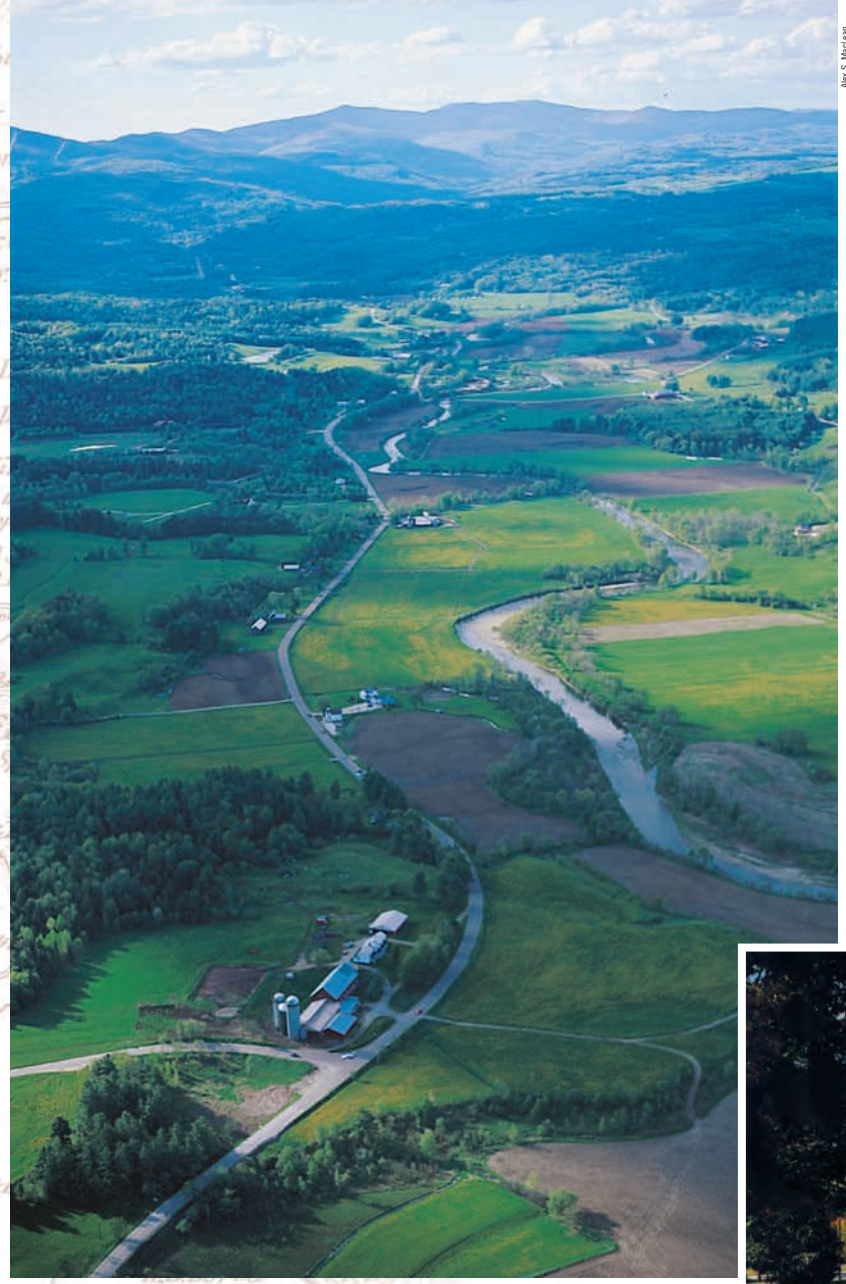
Kicking Stones Down A Dirt Road

Rural Resource Protection in Vermont's Mad River Valley

Prepared for the
Mad River Valley
Rural Resource Commission
by Virginia Farley
and Joanna Whitcomb



Alex S. Maclean

"I like the little dirt roads. If it was up to me I would ask that we not pave roads for a while, that we have a moratorium on paving roads so that we can take a look at what it means to pave a road, what happens to traffic patterns, what happens to the speed of vehicles, what do the roads look like, what do they feel like, what kind of roads do we want our children to walk on, what kind of memories are they going to have. Are they going to have memories of cars racing by at 60 miles an hour or are they going to have memories of going down a dirt road kicking stones?"

—George Schenk, WARREN

Virginia Farley

Virginia Farley

"I'm very fond of a place that most people don't seem to go. I love this spot. It's the beaver ponds behind Blueberry Lake. I think the reason people don't go there is because it crosses the definition of what land is. Is it land or is it water? You can't walk through it, you can't swim through it, and you can't canoe through it very easily. But, God, it's a wonderful place."

–Randy Taplin, WARREN

Dedication

This guidebook is dedicated to all of the individuals who care for our community — the land, the water, the wildlife, the historic character and the people.

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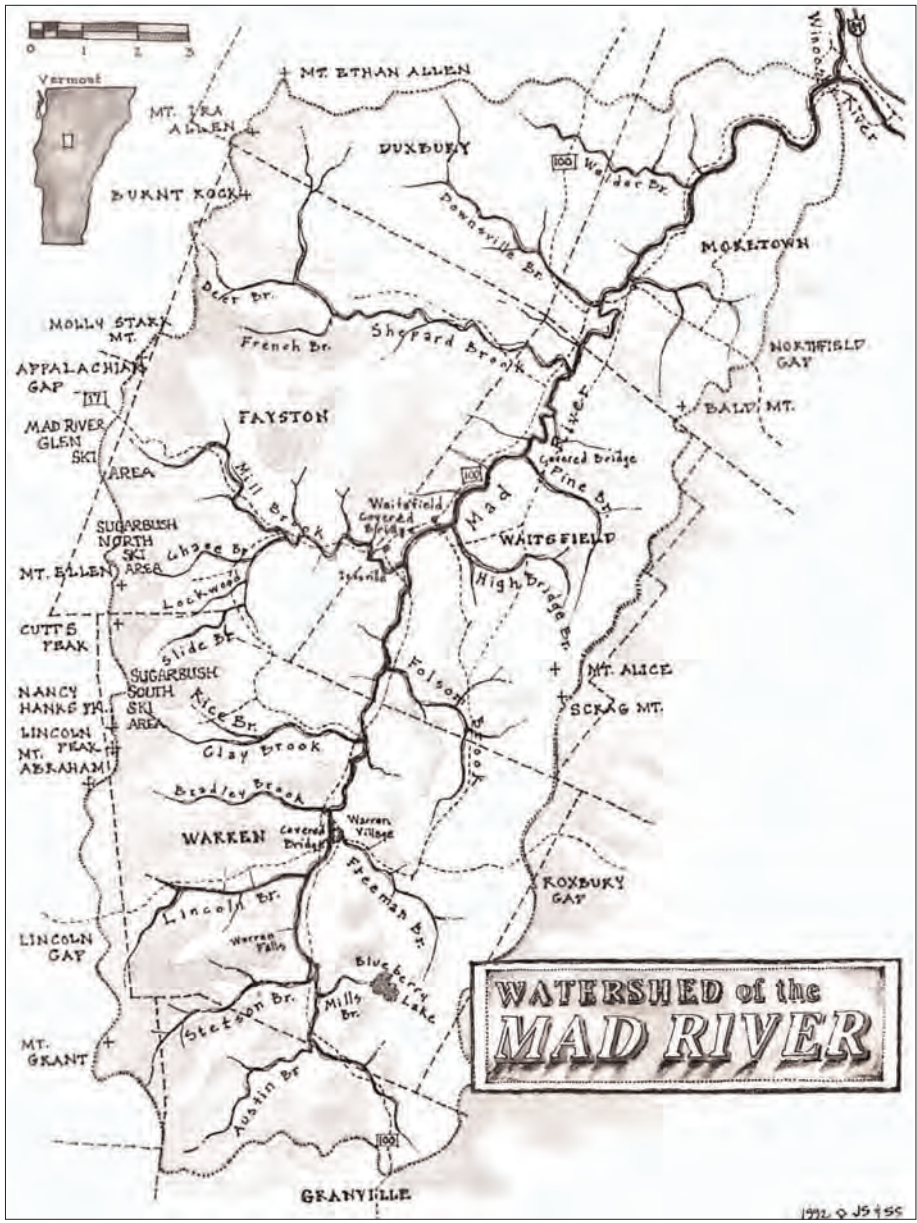
Virginia Farley

Ann D. Day

1 Introduction

In 1988 the Mad River Valley Planning District published the first Rural Resource Protection Plan. It contained an inventory of many of the resources and places which help define rural character, including agricultural and scenic lands, river and trail resources, and historic sites and structures. The plan also included recommendations for action, many of which have been undertaken. Some of the recommendations, although not yet accomplished, are still valid and are being pursued. In 1996 the Mad River Valley Rural Resource Commission, under the auspices of the Planning District, decided to acknowledge the accomplishments of the original plan and take a look at some of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

This guide has several purposes. First, it is designed to offer a reflection of the rural character of the Mad River Valley: what people think and feel about the place in which they live. It describes many of the values we share that relate to the land, the people, the community, and our work. It takes a look at some of the tough questions we face as the population increases, and as we strive to find a balance between conserving our rural resources and maintaining a thriving resort community. It offers a description of the rural resource protection efforts that have taken place in recent years, and acknowledges and celebrates those successes. This guide also looks to the future and explores new ideas for protecting rural resources.



Jeff Schoellkopf and Sally Sweetland

1 Responsibility to the Land

It is believed that the Abenaki people had temporary settlements in the Mad River Valley thousands of years ago. However, permanent human settlement of the Valley has only occurred in the last 200 years. The changes in the land during the first century of settlement were dramatic. Homesteaders in the lumber and potash industries harvested nearly all of the virgin timber, and lands were cleared for dairy and sheep farming. The river and streams were dammed for milling.

In the mid 1800's, the agricultural and timber economy of Vermont and the Valley declined dramatically as a population exodus occurred. According to Charles Johnson in *The Nature of Vermont* a number of causes were responsible including the railroads, the discovery of fertile midwest soils, the Civil War and particularly, the degradation of Vermont's natural resources. He explains:

"The expanding logging industry had moved deep into the untouched forests and cut practically everything—but taking only what was marketable—then left when the trees were gone. Under the combined effects of farming and heavy logging, 70 to 75 percent of Vermont by the 1850's was open land, in the form of clear-cut areas, pastures, or croplands, and the hills and mountains, stripped of their protective trees, could no longer hold onto the soil—the streams and rivers became muddy with the runoff. The ill-farmed land became harder to work and less productive, or else simply washed away into the rivers. Hunting and trapping continued unabated, with few conservation laws and little or no enforcement of those that existed. Wildlife of the forests grew scarce, and the fish that depended on clear, cold streams diminished or vanished completely. The Green Mountains of Vermont, in short, had become a biological wasteland, offering little for people to live upon—a dramatic change from the bounty of a century earlier."

> *"You cannot know who you are until you know where you are."*
> Wendell Berry

Those who stayed behind tended the best soils, many of which remain in agriculture today. Over time, nutrients were replenished in the soil. "Old fields" took root as shrubby vegetation and pioneer plant species returned. Once the trees were reestablished, fish and wildlife re-populated the rivers, streams, woods and fields.

The land rebounded, and in the course of time people learned valuable lessons about land stewardship. By the first quarter of the 20th Century, a conservation ethic was beginning to emerge in the United States which eventually helped reduce poor agricultural practices and indiscriminate logging.

Steam powered saw mill in Waitsfield Village ca. 1880-1905

What is Rural Character?

Rural character is defined by a complex web of elements relating to the land, the people, our work, and our sense of community. Residents of the Mad River Valley define it using different words, locations and feelings. Following are some responses from the 1996 Rural Resource Roundtable:

"Shared community values and responsibilities."

"Sustainable rural economies."

"Human scale in the built environment."

"Wild lands as part of the rural experience."

"Abundance of greenery, mountains, rolling landscape, greenways."

"Inhabitants using the land."

"Being reminded of our history."

Land Ethic – A Definition

"We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love or otherwise have faith in... A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity."

–Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

This movement was due in part to the earlier writings of Vermonter George Perkins Marsh, who in 1864, wrote *Man and Nature* wherein he described, among other things, the devastation of Vermont's natural environment. Calling for a sense of stewardship for the land, Marsh wrote:

"We have felled forest enough everywhere, in many districts far too much. Let us restore this one element of material life to its normal proportions, and devise means for maintaining the permanence of its relations to the fields, the meadows, and the pastures, to the rain and the dews of heaven, to the springs and rivulets with which it waters the earth."

Today, we live by an amalgam of personal and community land ethics in the Mad River Valley. This sense of responsibility to the land and our history takes many forms, including:

- farmers who build manure storage facilities and maintain vegetative buffers along streams;

Volunteers install a streambank stabilization system on the banks of the Mad River, Fall 1996.

- forest owners who use selective cutting practices and install water bars on their skid roads;
- landowners who allow the public to use their land for snowmobiling, fishing, hiking, skiing, hunting, and nature study;
- home and business owners who restore historic structures;
- residents who write letters, regular columns and articles in the local newspaper about river health, backyard nature, and statewide environmental concerns;
- businesses and industries which seek environmentally sound solutions to previously harmful problems or by-products;

- towns which articulate conservation values in their Town Plans, pass protective regulations, and appropriate funds for land conservation;
- volunteers who create greenways, stabilize riverbanks and monitor wildlife populations; and
- citizens who participate in hearings and speak out on behalf of their quality of life, the bears, the river, and scenic resources.

Most often, concern for rural resources takes the form of an unspoken sense of responsibility—a sense of doing what is right for us, our children, our community, and the land.

2 People of the Valley

In the summer of 1996, a roundtable to discuss rural resources was held at the Lareau Farm Inn. Jeff Squires, Deputy Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Transportation and former Director of the Mad River Valley Planning District, pointed out that the essential ingredients in protecting rural character are the appreciation and energy of local residents, along with their willingness to work toward consensus. From his comments:

Winter Carnival Snowshoe Race

"The Planning District is unique in the state of Vermont. The fact that the Planning District has sustained itself is testimony to the quality of the people in the Valley. When I think about why this [concern for rural resources and the future of the Valley] all came about and why it has been sustained, it has a lot to do with the quality of place—the physical and natural attributes of this place. But I think it has certainly as much to do with the alchemy of the people; the combination of the extraordinary people who are here. The combination of people who are excited and appreciative of this place has been the single most important factor in creating the energy that has sustained the good work. The Valley has established real success stories. What is unique is your ability to find commonalities and build on them."

When we speak of rural resources in the Valley the focus tends to be on the natural elements of the landscape. Yet, as Jeff Squires points out, it is also the alchemy of the people that defines the quality of place.

Voices

Following are some of voices of the Valley describing their neighbors and the place they call home, past and present.

Kinny Connell

"Those early days were hard days, but on the other hand they were wonderful days too... Most everybody was in the same category as far as finances were concerned... There wasn't much money to play around with... but they were always self-sufficient, because they raised their gardens and they had their pigs, and they had their cattle and you know the hens and... their maple syrup...This probably was one reason why in the Depression most of the people had plenty of food around here."

–Otis Wallis, *VT Folklife Oral History*, 1992

Voices

"The Mad River Valley lacks the commercial ambiance of Stowe, yet isn't quite a quiet set of farming villages any more either. What makes a place special? The scenery? The people? Our Valley is blessed with both... From the original settlers, whose families have been here for generations, to the newer arrivals still trickling in, we draw our strength."

–from "The Fabric of the Mad River Valley" by Katherine de Marne Werner, as it appeared in the 1995 Waitsfield Telecom phone book.

Growing up in a Place of Change

In an interview recorded by Tara Hamilton, Valley natives Pam Barnard and Rick Thompson describe how they perceive the place they live and how they have adjusted to the changes over the years. They touch upon various elements of rural living including the need for jobs and affordable housing. They also identify challenges that arise as a rural community is transformed into a resort community, including rising land prices, traffic congestion, and the loss of access to open spaces. They remind us that rural character means more that just having pretty mountains to look at. It involves an awareness of the many needs of the community and a commitment toward meeting those needs. In this way we can sustain rural character as a reality, rather than as a romanticized ideal.

Tara: What is most important to your quality of life here in the Valley?

Pam: The small town rural nature that is a part of the town I feel connected to for having grown up here. That's really very important. Also, the varying geography, the open spaces, the woods, the hills, there's such a variability which lends itself to finding community places, private spaces, and sacred places of your own.

Rick: Having that rock you can sit on a nice fall day when the sun is just right and the wind is blowing the rustling leaves.

Tara: What are some specific places that are most important in defining the character of the Mad River Valley?

Pam: For natural spaces I would say the whole flood plain, the river along the bottom of the valley, all the open fields which were active farmland, and the mountains.

Rick: There's a place over on the Rolston Road that goes right by a big meadow that I used to spend time haying for a farmer. I used to watch the weather come over the mountains. You could almost dream that it's a prairie with a big sky and then all of a sudden, boom, you descend into the valley. If you go down certain times in the morning it's cool down there and warm up here, or the other way around at certain times of the year. I spend time wandering through fields and woods and transition areas. It's become more difficult to do that because people are posting land or you find out that they don't really like people going by. I honestly don't know which is the greater of the two joys, working in the woods or just looking at them.

Tara: How about describing some specific places that are special to you?

Pam: The farm where I grew up, which is soon to be sold, on the Common Road. It's just emotional, it's an incredibly powerful connection for me, to just walk up in those fields. It's incredibly beautiful too, it's more than just the personal memories. I remember many stories; my father, Clesson Eurich and my Uncle Clarence Tucker talking about places in the Valley. When you are out actually working in the fields or working in the woods you have a different appreciation for the land; it's a really nice connection. It's not only nostalgic, you become

Pam Barnard

The old Barnard Farm (now owned by Lang/Outwater)

familiar with the trees, with the lay of the land, and with the way the water drains. You become very familiar with it in almost an intimate way. It's really nice to know a piece of land that way.

Tara: Are there places that you feel are threatened?

Pam: Yes, particularly our old place. It was purchased and sold and became a commodity. That was the hardest thing for me to swallow because it was never that in my eyes. It was a little more in my parents' eyes of course. They were the ones financially invested in it. It was really a shock to me that it can become something that people wheel and deal and make money off of. But it was subdivided very carefully and it will become a very exclusive neighborhood because the land is so expensive. Certainly, people say it could have been a whole lot worse. I can't just walk up there and appreciate it because I'm on somebody else's property. I could ask every owner, and they'd probably say "Sure, you can walk on the land." But it has a whole different feel. I do feel a threat from the economics of the Valley. It's very expensive to live here. It's becoming the haves and the have-nots. The beautiful uplands now belong to people with a lot of resources. It didn't use to be that way.

Tara: People seem to have different perspectives on whether the tourism was welcome or not.

Pam: The sense that I have is that in the beginning the tourism brought amenities. It made life easier in some ways, but

Rick Thompson

Pam Barnard

it started to make a turn in the 1980's to be the dominant presence in the valley, economically. Everything started being geared toward tourism. It changes everything. It changes who lives here, it changes the kind of stores that are here, the kind of people. It changes the whole community. I think it's hard to keep a core rural community and be a tourist attraction at the same time. That's what I really fear—is that we're going to lose the local community. There are practical things, like trying to make a turn out of Bridge Street. You feel like you're inundated and it scares me to think that people want that year round.

Rick: Say it's Saturday afternoon and you need groceries and you start kicking yourself for not going Saturday morning. Why? Because there's going to be so many people in the store and so much traffic. It can lead to frustration. Time goes by and you realize you start planning some of your own daily life around what these other people are doing that are coming into your community, and you say this place isn't even mine anymore, is it?

Pam: And of course some people would say that's a small price to pay. The comment that really gets my goat is people who say accusingly "You know you wouldn't be here if it wasn't for... " and they don't know what they're talking about because I would be here. Both of us would probably be here some way or another.

Tara: Do you think the rural character and natural resources of the Valley should be preserved and if so why?

Pam: Yes I do... because it's what makes it the place that it is.

Rick: For me it's the dominant frame of reference... the sense of place is what's in that rural environment.

Tara: Is the rural character threatened?

Pam: Yes.

Rick: Oh yeah.

Tara: What are its most significant threats?

Pam: Two things: one is the constant flow of strangers in and out of the Valley. Two is the economic strings that are making it really hard to be here unless you have a lot of money. It's pulling away from the middle, that the people who don't have the ability to have their own home are really in trouble.

Tara: What are some ways the community might try to protect or mediate these threats?

Pam: First, I think the economic community has to be diverse, we have to not be solely reliant on tourism. Second, is the issue of affordable housing. I know it's written in to certain documents. We've talked about making it part of any major subdivision, but it's never been pushed, and it probably won't... but that needs to happen. Also, there's a piece about keeping and fostering the community. The school needs to stay strong. It is a really defining piece of a community. Different churches are thriving, different ones are struggling, but those are part of a community. I try to support local businesses, we both do that. It might be cheaper to go some place else like the big discount stores. I can't even imagine doing that. You pay a little bit more... but I also feel it's important to support your local hardware store, and local grocery.

Tara: Do you think the expansion at Sugarbush Ski Resort will affect character of the Valley?

Pam: Potentially, yes. But, I do think that there are enough people who are watching it. Maybe because it's been so dramatic. People are saying "hey we don't want to become a Sunday River." On one hand I'm really scared, but I also think that enough people have their hair raised up and are going to the meetings. And I suspect we will be a different place for them than the other ski areas that they have.

Voices

"I figure if skiing was my recreation, it could be my business."

---Henry Perkins, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

"My brother and I worked in the woods. In [those] days you cut a thousand feet and you got two dollars and a half."

---Nelson Patch, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

3 Making a Living in the Valley

For two centuries, farming and forestry remained integral parts of the land-based economy in the Valley. However, in the mid-1900's the local economy began to change with the opening of three ski areas: Mad River Glen in 1948, Sugarbush in 1958, and Glen Ellen in 1962. There are now many ski and tourist-related businesses in the Valley. In addition, the variety of outdoor activities has made the Valley an attractive year round recreation center.

Tourism and recreation are only a part of the overall economic picture of the Valley. Due to the increased sophistication of communication technology, an increasing number of people now conduct business from their homes or satellite offices.

A view of Sugarbush Resort across snowfields

Manufacturing, transportation, and communication firms as well as other small businesses also support the local economy.

There have been dramatic changes in economics and resource use in the past 100 years. Historically, natural resources from the land supported a local, or perhaps regional economy. Today, raw materials from rural communities throughout the world support a global economy. The Valley is no exception. Valley saw logs are fashioned into fine furniture sold throughout the region. Cows' milk from Valley farms is distributed in the Boston market. Local pumpkins become jack-o-lanterns on porches throughout the northeast. Maple syrup graces pancakes and waffles all over the country. Our scenery provides the backdrop for cherished snapshots in photo albums in Boston, New York, Europe, and beyond.

There are many benefits to the global economy including job opportunities and access to a variety of goods and services at reasonable costs. But there can be drawbacks as well, including the loss of local cultures and the degradation of rural resources. In recent years there has been a growing interest in "sustainable development" and the creation of sustainable local economies as a way of keeping economic benefits closer to home, enhancing social equity and protecting the environment. The United Nations Commission on Environment and Development's report, *Our Common Future* defines sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". Sustainable development embraces concerns for prosperity, human welfare, and the overall quality of life of our communities. Section Four of this guide explores steps that can be taken to enhance our local economy and encourage the sustainable use of rural resources.

Sugaring

Pumpkin harvest

"At the moment, the rural East—like almost every other part of the globe—is whipsawed by economies vastly beyond its control. The look of our landscape and the patterns of our lives are determined by the global economy of timber and paper, and by the regional economies that drive second-home construction. We need something else: an economy that not only doesn't require endless growth to sustain it, but begins doing with less; one that not only stops pitting jobs against the environment, but begins to question what jobs mean and how much money they should pay. An economy that begins to decouple the region from the globe, increasing its self-reliance and sustainability."

–Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, 1995.

Voices

"So I got a bright idea to go into the gasoline business after cruising Route 100 after 4 o'clock in the afternoon... Nobody was open. Mad River Glen was already here since 1948... and we heard Sugarbush was coming in, and I said, 'Well, it'll be a lot of traffic.' So I jacked the building up and pulled it over there and put it in the field where I used to raise corn and hay and grazed my cattle. Put in a set of bathrooms. And then I built a dairy bar next to it, and we ran that for 24 years I guess."

---Hap Gaylord, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

4 The Community

The original settlers of the Mad River Valley shared a sense of community through activities such as barn raisings, church suppers, dances and town meetings. "Community" implied friendliness, family traditions, safety, trust, security, and responsibility for the youth and elders of the society.

Katharine Hartshorn, the Warren Town Historian writes:

"Everyone got together to 'raise' a barn or house, get wood for their firewood, logs to saw for timber, husk corn, tie quilts, etc. These events became social events with local music and food supplied by the neighborhood women... For years, the small children were 'baby-set' at the village school while parents attended Town Meeting. Meals were served at the noon recess by the church ladies. People got reacquainted with friends and neighbors. Everyone attended."

In the past, community was firmly rooted in "place". The Green Mountains and Northfield Range defined a geographic area where a diversity of Valley residents lived, worked, played, and governed themselves. Community was a requirement for rural living, an absolute necessity for survival. People worked out their differences, or came together in spite of them.

Today the modern worlds of on-line chat rooms, worldwide communications, the global economy, and rapid and inexpensive travel challenge our local geographic linkages. More and more often, people are finding a sense of community in interest groups and social circles ranging far from home. Sense of community tied to *place* is threatened in the United States.

Fayston Town Meeting Lunch

But the Valley is fortunate. Our geographic ties are strong. We still have our church suppers, community dances and Town Meeting lunches. In addition, community ties foster such endeavors as the building of the Skatium; the creation of a community fund and periodic fund-raisers to help people in need; the volunteer fire

Voices

"In this area we were fortunate that we had the mountains that people wanted to ski off from. If it wasn't for Sugarbush Ski Area and Mad River [Glen] we would still be popple trees and poverty."

---Jack Larrow, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

and ambulance services; the running of the Triathlon; support for local land conservation; the purchase and renovation of historic buildings such as the Wait House; the creation of an arts and cultural center; and much more. The Valley has a strong sense of place whereby residents share a responsibility for maintaining community values, including caring for one another, our historic resources, and the land.

Participants in the August, 1996 Rural Resource Roundtable ranked sense of community as the most significant factor in defining rural character. Their sentiments included:

"Shared community values [in the Valley] include a sense of space, a desire to experience the land and a responsibility."

"It is about connections—people living and working together—relationships—sharing."

"Rural is at least partly a state of mind of the people who belong in the community."

"A community where everyone respects and cares about each other."

"A functioning community is accessible, has open institutions, people share interests and there is mutual respect and a sense of responsibility."

Rubber Duckie Race fundraiser for MRV Ambulance

Dads and their little girls at the Skatium

An important reflection of our sense of community has been the long-standing commitment to the protection of rural character. Since the enactment of local zoning in the 1970's, selectboard members and planning commissioners in Valley towns have understood the role of local government in protecting rural resources. In 1979, when planning was still a foreign word in many Vermont towns, Valley selectboards supported the Mad River Valley Growth Study, a comprehensive assessment of the community's future. Three years later a major expansion at Sugarbush Ski Area was proposed. The towns worked together through the Federal Environmental Impact Statement process to ensure that the

Voices

"And of course during the war everybody tried to do a little more, but by then a lot of the smaller farms were already closed, they were already absorbed by the neighbor. They got twice as big, that seemed to be a trend at one time, bigger is better."

---Rupert Blair, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

Voices

"Sugarbush has invested heavily in its resort and in the educational and cultural growth of the Mad River Valley. We view ourselves as an integral component of a diverse community that revolves around the region's magnificent natural resources. We also see ourselves as a resource... for a variety of educational, environmental and cultural programs and services, as well as a resource for members of the region aspiring to enter a profession in disciplines ranging from computer programming to law, planning, marketing, and recreational management. We recognize the unique character of the Valley and are committed to growing our business and opportunities for our community in harmony with that character... for that is what brings people to our collective doors."

–Rich McGarry, Managing Director of Sugarbush Resort, 1997

Sugarbush Food Drive

proposed development in the Green Mountain National Forest did not over burden the local infrastructure and degrade the Valley's resources.

The Planning District was created in 1985. It remains the only such planning entity of its kind in the state of Vermont. It is governed by a steering committee composed of a planning commissioner and selectperson from each town, as well as a representative from the local business community and an ex officio member from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. Sugarbush Resort is an active participant in the District and funds 25 percent of its annual budget. The purpose of the District is to plan for the future of the Mad River Valley, specifically the "physical, social, economic, fiscal, environmental, cultural and aesthetic well-being of the Towns of Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren." Since its inception, the district has assumed a leadership role in protecting the natural resources and rural character of the Valley, as well as providing long term planning direction.

In the fall of 1987 the Planning District initiated the Rural Resource Protection Project to inventory rural resources and develop a conservation strategy. Funding was obtained from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation under the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program. The Rural Resource Protection Plan was published in 1988. From the Plan:

"The rural character of the Valley is a source of pride, pleasure and inspiration for Valley residents and visitors. The "whole" of rural resources is equal to much more than the sum of its parts. It is the combination of rural qualities and

Mad River Valley Steering Committee

Baseball on the Mad River Green

the relationships between them that give the Valley its sense of place and uniqueness. It is the rich history behind, and still evident in, the working land. It is the scenic contrasts between farm and village, woods and fields, mountainsides and river bottom. It is both the subtle and strikingly obvious variations of a rural landscape."

Specific aspects of rural character included in the inventory are: scenic resources, agricultural and open lands, river and trail resources, historic resources and archeological sites, and outstanding resource areas —where elements of rural resources combine including scenic farms along the river, and public trails which offer vistas.

In the nine years since the project began, great progress has been made toward community awareness of rural resources. Successful protection efforts include land and river conservation initiatives, historic preservation efforts, trail and greenway creation and town plan revisions.

The success of the effort is due largely to the Planning District's leadership and our community's belief that the protection of rural character will not happen on its own. Section Three offers a glimpse of some of the accomplishments that have been a direct or indirect result of the Rural Resource Protection Plan and the community land ethic that it has helped foster.

Voices

"Initially, I was drawn to the Valley by its physical structure—a community folded between the hills. The community, which is the people and the landscape, has inspired me to build my home here and settle in."

–Craig Goss, Fayston

2 Tough Questions

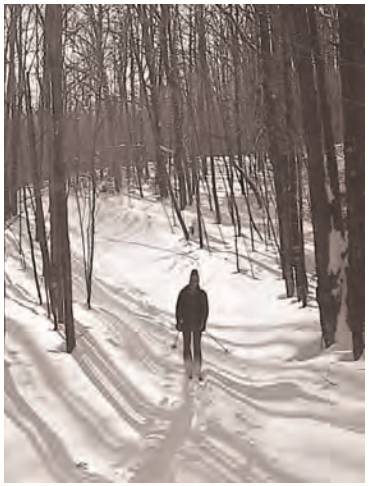
"Successful gateway communities... have the ability to recognize, and the courage to reject, development that doesn't enhance local values. At the same time, they should realize that they can't deal with the challenge of growth simply by resisting all change... Change is inevitable, but it does not have to come at the expense of what citizens and communities value. We can either be victims of change or we can plan for it, shape it, and emerge stronger from it. The choice is ours."

–Jim Howe, Ed McMahon, and Luther Propst
Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities, 1997

Julie Campoli

Houses sited in the middle of a field, southern Vermont.

Ann D. Day



Town and cities that border public lands are considered gateway communities. The Mad River Valley is one such community bordering the Green Mountain National Forest, a popular destination for downhill and cross-country skiing, hiking, hunting, and other outdoor activities. The scenic beauty and quality of life in these communities attract tourists and new residents fleeing from the noise, traffic, over-development and crowding of suburban and urban areas.

Throughout the United States there are areas where the natural beauty is so significant that, in an effort to capitalize on that beauty, rural character is severely compromised. Towns are losing their identities. Country roads become arteries carrying consumers from shopping plaza

to shopping plaza. Scenic farms and ridgelines sprout poorly sited houses. Developments are named after the very resources they are replacing.

The irony is that while much is gained in terms of economic growth, the very resources that were so cherished—the farmland—scenery—the quiet, uncrowded atmosphere—the feelings of expansive wilderness—the abundant wildlife—and the historic character—are all diminished and sometimes lost entirely. Tourists still visit many of these places, but for very different reasons.

We might hope, or wish, that these things could never happen here. But given the reality of the times we live in, the population growth of this country, and the Valley's proximity to major metropolitan areas and employment centers such as Chittenden County, Waterbury and Barre/Montpelier, we have to ask: Are there signs of it happening? Do we care? What can we do?

1 The Goose and the Golden Egg

The economic benefits of tourism to the local community are substantial. According to a supplement to the June 1996 Mad River Valley Economic Model, approximately 87% of the primary revenue stream in the Valley is tourist related. In addition, the ski areas and condominiums constitute a major portion of the grand lists in Warren and Fayston, as do tourist-related businesses in Waitsfield. Although the ski areas do not directly employ most residents, many economic livelihoods depend on the resorts.

One of the goals of Sugarbush is to become a four-season resort, with a conference center to attract business in the off season. According to the ski company's December 1996 Master Development Plan, it also hopes to increase annual skier visits from about 340,000 (18 year average) to 600,000 by the year 2001.

In many resort communities, economic development is synonymous with land development. Ski areas often rely on the sale of condominiums, hotel rooms and other real estate to ensure adequate profit margins. Also, increased skier visitation and "four season" tourism can result in secondary impacts, including the development of the land base and the loss of rural character.

A major question facing the Mad River Valley is whether we can retain our rural character, protect our natural resources and enjoy the benefits of the economic growth associated with a major ski and summer resort area. We have become accustomed to hearing phrases like "the Valley's natural beauty is its greatest economic asset." But can we live off the interest from that asset without spending the principal? When does the quest for economic betterment tip the scales too far towards resource degradation, killing the "goose that laid the golden egg?"

Bragg Hill view of Mount Ellen

Voices

"It is very obvious that Sugarbush is the largest employer in the Valley and that the economy here would die or be non-existent if the ski complex was not here... Many of us who were born here remember the struggles. We remember it all before Sugarbush. We appreciate the trees and the shade that they provide, but we also know that money does not grow on trees. We want to save trees, too, but we have to live. We remember when there only was farming and logging, yes logging, all the time."

–Bob Kingsbury, From *The Valley Reporter* February 14, 1997, Letter to the Editor

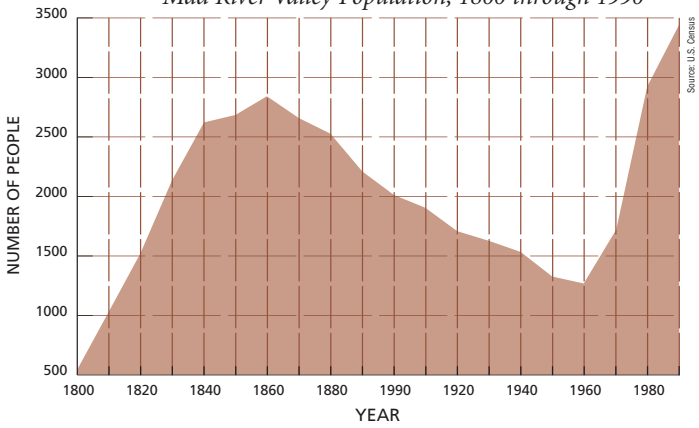
2 Saving Place

In any rural community, the sense of place is rarely static. Each new house, ski trail, tour bus, business, school addition, paved road, robbery, and traffic jam redefines the sense of place. No one wants to admit to wishing they could "shut the door" behind them, but is that how some residents feel? Some residents wish we could freeze the Valley today, or yesterday, or at some point tomorrow. Some think or say with regret: "This is not the Valley I chose to live in" or "This is not the place I grew up in."

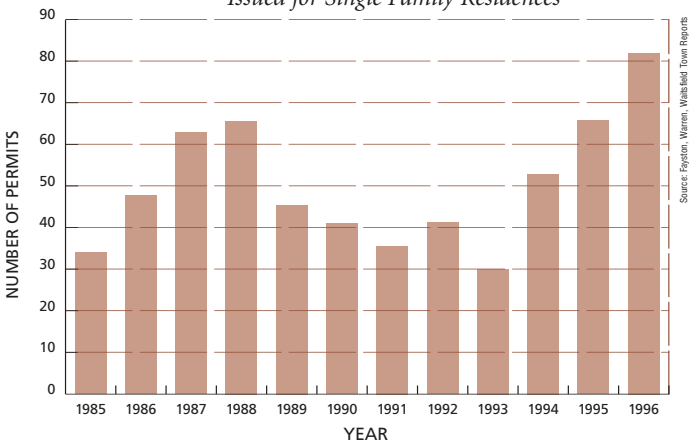
Not only has the population grown over the years, it has changed. There is much less focus on the land as the direct source of sustenance and livelihood. Transportation improvements have made the area easily accessible. During peak tourist times such as fall foliage, Fourth of July, Christmas and Presidents' Weeks, the number of people in the Valley swells the local population of about 3,500 to upwards of 13,000.

In coming years it is likely that we will feel increased pressures of year-round and seasonal population growth. It is important that we work together as a community to find ways to save our sense of place and protect our resources without feeling the need to shut the door on future growth.

Mad River Valley Population, 1800 through 1990



Mad River Valley Building Permits Issued for Single Family Residences

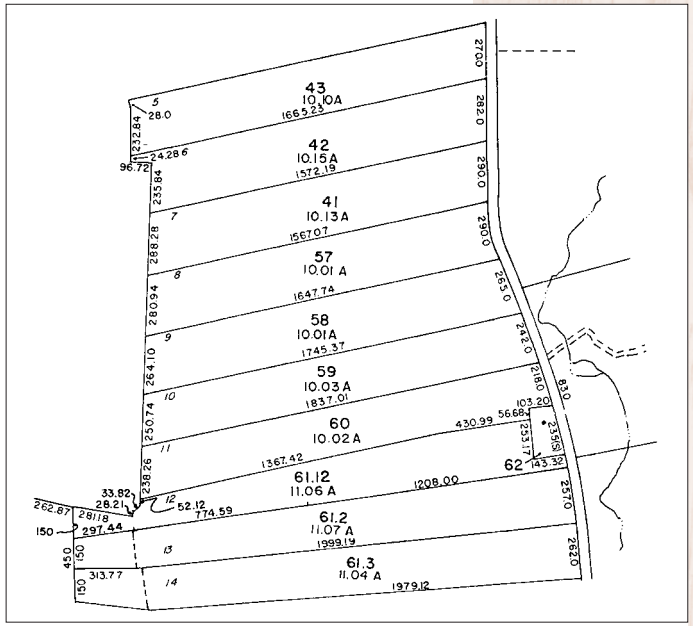


3 Land Fragmentation

One of the greatest threats to rural character is the fragmentation of land. Subdividing land for housing and other uses can cause habitat loss, reduce hunting, fishing and recreational uses, and result in the loss of scenic beauty. Over the years, all of the Valley towns have experienced some degree of fragmentation and parcelization of their land base.

In the mid-1990's, a debate erupted in Waitsfield over develop-

ment on the Northfield Mountain Range. Fear of losing this scenic ridgeline to a smattering of houses prompted the Waitsfield Planning Commission to propose a ridgeline zoning amendment which would prohibit development over 1,700 feet in elevation and restrict development between 1,500 and 1,700 feet. In addition to concerns over scenery degradation, land fragmentation and headwater impacts, the 1993 Town Plan states that traditional land uses such as forest management, wildlife habitat, low impact recreation, and hunting are threatened by increasing development pressures.



Subdivision plan showing 10-acre "spaghetti" lots

The Ridgeline Discussion

The Northfield Range proposal raised the issue of private property rights versus the public good. This issue is playing out in communities and the courts all over the country. Some Northfield Range landowners have stated that the Town should not unreasonably infringe on their rights as property owners to make use of their land. The Planning Commission is working toward finding common ground to recognize the public good while instituting reasonable safeguards against environmentally damaging development.

"Unlike so much of the country, the Valley has retained its beauty and unique character. We owe a huge thanks to our predecessors for their careful stewardship, and we have an obligation to future generations to continue that stewardship. Given today's development pressure, especially in sensitive areas such as the Northfield Range, this will require tremendous commitment and sacrifice. If we don't rise to the challenge and protect these areas, though, we will have failed the future." –Brian Shupe, Waitsfield

"Take the Northfield Ridge for instance—to say that no development can take place there at all I think is the wrong thing to do, but they can have some measures that will encourage the owners to do the right thing. There's got to be an incentive or else it won't work. It's the same old thing, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. If they [Town / State] want individual ownership, which I think is essential to maintaining our democratic system of life, they've got to recognize the rights of the individual."
–Ed Eurich, Waitsfield

Voices

"And I go to that store and don't know anybody hardly. And I don't like that. We used to know most everybody...You read the paper, you don't know the names in the paper."

---Jessmine Larrow, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

"People say we have to get more people here-—more tourists—we have to have growth to survive. Some think that the only way is growth, everything has to get bigger and bigger, you have to sell more and more, you have to get more and more people here, or you have to consume more and more. How long can that go on? It can't go on forever."
---John Gallagher, Moretown

Voices

"We lost that [pasture] land, and a lot of other land around. Houses were built where we had cattle pastures. And the ski traffic. Fourth of July and the Air Show Day were big days for us to try to get across the road or get the cattle across. The kids used to play out in the yard, right in the road when they were growing up. Now it's not safe to walk up and down the road. They just wouldn't be playing out there anymore. Used to be a very quiet road. Occasional traffic. The milk truck came in maybe and the mailman, and that was about it."

–Marline DeFreest, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

In early 1997, an interim zoning bylaw for Waitsfield's Forest Reserve District was passed. Its purpose is *"to protect significant forest resources, water supply, watersheds, forest ecosystems, and wildlife habitat at higher elevations; to assure continued present and future outdoor recreational opportunities along the ridge; to keep the visual character of the ridge natural and undisturbed; and to exclude development in areas with steep slopes, shallow soils, unique or fragile resources, wildlife habitat, and poor access to town roads and community facilities and services."* The Town of Waitsfield plans to use the two-year time period afforded by the zoning to study long-term management options for this area.

Warren Fourth of July parade

4 The Future of Agriculture

Farming is an essential part of our rural infrastructure. The fact that the Valley has maintained an agricultural base is a testament to hard working and dedicated farmers. It may be an overstatement to say that agriculture is thriving, but it is hanging on. As of 1997, the Valley had approximately 15 farms, including dairy farms, beef operations, sheep farms, vegetable farms and a deer farm. There are literally thousands of acres in productive agriculture in the Valley. We now have several small commercial agricultural operations including farmstands and organic produce. The Waitsfield Farmers Market offers food and produce from local farmers—maple syrup, apples, organic beef, pork, poultry and vegetables. The purchase of development rights by the Vermont Land Trust and the Town of Warren has permanently protected approximately 700 acres of active farmland.

Despite these positive aspects, agriculture in the region is challenging. Farmers must contend with high property taxes, difficulties finding labor, traffic, the low price of milk, and the lack of efficient modern equipment and barns. Many farmers are nearing or at retirement age and the land is their nest egg. High real estate values make it difficult to pay taxes and create a challenge for conservation efforts. The future of farming in the Valley is not guaranteed.

5 Property Tax Reform

In January 1997, the Vermont Supreme Court decided that the State's method of financing education was unconstitutional. The *Brigham* decision forced the State legislature into action. As this document goes to press, property tax reform raises more questions that answers:

1. Will towns continue to recruit new businesses? What are the incentives for such action?
2. Will/can communities continue to offer local tax stabilization programs for farming and forestry?

Neill farm

3. How will development activity change?
4. Will there be an increase in subdivision activity in the towns with high tax rates?
5. Will the State and regional planning commissions step up to the plate and assist communities in siting facilities in locations based on infrastructure and efficient land use vs. tax benefits?
6. How will reform affect conservation efforts?

6 Finding Balance

The world has become highly sophisticated since the Valley was settled 200 years ago. This sophistication adds richness to our work, recreational pursuits, social interactions, and sense of community. It also creates new challenges and opportunities as we seek the delicate balance between our reliance on technology and our attachment to the land; between our need for economic growth and our satisfaction with the simple pleasures of life; between our worldly connections and our need for a sense of community is rooted in the place we live.

Larry and Linda Faillace tend their sheep

It is essential that we continue a dialogue in which difficult questions can be asked and openly discussed, and trade-offs thoroughly and thoughtfully considered, so that the community can move toward a shared understanding of what is needed to protect the qualities of the Valley that bring us here and keep us here.

Voices

"I've always said that Vermont was a good state until about 1950 when all the Flatlanders came up here, they changed everything around. And, I'm one that's very independent. I believe that if you own a piece of property you have the right to do what you want to with it. I'll go along with maybe some regulations, but I think things are just going a little too far. We've always felt that one owned a piece of property to do whatever they wanted to with it. And as long as it didn't interfere too much with the neighbors."

–Otis Wallis, *VT Folklife Oral History,* 1992

3 WE PROTECT WHAT WE HOLD DEAR

Virginia Farley

A Record of Accomplishments

The following section describes accomplishments of the Rural Resource Protection Project, as well as other efforts to conserve rural resources in recent years. It is important that as we engage in the challenges of today and anticipate the opportunities of the future, we also remember to celebrate our recent successes.

Three properties, totalling nearly 3,500 acres are visible in this photo taken from Maple Avenue in Waitsfield. They are: the Defreest farm (foreground), Knoll farm (right middle ground) and Phenn Basin (background).

MRVPD

1 Land Conservation

In 1985, the Mad River Valley Planning District established a partnership with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT). VLT is a nonprofit conservation organization active in the conservation of farms, productive forests, scenic and recreational lands, and important wildlife habitat. This partnership has resulted in the permanent protection of over 5,000 acres of land throughout the Valley, including:

- the scenic 150-acre Knoll Farm and the adjoining 269-acre Brightenback parcel in Fayston;
- the addition of the 3,100-acre Phenn Basin in Fayston to Camel's Hump State Park and Reserve;

Virginia Farley

- the Eurich Pond and Double Top Mountain limited development properties in Warren;
- the 1,000-acre Maple Avenue Project in Waitsfield, including the 200-acre DeFreest farm, the 180-acre Joslyn farm, the 360-acre Scrag Municipal Forest, the 114-acre Hoblitzelle property, and the 37-acre Lang/Outwater property;
- the scenic Route 100 Maynard and Turner farms totaling 380-acres with 11,000 feet of river frontage; and
- the important Maclay and Farnsworth properties.

These conservation projects were achieved through a variety of means including: donations of land and conservation easements from generous landowners; funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and private foundations; pre-acquisition by the Trust for Public Land; town appropriations; private donations and other sources. In addition to these conservation efforts, the Town of Warren has guaranteed the permanent protection of 225-acres of farmland through a local purchase of development rights program. Also during the summer of 1997, Sugarbush donated an easement to the Green Mountain Club protecting two miles of the Long Trail, the largest donation in the Club's history.

The Valley also benefits from Camel's Hump State Park (3,481-acres) and the Green Mountain National Forest (6,298-acres). These lands offer superb outdoor recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and scenic views. A recent local effort added the stunningly beautiful and popular Warren Falls to U.S. Forest Service holdings in the Valley.

In addition to these land conservation efforts, the Slide Brook basin has been the subject of intense interest in recent years. The area has the largest and most intensively used beech stand in the state, known to date. Beech trees provide critical black bear habitat, as beech nuts are a staple in the bears' diets. Sugarbush Ski Resort, the U.S. Forest Service, the State of Vermont, and a local citizens group are working together to find a permanent solution to protect Slide Brook. Currently, ski development in the basin is being monitored to sustain the remote habitat.

Harrison Snapp

"Bear nest"

PHENN BASIN

For over 30 years Phenn Basin in Fayston had been managed by a local timber company for sustained yield forest production. In 1994 the land was sold to an out-of-state developer and the timber rights were sold to a Canadian timber company. The objective was to remove nearly every board foot of marketable timber through a diameter cut, minus some minimal stream and roadside buffers. Softwood plantations were to be clear cut. Other softwoods over eight inches in diameter, as well as all hardwoods over 12 inches in diameter were headed for Canada.

To forestall the heavy cutting of timber on the 3,100 acre property, no less than a dozen organizations and agencies worked together to support State acquisition of the land. The Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation organization, the Vermont Land Trust and the Mad River Valley Planning District led the effort.

Everett Maynard and Albert Turner

VOICES

"We investigated the Vermont Land Trust very thoroughly, as we'd had some reservations about it. We found nothing wrong and what they proposed suited our situation. The land will remain open at least. We know the land won't be developed. I didn't want it developed. I lived here most of my life and I kind of like it."

–Albert Turner, From *The Valley Reporter* article "Turners, Maynards join land conservation efforts" by Lisa Loomis, June 16, 1996

"We wanted to protect the property so it wouldn't be developed. There is quite a lot of pressure on farmland and it is getting scarce. This way, if our son wants to farm, this will give him an opportunity to continue."

–Everett Maynard, From *The Valley Reporter* article "Turners, Maynards join land conservation efforts" by Lisa Loomis, June 16, 1996

Voices

"If you harvest a piece of wood land so that it can't be harvested again for forty years, you're almost guaranteeing that someone is going to sell it for development because you can't wait for 40 years to get money out of it. If you harvest it sustainably—if you take a few trees off of it every year and in a sustainable way—it's going to at least pay its own taxes. I think that short-term thinking in the logging industry is very threatening to the Valley's rural resources."

–Randy Taplin, Warren

"You shouldn't be able to make a killing off the land. A living, yes. A killing, no."

–Kate Stevens, Fayston

Virginia Farley

Heavy cutting on Ward Hill in Duxbury

Joining in as major players were the Town of Fayston, the Vermont Forest Parks and Recreation Department, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Sweet Water Trust, the Green Mountain Club and the Catamount Trail Association. Governor Howard Dean, U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), the Mad River Path Association, the Friends of the Mad River, the Mad River Valley Recreation District all lent critical support to the undertaking.

The result of this collaboration was the addition of a highly significant resource to Camel's Hump State Park and Reserve including remote headwater streams, beaver ponds, migratory songbird habitat, black bear corridor, bobcat ledges and moose habitat. Conservation easements are held by the Vermont Land Trust, and the Catamount Trail Association holds a public access easement on two miles of cross-country ski trail. In addition, several miles of snowmobile trails have been maintained, and a 300-acre buffer for the Long Trail was insured. The property is now managed for a combination of biodiversity enhancements, forest production, and low impact recreation.

Virginia Farley

Information on river health is posted at various locations along the Mad River.

2 River and Streams

In 1990, an outgrowth of the Rural Resource Protection Plan and a fractious water withdrawal issue, a new watershed association was established "dedicated to protecting and improving the ecological, scenic and recreational value of the Mad River and its tributaries." In its seven years of existence, Friends of the Mad River (FMR) has become a highly effective voice for the River. Its major accomplishments include:

- publication (with the MRVPD) of the award winning *The Best River Ever: A conservation plan to protect and restore Vermont's beautiful Mad River Watershed*;
- sponsorship of the Mad River Watch Program which involves volunteers in on-going water quality monitoring of the river and tributaries, and the publication of test results in *The Valley Reporter*;
- erosion control work at the Bobbin Mill in Warren and the 1824 House in Waitsfield;
- active participation in the permit review process for new developments at Sugarbush Ski Area leading to the inclusion of several headwater protection initiatives in the development plans;

Sucosh Norton, Katie Sullivan and Elizabeth Walker install a river sign.

- the acquisition by the Town of Waitsfield of the popular Lareau Swim Hole and the development of a River Park plan for the property;
- initiation of the Mad River Valley Oral History Project produced by the Vermont Folklife Center;
- creation of Stream Teams, volunteers trained to assess the condition of streams and riparian zones to identify opportunities for stream enhancement and restoration projects.

In addition to these accomplishments, Friends of the Mad River has also achieved something less tangible but just as significant. It has created a tremendous awareness of the river and a sense of responsibility for its health. During the "1824 Site" riverbank restoration project, 65 volunteers logged 480 hours to secure hemlock trees in the 300-foot bank, place brush-rolls of alder and willow saplings, secure willow posts to the bank and plant 300 trees and bushes. Participants in that effort left the site day after day tired from the physical labor, but energized by the feeling of having helped restore a precious and shared resource.

Awareness of the river's health is also extended to the hundreds who read *The Valley Reporter* and its regular reports on river health. It has been suggested that the Valley is "E. coli literate," a reference to the bacteria that enter surface waters from failing septic systems and agricultural runoff. The general public now has an understanding of how land uses affect the water quality of our favorite swim holes, as well as the overall health of the River.

Sugarbush Triathlon

Yet, despite these successes, challenges to the river system persist. According to *The Best River Ever*, the river system is relatively healthy in the upland reaches, except where development is intense. Cool tempera-

Voices

"Our river is very important. When I was growing up here, the local doctor often closed the river to swimming in the summertime, and that seldom happens now. Our river is a lot cleaner now. I know that's hard for people to believe. When I was a selectman in the community, I remember going to some of the buildings and houses in the center of Waitsfield and talking about septic systems and making sure that they knew that they had to stop "straight piping" into the river. And certainly the evidence of rip-rapping the stream banks with junk cars, some of the practices that we did back then, you wouldn't think about doing today... so we've come a long way with the river. It certainly is an enormous recreation resource. We do the Sugarbush triathlon every spring, I happened to do the paddling part for my master's team and it's a very big part of the race, 140 canoes or kayaks on that water. That's something that we didn't do when I was growing up here."

–Dick Jamieson, Waitsfield

Voices

"We all need friends—even rivers. So it is with the Mad River, that meandering stream popular with swimmers, photographers and white water canoeists. It's not a particularly long stretch of water either, just 26 miles. But it happens to flow through some of the state's prettiest scenery, and some of the most expensive resort property in the Green Mountains. It starts unassumingly enough as a trill of water at a high point in Granville and ends much thicker at the Winooski... Luckily, here in the valley that bears its name, there are plenty of people who want to befriend a river. There are enough solid citizens who think water and trees and mountains should stay pretty much the way they were before the valley had a name."

–Art Edelstein in the *Times Argus Country Courier,* December 6, 1996

tures and clean water provide for healthy wild populations of brook and rainbow trout and safe swimming in many deep, cool pools. However, the river below Warren Village through Waitsfield and Moretown has problems. According to the plan these areas are affected by:

- streambanks with little shading from trees and shrubs and banks that have been riprapped for stabilization without providing for fish habitat;
- agricultural land worked close to the river, without adequate vegetated buffer strips;
- water temperatures higher in the lower reaches than in the upper reaches of the watershed, and contamination from failing on-site sewage systems; and
- erosion and sedimentation of streambeds from poorly managed stormwater runoff.

As a dynamic living system, the river and its riparian areas will require constant care and vigilance.

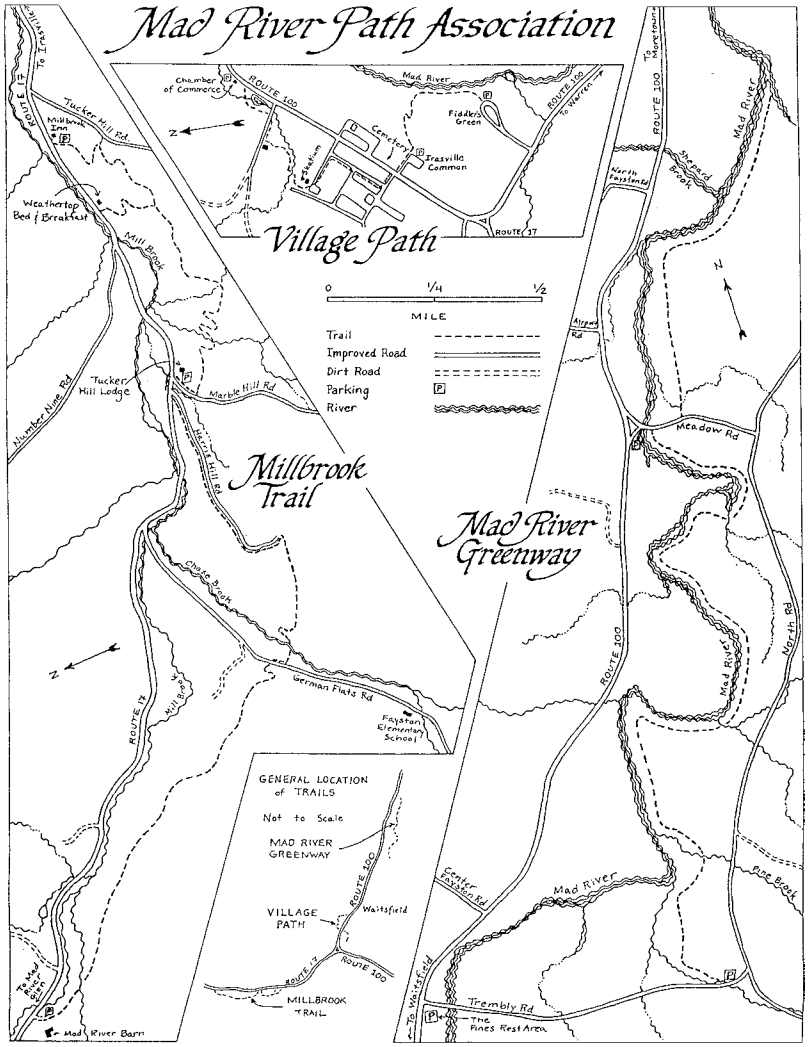
3 Trails and Greenways

The Valley is filled with trails, paths, logging roads and Class 4 roads —all with views and character of their own. We are lucky to experience these places, but very few are permanently protected by public ownership or easements. Through the efforts of the Rural Resource Protection Project, interest in local trails has grown.

In 1990 the Mad River Path Association was established. Initially, a loosely formed group, its purpose was to create a path linking the Valley towns. Its first effort was to create a one mile nature trail at the Warren Elementary School. Ninety people came to the first Mad River Path work day at Brooks Field in Warren. They installed culverts, built stone headers, organized the drainage, cut trees and planted grass. Young and old came with every tool from clippers and shovels to a full size loader and back hoe. In one rainy day, the whole one mile section was complete.

Ann D. Day

Nature walk along the Mad River Greenway



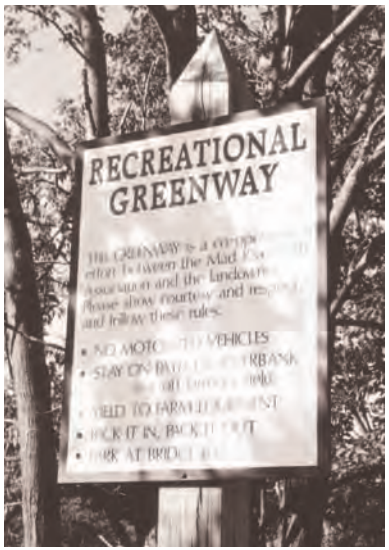
Macy Moulton

In 1993 the Mad River Path Association was formalized. It is a nonprofit volunteer organization whose mission is to create and maintain recreation trails throughout the Mad River Valley. It currently maintains eight miles of trail including:

- the Mad River Greenway—a 2-1/2 mile path along the Mad River;
- the Millbrook Trail—4 mile single track trail in Fayston;
- the Village Path—a 1-1/2 mile walking path connecting Fiddlers Green, Irasville Common and the Mad River Green in Waitsfield; and
- the Warren Nature Trail—a wooded path adjacent to Brooks Field and the Warren Elementary School.

Strong community support, generous landowners and many volunteers have made these trails possible. As a nonprofit community based organization, the Mad River Path Association uses a variety of methods to fund its programs including membership fees, donations, grants and creative activities.

The Catamount Trail Association (CTA) and the Green Mountain Club (GMC) are two other successful volunteer nonprofit organizations dedicated to developing and maintaining trails. Since 1985 CTA has made great strides towards protecting the

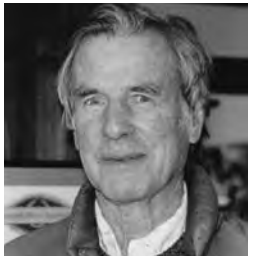


Virginia Farley

Voices

"It's nice to see people of all ages enjoying the Greenway. The Greenway is an opportunity for us to do something for the community. People respect the property and take good care of it. I'd like to see the path continue to Waitsfield Village and all the way to Moretown."

–Angela Neill, Waitsfield



"As more land is developed it will become more difficult to access the trails we now take for granted. For years, I've enjoyed riding my horses and hiking through the woods. If we don't protect these paths now, we won't have them to enjoy in the future and our grandchildren will miss out on one of the great assets of the Valley... a ride in the woods or a hike along the river."

–Arthur Williams, Fayston

Voices

"Just having the path enhances the quality of life here, because I value having access to trails both in the woods and along the river. Another special feature about the Valley is being able to hike on an afternoon, being able to say we're going to go up to Sunset Rock, or Burnt Rock or Scrag Mountain, or Mount Abe, having those choices right here where we live."

–Katie Sullivan, Waitsfield

280-mile cross country ski trail running the length of Vermont. About ten and a half miles of the trail winds its way through the western side of the Mad River Valley. The Long Trail which runs along the spine of the Green Mountains is maintained by GMC and enjoyed by Valley residents and visitors.

4 Historic Resources

The historic resources of the Valley include structures such as houses, businesses, barns, and covered bridges as well as the less apparent stone walls, cellar holes, landscapes, and dirt roads. There are many historic preservation success stories in the Valley. Below are some of the highlights.

Waitsfield Village

Waitsfield Village was the Valley's first listing on the National Register, nominated as an historic district in 1983. The village is typical of many New England historic districts. It is a concentration of historic structures dating from a range of periods in a classic village setting. The Village District includes the second oldest covered bridge in the State; the Waitsfield Federated Church which dominates the Village with its tall steeple; and the Joslin Memorial Library. At the southern edge of the village is the Bridge Street Marketplace. As a result of its nomination to the National Register, tax credits became available which enabled the Marketplace to be restored.

Keith Davidson

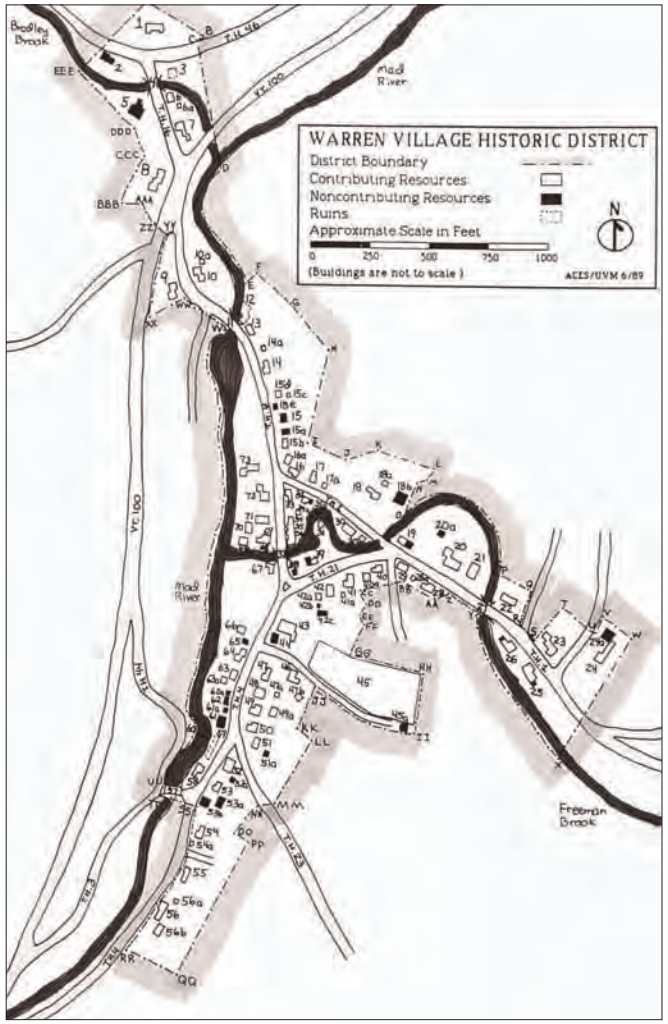
Aerial view of Waitsfield Village showing a portion of the historic district

Warren Village

The historic and architectural resources prevalent in Warren Village heavily influence its character. This is evidenced by the designation of the village as a Historic District on the

National Register of Historic Places in 1992. The village is an excellent example of small 19th century mill village that retained its character and context to the present with few alterations. The district includes 74 contributing buildings within 50 acres, running along Main Street and up Brook Road. Warren Village is bordered by steeply sloping, wooded hillsides that limit its expansion and form a visual backdrop. Waterways have strongly influenced the pattern of activity in the Village.

Thomas D. Visser



Mad River Valley Rural Historic District

In 1995 the Mad River Valley Rural Historic District was added to National Register of Historic Places. It is significant for its historic farmsteads and its reflection of historic agricultural practices. Located along a relatively flat stretch of fertile bottom land bordering the Mad River between the villages of Moretown and Waitsfield, it is enclosed on both east and west sides by rolling wooded hills. This 2,000-acre river valley district shows the continuum of agricultural history from the 1790's to today. In 1996 the 122-acre Turner farm and the 256-acre Maynard farm were permanently conserved through conservation easements. While there are some recent intrusions and some farms are no longer active, this district retains the appearance and activities of a traditional Vermont farm valley.

Ann D. Day

Knoll Farm

Knoll Farm

The Knoll Farm in Fayston was added to the National Register in 1996. The property had already been conserved through a donation of conservation easements to Vermont Land Trust under its historic name the McLaughlin Farm. Situated on a hillside overlooking the Valley floor,

Voices

"More and more we're seeing traditional buildings lost. There are a lot of people here, though, who have invested in the older buildings and barns which have been good locations for people to start small businesses. A good way to keep the barns in use is to see how we can encourage not only agricultural businesses, but other uses as well."

–Mary Gow, Warren

the Knoll Farm has some of the most visually sensitive land in the Valley. The 150-acre farmstead reflects the history of farming in the Mad River Valley. "It has changed, adapting bit by bit to accommodate the changes in the economy and the farming techniques, while retaining the original patterns of its buildings, pastures, and woodlands." *Elsa Gilbertson, State Office of Historic Preservation, 1995.*

Joslyn Round Barn

Joslyn Round Barn, which is listed on the National Register, was restored as an accessory to the Round Barn Inn in the 1980's. It houses the Green Mountain Cultural Center and is the site of a number of art exhibits, performances and public events. It is an example of a barn no longer used for agricultural purposes, but which still contributes to the rural and cultural landscape of the Valley.

Virginia Farley

Joslyn Round Barn and surrounding farmland in Waitsfield

General Wait House

The 1995 town acquisition of the historic Wait House was a significant achievement stemming from the Rural Resource Protection Plan. A coalition of local agencies and organizations worked with the town to acquire and renovate the building. The $400,000 project included the purchase and renovation of the property into a visitor center, offices, public meeting space, and restroom facilities. The Mad River Valley Planning District secured more than half the money through grants. The Waitsfield Historical Society raised $50,000 through fundraising and the remaining $120,000 was appropriated by Waitsfield taxpayers. The General Wait House was the first frame house in Waitsfield and was built in 1793. General Wait was a leader of the Green Mountain Boys and active in the Revolutionary War.

John Williams

General Wait House Dedication Ceremony, Fall 1997

Virginia Farley

He was also a civic leader, serving as a selectman and state representative. The Town of Waitsfield is named after him.

The preservation of historic resources continues to challenge landowners and the community. Funding is limited, and often the sensible use of the structures is at odds with historic characteristics. In addition, new uses for historic structures are not always obvious or practical. Some structures are simply lost to neglect.

Historic sites and structures are essential to our rural character. Their preservation should be an integral part of our planning and conservation efforts. Restoration and adaptive reuse should be encouraged whenever feasible.

4 Maintaining Rural Integrity

General Wait House Preserved — Phenn Basin Saved — 1824 House Riverbank Stabilized — Greenway Created — National Register Districts Established — Valley Farms Conserved — Slide Brook Bear Habitat Protected — Long Trail and Catamount Easements Secured

MRVPD

View of Sugarbush/Mount Ellen and Mad River Glen from Wrisley pasture in North Fayston

These and other success stories are to be celebrated. Few communities in Vermont have such a long-standing commitment to rural resource protection. Yet, we continue to grapple with tough and challenging choices about how we use our land, water, historic buildings and other rural resources. Rising to the challenges requires a firm commitment, clear vision and the necessary tools to achieve our goals.

MRVPD

Pines Picnic Area on Tremblay Road in Waitsfield

This section offers a variety of suggestions and ideas for the future such as: creating measures of a sustainable community, master planning, refining our vision, and improving land use tools. Many suggestions are drawn from other areas of the country facing similar challenges. We hope to offer a starting point for discussion through the various Valley governing boards, citizen groups, and businesses, as well as inspiration for informal conversation among community members.

1 A Vision for the Valley— Public Participation

In 1980 a successful series of public forums was held including topics such as: the function and future of Route 100, perceptions of the landscape, and intermunicipal cooperation. This discussion led to active participation in the U.S. Forest Service Environmental Impact Statement for the expansion at Sugarbush Ski Area and subsequently the creation of the Mad River Valley Planning District. In 1990 the Valley reassessed its future with forums on issues including growth patterns, economic development, fiscal impacts of growth, the Mad River, housing and rural resource protection.

Warren Candidates' Forum

We are now facing challenges, some old and some new, which require new thinking and the involvement of a broad-based citizenry. As we approach the year 2000, a fresh look at the future would be appropriate. There are new models for community involvement which have proved successful in bringing a diversity of residents together to find common ground. For example, "Future Searches" are two and one-half day conferences used in a variety of community-enhancing ways. Marvin Weisbord explains in his book *Discovering Common Ground*:

> "First, we invite a much broader cross-section of 'stakeholders' than is usual, widely diverse people who affect each other but rarely or never meet; second, we have them self-manage tasks of discovery, dialogue, learning and planning; third, we have them explore, together, the WHOLE system—its history, ideals, constraints, opportunities, global trends, within and without, rather than just the parts closest to home and soaking up the most energy.
>
> However, the most radical aspect of these conferences is our stance toward conflict... We neither avoid nor confront the extremes. Rather, we put our energy into staking out the widest *common ground* all can stand on without forcing or compromising... Should people open up old wounds, fight old battles, or jump to problem-solving, we seek to have them acknowledge each other's reality and remind them that the task is finding common ground and future aspirations. [In this way] we tap deep wells of creativity and commitment."

Thomas D. Visser

The Natural Bridge in Warren Village

Another potential model for the Valley is the highly acclaimed Upper Valley 2001 and Beyond program developed by the Institute for Community Environmental Management in Woodstock, VT. Through one and one-half day programs, residents develop "Community Profiles" through discussion of topics including local wealth, working landscape, cultural heritage, education, social service, effective community leadership and citizen participation.

Public participation is key to all aspects of community enhancement. At the Rural Resource Roundtable in August 1996, a number of ideas were suggested to increase public participation and awareness concerning rural resources. These ideas include:

- conduct workshops and training sessions for local officials;

- videotape local meetings and air them on the cable network;
- publish regular newspaper articles on rural resource protection opportunities;
- create a Planning District or Rural Resource Commission newsletter;
- develop and distribute "A Homeowner's Handbook for Living in the Mad River Valley";
- create a lending library at the Planning District;
- develop a Valley website that includes resources, Act 250 permit applications, and all official meeting minutes; and
- encourage participation at local, state and federal levels in the planning process and development review.

2 A Valley Master Plan

Although town planning is coordinated through the Planning District, there has never been an overall master plan for the Valley. Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren along with outlying towns such as Moretown and Duxbury face many similar issues. A Valley master plan would document the Valley's natural, cultural, social and economic resources. It would more clearly define the areas suitable for development and conservation. A master plan would create a realistic understanding of the Valley's future and establish reasonable Valley-wide goals. These goals would reflect special resources, existing land use patterns, and anticipated growth.

Harwood School budget meeting

A Word about Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of community life. How conflict is processed and resolved determines if a community can effectively reach resolution—or ends up damaged and stuck in the past.

The Valley has experienced many periods of conflict. Often the use of rural and natural resources is at the heart of the debate. In these times, it is important that we respect individual convictions, however unpopular. It is also important for the community to develop mechanisms to resolve conflict without using intimidation, aggression and fear. In addition, we should recognize that, while resolving land use conflict at the local level is a desirable goal, sometimes there are overriding regional, state or national interests that must be reconciled.

Resolving conflict requires attention to process and a respect for differences of opinion. In fact, sometimes debate on the substance of issues needs to be suspended in order to determine the best process with which to proceed. During periods of conflict, it may be helpful to ask questions such as:

- Are we using the appropriate mechanism for resolving the conflict?
- Are all the involved parties given adequate opportunity to participate in meaningful ways?
- Is representation of interests balanced?
- Are the underlying motivations of the parties understood and honored?
- Is it desirable to take "time out" for the parties to clarify their objectives? Is communication between interested parties adequate and above board?
- In an effort to resolve conflict and reach "win/win", how much compromise is acceptable?

Voices

"Zoning is necessary to establish a minimum code of conduct. But by itself, it will only stop the worst land uses. It's only an arrow in the quiver."
–Bert Lindsay, Fayston

Virginia Farley

Foliage traffic at Bridge Street in Waitsfield

A Valley master plan would not supersede individual town plans. It would weave together existing information and provide a more comprehensive view of development and conservation in the Valley. A Valley plan could include the same elements of a town plan with a greater focus on the inter-town issues such as:

- transportation networks and public transit;
- wastewater and water systems;
- regional economy—local business, local wealth;
- growth centers;
- working landscapes;
- rural and natural resource base such as wildlife habitat, forests and agriculture;
- education and social services;
- incremental development;
- secondary growth impacts;
- community leadership; and
- informed citizen participation.

A master plan could forecast potential development scenarios under current regulations and market trends to produce a vision of what the Valley may become. It would be a tool for local officials and a reference document when making tough decisions for their towns.

3 Land Use and Protection Tools

In addition to local and regional plans, communities which are highly effective in managing growth have legally defensible, well-written land use regulations. These regulations include zoning, subdivision, and site plan review bylaws, health ordinances, building codes, and/or design review standards. They provide for a town's "fair share" of future growth and for a logical balance between community goals and landowner interests.

Well-written regulations allow for development of suitable resources, are flexible, and provide incentives to encourage efficient and appropriate development. Valley residents have consistently supported land use regulations and Town bylaws reflect a high degree of sophistication. However, as with plans, regulations periodically need to be reviewed and adjusted to mirror the changes in goals and new strategies for development and conservation. For example, zoning in the Valley's growth centers may be too restrictive for the types of development necessary to accommodate growth, while zoning in the areas outside the growth centers may be too loose to achieve the desires of the community.

MRVPD

Shepard Brook in Fayston

In the past, towns relied primarily on zoning, subdivision review and local participation during Act 250 and other state and federal regulatory reviews for the implementation of community rural resource objectives. However, the Planning District has always recognized the tremendous value of non-regulatory tools for achieving planning objectives. These tools include purchase of development rights, donations of conserva-

tion easements, tax stabilization programs, and other incentives.

With appropriate resources, the Rural Resource Commission can play a greater role in protecting the Valley's rural resources. Town officials and residents often seek assistance in making conservation and preservation decisions. The volunteer professionals who make up the commission could provide more formal assistance. They could review development proposals for historic preservation and appropriate design and conservation opportunities, and make advisory recommendations to local boards. In addition, the State Historic Preservation Office can provide guidelines and technical information on tax savings and grant programs.

To manage the Valley's growth effectively, it is necessary to continue to acquire important conservation lands through gifts, easements or purchase. The Planning District, working with the Vermont Land Trust, can help the Valley towns identify and secure public and private financing to help with acquisition. As they have in the past, the towns will need to continue to make regular financial commitments to conservation to ensure adequate leverage for state and private funds.

Rural Resource Protection Throughout the Country

Following is a sampling of creative ideas from around the United States. For more information see the book *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities.*

- Property tax incentives encourage owners to renovate historic buildings in Fredricksburg, Virginia.
- Red Lodge, Montana provides a short video to new property owners about local history and sense of community. It is required viewing before receiving a building permit.
- In the Rincon Valley east of Tucson, Arizona, a planned resort and residential development adjacent to Saguaro National Park will generate funds from surcharges on hotel rooms, occupancy fees on commercial and retail outlets, and transfer fees and monthly assessments levied on homeowners. The funding will support long-term ecological monitoring and environmental education for area school children and their families.
- Monroe County, Florida instituted a tourist impact tax derived from a one percent tax on hotel and motel rooms. Half of the funds are used to acquire wetlands, wildlife habitat, recreation sites and affordable housing sites.
- In a four to one vote by residents of Boulder, Colorado voted to increase its sales tax, which generates $13 million a year for open space acquisition. Over 25,000 acres of land have been conserved.
- Residents of the Borough of Kenai Peninsula in Alaska receive a property tax credit of up to 50% for undertaking riverbank restoration projects.
- In Aspen, Colorado a local land trust has set up a fund to offer free tax and financial advice to landowners. The effort has lead to the protection of two important properties.
- Developers in Washington County, Utah (gateway to Zion National Park) donate between $100 and $500 to the Virgin River Land Preservation Association for every house or lot sold. Proceeds could total $600,000 over the next 10 years and will be used to acquire recreation areas and conservation easements.

Here in Vermont, Charlotte residents voted a 10-year tax of 2 cents per $100 of assessed property. The measure creates about $68,000 a year for the purchase of development rights on privately owned land. Recently the Town of Williston enacted a Residential Phasing Policy setting a goal of a mid-range population growth rate of 2.1% per year as its "fair share" of regional growth. The ordinance requires that housing be sited to preserve valuable resource lands and open space, and that new residential projects be compatible with the Town's Open Space Plan.

Voices

"Value-added enterprises can have a significant impact on local economies. Instead of natural resources being sent from the area, local businesses can add value to the resources by creating a final product that is sold locally. We have several good examples right here in the Valley including restaurants serving flatbread pizza, salads and other foods made from local farm products, and wood workers producing furniture and building materials milled from local trees."

---Valerie Capels, Waitsfield

It has been suggested at numerous public meetings that there should be a Mad River Valley Rural Resource Protection Fund. Donations, annual town appropriations, fines from permit violations, and grants are a number of ways of funding such an effort. The fund could be used for innovative projects that assist landowners with land planning and financing decisions.

Two very important non-regulatory tools are public involvement and education. Open and on-going communication enables town officials to introduce landowners to community concerns before they make irrevocable decisions regarding the future of their properties.

Valley chefs at "Taste of the Nation" fundraiser for the hungry

4 Indicators of Sustainability

Picture yourself walking along the edge of a mountain stream on a hot day in early summer. Perhaps it is a tributary to the Mad River. You are sweaty and tired. You stop at a pool. The water is clear, emerald green and very cold. You take off your clothes and slide into the pool. The cold is biting, but refreshing. The brook trout move under a rock overhang. In a few minutes your body adjusts to the cold and you are enjoying the soak.

Now picture the same pool days later after a torrent of rain. The water is frothing milk chocolate brown. Sticks and tree limbs bounce wildly off rocks. The pool is indistinguishable. A few months later drought conditions set in. This time the pool is nothing more than a puddle with slick algae covering the rocks. Water striders scurry across the surface.

The pool is in a continual state of flux as the stream flows into it, through it, and out of it. Yet, on the day you first visited the pool, a dynamic equilibrium was reached. The water was constantly changing, but the integrity of the pool was maintained. During flood and drought, the pool no longer existed.

The Mad River Valley is a complex system with water, air, wildlife, natural resources, and people constantly flowing into it, through it, and out of it. Social and economic systems interface with natural systems. The health of the Valley depends on our systems remaining open, alive and in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

Yet, how well do we really understand the various systems of the Valley? How do we know if they are in equilibrium or not?

We have useful measures regarding some systems, such as the Mad River where E. coli bacteria counts are taken on a regular basis. We measure skier days on the mountains, wastewater flows in Sugarbush Village, and traffic counts at Route 100 and 17, and we have some knowledge of the local wildlife ---but our overall knowledge of the health of our rural systems is limited.

Maintaining the integrity of the natural, social and economic systems of the Mad River Valley requires that we qualify and quantify the elements of rural character that we most value. To do so requires an alertness to detail and a willingness to pay attention to the yearly, monthly and even daily changes to our systems. By paying attention to various indicators, we are in a better position to protect rural character and to make sound decisions based on our knowledge of the trade-offs involved.

Summer concert at Sugarbush

In the October 1995 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* an article appeared titled: "If the GDP is Up, Why is America Down?" The article explored how this country measures productivity, economic health, well-being, and indeed happiness by the Gross Domestic Product. The authors pointed out that every time money changes hands, the GDP increases regardless of the type of transaction. Transactions which are good for social and environmental health are treated exactly the same as those which diminish those values.

The authors proposed a new national index to incorporate factors that the economic establishment currently ignores. A "genuine progress indicator" (GPI) would show debits for factors like resource depletion, degradation of habitat, and loss of leisure time.

This kind of thinking might be applied at the watershed level as well. Valley towns could work together to develop a system of measures with a working title of Valley Indicators of Rural Integrity (VIRI) Modeled after successful programs in the Upper Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont, Oregon and elsewhere, the VIRI could measure indicators such as:

- miles of streambanks stabilized;
- acres of land conserved;
- acres of forest and agricultural land in sustainable, productive use;
- length of trails developed and enhanced;
- pounds of materials recycled;
- number of historic buildings preserved;
- percentage of local residents voting, attending hearings and other public meetings;
- volunteer hours spent providing community services (fire, ambulance, library, etc.);
- number of affordable housing units;
- percentage of retail businesses that are locally owned; and
- percentage of value-added products sold in the Valley.

This is a list of ideas to foster creative thinking and discussion. The actual indicators should reflect community values. Rural integrity indicators could be an outgrowth of a vision process, and could be incorporated directly into the on-going activities of the various boards and groups currently active in the Valley.

Kinny Connell

Volunteers planting trees along the Mad River

5 Business Citizenship

Each year many businesses throughout Vermont donate funds, time, services, products, land and other assets to land conservation and other rural resource protection efforts. Some are going even further, incorporating environmental objectives into their business plans and day-to-day operations. Why are businesses participating in these efforts? One answer is what is good for Vermont is good for business in Vermont. A few examples of this good work include:

J. Leyton

Community business leaders meet to set goals for local United Way efforts.

Sugarbush Triathlon

- businesses donating land and equipment for recreation;
- ski areas sponsoring environmental education programs and creating trails for off season use;
- builders giving time and materials for housing, playgrounds and other outdoor recreational facilities;
- food producers/restaurateurs giving food to the needy;
- businesses donating products, services and money for fund raisers and special events;
- businesses sponsoring community events such as the winter carnival, recreational races, and river protection projects;
- businesses regularly holding food drives for the Mad River Food Shelf; and
- ski areas offering discount ski programs for children.

A healthy economy helps to make these efforts possible. Valley businesses are commended for their work and are encouraged to seek ways to continue to actively participate in rural resource protection.

6 Land, People, Work and Community

This guide offers an exploration of interrelationships inherent in a rural community: people tied to the land through work, recreation and a sense of community. Rural linkages are strong in the Mad River Valley. Yet, attention is required to ensure that we do not wake up one day to find that the incremental chipping away of our rural resources has left a community deprived of the very values that once defined it.

In December of 1996 an article ran in *The Valley Reporter* describing a journalist visiting the Valley. "Writing for the *Boston Herald*, travel writer Cindy Atoji claims to have found sanity in Vermont's Mad River Valley where veterinarians outnumber doctors and there are no pay phones in town." Unlike other tourist towns in Vermont, "the Valley, she claims retains its rural charm. 'There are no outlet malls or gaudy shopping strips.' …The Valley is a microcosm… of modern life, combining urban comforts with country living… She praises the 'quiet, boulder-strewn, green-hued brook that invites fishers, campers and kayakers into its waters, while hiding some world-class swimming holes.'"

"Land, work, people and community are all comprehended in the idea of culture. We can understand [these connections] only after we acknowledge that they should be harmonious..."

–Wendell Berry

Winter Carnival dog sled race

Home—peace—serenity—rural charm—abundant natural beauty—urban comforts—an eclectic, contemporary community. These are words and phrases often used to describe the Valley, and how residents and visitors feel about this place. Yet, there is conflict among these accurate descriptions. Urban comforts are not gained without some loss in peace, serenity and rural character. The very attributes, which so enchanted the *Boston Herald* writer, will be diminished if we do not take strong action to protect our rural resources.

The words, photos and sentiments expressed in this guide describe a very desirable place to live and visit. We know people will continue to seek the Valley's many pleasures. We only hope that those who come will participate in the dialogue, add to our sense of community, help enhance the Valley land ethic, and tread lightly on our precious rural resources.

We also hope this guide will spark new discussion about the values of rural resources, encourage participation in the good work that is currently underway, and engage community members in creating new ideas for the coming challenges.

RESOURCES

Mad River Valley Planning District
Mad River Valley Rural Resource Commission
PO Box 471
Waitsfield, VT 05473
802-496-7173
MRVPD@MADRIVER.COM

Mad River Path Association
PO Box 683
Waitsfield, VT 05673
802-583-8181

Sugarbush Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 173
Waitsfield, VT 05673
802-496-3409

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
136 Main Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-828-3250

VT Agency of Development and Community Affairs - Division for Historic Preservation
135 State Street, Drawer 33
Montpelier, VT 05633-1201
802-828-3226

US Department of Agriculture Forest Service
Rochester Ranger District
RR 2, Box 35
Rochester, VT 05767-9400
802-767-4261

VT Folklife Center
2 Court Street
Middlebury, VT 05753
802-388-4964

Friends of the Mad River
PO Box 255
Waitsfield, VT 05673
802-496-9127

Preservation Trust of Vermont
104 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802-658-6647

Central VT Regional Planning Commission
26 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-229-0389

Vermont Land Trust
Headquarters:
8 Bailey Avenue
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-223-5234

Champlain Valley:
PO Box 850
Richmond, VT 05477
802-434-3079

Central Vermont Community Land Trust
39 Barre Road
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-223-0188

Lake Champlain Basin Program
Gordon-Center House
54 West Shore Road
Grand Isle, VT 05458
802-372-3213

National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-673-4000

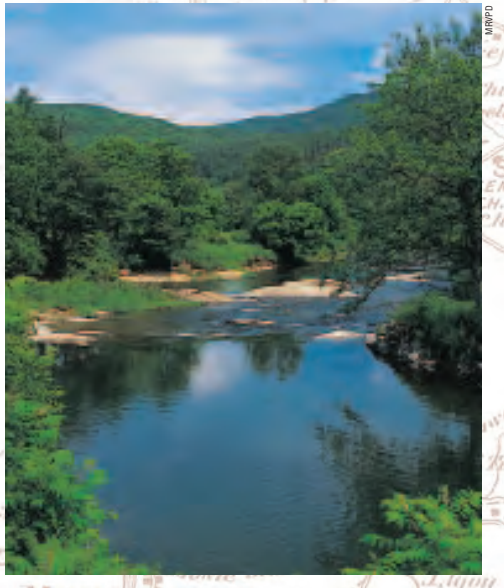
River Watch Network
153 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-223-3840

Ann D. Day

"Among my favorite places to hike, cross-country ski, snowshoe and Red Rocket (sled) is the land my family owns. I always love to go up there. Another favorite is the top of Lincoln gap that they don't plow in the winter it is a great hike and an even better sled down! I love to sled way up in the woods on Prickly Mountain (where I live). Phenn Basin is a beautiful place to snowshoe. I like to hike Burnt Rock and Sunset Rock.

"I would like to see all the farmlands preserved so as not to be built up. I love to swim in the river in Warren Village, at the covered bridge in Waitsfield and Lareau's, in my pond and Blueberry Lake. My favorite picnic places are in the meadow at the top of Prickly and at Sunset Rock.

"I love to walk in the enchanted forest up at Plum Creek. I also like to walk along the river. I love to cross-country ski at Blueberry Lake, but also the old Blueberry Lake trails that go through the beaver ponds behind the lake. Right now the lake and land are for sale and it would be terrible if it wasn't kept as it is. There are lots of animals, including bear, and a rare flower that blooms in the swamps.



MRVPD

"The Valley is a magical place and I now recognize what a lucky individual I am to have the privilege of growing up here. I would like to come back here in 20 years and have my children see it the way I see it now—beautiful."

–Emily Norton, WARREN, AGE 14

"There's nothing like changing your perspective—a view from Prickly or Scrag, a trip in a canoe down the Mad River—to remind you of what a fragile and wonderful valley we have for our homes and community. It reminds us of why we're all in this together—physically we live in a valley, and we have so much to enjoy and preserve."

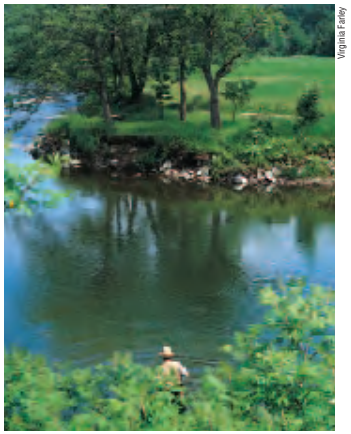
–Ellen Strauss, WARREN

Alex S. MacLean

Ann D. Day

"You should get up early and go up on top of the mountain and look over the Valley because it gets socked in and the mountains look like little islands popping up out of the ocean."

–Tiger Baird, WAITSFIELD



Virginia Farley