

CONNECTIONS

THE NEWSLETTER OF COLD HOLLOW TO CANADA FOREST LINK



WINTER 2013

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PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION

By Charlie Hancock

Hi friends, and welcome to the Winter edition of *Connections*, the quarterly newsletter from Cold Hollow to Canada. We hope that this edition finds your wood piles topped off and your skis waxed as we settle back and watch the landscape turn white again.

This year CHC enters its 6th year as an organization. From a small gathering of community members armed with magic markers and maps discussing what we value about the place we call home, CHC has grown to have engaged hundreds of people from across our region (in both the US and Canada) in our work celebrating the natural heritage of this place and working to protect it. We continue to expand our horizon with the projects planned for the coming year, and reflect that none of this could have happened without your engagement and continued support.

We had an important milestone this past year with the completion of Cold Hollow to Canada's first conservation project, which was featured in the Vermont Land Trust's annual report (*Connecting Habitat and Neighbors*). The project conserved three parcels in Enosburg totaling over 500 acres, made possible through the donation of easements by landowners that share our vision of permanently protecting those portions of our forest that are critically important to wildlife habitat and connectivity, as well as to our human communities that call this place home. An additional easement donation in Fletcher, and a

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CHC STEERING COMMITTEE

Bakersfield:
Mary Schwartz and
Forrest Dunnivant

Enosburgh:
Nancy Patch

Fletcher:
Corey Brink

Montgomery:
Charlie Hancock,
Chair

Richford:
Bill McGroarty and
Lenny Tamulonis

PHOTOS: JOANNE WAZNY

purchased easement on a farm and forest tract in Enosburg and Sheldon, saw the total area protected in our region grow this year by over 1,100 acres. Thank you landowners!

In other news, our Keeping Track teams are back out in the woods monitoring the five transects established in our region, and with the return of the snow those participants in the Wildpaths project will be back monitoring the connectivity zones in our area to gather data on the movement of mammal populations in our region. Interested in joining a team, or curious to learn more about the projects? Check out the tracking page at our website at www.coldhollowtocanada.org. In this issue we've got a great first-hand account of one of our member transects in Montgomery, and if you missed it *Northern Woodlands* current issue has a great piece on the work being done in our region by CHC and our partners.

CHC has a number of other irons in the fire. Our second meeting of our *Enosburg Wood Forum*—part of the Land Owner Cooperative Project which was introduced in our Spring 2012 newsletter—is coming up on January 12th. CHC is presently working to secure funding to expand the project to other towns in our region. This project is built around the Peer-to-Peer model discussed in greater detail later in this newsletter.

Inside you'll also find another in our Invasive Species series, this time focusing on Bittersweet, as well as information on upcoming events around our region. We hope you enjoy this edition.

Happy Solstice.

– The CHC Steering Committee



JOANNE WAZNY

CONFESSIONS OF A KEEPING TRACKER

By Joan Hildreth, Montgomery



Members of Montgomery's Keeping Track Team

JOAN HILDRETH

Having heard about the Keeping Track (KT) program's mission "to inspire community participation in the long-term stewardship of wildlife habitat," my husband Bill and I were definitely intrigued. We decided to enroll in the KT training program which was being held during 2010 to 2011, and are so glad that we did. It was a wonderful learning experience, truly an eye opener, as well as lots of fun with great people!

Following completion of the training, a number of us from the Montgomery, VT area who were in the program together formed a KT team. Our team consists of Doug Clowes, Jeff Goyne, George Hambleton, Todd Lantery, Bill and I. A transect (a study area) in Montgomery was identified during the fall of 2011, and we started to monitor it regularly in January of 2012.

Once each season (four times a year), we all walk or snowshoe the approximately 3 mile loop looking for sign of seven focal species whose presence (or absence) is indicative of the status of their core habitat. These species are black bear, river otter,

mink, fisher, bobcat, lynx, and moose. To date, we have found sign of all but river otter.

The types of sign we look for are tracks, scat, marked trees, feeding sign, hair, carcasses, rub/rut pits, scratches (feline), urine/other scent markings, bedding sites, dens, and spraint mounds/grass twists. When we do find sign, it's documented with photographs, measurements, and a data sheet which indicates location, landform features, general habitat type, vegetation type, and type of

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JOAN HILDRETH





forest where the sign was found. This information is later entered into the KT data base.

So far, we've monitored the transect a total of eight times, with our ninth time coming up soon. Bill and I always look forward to spending the morning with the other KT team members walking in the woods, looking for animal sign, doing plenty of laughing along the way, and seeing things we never noticed or had knowledge of before doing the KT training. We've found that we experience the woods in a totally different and more enjoyable way than we ever had before, and we feel fortunate to be on a team with knowledgeable, enthusiastic people who are also a lot of fun! On some occasions others have joined us, including people who are considering doing the KT training and land-owners whose property the transect crosses. That's been great, too.

During the KT training, we learned that knowing where to look for sign is one of the keys to successful tracking. The following is an example. One of the first times we walked the transect, we noticed a grove of red pines not too far off the trail and decided to check it out. We'd learned in the



Black Bear Rubbing Against Red Pine

JOAN AND BILL HILDRETH

training that black bear often mark red pines, so it made sense to investigate. We could hardly contain our excitement when we found that a number of the pines had been heavily (and recently) marked by bear with their claws and biting. The trees had also been rubbed a lot as evidenced by all of the bear hairs stuck in the bark and sap. This past summer we set up a camera there to see if we could capture some of the bear activity in photos and were all very pleased when we saw the pictures of different bears marking the trees.



Fisher Scent Post

JOAN HILDRETH

Here's another example: If anyone had ever told me a few years ago that I would be on my hands and knees with a group of people sniffing a stump and looking for hairs stuck in it (and loving every minute of it), I never would have believed it! But that's another one of the many things we learned to do to look for sign. In that particular case, we were looking for, and identified, a fisher scent post.

Monitoring a KT transect has provided an opportunity to learn a lot, to enjoy the outdoors with great people, and to gather valuable information about wildlife in this area. We look forward to continuing to share this experience over time with the members of our team as well as others who have an interest in participating in the long-term stewardship of wildlife habitat.

MAKING DECISIONS IN YOUR WOODLOT

THE PEER TO PEER MODEL

By Nancy Patch

Research has shown that when people need to make a decision about their land they often turn to a trusted friend, neighbor, or family member (Catanzaro, 2011). Traditional extension forestry has been a top down form of communication, and is not often the source sought out for information. In many cases the woodlot owner is seeking advice on issues that they do not consider active management or related to forestry such as wildlife habitat, a small sale of firewood or timber, estate planning, or advice on conservation easements. Traditional extension services also tend to be top down and presented in the form of workshops, lectures, fee for service, or through fact sheets, publications, or websites. This newsletter is in fact a traditional form of Forestry extension, and has as an audience a self-selected group of people seeking this information. How to reach the larger public is the question.

As an alternative, peer to peer learning involves landowners sharing their knowledge and experience with one another. Knowledge is spread through informal means and social networks, involves two-way communication, recognizes that every participant is both a teacher and a learner, and can occur either through an ongoing forum or a one-time exchange. This type of exchange is effective because issues and goals are often similar, woodlot owners have direct experience with these issues, fellow neighbors are seen as unbiased sources of information, can recommend trusted professional service providers or sources of assistance, speak the same language based on the same history, and are easy to contact.

A peer to peer learning environment can take place formally through woodland owner organizations, co-operatives, or Woods Forums. Local grass roots organizations like CHC regional partnership are often found to be excellent partners in convening

peer to peer learning opportunities and information networks. An example of a Woods Forum project is being tried right now in the Cold Hollow to Canada region with a group of 10–12 neighboring landowners in Enosburgh. CHC is hoping to expand these forums into other parts of the region in the near future.



LENNY TAMULONIS

The role of the resource professional in these forums is to convene, facilitate the forum and/or provide a source of information. A typical forum will start with a topic that may be initially presented by a professional, but then leads into more open exchange where woodlot owners can ask each other questions and have a discussion on the topic at hand. The professional is present to answer questions. The important difference between a forum and a workshop is in the woods forum there is a two-way communication established in a mutually respectful interpersonal learning atmosphere, where everyone is both teacher and learner. A workshop tends to be expert to non-expert, or teacher to learner. Workshops are excellent ways to learn from a professional, but getting the word out to people about forest decision making is most effective through a woods forum and peer to peer communication.

Catanzaro et al (2011). Challenging The Traditional Extension Model. Published online, Small Scale Forestry.



OTTERS IN VERMONT

By Lenny Tamulonis



DMITRY AZOVITSEV

Once, when some friends and I were walking in the woods near a stream, we came across a small mound of twisted grass by the trail and somehow it seemed out of place. Someone, more knowledgeable than the rest of us, took a twig and poked it into the grass and then passed it around and asked us to smell it. The smell was rank and fishy. She told us we had found an otter twist. An otter had pulled and entwined together some vegetation and left some scat and scent on top of it to let other otters know that it was nearby.

The river otter (*Lutra Canadensis*) is fairly common in Vermont. It's a member of the weasel family but can grow a lot larger than a weasel—up to thirty pounds and as long as four feet. It's well-suited to living on land and in the water. It's a streamlined animal with short ears, smooth body, and long tapered tail. In the water, it can open and close its nostrils and short ears internally; it has a thick, oily coat of fur, and webbed feet with a good set of claws that are very well adapted for digging. They have sharp hearing, long sensitive whiskers and an acute sense of smell to help it find food. Its eyesight is adapted for underwater swimming and consequently it's somewhat nearsighted. This can be startling to human hikers and boaters when a curious otter comes up within a few feet to peer at them.

Typically otters make their burrows right on the water with several entrances, usually with one hole allowing direct access into the water and this easily allows it to hunt for food. It can walk along a stream bed looking for crayfish or amphibians under rocks, swim with its head under water in search of slower moving fish like catfish or suckers, or even fully submerge in deep water. Fish are its preferred food, but if they have an opportunity they'll eat mollusks, small mammals, insects and even birds. It's not a scavenger and will rarely eat carrion.

Because otter pelts have value, Vermont closely monitors the otter population and takes care to see that the hunting and trapping season is limited to October through February and this effectively protects mothers and their newborns.

Even though they are related to the weasel, otters have a lot more fun and certainly are a lot more playful. Frequently in winter you'll be able to find an otter "slide" along a streambed or pond where otters have travelled by sliding along on their bellies in the snow and ice. We found a slide on a low hill by a pond where it was obvious the otters had slid down into the water and repeatedly climbed back up to the top and slid down again just for the sheer fun of it. If playfulness is a measure of intelligence, otters must be among the smartest of all animals.



TOMO YUN

ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET

By Nancy Patch

C*elastrus orbiculatis* is also known as Asian or Asiatic Bittersweet. The plant is native to Japan, Korea, and China and was introduced in the United States as an ornamental. The fruit is bright red with an exfoliating orange husk and is found at each leaf axil resulting in a profusion of brightly colored fruit all along the vine. It is still widely sought after in dried flower arrangements and ornamental wreath making, and so is still sold in some nurseries. If given the opportunity, you can tell nurseries and crafters that this plant can destroy native habitat and kill native plants.



Brightly Colored Fruit



American Bittersweet

There is a native American bittersweet, *Celastrus scandens*, which can be differentiated from the non-native by the location of the fruit. The fruit of the native vine only occurs at the branch tips, while the invasive plant fruits all along the vine at the leaf axil. The amount of seed from the invasive plant is far greater than the native plant. This profusion of fruit is what has made it so attractive to the craft and nursery markets. It is also the cause for concern.



Oriental Bittersweet

This plant is one of the most devastating invasive species and is currently spreading aggressively throughout the Champlain Valley and has been seen planted in eastern Franklin County. This climbing vine can grow into trees reaching 60 feet in height, and growing to a diameter of 5 inches. The weight of

these vines can break or pull entire mature hardwood trees down. A spectacular example of this can be seen driving along Interstate 95 into Massachusetts, where all the trees along the Interstate edge are being broken and pulled down by bittersweet vines. The same thing is happening throughout our state in smaller pockets. The vine can also strangle small trees and weaken larger trees by girdling. Another concern to biologists is the ability for the native plant and the introduced plant to cross-pollinate. Because of this cross-pollination it is feared that the native plant may soon disappear.



Bittersweet Vines on Trees

The plant once established is very hard to get rid of. The fruit of the plant remains viable for a long time and has a germination rate of 95%. It also proliferates vegetatively by root suckering. Just cutting the plant will not destroy it. The roots hold energy and continue to send out new shoots. Because of the persistence of the seed bank, control of this plant is a long term proposition. Pulling the plants is rarely successful as any amount of root left can proliferate. Some measure of control and limiting spread can be achieved by regular cutting. Chemical control may be a reasonable solution, and a systemic basal bark application of triclopyr seems to have the best control. This is a restricted chemical and a professional applicator should be consulted.

Alternative plants for your garden include Virgin's bower: *Clematis virginiana*; or Virginia creeper: *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (my personal favorite). It is not recommended to plant the native bittersweet as it has often been confused with the non-native in nurseries and also has the problem of cross-pollination and so there may not be a pure genotype of this plant available. It is very difficult to find true American Bittersweet for sale.



UPCOMING EVENTS

BAKERSFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meets the last Monday of every month at 1:00 PM in the Town Hall Building, 40 East Bakersfield Rd, Bakersfield.

ENOSBURGH CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meets the fourth Monday of every month at 7:30 PM at the Cold Hollow Career Center, 184 Missisquoi St., Enosburg Falls.

MONTGOMERY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meets the first Wednesday of every month from 5:30 to 7:30 PM at the Montgomery Town Office, 98 Main St (VT Route 118), Montgomery Center.

RICHFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meets the fourth Wednesday of the month at 5:00 PM in the upstairs conference room of the Arvin A. Brown Public Library, 88 Main St, Richford.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER STUDY COMMITTEE

Meets the third Thursday of every month from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Locations vary so visit www.vtwsr.org for up-to-date information.

COLD HOLLOW TO CANADA STEERING COMMITTEE

Meets the third Monday of each month from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Cold Hollow Career Center in Enosburg Falls or Bakersfield Library. We rotate the location, so please let us know if you'll be joining us. It'd be great to see you there.

National Audubon Christmas Bird Count Saturday, January 4, 2014

The CBC is a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society, with over 100 years of citizen science involvement. It is an early-winter bird census, where thousands of volunteers across the US, Canada and many countries in the Western Hemisphere, go out over a 24 hour period to count birds. Count volunteers follow specified routes through a designated 15 mile circle, counting every bird they see or hear all day. Our Eastern Franklin County CBC includes the towns of Richford, Enosburg Falls, and Montgomery and is supported by all three town Conservation Commissions.

To sign up as a volunteer or to learn more about the CBC, please contact **Eddy Edwards** at **802-933-5327**. Whether your interests are to participate on an assigned route or to simply count birds at your feeders, there is room for everyone to become involved.

2014 Vermont Maple Conference Lamoille Union High School, Hyde Park Saturday, January 25, 2014

7:30 AM to 4:30 PM

\$30 fee. Register and pay on-line.

For more info:

<http://vermontmaple.org/vermont-maple-conferences>

**Don't forget to check coldhollowtocanada.org for updated Upcoming Events*