

# Thirty Years of Organic Family Forestry

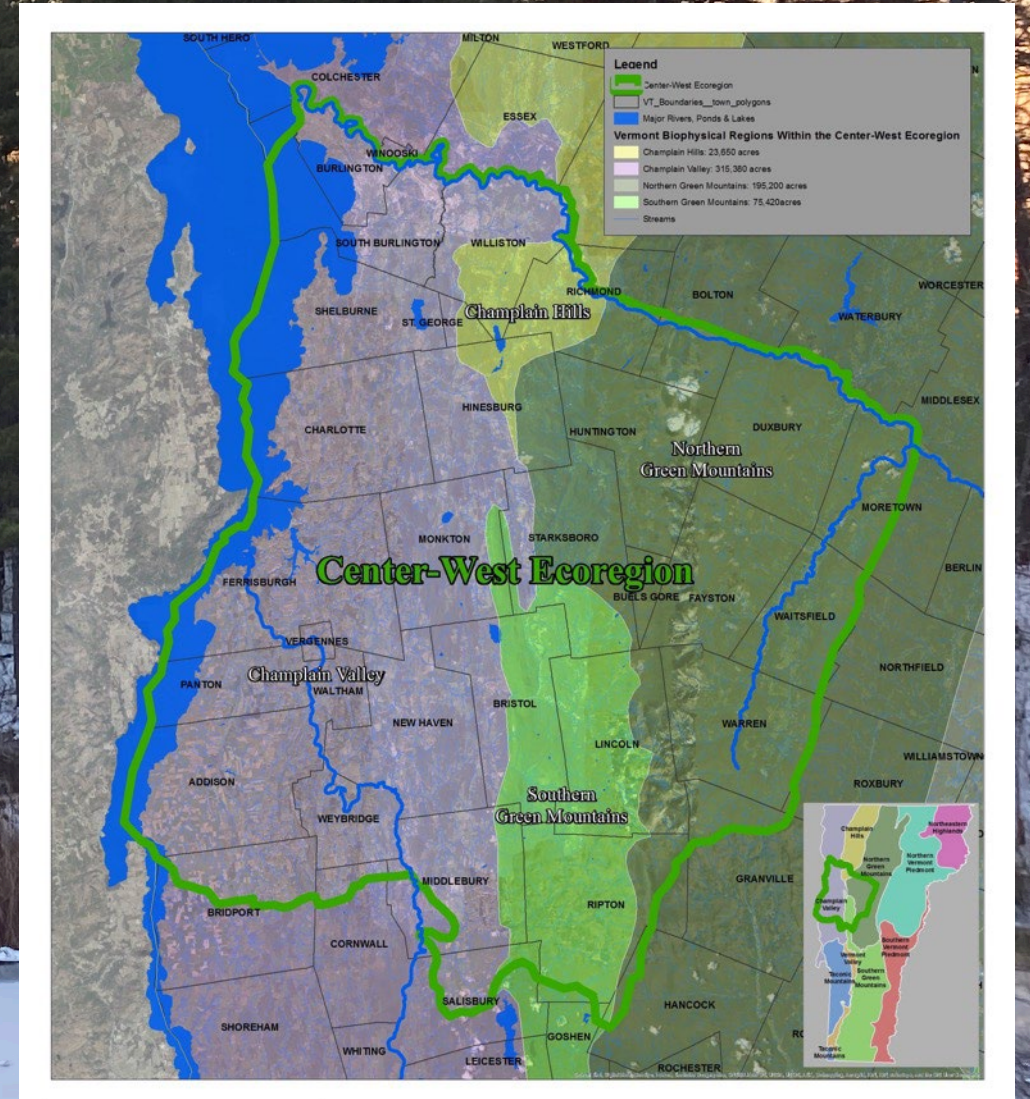
In Vermont's Center-West Ecoregion

by David Brynn  
Executive Director  
Vermont Family Forests

# The Center-West Ecoregion—Home grounds

*“Find your place on the planet. Dig in,  
and take responsibility from there.*

– Gary Snyder



# Three-decade quest

1. Honor the spirit & intention of Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program.

**Government**


2. Care exceptionally well for the land community.

- Maintain water quality,
- Enhance native wildlife species richness,
- Optimize atmospheric carbon sequestration & storage,
- Promote flood and drought resilience.

**Ecological Commons**

3. Honor & achieve the ownership objectives of Vermont's family forest landowners.

**Private**

A logging truck is shown in a forest, carrying a large load of cut logs. The truck is a dark-colored utility vehicle with a flatbed. The logs are stacked high on the bed. The forest is filled with bare trees, suggesting a winter or late autumn setting. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and some snow. The truck has a red bumper with the word "HARDY" visible. A person is visible in the driver's seat. The overall scene depicts a logging operation in a natural setting.

And do all this in ways that are **ecologically viable, economically feasible, and socially responsible.**

In a word, **sustainable.**

A photograph of a dense forest in winter. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow. Tall, slender trees with dark trunks stand in the foreground and middle ground. Sunlight filters through the branches, creating bright spots and long shadows on the snow. The overall atmosphere is serene and quiet.

*If it isn't complicated,  
it isn't conservation.*

# How it started

A photograph of three men standing in a forest next to a red tractor. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and a blue cap. The man in the middle is wearing a green vest over a plaid shirt and a white cap. The man on the right is wearing a blue jacket over a plaid shirt and a dark cap. They are all smiling. The tractor is red and has a large, treaded tire. The background is a dense forest with green trees.

As County Forester, I saw the constraints for landowners and the land in the existing system.

*“Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal.”* – Aldo Leopold

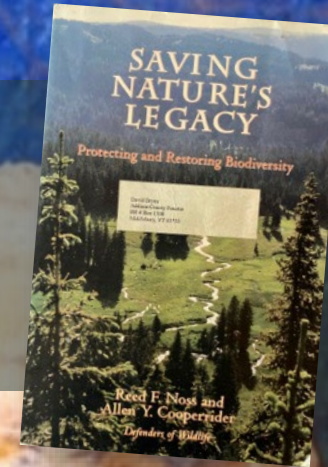
*“The two great ruiners of land are ignorance and economic constraint.”* – Wendell Berry

# Epiphany in Grand Union's Dairy Aisle

## Reed Noss presentation in Montpelier.

*Saving Nature's Legacy: Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity.*

- Work from headwaters down.
- Allow natural processes to accomplish restoration.



Vermont Family Farms milk.

If Vermont Family Farms, why not Vermont Family Forests?

If Vermont Family Farms milk, why not Family Forest® lumber?

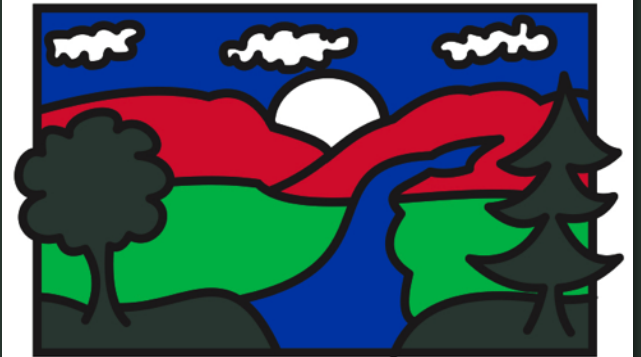
And that's how we began.

Initial meeting with 40 local forest landowners, known at that time as NIPFs. Together we explored the idea of an organization that was truly different from Tree Farm.

**Our founding mission:**

To conserve the health of the forest community and, when appropriate, to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefits.

**VERMONT  
FAMILY  
FORESTS**



**SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY  
FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY**

# Our current four-part mission

**Observe**, understand, & preserve forest ecosystem health;



**Practice** forest-centered conservation that is holistic & adaptive;



**Support** careful management of local family forests for ecological, economic, & social benefits;



and **Foster** a forest culture focused on community well-being, ecological resilience, & the quest of an optimal land ethic.



Observe.  
Practice.  
Support.  
Foster.



Today, we'll focus on the **practice** of forest-centered conservation

	<b>Industrial Forestry</b>	<b>Family Forestry</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Timber	Water, Wildlife, Carbon, Forest ecosystem health, Recreation, Aesthetics, Firewood, Timber
<b>Guiding Philosophy</b>	Wise Use— forest resource management	Forest Health First— forest ecosystem conservation
<b>Timeline</b>	Cutting cycle	Stewardship cycle
	15-25 years	Annual - a few years
<b>Maturity age</b>	Economic (short)	Ecological (long)
<b>Parcel size</b>	Large	Small
<b>Access to forest</b>	Periodic	On-going
<b>Access design</b>	Skid trails, ditches, culverts	Forwarding paths, lines of grace, broad-based dips, unditched

A man wearing a dark cap, glasses, and a dark jacket is standing in a forest. He is holding a red tag and marking a tree trunk. The forest has many trees and some yellow leaves are visible in the background.

# Core issue for landowners

Vermont's forests produce roughly 0.66 cords of merchantable wood per acre per year.

Firewood, for example, pays \$30/cord on the stump. So, landowners gross only \$20/acre/year selling firewood stumpage.

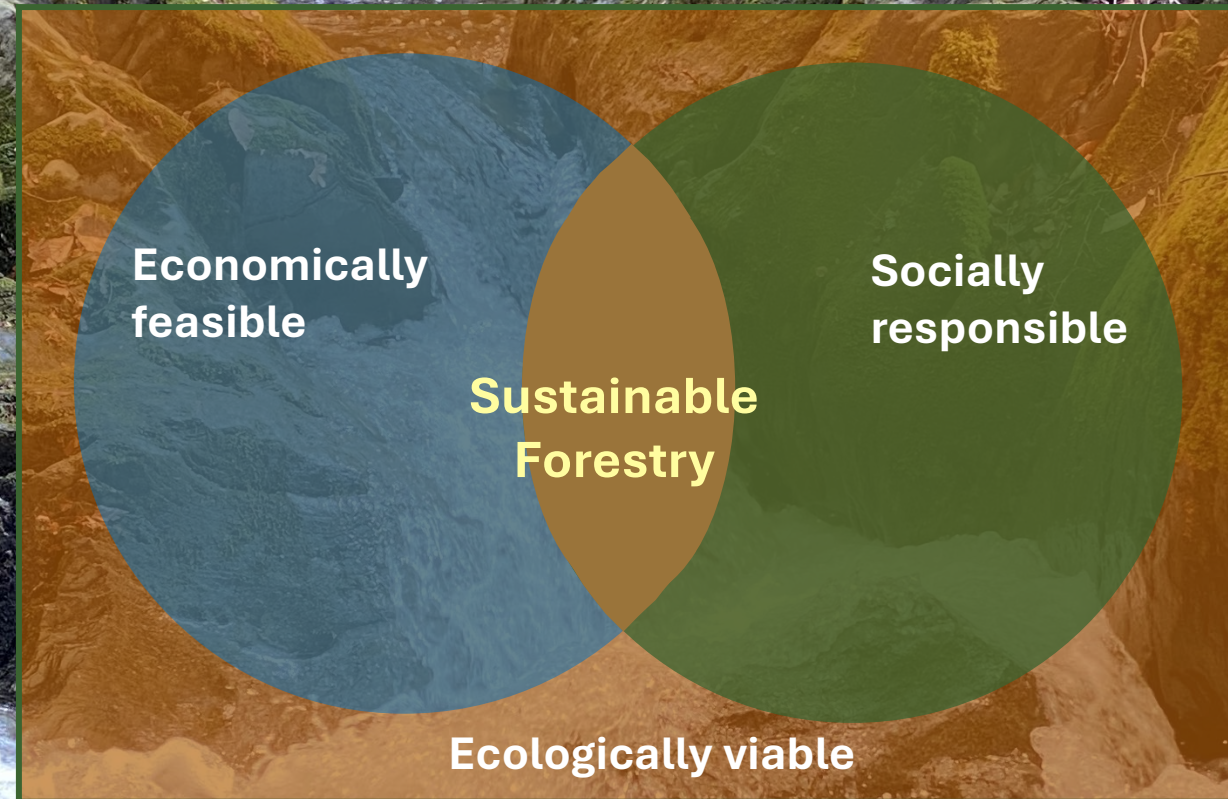
**Where is the economic viability?**

**Creativity & value-adding required!**

Instead of selling stumpage, the landowner could cut, split, stack & dry firewood, creating a \$500/cord product (25 times the value of stumpage).

The same principle holds for landowners milling logs on site versus selling logs as stumpage.

# VFF's Strategies for Manifesting Sustainable Forestry



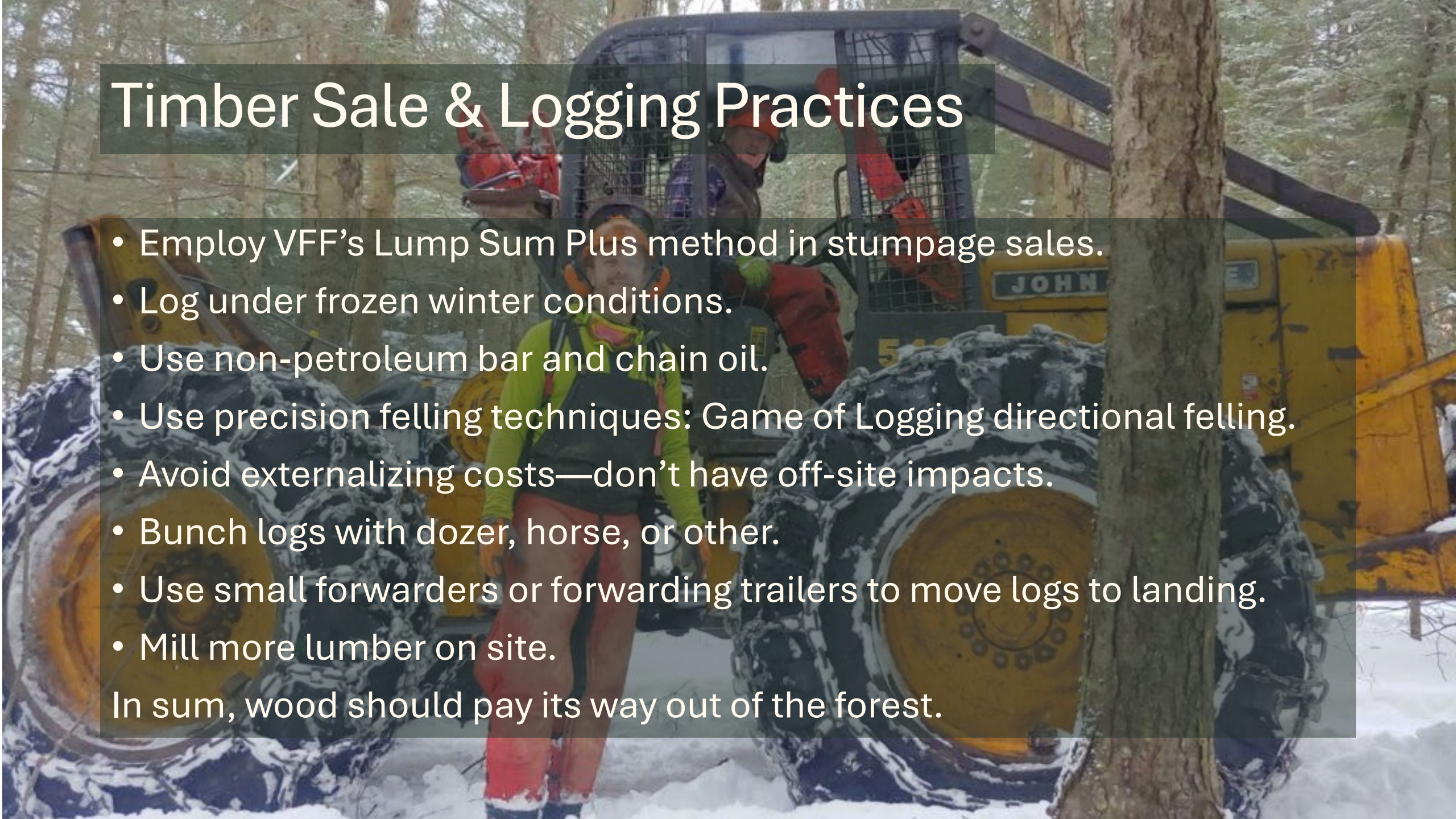
“Without ecology, there is no economy or community.” – Justin Brande

# Silviculture & Access Practices

- Practice uneven-aged management by area regulation.
- Grow high-quality timber: stocking upper A-B density.
- Create a portfolio of what the forest is willing to yield.
- Let more wood rot in the forest.
- Carry high basal areas and maintain intact canopies.
- Grow and hold large old trees.
- Employ light crop tree release: flag the crop, fell or girdle the crap.
- Avoid synthetic pesticides.
- Create Lines of Grace: (7% grade, 5% of forest maximum)
- Slow, spread, and sink storm flow.
- Monitor water quality and Optimal Conservation Practice compliance (Water quality tests reflect forest health, just as blood tests reflect your body's health.)

In sum, silviculture should support landowner objectives well beyond timber.

# Timber Sale & Logging Practices



- Employ VFF's Lump Sum Plus method in stumpage sales.
- Log under frozen winter conditions.
- Use non-petroleum bar and chain oil.
- Use precision felling techniques: Game of Logging directional felling.
- Avoid externalizing costs—don't have off-site impacts.
- Bunch logs with dozer, horse, or other.
- Use small forwarders or forwarding trailers to move logs to landing.
- Mill more lumber on site.

In sum, wood should pay its way out of the forest.

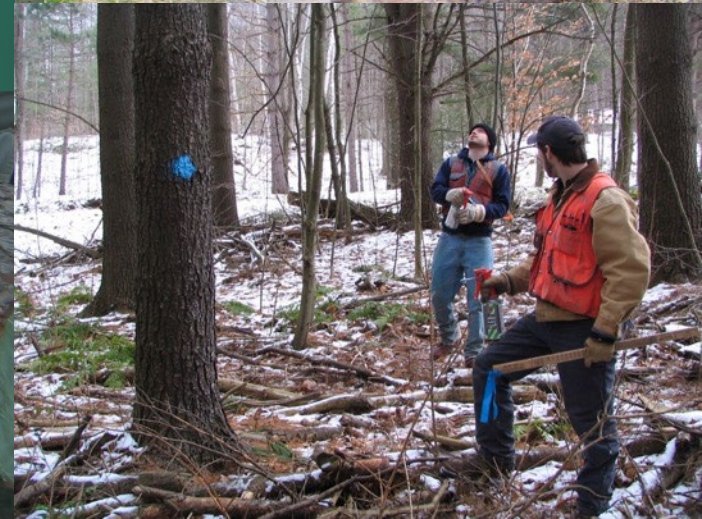
# Marketplace Practices

A man in a dark shirt and jeans is operating a yellow forklift in a lumber yard. The forklift has 'CK' on its side and a 'WOOD' logo on the back. In the background, another man in a light shirt stands near a large stack of lumber. The scene is set in a well-lit industrial or outdoor storage area.

- Reason globally, act locally.
- Avoid undifferentiated commodity markets.
- Go direct, avoid brokers.
- Dip beak in forest product value-adding.
- Prioritize local markets.
- Work with architects more.

# Applying the Ideals: VFF Demonstration Projects

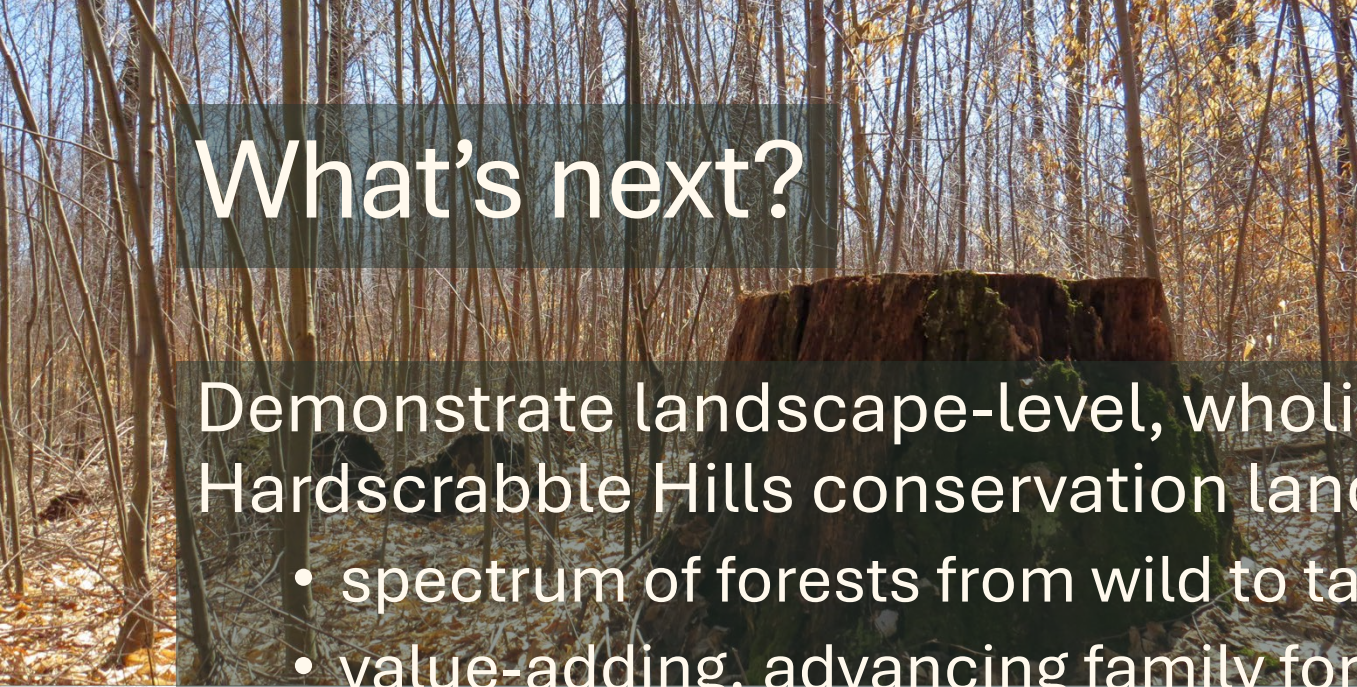
- FSC group certification: first in the world
- UVM Rubenstein School
- Middlebury College McCardell Bicentennial Hall
- Green Mountain Club headquarters
- Shelburne Museum English barn
- Family Forest® flooring
- And many more...



# What's next?

Demonstrate landscape-level, wholistic conservation in the Hardscrabble Hills conservation lands.

- spectrum of forests from wild to tame
- value-adding, advancing family forestry
- lines of grace; slow, spread, & sink storm flow
- ecological monitoring (both academic and commoner/citizen scientists)
- Natural Forest Returning Ground



Explore the model of Norwegian family forestry.

- Landowners are the industry (cooperatives)
- Hytte as VFF ADU (Minimize borrowed capital, Optimize land and labor)



A photograph of a forest floor covered in fallen leaves and tree trunks, with a semi-transparent text box overlaid. The forest is dense with trees, and the ground is covered in a thick layer of brown and orange leaves. The text box is a dark, semi-transparent rectangle that allows the background image to be seen through it.

Learn from old growth forests through an assemblage of people with different perspectives, inspired by Jerry Franklin (Colby Hill Ecological Project).

- Acknowledge ecological commons (air, water, wildlife), & empower commoners and commoning in scientific monitoring.

A person wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, blue pants, and a blue cap is standing in a forest. They are holding a measuring tool against the trunk of a large tree. The forest floor is covered with fallen branches and leaves. The background is filled with many trees and dense foliage.

Continue to empower family forest landowners—

- Family Forest Conservationist Training in 2026

And more... stay tuned!

# Gratitude

Deb Brighton  
Molly Beattie  
Jim Cronin  
John Elder  
Chris Klyza  
Stephanie Kaza  
John Shane  
Paul Ralston  
Carl Newton  
Max McCormack  
Terry Turner  
Zack Porter  
Cecilia Danks  
Liz Thompson  
Blair Williams  
Bill Hall  
Sam Hudson  
Tom Bahre  
Chuck Vile  
Bill Jesdale  
Roy Whitmore  
Aldo Leopold  
Reed Noss  
Gary Snyder

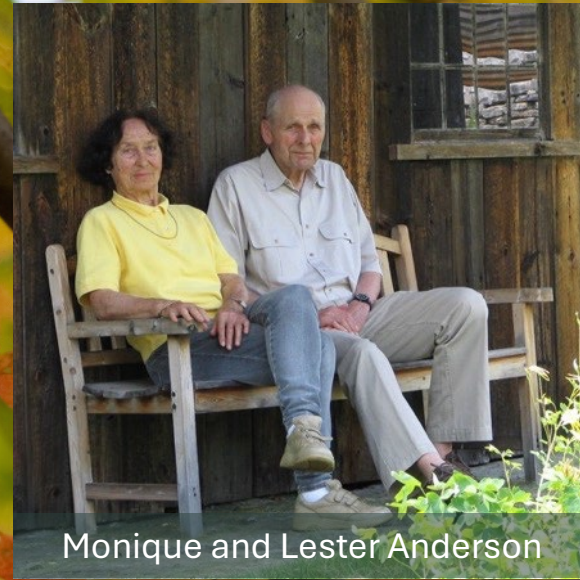
Eric Sorenson  
Eleanor Bezio  
Steve Webber  
Nan Jenks Jay  
Stan Rowe  
Conrad Motyka  
Jim Wilkenson  
Stan Smith  
Emile Cote  
Elizabeth Reidy  
John Donnelly  
Sandra Murphy  
Gary Hawley  
Don DeHayes  
Karen Leuders  
Nancy de Tarnowsky

Art Heitman  
David Bollier  
Jonathan Corcoran  
Pete Hannah  
Walter Carlson  
Larry Brynn  
Art & Richard Lavigne  
Fred Foster  
David Foster  
Jack Clausen  
John Dewey  
Wendell Berry  
Len Schmidt  
Scott Hamshaw  
Caitlin Cusack  
Ali Zimmer

Warren & Barry King  
Netaka White  
All VFF landowners  
Wilder Wheelock  
Erik Bakken  
Kathleen Stutzman  
Kel Richards  
Dave Wetmore  
Ralph Tursini  
Brendan Weiner  
Art Yandow  
Wayland Myott  
Russ Reay  
Holly & Jake Callery  
John McNerney  
Don Dewees



Bill Torrey



Monique and Lester Anderson

Bill Sayre  
Peg Sutlive  
Beverly Wemple  
Kristen Underwood  
Jim Sector  
Linda Johnson  
Tom & David Kenyon  
Jason & Nina Bacon  
Bugs Walker  
Lisa Nading  
Sarah Laird  
Chris Johnson  
Bill Scott  
Bill Leak  
James Patric  
Nick Patch  
Brian Stone  
Norm Hudson  
Jerry Franklin  
Dick Nessen  
Matt Atkins  
Jeremy Perfect  
Mike Dever  
Susan Gallagher Borg  
Fred Laing  
Matthew Witten  
Mariafranca Morselli  
Jonathan Blake  
And all the rest...

Thank You ~ and May the Forest be With You!



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