the table because there are fun things for them to do and learn." Catie is a catalyst for change, especially with her network of homeschool families and her participation in natural resource-based organizations.

Catie's thoughts for the future of the land involve the next generation. "Someday, I would like it to be their property, and they need to have a sense of connection to the land. They're getting that every single day with their outdoor learning and little hidden games." In actuality, Catie sees this connection as providing a sense of place for her children, irrespective of the place. She notes, "When I go home near Montpelier, I feel a sense of relief because it's familiar, like home. That sense of place is a critical gift for kids."

Catie and Mark have met with an estate lawyer to begin an estate plan but they're discovering that it takes much longer than anticipated. Although the plan is not yet finalized, they are having the important conversations between themselves and their children. With three children, they know that they can't predict the future, but it's important that the land stays intact, that it reflects their value system. "We have snapping turtles and beavers and bears and deer. I don't want to see that lost," she says. "It's a constant conversation that Mark and I have." It's also important to Catie that her family stays intact, that the legacy she and Mark have built keeps her children connected. And that's why they engage their children in these conversations too. "We've always been open with our children, willing to have conversations that other families might avoid."

Mark is a forester, so management was always in his realm. He's written the forest management plan for the property and does the work. However, Catie says that she has taken a much more active role in the last few years, driven by her innate curiosity. As a team, Mark and Catie consult each other in their respective fields of interest — he with management, she with education — but they recognize who does the actual work! Recently, Catie

has taken a greater interest in the introduced species that Mark has been working to eradicate. "I at least want to get better at identification," she says.

The last timber harvest on the property was about five years ago, and Catie admits quite honestly that she did not have much room in her brain to absorb what was happening. "We had three children in three and a half years; Mark was getting his masters; and we had just built a house. My brain was at capacity," she says. She's now more engaged and understanding more about harvesting and management; she credits Marks as being a great teacher!

Catie has also thought about completing a Women's Game of Logging to learn about chainsaw use. "I've used a chainsaw before but it's definitely not my favorite. Give me a pair of loppers," she says, "Something that's safe, reliable, and strong." That said, Catie is not one to be intimidated. "I'm so good at putting myself in situations that I find horrifying. I'm almost drawn to the things that scare me. I can see the benefit and I'm not going to let fear stop the benefit." Catie definitely embodies the "just do it" attitude. She says that she never wants to look back and wonder - what if? Another of her superpowers!

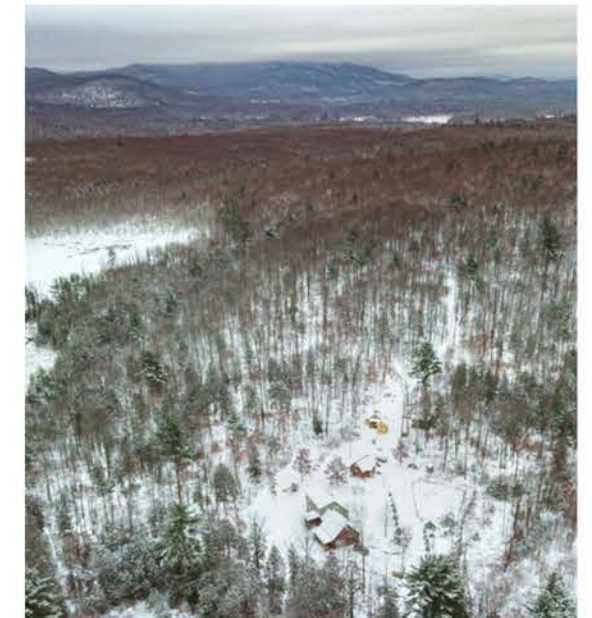
As a testament to the hard work and

dedication of Catie, Mark, and their children, Foxglove Farm was recognized as an Outstanding Tree Farm in 2024. With this honor comes a celebration and, for Catie, celebration invites community. "For me personally, I just need community," she says, "and am eager to do anything to foster it." They celebrated their achievement with a picnic and Tree Farm tour for about 50 woodland owners.

Catie's suggestion for other women landowners is all about community. "Find your community. Get involved," she offers. "Don't be afraid to ask questions." Catie recognizes there are fields where women are not traditionally involved, so "not knowing something might make you feel like you don't deserve to be there." Other women woodland

owners can find their seat at the table and discover their own superpowers by following Catie's example and asking lots of questions. If Catie has any advice for the younger generations, it's: "Get to the table. Sit and listen. The more we see young people at the table, the more normal it will be," she says, "So just get there!"

Vermont is everything to Catie and Mark. Foxglove Farm in Leicester is where their love of the land, the hard work, and the bountiful opportunities all come together. Catie acknowledges that there are challenges living in a place where the cost of living is so high but for her, the sense of peace and beauty make it acceptable. "I will pay more for a gallon of milk in order to live here, in one of the most beautiful states in the country," says Catie, "That's the compromise."



Aerial view of Foxglove Farm.



The family standing with their outstanding tree farm award.



MAST TREE RELEASE

Barbara is slowly bringing a property back to wholeness again. Nicknamed The Ledges for its steep rocky cliffs, it sustains patches of yew, hornbeam, basswood, and black cherry trees on its forested slopes. The nearby wetlands help create habitat for many songbirds, black bear, and moose.

Barbara describes her land as her fourth child. She grew up with free rein to explore her parents' 400-acre property in Lamoille County. After leaving Vermont in 1957, she used family inheritance to buy her own land in 2005, which she named The Ledges. "Trees and plants were my childhood companions. I feel what the land is doing. It's a living whole that I'm allowed to spend time in and with." But the steep acreage had been far from whole for many years. Previous extensive logging significantly damaged the land and the forest. Barbara spent over thirty hours (cumulatively 17 miles) walking up and down The Ledges using the mapping tool, Avenza. She took 473 digital notes on wildlife signs, plant life, and ecology to log the special, fragile, and intimate features of the land. Spending time in and around the land helps inform necessary choices about how to manage the forest. She hand-planted a hay meadow near her cabin and, though nearing 80, regularly wields a scythe and chainsaw as needed.

The focus for the land is recovery. Barbara's property has been a certified Vermont Tree Farm since 2013, demonstrating her commitment to sustainable forest management. Barbara asked Audubon Vermont to conduct a bird habitat assessment in 2014. The assessment found 29 species of birds, some "species of concern," by sight and sound. This and Barbara's extensive notes informed her

BARBARA

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE
137.63 acres (135.63 actively managed)

LOCATION
Craftsbury, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
Patch cut (2 acres)
Mast tree release (72 acres)
Trail work (1320 linear feet)



Steep cliffs form The Ledges, giving the landscape character and striking views all year round.

work with her forester, David McMath, to develop and implement her 2016 forest management plan. Between 2005 and 2014, Barbara heard fewer warbler species singing in the woods by the cabin and down the ledges. Some species of warblers rely on young forests and moist thickets. She worked with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to complete a 2-acre patch cut on the edge of her wetlands, spurring the successional growth of shrubs and berries. She is considering similar measures in the upper woods.

NRCS funding also partially supported a mast tree release and the rehabilitation of logging roads between 2011-2014. Mast trees (beeches, hop hornbeams, and black cherries) feed bears, partridge, turkeys, and songbirds. They selected 30 healthy mast trees for release, and marked surrounding trees to be girdled or cut. Increasing seed and fruit production improved animal habitat in those sections of the forest. The road work repaired deep gullies caused by erosion and allowed Barbara to travel to outer corners of the parcel to observe and plan its care. By design, the trails respect seeps and other wet areas and are built with minimal disruption to well-established trees.

Barbara's goal is for "the land to grow according to its own rules." When she first stayed on the property, there was no running water or electricity. "To be alone in the land and with the land for a time during which you put yourself at its mercy. To simply say, 'I'm here with you,' and listen to the response from all around."

PROJECT PARTNERS

David McMath, Licensed Consulting Forester
David McMath worked with Barbara to develop and implement her initial forest management plan.

Audubon Vermont
Audubon Vermont conducted a bird habitat assessment on Barbara's property.

Tyler Pelland, Pelland Forestland Management
Starting in 2022, Tyler Pelland took over management planning and implementation efforts.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Barbara received funding through the NRCS to complete forest management activities.



Barbara has harvested cherry (shown above) and other high-quality hardwoods for furniture and other woodworking projects.



An ancient hemlock sits at the bottom of the property.

MAST TREE RELEASE

A valley woodland surrounds a historic farm. Nestled in the Mettawee River Valley, the farm features a diverse woodland surrounding rich farmland. The woodland sits just below Haystack Mountain and next to the North Pawlet Hills Natural Area.

Barbara is grateful to have any chance to get out on her beautiful land. For much of her adult life, she lived in New York, running The Good Table, her farm-to-table food service business. Whenever possible, she made her way back to a rural corner of Pawlet to spend time on the land that has been in her family since the 1940s. In 2019, she came back full-time as the sole owner and manager. The woodlands nestle around a farm that has hosted cows, chickens, and organic vegetables over the years. When Barbara’s father stopped farming in 1988, the barns lay empty for years. Today, Barbara leases the farmland to Laughing Child Farm, an organic sweet potato farm. A highlight of the surrounding woodland is a unique forest landscape: dry oak, hickory, and hophornbeam trees with an open grassy floor.

Barbara’s goals are to increase wildlife on the land and be a good steward of a healthy forest. In 2006, her family learned about the Current Use (or Use Value) program. Under this program, land is appraised (and taxed) as farming or forestry land rather than at its fair market value. This program incentivized Barbara to actively manage the land as woodland. She developed a forestry management plan alongside Southwind Forestry and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Barbara is now working from her second ten-year plan, which she will renew in 2027.

BARBARA

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE
225.5 acres (198 actively managed)

LOCATION
Pawlet, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
Mast tree release (8 acres)
Patch cuts (3.9 and 2.0 acres)
Irregular shelterwood harvest (7 acres)
Timber stand improvement (13.9 acres)



A view of the unique dry oak, hickory, and hophornbeam forest on the property with good density and mixed ages of the trees.

In 2016 Barbara’s land was certified as a Vermont Tree Farm, which confirms that the forest management meets certain sustainability standards. Wildlife biologists and foresters worked with Barbara to identify five unique stands — areas of the forest where the trees can be grouped by certain characteristics. The professionals identified priority activities for each stand. In one stand, they completed patch cuts, harvesting mature trees to create open space with shrubs and grasses to attract migratory birds and other wildlife. In another stand, they harvested competing trees around healthy mast trees. The fruit of forest trees and shrubs are called “mast.” Mast-producing tree species in this stand included red oak, white oak, and shagbark hickory. Barbara was able to secure funding through the Natural Resource Conservation Service for both of these activities, as well as to pay Redstart Forestry to do introduced species control. In a third stand, they selectively harvested individual mature trees to prioritize hardwood trees like red oak, white oak, shagbark hickory, and sweet birch. In addition to being mast-producing and high-value timber-producing species, these trees are also prime roosting spots for bats.

When Barbara envisions this land in 50 years, it doesn’t look that different than it does today. She is committed to managing the forest, making space for wildlife, and keeping trees healthy. She looks forward to walking the land with foresters, evaluating the work that was done previously, and making plans for new projects. Her advice to other landowners? “Get connected. There are so many resources available to help with this work and to connect you with other resources.”



One of the two patch cuts completed in one section of Barbara’s woodland.



The same area of the forest three years after the patch cut, showing the growth of shrubs and other low-lying plants.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Southwind Forestry
Barbara brought in Southwind Forestry to create and manage her Forest Management Plan.

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR)
Barbara worked with staff at the Departments of Forests, Parks, and Recreation and Fish and Wildlife to understand and promote the health of her forest.

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
Barbara received funding from NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to pay for activities that improve the health of the forest and its wildlife.

Redstart Natural Resource Management
Barbara worked with Redstart to manage introduced species in the woodlands and is planning future planting work.

LOVE AND LEGACY

"You've got to have the long range view, but you could not do anything more for the world than investing in forestry."

Julie, a nonagenarian and Detroit native, began her love of the outdoors as a young girl on her family's property in Wallingford, Vermont, where her mother was born and raised. "Every summer mother would say 'we're going home' the moment school was over. Vermont was always her home and she instilled love of Vermont in all of us," recalls Julie. She has nurtured this love for nine decades, more than seven of them alongside her husband Peter. She and Peter met at Middlebury College and were married in 1954 when they graduated. While this is Julie's story, Peter figures prominently. They are the perfect pair, among one tenth of one percent who have been married more than seventy years.

Julie and Peter are unique in many ways. They are enrolled in the Vermont Tree Farm program and have been honored as Vermont Tree Farmers of the Year. Their East/West woodland ownership is a long story, but they have clearly managed their bi-coastal



JULIE

lifestyle with great care.

Peter was from Illinois but his family also had connections to the land. His father was from New England and worked for a business selling poles that were harvested on land he bought in the South. Peter helped in the timber management, and he and his sisters would ultimately inherit these land holdings. Although they lived out of state, in 1980, the family purchased 187 acres in Granville, Vermont. Over the years, they added additional parcels and today own and manage 562 acres of woodlands and a home where they live part-time. Their California ownership came later when the Parker family's southern woodlands were sold and the proceeds invested in west coast woodlands.

Julie is very candid in her assessment of their woodland journey. "I did not choose a life relating to forests. I chose a life relating to people, majoring in French, exploring other countries and cultures. I love birds. I love trees. I love Vermont and its rural nature. I love our house, but I'm a partner in managing our land. I am very dependent on Peter's knowledge." And he includes Julie in everything, valuing her opinion. She has learned a lot about forest management, but quickly adds, "I've learned an awful lot about myself as well."

Julie is also very candid about how difficult it was for her to put down roots as a part-time resident in Vermont. She had bouts of serious depression and a very serious episode of post-partem psychosis after the birth of their third child years earlier. The disruption to her life caused by the part-time transition to Vermont created a real setback for Julie when it came to her mental health. "I did not know how I could bond here or who I could bond with and Peter said, 'bond with me.'" She was willing to look inside herself, face her own shortcomings and dysfunction and that led to a dramatic breakthrough. "It really added up to a transformation, a kind of awakening," she says. Julie does not shy away with her struggles with depression and, in fact, has recently written an autobiography, *A Journey Beyond Despair*, that chronicles her adult life.

Despite the challenges, Julie has insight. She needed to meet townspeople. In California, she had a full life focused on people, teaching yoga in their home and starting a TV show. She felt uprooted in Vermont. She found a solution at the church. "There was no piano player and even though I wasn't great, I was better than nobody. The congregation was thrilled and so I

began to meet the locals, began to feel as though I did belong," she says. Peter, on the other hand, was perfectly at home here in the woods. Julie's eventual connection came from Peter's encouragement, asking her to start with simple walks in the woods, carrying pruning shears and shovels. "These fields have lots of rocks, he said, and I've got a crowbar if you can just kind of help me. And I'm thinking 'me, rocks, crowbar, this is not adding up.' Peter was very patient." Ultimately, it was an inner journey for Julie. "It took time, but I wanted to be the partner for Peter just like he had been for me, suffering through the yoga years. Then we really both began to love this place."

Julie describes life ever since as beautiful. "I've learned what I call JOBA: the joy of being alive." That joy



Julie and her husband Peter at their Vermont property.

for Julie is made up of an amalgam of people and nature. She loves interacting with people, especially her daughters and grandchildren when they come to visit, and she loves being in the woods in Vermont and California. She has her special places in the woods. "We've got two beautiful cherry trees and two beautiful soft maples and a lovely yellow birch that are kind of legacy trees and we've got a lovely little meadow where I walk every day. That keeps my blood pressure down." Julie is also very excited about some small oaks that she and Peter have been watching since they were quite young. "We always say, 'now let's go see our oaks, see how they're coming.'"

Some special places in the woods are more connected to experiences than the trees themselves. Julie had a friend from Nantucket who would visit and they would sit together under a particular tree. Her friend has since died and for a while Julie had a terrible time with her emotions. But her instinct was to go and sit there, to be with her friend and now, she says, "There's a very deep part of me invested in this beautiful spot where I can be alone with myself, or alone with the earth."

When asked if the woods are an inspiration for her writing, Julie ponders that question for a bit and responds, "I can't say yes, but maybe I'm missing

something. It has a quiet peaceful effect on me that gives me a chance to reflect. I can say it was right here that taught me some of the deepest lessons about myself. So, I'm really glad I overcame all my resistance to being here."

And, once Julie overcame this resistance, she was all hands on board with Peter in learning about forests and forestry. They signed up with Vermont Woodlands, Coverts Vermont, the Vermont Tree Farm, and the California Forestry Association. They learned so much about forests and how essential they are to humanity. They learned how to manage their forests and harvest sustainably. Julie explains, "We're always growing more than we cut. We're going to create old growth redwoods in California by careful management. We also learned that Vermont is not a place where it's easy to earn a living from the woods unless you make maple syrup, raise goats, or live a simple life. That was not the kind of lifestyle that we needed but we also wanted to maximize what the land could give us to keep the children interested, to keep it in the family."

Keeping their woodlands in the family is very important to both Julie and Peter. Peter has become an expert on family estate planning, navigating family ownership with his sisters in his generation as well as with his children in the next generation. "It takes an artist to do that. He's a good listener," says Julie. "It's very hard to try to persuade a bunch of young people to not see just money. A lot of it involves getting them involved, maybe somehow getting a little bit of a check to them, and helping them to think in the long-term." Julie and Peter have involved their daughters and grandchildren in both the Vermont and California properties. In Vermont,

they have hired their grandchildren to help with pruning and other tasks over the summer. "I would say our grandchildren are very interested. They love to come." All three daughters will come to own the Vermont property, but it has been decided, and all agree, that Nan, their middle daughter, will be the manager.

Although Peter is the lead in their partnership when it comes to forest management and operations, Julie has her own area of expertise. She is an avid birder. "The birders come every spring. We've got 16 years of records of the birders coming, usually early in June when we first arrive, and then coming back two weeks later to pick up other birds that might return a little later. And that's been a lot of fun for me to have this group." She also gets a lot of joy from observing and appreciating the changes in the forest over time. One time after visiting Shelburne Farms, Julie worried that their woods and trees were "messy." "I never saw such gorgeous woods as those at Shelburne Farms. Oh, maple and oak, not one of them double tops or anything." She was very relieved to learn that those trees had been planted and tended. She talks about the fun of knowing where the next harvest is going to be, and of walking the boundaries with Peter. "We've done a lot of bushwhacking and blazing of our trails," says Julie, although she admits to being more comfortable on the trails.

Julie also likes to think about how they can use their land to engage and educate other people, and Peter encourages her in that. In both California and Vermont, she finds that often people don't understand the values of a managed forest. The first question they often get is something like, "You don't cut trees,

do you?" That's when the lesson begins. "We had to sit down and talk to our neighbor, to explain about the pine harvest, the health of the trees, and the need to harvest before they all fell down on their own." Now, that neighbor has joined Vermont Coverts and Vermont Woodlands and has had a little harvest. "That was a great step forward," Julie notes. The neighbors have all heard about conserving their property, too. Some have done that while others are still resistant.

The property is conserved under a conservation easement. A big part of the motivation to build their ownership was seeing properties divided up into 10-acre "spaghetti" lots. "Those owners weren't interested in forestry, they were interested in investment." So when the opportunity arose, they bought additional properties.

"The forest is such a wonderful carbon sequester and we feel that we're doing something wonderful by having 500 acres of managed forest," says Julie. But it's not all about climate and carbon. Julie is particularly passionate about birds and bird habitat, and is very connected to certain trees. There are trees she hopes will never be cut and wants to put up signs that say "Legacy Tree" so they will stay forever.

Julie would encourage other women to

to buy forestland "like crazy" if they're considering it. "You've got to have the long-range view, but you could not do anything more for the world than investing in forestry." Julie spoke about this being a 'women's era' where people have grown open to women excelling in all kinds of areas and doing things once not deemed acceptable, like owning woodlands on their own. In the same vein, she talked about not experiencing discrimination as a woman involved in owning forestland. "I felt there was a blindness, I haven't felt sexism." And she is very proud of her daughter Nan. "She's a woman. She got into [forestry], she wanted to know more, she wanted to understand more, she wanted to be involved mainly in the California property, because we lived out there. And we would go up, not regularly but periodically, and meet with our forester."

When asked about a favorite tool, Julie first mentions an electric saw that she was just tickled with. However, she eventually realized that it didn't work very well, and Peter did not encourage her to replace it. "He's very safety conscious, and I might be a little impulsive," she notes. Today her favorite tool is her pruning shears, but she also has a favorite shovel and always has her walking stick and

binoculars when she goes into the woods.

Ultimately, beyond management goals, beyond the joy of birding, Julie has found that being a woman woodland owner has been about the power of being in a forest setting. "The forest is a setting. I suppose buying a business might be a setting. There are all kinds of settings, but a forest is kind of a classic setting because there is this beautiful expanse of nature. You're going to face nature and it's going to bring out your own nature." Julie continues, with an eloquence born of struggle, "There were a lot of things about me that I did not know. A big inner journey into inner discovery that this forest witnessed. If you call it a play, this forest was the setting for us figuring out how to make it together and with our very, very different approaches and the give and take."

Julie's deeply moving story, *Journey Beyond Despair: A Memoir of Love, Psychosis and the Power of Insight*, on Amazon and Barnes & Noble, reveals in humbling and candid detail her 30 years of searching inward for the dysfunction that led to permanent healing.



BUILDING TRADITIONS

"Your thoughts are valid; your concerns are important. You know yourself best, and your land is an extension of you."

Sam grew up on Long Island and after spending a summer in Vermont she always knew she would end up here. She and her family were skiers, so she spent much of her childhood time on the slopes in southern Vermont, but it was the Green Mountains and forests that drew her to Vermont. Sam arrived here in 2013, living first in her family's ski condo, working here and there. In 2016, she laid down her own roots, purchasing a "fixer-upper" in East Dover on 3.66 acres. Much of the appeal of this home was the contiguous 74 acres that were on the market. In 2018, Sam's family, including her mom Deidre and two siblings, set up an LLC to purchase and steward that parcel.

While the ownership of the land is shared equally in the family, Sam sees herself as its primary steward. "I do a lot of the labor on my own," says Sam. But she also works hard to keep her siblings engaged. All four owners have different worldviews and values. Sam and her mom are in constant communication, letting the other two know what it is they are doing. "So when we decided to get a forester, we had a big conference call. When we got the plan, the ten-year plan, we had a conference call with my two siblings." It is clearly important to Sam and Deidre that everyone sees this land as their



SAM

place to enjoy, a place to recreate, hike, snowshoe, ski.

Sam's stewardship is driven by her values of health and resilience. The concept of resilience is peppered throughout Sam's story. She experienced both 9-11 and later the loss of her father as a young girl. She watched as others around her struggled and although she had her struggles too, Sam was resilient. Resiliency became the "thing" that got her through. It is also her big focus on the property.

Sam's concerns with health and resilience do not end at the property boundary lines. She thinks about health and resilience, and their place in the larger community. "It's important for both the physical landscape and the community. The connection between resilient landscapes and resilient communities is huge." It's also complex. Sam understands that her actions can impact the broader community and questions how to balance both the needs of the community and the land. "How does what I do here fit into the bigger piece?" she wonders. And, when asked what it means to actually make a forest resilient, she responds, "I think it starts with the health and diversity of the forest."

Sam is still working out her vision for the future of the land because she sees so many possibilities. She imagines the property as a resilient space for both the community and the forest. She sees opportunities for art therapy, for mental health retreats, for recreation, but nothing can happen without a healthy resilient forest. Sam, like many people, needs the forest to sustain her too but doesn't want to see what she calls, extractive capitalism." This does not mean that Sam is opposed to timber harvest. The property is enrolled in Use Value Appraisal and a timber harvest is currently underway. The primary goals

of the harvest are wildlife habitat, forest diversity, and forest health.

Sam is a model for landowner engagement. She works on the property. She and her mother have spent a considerable amount of time online educating themselves about forests and forestry, as well as becoming active members in Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife. She's even spent time with their forester marking timber for harvest and inoculating ash trees. Because of this she talks knowledgeably about the different treatments that are being applied to each of their stands as well as specific trees of interest. She tracks all this information on Avenza, an offline mobile mapping software. "We have some cherry trees that I've marked, and some of my friends make bark medicine. So some of the pyramids on the map show where the cherry trees are and how to get to that point." Another way that Sam is increasing her knowledge about the property is to document changes with before-and-after pictures, which can be linked to Avenza maps.

All the land management is happening with the help of a forester. Through a series of explorations and questions, Sam ended up with a female forester. She values the relationship with her forester and feels that her questions and concerns are taken seriously. Unlike some instances she's heard about, she doesn't feel like this is an "expert and novice" relationship, that she's just expected to trust and not question. She feels that working with a female forester is a more collaborative relationship. "I got to help her make some decisions, which made me feel really involved, and that was great."

While there are a growing number of female landowners, the number of female professionals has not grown rapidly.

Sam is a young landowner and like many her age is facile with technology like the Avenza app. She is also capable of doing much of the work on her property, including cutting and splitting their harvested trees with a chainsaw and wood splitter. "I couldn't live without my wood splitter," she laughs. She's hoping to purchase a Billy Goat - not a real goat, but a brushcutter that does the work of a billy goat. Sam attended a Coverts Meet and Greet where she met other women landowners and learned about this tool. They assured her she would be able to use it. Sam and her mom, Deidre, who lives nearby, have different perspectives about working on the land. Sam feels fully capable with the right equipment; Deidre feels she no longer has the physical strength to do the heavy work. Like many women landowners, Sam and Deidre see that aging in place on your property demands that you remain physically strong or have the capacity to hire the work.

However, hiring someone brings up the issue of trust. Sam talked about the importance of finding professionals that you trust, people that share your values and care about the landscape in the same way. She finds that belonging to a woodland owners' organization like Vermont Coverts has been a big asset in finding dependable help when she needs it. "It's just asking other people at those Meet and Greets - What do you do? Who do you use?"

Sam says that you may have to advocate for what you want, even once you've found labor you can

trust. They had a situation where the logger had several canceled jobs and wanted to come and cut even though the ground was quite wet. "We specifically had in our contract that it was supposed to be a winter harvest so that the ground would be frozen. I had to say something to the logger to make it clear that I knew it wasn't dry enough. It would have been a disaster if they came up here when it was so wet. I don't think loggers are used to that. Ultimately, the logger was reasonable and was like, 'Yeah, I got it, we won't come.'" When asked what made it easy to be such a strong advocate for what they thought was right, Sam said, "I think what's different is that stewarding this land was a



Sam and her dog in the woods.

choice for our family, and it was something we knew we were going to do right."

Being new landowners also meant that they had to manage neighbor expectations. "As soon as we bought this place, everyone was like, you better not cut anything." Before the harvest, Sam asked their forester to send out a letter to the neighbors alerting them to the upcoming harvest, its goals and that it was in keeping with the Current Use plan. One neighbor immediately called the forester and asked if the harvest was going to affect their property.

Another neighbor had been using the property as an ATV trail and expected to continue. Sam put up signs and a trail cam. After a few interactions and a discussion about the destruction ATVs can cause, he stopped. Then, after posting the land, they got an angry letter from a neighbor saying they couldn't just go around putting signs up in the woods. They resolved this with the help of their surveyor. Sam is not interested in keeping people out. She posts the land to control how people access the property and when, because it is very wet at times due to numerous seeps.

Being new landowners also meant they did not know the history of the property

and its past use. Sam did a lot of research at the town hall, getting out old surveys and maps. She had fun finding all the stone walls on the property. She found out that their property, like many Vermont properties, had been clear cut for sheep farming. And then the prior owner had high-graded. "He didn't do any active management, just went through and grabbed the biggest trees, so we're left with a lot of poor land use decisions that we're trying to rectify." Looking at the past abuse the land had sustained and doing a lot of research on resilience led Sam to understand how a forester could help her achieve her goals. That's when she started looking for a local forester who could help them meet their goals of diversity, wildlife habitat, and a forest resilient to the impacts of climate change.

As far as challenges specifically related to being a woman forest landowner, Sam says, "It's just an assumption that we can't do it. Can't own it, can't manage it, can't do the work ourselves." Her advice to other women would be to "just do it," whether you're contemplating buying a piece of woodland or thinking about what actions to take. She recommends getting clear on your goals and asking lots of questions. "Your thoughts are valid; your concerns are important. You know yourself best, and your land is an extension of you." When thinking about challenges, Deidre refers back to physical limitations that affect her ability to do some of the work. She also mentions the challenge of knowing whether or not you are doing the right thing. But, Deidre said, "Sam's not afraid to ask questions, and I ask different questions." At the end of the day, they hope they've asked enough of the right questions, and also found and vetted professionals that share their values. "And then you've got to just make a decision and go for

it," Sam said. She followed that thought by pointing out that even if things didn't work out as expected you were still going to learn something.

Though they haven't owned their property for long Sam can point to some successes. "I think the riparian buffer is the biggest success. Absorbing and storing water is huge in Vermont." Sam went on to tell the story of how the previous owner had mowed right down to the sides of a stream that goes through the property and how the water from Tropical Storm Irene washed a ravine into what had been a field. Sam let the white pine that wanted to seed the field grow. When storms hit in July 2023 she hiked up to the ravine to see what was happening. She found that the water was just slowly filtering, instead of rushing through, and just being absorbed. "It was magical," she said.

There is a lot of forestry work happening on the property right now, and Sam spoke a good deal about that. However, she connects with her property in many ways. She loves discovering wild edibles in the woods. She has a camping area where she and her friends had a "campout and blessing ceremony" to bless the land before the harvest. She'd also like to have a workshop on harvesting and firing clay and other educational events. Part of the attachment to both land and people, she says, is building traditions. "A tradition that my brother and I are establishing is to walk the boundaries each year and repost the signs. I think we're finding ways to connect with each other that we haven't before."

Like other landowners who have spent time on their land, Sam has places that are special to her. She goes down to the stream that runs through the

property near her house every day. "There's just something really powerful about water. I go there every day, and it's just like a really peaceful, meditative spot." Sam loves the silence of the woods in general. There's a special hemlock stand that she doesn't get to as often. "It's just quiet. I think it's the hemlock."

Sam and her family are in the early stages of their ownership journey. She, in particular, is growing her attachment and making new discoveries every day. Sam has gained a lot of knowledge in a short time but knows there is still more to be learned. So, she takes her own advice to others and learns as much as she can and then just "does it," learning from and documenting her journey along the way.



PATCH CUTS

A gurgling stream runs through a gently sloping woodland. Once used for pasture, the rocky soils now support wildlife like deer, bear, turkey, grouse, and other forest birds. It is being managed to encourage new wildlife and other forest products, like timber and maple sap.

Growing up in Bulgaria, Lina never expected to be a landowner in Vermont. But she's jumped into the opportunity with both feet. She has learned a variety of skills she never expected to use, like operating a chainsaw, following hounds on a bear hunt, and attending VT Coverts' three-day intensive Cooperator Training on forest and habitat management. When Lina added a sugarbush, she realized basic plumbing skills were necessary for its upkeep and maintenance. Lina is growing mushrooms in a small clearing in the forest and she joined volunteers with the Connecticut River Conservancy to plant shrubs supporting the stream running through the property. She has planted trees throughout the property and has worked to expand the network of trails running through her property. Each project she undertakes helps meet her goals of welcoming wildlife into the land and enabling recreation.

Lina got started managing her land through introduced species. She saw aggressive species taking over the edges of the property and brought in Redstart Forestry to manage removal. To meet the requirements for the Current Use program, she created a forest management plan with Patrick Bartlett (now retired). Lina continues to complete projects with Redstart and a local logging company, HB Logging. She received funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to address introduced species, plant shrubs, and complete patch cuts.

LINA

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE
90.23 acres (79.23 actively managed)

LOCATION
Woodstock, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
Patch cut (2.2 acres)
Overstory removal (10.73 acres)
Single tree, group selection (8.16 acres)



Lina participated in Northeast Woodland Training's Game of Logging four-day course.

As part of her plan, the foresters recommended strategies to remove trees that were diseased or infested with pests and promote healthy trees. Lina prioritized sugar maples and softwood trees that support deer during winter. In one area of the forest, she completed patch cuts to clear small areas of trees. This strategy creates an opening, allowing direct sunlight to reach the forest floor and promoting the growth of native plants like blackberries and raspberries. Carried through bird feces, wild bushes will grow from seeds within a year of a clearing, providing wildlife food for many years.



A volunteer crew from the Connecticut River Conservancy planted trees on the property.

Foresters recommended leaving tree tops behind in the patch cuts. The tops provide nesting spots for forest birds. They also protect sensitive new growth from browsing deer. As they decompose, they put nutrients back into the soil. The dead wood also stores carbon and keeps it from going into the atmosphere, helping slow climate change.

Lina advises other women landowners to get out into the woods and do hands-on work. Each project she completes builds her confidence and her familiarity with her woods. She's looking forward to growing nut trees in one of the patch cuts, with dreams of planting a newly revived hybrid version of the American chestnut. She's also building bat houses around the property. Additional harvests will prioritize high-quality sugar maples and remove declining species. In fifty years, she wants her land to be healthy, full of birds, and full of people enjoying the woods the way Vermonters do.

PROJECT COSTS

ACTIVITY	ACRES	NRCS FUNDING	COST
Introduced species control	13.3	\$3705	\$7100
Shrub planting (supplies)	.6	\$483	\$1000
Patch cut	2.2	\$1603	\$1200

PROJECT PARTNERS

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
Lina received funding from NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to pay for activities that improve the health of the forest and its wildlife.

VT Fish and Wildlife Department
Habitat Biologist Travis Hart worked closely with Lina to plan, layout and certify the work funded by NRCS.

HB Logging
Lina brought in HB Logging to complete logging projects on the land.

Redstart Forestry
Redstart is helping manage introduced species and create Lina's next forest management plan.

PATCH CUTS

JESSICA

Tucked away in northern Vermont, the Hi Vue Maples property is a haven for wildlife. Snowshoe hares, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, bears, and lynx have been spotted roaming the land, which sits on a wildlife link between Vermont and the Sutton Mountains in Quebec.

Jessica’s family began producing maple syrup and related products in 1903, beginning operations under Hi Vue Maples during the Great Depression. Jessica is the first woman manager in four generations. The family land is adjacent to over 45,000 acres of unfragmented forest that spans Montgomery, Westfield, Richford, and Jay. Jessica and her family decided to conserve the property with the Vermont Land Trust in 2022 to keep the land unfragmented and free from development. Jessica is involved in Cold Hollow to Canada (CHC), a land stewardship and wildlife habitat conservation organization. Their Woodlots Program engages landowners from contiguous forested properties to focus their management strategies at the landscape level. She has enrolled their forest in the Cold Hollow Carbon Project, which aggregates 12 Vermont parcels to enroll in the voluntary forest carbon market to implement forest stewardship practices that maintain and increase carbon stocking and provide revenue from the sale of carbon offsets.

Hi Vue Maples is not only designated as one of Audubon Vermont’s Bird-Friendly Maple Producers, but it is also a certified Vermont Tree Farm. This dual recognition highlights their dedication to both healthy forests and bird habitat. By considering bird habitat in how they manage their sugarbush, their efforts promote a diversity of native tree and plant species and multiple layers of forest vegetation to create welcoming habitats for Vermont’s songbirds.

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

408 acres (7 managed in project)

LOCATION

Richford, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Patch Cut



Jessica and her family conserved the Hi Vue Maples property with the Vermont Land Trust in 2022.

With guidance from Audubon Vermont and funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and CHC, Jessica completed two patch cuts on the property. Until the late 1980s, the area had been pasture. Since then, trees had returned but were all the same height and over 20’ tall. Ideal songbird habitat for nesting, foraging and cover involves a mosaic of multiple layers of vegetation.

Jessica and her team completed the first patch cut in a 5-acre area in the fall of 2020. She replanted the cut with fruit and nut-bearing trees like oak and dogwood, and shrubs including viburnum and elderberry. They completed a second patch cut in a 2-acre area in the winter of 2022 and left behind some black cherry, beech, maple, and apple trees. Jessica plans to plant oak trees. They selected species to leave or plant that will help provide food for songbirds and mammals.

Jessica encourages fellow women landowners to ask questions early and often. She says that has helped her build a trusted community network that she relies on as she continues to manage her land. With so many sugaring projects, the family is spread thin, so Jessica is responsible for most of the forest management. The resources she has tapped into have allowed her to do more and she’s excited for new projects to come. She loves seeing evidence of wildlife throughout her land and it inspires her to continue her work to manage the beautiful forest.



A small stream trickles through boulders in one part of the forest.



Jessica stands near an old stone wall running across her property.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Audubon Vermont

Audubon Vermont provided technical support and guidance in developing management recommendations to enhance habitat for priority forest birds through its “Forestry for the Birds” and Bird-Friendly Maple programs.

Cold Hollow to Canada (CHC)

CHC’s Woodlots Program provided partial funding for the patch cuts.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS provided partial funding for the patch cuts.

PATCH CUTS

SHEILA & JULIE

Old agricultural land has regrown into woodland dotted with apple trees in the hills of Wolcott. Trails meander across the land, passing by wetlands through hemlock and mixed hardwood forests.

Julie and Sheila define their approach as “slow forestry.” They prefer to spend time learning and understanding the land, cultivating it slowly according to their goals and its needs. Several years after they bought the woodland, Julie took the three-day VT

Coverts training. That sparked her interest in actively managing the land. The pair, a retired teacher and a retired school counselor, now spend their days enjoying and maintaining their woods. But they don’t do it alone. Their property sits a mile down the road from a neighbor’s woodland. They credit some of their philosophy to that neighbor, Dave, who has harvested firewood for the couple from their woodland since they first bought the land. It’s a collaboration: between themselves, their forester, their neighbor, and the woods themselves.

Julie and Sheila work with Allan Thompson of Northern Stewards, LLC. Allan also works with another local neighbor, which helps support a continuous stretch of managed woodland between the two properties. Their Forest Management Plan identifies two primary productive stands in the forest. Stands are areas of the forest where trees are grouped by shared characteristics. The first stand contains a mature mix of large eastern hemlock sprinkled with red maple, birch, and spruce. Allan recommended harvesting

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE
74.99 acres (70.29 actively managed)

LOCATION
Wolcott, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
Patch cut (<1 acre)
Single tree selection (31.91 acres)
Tree release (crop, mast, and apple - 20.82 acres)



Julie watches barred owls nesting in the snag on their property in May 2020.

individual trees (single tree selection) to encourage trees more tolerant of shade to establish. The second stand is old pastureland that has regrown a mix of hardwoods and softwoods with apples and hawthorns nestled throughout. In this stand, Allan recommended harvesting trees to “release” (or provide more space for) valuable trees like high-quality hardwoods and wildlife food trees.

Julie and Sheila do most of the work in the woodland themselves. They also trust that when Dave comes in to harvest firewood, he’s selecting trees that support their goals and the management plan. In 2023, they partnered with WOW-VT and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to complete a small patch cut along one side of a forested wetland and plant 16 trees in the 0.7 acre opening. This patch cut was prescribed in their forest management plan. Wetlands are sensitive and important habitats for wildlife. A patch cut — clearing most or all of the trees in a small area — promotes new forest growth, including dense brush and berries. The young forest next to the wetland creates shelter for animals who rely on the wetland for survival. This work was funded by the US Forest Service as a WOW-VT Demonstration Project.

Sheila and Julie think a lot about how their woodland will fare in a changing climate. They’re working to plant trees, like red oak and mockernut hickory trees, that may be more resilient to coming changes. Their goal is to build a resilient woodland that will remain beautiful for their grandchildren. But they’re okay thinking one day at a time – they prefer to take it slow.



The VYCC crew rests in between work on the patch cut on Julie & Sheila’s land.



A section of the patch cut shortly after it was completed.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Northern Stewards

Consulting Forester and Certified Wildlife Biologist Allan Thompson works with Julie and Sheila to create their Forest Management Plans and answer questions.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

A crew from VYCC completed a small patch cut on the property as part of a partnership with WOW-VT.

Women and Our Woods-VT (WOW-VT)

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

BEAUTY IN THE ORDINARY

"There are magical places all around me."

Ann has a unique view of her property. She sees possibilities everywhere. What others might see as annoying tree stumps, Ann has turned into works of art. She loves to walk her woods and imagine what could be. "There are magical places all around me." One of Ann's goals is to learn how to use mapping software so she can map her many special places, such as bogs, wetlands, old apple orchards, and the cemetery. Ann gets great joy from these places and wants to share them with others. She envisions building trails that serve as invitations into the woods.

Ann had a gentleman friend with an excavator. "I thought I was in love," she said, "but it was just the excavator." She would love to own an excavator, which would make the work so much easier. And if she did, you'd probably find her on her land, on that machine every day. For now, she tends her land with the tools she has, including her chainsaw, tractor, and brush hog – her favorite tool! Owning this equipment and understanding how to use and maintain it is quite a learning curve.



ANN

Ann counts on her neighbor George for his help and guidance.

Ann recalls, "When I first started using a chainsaw, I got it stuck a lot. I'd be so exasperated." Now she does so much better releasing trees, opening up the apple orchard, and just cutting her own firewood. She has a Husqvarna XP model that's lightweight. "Even just a half pound can really make a difference when you're wielding a saw," she says. Feeling like she knows what she's doing now is what Ann counts as her biggest success. "I've spent enough time in the woods now and know what to expect. I'm going to be okay," she says with confidence.

With successes also come challenges. "You have to

stay physically fit," Ann says. "If I'm not strong, I can't be here." Ann doesn't want to get hurt so she won't have to listen to "some idiot" telling her to drive the tractor up the steep hill in the snow. This last sentence speaks to Ann's frustration as a single woman landowner in finding reliable advice and good networks. In some cases, Ann has found that in this male-dominated industry, she has had to tiptoe around egos. She has had to navigate the difference in being assertive without being viewed as "bitchy."

Ann's path to stewarding this land began in Chicago before her birth. Her mom's first husband worked for National Life. They would come to Vermont for annual meetings and both fell in love with the state. When he could not get life insurance due to pre-existing childhood conditions — complications from scarlet fever as a child — he invested in 130 acres and an old farmhouse in Washington, Vermont, as a legacy for his wife and their four children. After his death, Ann's mom remarried and Ann was born the fifth and youngest child. She was about six months old when the family ventured to Vermont and bought a "tourist house" in the valley. Her mom operated the house while her dad put himself through the University of Vermont (UVM) to become a teacher. They chose to leave Vermont and return to Illinois when her dad was offered a teaching job. They spent summers in Vermont as their plan was to retire here, but Ann's heart was already in Vermont, and summer's end always brought her sadness. It brings her comfort that her parents did get to spend their last days on the hill that they loved.

For many years, the inherited home on the hill, where Ann now lives, stood vacant except for a few cows that wandered through. It needed lots of TLC.

Then in the late 80s, Ann's dad retired and her mom's dream to be in the house on the hill came to fruition. The TLC was in abundance with family, friends, and boarders who worked in exchange for rent.

Ann is following in her father's footsteps when it comes to managing the land, though their motivations for working with the land are very different. She explains, "My dad was really interested in making the land pay. He was a money man; he had to raise all these kids on a teacher's salary and turn this land into something profitable." Ann's vision for the land is much more eclectic, though still governed by a management plan and being part of the Use Value Appraisal program.

"I am having a blast," she says, "with my little DR® walk behind." In a field that once was home to red pine, Ann is loosening the stumps and turning them into sculptures. "I'm taking my time kicking the stumps free, pulling them up, and brushing them off." These stumps become amazing works of art that Ann has displayed at a local gallery. "And finding hazelnut bushes! I've got hundreds of hazelnut bushes," she says. Ann is concerned about the loss of beech so has planted some oak. She also has four chestnut trees that are doing well, at least three of the four.

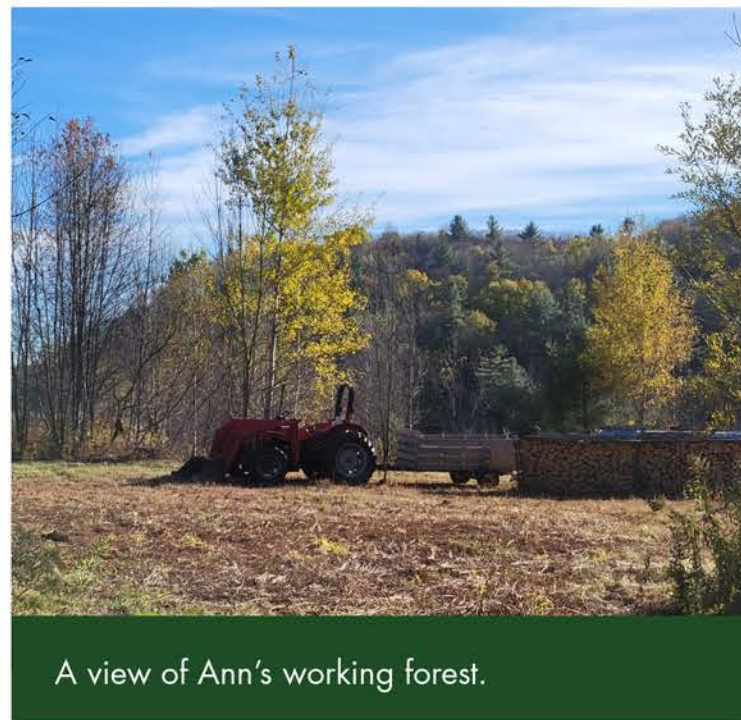
Ann gets so much joy just exploring places and making paths that are invitations into the woods.

But, for a long time, there was anxiety about her future on the land that offset some of the joy she found there. “I spent so many years just worried about what will happen to me when my Mom dies?” The worry came from the fact that all of the siblings would inherit the land in shared ownership. And, Ann was unsure of what her siblings’ desired outcome for the land would be when her mother passed away. She wanted to keep the land but could not afford to buy them all out. Ann sought help with legacy planning. In the end, Ann and her sister were able to buy out her brothers, and she now owns the land jointly with her sister and her sister’s children. Her co-owners let her have autonomy when it comes to managing the land, but she needs to keep them informed, and put up with a certain degree of second-guessing of her decisions, which can sometimes be frustrating.

Ann’s current succession plan is to leave her share of property to her nieces and nephews. She has learned that inheriting something isn’t always a gift, especially woodlands. She honors the fact that they’re her relatives, but what she’d really like to see happen is for the property to go to a local young couple

with a love, passion, and connection to the land. But, that is a worry for the future because Ann is too busy working on the land. Controlling introduced species is nearly a full-time job. Ann doesn’t know how many “hours, days, months” she has spent pulling up the wild chervil; and while she wasn’t looking, the goutweed took over. The Japanese knotweed is just below the house and hasn’t traveled down the brook because Ann keeps “whacking and piling and whacking again.”

There is a cemetery that Ann’s property surrounds. It’s the Fish Cemetery, named for the original family and it makes Ann very nostalgic to think about those who came before her. According to Washington town history, the land was a sheep farm when Vermont’s hillsides were dotted with sheep. And then they grew wheat to survive. “It blows my mind when I think of how hard it would have been to survive here on these rugged hillsides,” she says.



A view of Ann’s working forest.

As Ann travels her woods, on foot or machine, Ann is uncovering stone walls, making trails, and finding the next magical place or thing on her property. She has found bog iron samples and had moose sightings. She would love to have more visitors use her trails and enjoy the land as much as she does. And maybe even have a “stump digging” workshop to let others find those gems that she uncovers. Perhaps her favorite pine stump sculpture is what she calls Phoenix Rising. Maybe it’s a “woman’s heart” that sees beauty in so many places, that creates something from the very ordinary. Ann sees the land through a different lens and has an intimate connection with the property and its treasures. Ann knows one thing for certain. “When I look around, I don’t think there’s any place else I really want to be. I’m like my mother,” she says.

What would Ann say to other women woodland stewards? “It’s critical to stay physically strong, be physically fit, and have a good support system.” Ann reads Northern Woodlands Magazine, is a member of Vermont Woodlands Association, and her property is a certified Tree Farm in the Vermont Tree Farm System. She further recommends, “Use the resources available, like your county forester and landowner organizations such as VWA and Coverts. And stay engaged with other women landowners.”



SINGLE TREE AND SMALL GROUP SELECTION

DIANA

Historic farmland has regrown into diverse woodland in Windham County. Trails crisscross the forest, along a stream, skirting wetlands as they meander across the property. Black bears have been known to stop through, enjoying the woodland alongside humans and other wildlife.

Diana believes in getting out on her land. If she could tell other landowners one thing, it would be to build a trail so you can easily get out into the woods. She and her husband, Lee, bought the property in two separate pieces in 1999 and 2000. The trails on their own property connect to trails on their neighbors' land. Due to Lee's busy work schedule, Diana became the primary manager of the land. Over the years, it became a passion. She retired early from her career as a structural engineer and became an avid cartographer. She's taken the full suite of Game of Logging courses, giving her confidence working on her land.

Diana appreciates that actively managing her land benefits her community. Her community gets to use locally harvested wood and support the sustainable forest economy. She enrolled their land in the Current Use program in 2006, creating a forest management plan alongside forester Andrew Sheere of Long View Forest Management. In the largest area of the woodland, Andrew identified individual or small groups of mature or poor-quality trees to harvest, called a single tree selection or group selection cut. This left space for younger trees to grow. In another section of forest, Andrew recommended the shelterwood method. This

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE
107.5 acres

LOCATION
Halifax, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
Single tree, group selection (59.97 acres)
1st stage shelterwood (17.89 acres)
Progressive clearcut (10 acres)



Diana has taken an active role in managing the land for the last 20 years.

practice harvests mature trees over multiple harvests. The trees that are left in the canopy after the first harvest provide shelter for the next generation of trees to establish, without letting in too much light for sun-loving weeds or non-desirable species to take over.

When Diana and Lee bought the land, around 10 acres of abandoned pasture had been regrowing for about 35 years and was no longer young forest.

Grouse and woodcock still nested around the area, but within five years, wildlife that needed young forest started disappearing as the forest matured. In 2014, Diana received funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to help offset the cost of clearing the area to begin the process of regrowth. They used a brontosaurus, a large machine that mulches the trees in place. Diana is able to maintain trails using her mower as the brush and shrubs regrew. That meant she had a firsthand view as the woodcock and grouse returned to nest.

When Diana envisions the future of her land, she sees people enjoying it. She wants the land to remain forested and laced with trails. She has begun the legal work to ensure that a large piece will remain conserved. Conservation will help ensure their vision for the land is carried on.



The old pasture showing one year (top) and six years of regrowth (bottom).

PROJECT COSTS			
ACTIVITY	ACRES	FUNDING COST	
2021 harvest	54	\$7,495 (timber)	\$4,576
Progressive clearcut	10	\$4,890 (NRCS)	\$13,000

PROJECT PARTNERS	
Long View Forest Management Andrew Sheere of Long View Forest Management worked with Diana to develop and help implement her forest management plans.	
Natural Resources Conservation Service Diana received funding from NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to clear the old pasture.	

SINGLE TREE SELECTION

DOREEN

Humans and wildlife have the chance to interact on this Rochester woodlot with a surprising family history. A VAST Trail and a Velomont mountain bike trail cross a small part of the land, passing alongside a bird-filled meadow. A farmer mows the meadow at the end of summer, allowing grassland birds, like bobolinks, to thrive. A small pond provides a habitat for water birds and other local wildlife.

When Doreen and her husband Bruce bought the property in 2018, they had no idea that it carried family history. Both Doreen and Bruce had been living in Southern California for over 20 years. They wanted to be back in a place where getting out into nature didn't require a car trip. They both knew Bruce's family had been in the Rochester area for generations. Only after they closed on the land did they realize that Bruce's great-great-grandfather had owned and farmed the same land they now owned. Both Doreen and Bruce took the three-day intensive land management training with Vermont Coverts, a course Doreen recommends any landowner take. The training helped them define their approach to active land management. Their goals are to better understand the land and help foster a balance between recreation, agriculture, forestry, and the needs of local wildlife.

One of the first steps the couple took was to enroll the land in the Use Value Appraisal Program. They engaged New England Forestry Consultants to craft a forest management plan to guide them through the next decade of managing the land. Their forester, John McClain, recommended a harvest in 2019. Working with logger Sam Lincoln, they thinned a little over 60 acres to remove poor-quality trees and harvest some mature spruce trees. In other areas totaling about 79 acres,

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE
257.95 acres (209.65 actively managed)

LOCATION
Rochester, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
Introduced species mgmt. (entire property)
Thinning (60 acres)
Single-tree selection (79 acres)
Pre-commercial thinning (11 acres)



Doreen's property features a pond that hosts local waterfowl.

they used the single-tree selection method to harvest mature trees for lumber and firewood. They also selected additional poor-quality, diseased, or pest-infected trees for removal. In 2020, they enrolled their land in the Vermont Tree Farm program, underscoring their long-term commitment to sustainable forest management.

In 2023, Doreen brought in the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) in partnership with WOW-VT and McClain to complete a demonstration project. The crew completed pre-commercial thinning on 11 acres in a crowded stand of forest. This style of management removed trees that aren't large enough or of a sufficient quality to use for lumber to allow the remaining trees to thrive with more space to grow. Doreen was excited at the chance to give young Vermonters a way to develop their skills and understand how this new management practice would impact the woods. She was also excited that cut trees were left to decompose on-site to add nutrients to the soil and habitat for small mammals and amphibians.



The land shortly after VYCC completed the WOW-VT demonstration project.

Doreen and Bruce are in an ongoing struggle with introduced species that have become established on the land. Doreen gets emotional when she thinks about the future of her land. She wants to be able to do more, but she also wants the woods to be its "wild self." Her future vision for the land is fewer introduced species, and healthy, resilient trees that can withstand the changing climate and incoming pests. She hopes the work they are doing today is laying the groundwork for that future.

PROJECT PARTNERS

New England Forestry Consultants
Doreen and Bruce contracted with John McClain (now retired) to create and implement their forest management plan.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)
A crew from VYCC completed pre-commercial thinning on the property as part of a partnership with WOW-VT.

Vermont's Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT)
WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned land.

SMALL GROUP SELECTION

ESTHER

Esther describes her property as a refuge for wildlife. She has spotted deer, wild turkeys, coyotes, foxes, bears, and bobcats throughout the forest, a mix of northern hardwoods, red pines, spruce and hemlocks.

Esther and her husband Roger enjoy hiking and observing wildlife and plants on their land. The regular presence of wildlife give Esther hope for the land as a refuge from the changes and stresses of climate change. Esther grew up in Montreal, vacationing at the property that is now her permanent home. Esther’s father purchased the land, a former dairy farm, in 1957. The farmers had cleared most of the forest for use as pasture. He planted most of the property as a pine plantation and enrolled the property in Vermont’s Use Value Appraisal Program (UVA). Enrolling a property in UVA allows eligible private landowners in VT who practice forestry or agriculture to have their land appraised based on the property’s value of production of wood or food rather than residential or commercial development. When Esther’s father passed away, Esther and Roger inherited the land. Their goals are to preserve and create habitat for birds and other wildlife while maintaining the health of the forest and quality of timber.

The Use Value Appraisal Program requires that landowners to work with a forester to create a forest management plan containing a schedule of forest management activities. Esther and Roger have been working with local forester Charlie Hancock of North Woods Forestry since 2008 to update and implement their management plans. In 2022, Charlie recommended a harvest known as group selection in one of the red pine stands, which removes groups of trees to create small openings. Removing mature red pine allows the forest to regenerate with more diverse tree species. Esther and Roger worked with volunteers from the Cold Hollow to Canada (CHC) Woodlots Program to plant nut-producing trees in the openings, such as oak and chestnut blight-resistant chestnut trees. CHC engages landowners from forested properties in the Cold Hollow Mountains to focus their management strategies on the landscape scale.

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

106 acres (4 managed in project)

LOCATION

Shoreham, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Tree planting
Small group selection

Later that same year, the CHC crew planted small shrubby, food-producing plants such as elderberry in the meadows that surround Esther and Roger’s house. These plants provide food for birds and other wildlife, increasing the value of the meadow ecosystem for wildlife. In 2023, Esther and Roger began to release apple trees with funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Cutting back competing trees “releases” the apple trees to allow their fruit production to increase. If competing trees or shrubs grow too close together, it can stunt their growth and food production by restricting sunlight. Apple trees are popular habitat for woodcock and other songbirds like blue birds, flycatchers, robins, and orioles as well as mice, deer and other mammals.

Esther’s recommendation to other women landowners looking to engage in forest management is to seek professional guidance from a trusted source. Charlie, their forester, has helped them identify a logger and connect with other resources. The CHC Woodlots Program has helped them complete projects and understand other landowners’ approaches to stewardship. Esther worries about maintaining the property as she and Roger age, but she’s simultaneously excited to watch life thrive on her property as they continue to invest in the forest and create habitat for local wildlife.

PROJECT COSTS

ACTIVITY	ACRES	FUNDING
Group selection	9.8	\$3,600 (timber)
Tree planting	4	\$600 (CHC), \$900 (NRCS)

PROJECT PARTNERS

- North Woods Forestry**
Esther and Roger have worked with Charlie Hancock from North Woods Forestry to create and implement their forest management plan.
- Cold Hollow to Canada (CHC)**
Esther and Roger are members of CHC’s Woodlots Program, which provided a volunteer crew and funding for their forest projects. CHC utilizes sustainable stewardship, forestland conservation, and community empowerment to further their vision of a more resilient and connected ecosystem.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**
Esther and Roger have a contract with NRCS to obtain funding to complete some of the management projects.