

Mad River Matters



Amy Polaczyk

Mad River Watch Volunteers practice taking temperature and conductivity measurements along the Mad River.

An Environmental Legacy

We walk the land they helped set aside for conservation. We retell their stories and we strive to meet the standards they set as leaders and mentors in the care of a living planet. We remember them.

As we celebrate their memory, the next generation of environmentalists are given something to aspire towards. But the work of an environmentalist is not entirely about what we remember. It is also about what is left behind long after the memory has faded.

The environmentalist's most lasting legacy can be found in wooded hillsides and soggy wetlands, in the chatter of spring birds and the bouncing hum of June

bugs in summer. It lives on in the layers of soil that build up on the forest floor and in the braids and oxbows of a river free to stretch along its floodplain. Generations down the line, the full legacy of today's environmentalists will reach maturity.

This dual legacy, the memories we hold and what has long faded into the landscape, reflects the way environmentalists are drawn to this calling in the first place. The day to day work of weaving together moral and scientific arguments is a deeply collaborative effort. From four-year olds catching green frogs at a forest-preschool to tenured professors of climatology expounding on the dynamics of carbon sequestration,

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FMR Board members, Kinny and Richard, pick up trash at Warren Falls on Green Up Day.

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An Environmental Legacy

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each of us stands as a social connection through which new environmentalists are invited into the fold. And, of course, nature has its own way of calling to us. Something as small and fleeting as the husky hoot of a barred owl at dusk can set one on the path to becoming an environmentalist.

However we arrive, over time we grow familiar with the rhythms of



Jen Bennett

the earth around us and move from speaking on behalf to speaking from within. Long before any notion

of legacy takes root, the boundary between environmentalist and the environment begins to break down.

As you contemplate your own legacy as a steward, as a lover of nature, as an environmentalist, take a moment to not only see the forest for the trees but to place yourself in that forest. Look around. These trees with their towering canopies, the soil of microbes and fungi underfoot, the cardinal puffed up in the cold, these are environmentalists too.

Our Wildlife Neighbors

Life in the Mad River Valley is all about connections. Whether we live here year-round or pick and choose our seasons, we form bonds across the community and deepen our connection to this place. Many of us are lucky enough to know our neighbors on a first name basis. And, in turn, they know us. That is, at least our human neighbors might know our names. But our wildlife neighbors live and communicate in ways that requires more than a handshake and a hello to get the conversation moving. Finding meaning in their stories asks us to attend to the context of the landscape around them. While we might imagine a brook trout having



something to say to an angler and ponder the poetry of a white pine sheltering chickadees mid-winter, we need to take the broad view if we want to understand our more wild neighbors on their terms.

Luckily, many very thoughtful people have been working for years to help paint a more complete picture of what the good life looks like for our wild neighbors in the Mad River Valley. Just this last year, Friends worked alongside members of the Mad River Valley Black Bear Initiative to co-host a series of presentations by Vermont State Bear Biologist Jaclyn Comeau. In



the spring, we teamed up with the North Branch Nature Center and the MRV Libraries to support long range, volunteer led amphibian research.

And in some cases, the science is already clear, such as brook trout and their need for cooler, connected streams. As researchers help us learn from our wild neighbors, we continue to find opportunities to be better neighbors as well – like our work with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps this fall to plant more than 500 trees along the Mad River or our ongoing partnerships with the USFS and USFWS to replace old culverts with new fish-friendly passage.

Snipe illustration by Jeannie Marie Nicklas

Ira Shradis



Hillary Martha

Spotlight on a Friend

This October, Corrie Miller stepped down from her role as Friends' Director after leading this organization for the last eight and a half years. Her leadership helped our Mad River Valley community tackle issues of climate change, flood resilience, and watershed health. We have been so lucky to have Corrie on our team these last few years and now, as she begins her new job with the Lake Champlain Basin Program as the Aquatic Organism Passage Restoration Specialist, we want to celebrate all she has accomplished.

Early in her tenure as director, Corrie worked with twenty community members to lay the foundation for *Ridge to River*, and then led the five-town coalition through extensive explorations of the challenges and opportunities posed by a watershed-wide focus on flood resilience, water quality, and increasingly, the realities of a changing climate. Stemming from *Ridge to River*, Corrie led the development of critical stormwater management projects across the Valley. She developed Road Roundtables to bring Valley road crews and Select boards together to solve common challenges and enhance communication. In 2018, she was joined by Ira Shadis, Friends Stewardship Manager, and the two worked to develop the Storm Smart program which has since worked with dozens of community members to find opportunities to build resilience at more than 120 properties across the Valley.

Corrie's ability to bring together strong



conservation networks was a hallmark of her tenure. She led a partnership of federal and state agencies, contractors, and road crews to reconnect native trout to their upstream habitat. This work leveraged more than \$1.5 million dollars and countless hours of scientific expertise to replace critical town road infrastructure and restore healthy streams and fish habitat.

Starting in 2020, Corrie and Ira led an expansion of the Storm Smart program with partners that brought the Valley-originated program to the greater Winooski River and Lake Champlain basins. And just in the last year, Corrie has been



instrumental in the early success of the multi-partner Mad River Valley Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative grant by spearheading important conversations about how to strike a balance between healthy ecosystems and great recreational opportunities in the Valley.

Corrie's leadership was instrumental in all phases of Friends work. Since she came on as director she has driven the technical work of identifying and implementing real projects on the ground, fundraised and leveraged partnerships across the state to help make our community more resilient, and provided vital technical assistance to countless community organizations and individuals.

While we will certainly miss her, Friends board and staff are eager to congratulate Corrie on her successful tenure as executive director and wish her the best at the Lake Champlain Basin Program.





Ridge to River Coalition Meeting.



2015 Leahy Summit.



Above: Road Roundtable meeting of road crew members.
Left: 2015 Manlin Culvert replacement to connect aquatic habitat.

Below left: Corrie and Ira table at an event at Lareua Farm
Below right: The rain garden installed at Harwood absorbs rain water, which helps keep our river clean and reduces the impacts of storms.



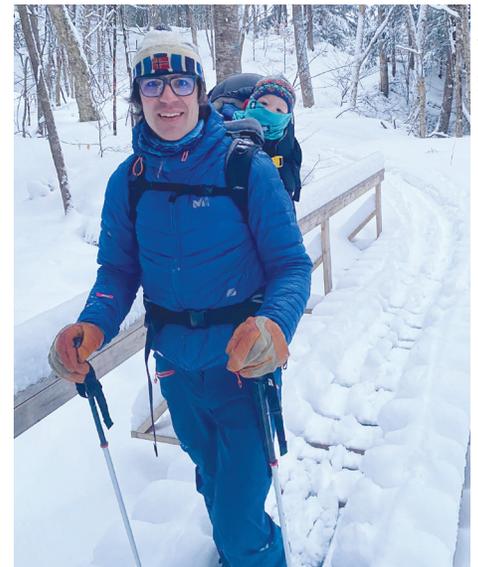
Community Conversations

While a handshake might start the conversation with a neighbor, we all know it takes a tremendous amount of work to build lasting and trusting relationships between the people in a community. And for the last three decades, Friends has kept this focus on community building front and center. Whether it's with our Mad River Watch volunteers or Storm Smart land stewards, we have worked to connect with as many people as we can to build a more resilient watershed community.

This is why, when opportunity arose to work alongside the Mad River Valley Planning District, the Mad River Path, The Mad River Recreation District, The Mad River Chamber of Commerce, and the Mad River Riders on the Mad River Valley Vermont Outdoor

Economic Collaborative grant, we jumped at the chance. This grant is funding several exciting projects, from the establishment of a new welcome center to the building of a new bridge and trail connector across the Mill Brook. One of these projects is the establishment of a Community Recreation Visioning initiative tasked with helping us create a 'gold standard' for recreation in our community that balances our love of playing in the outdoors with our responsibility for acting as its stewards. Friends staff serve on the initiative's steering committee alongside representatives from conservation and recreation groups in the Valley.

With the support of an experienced facilitator, the Community Recreation Visioning initiative members will continue to



Nina Otter

Matt Williams, FMR Board president, out for a ski over Doctor's Brook in Moretown with his son Silas

meet throughout 2023 and 2024. Our hope is to chart a path forward for a vibrant community full of diverse recreation activities that takes seriously our collective role as stewards of this valley.

Climate, Watershed, and Art

From October 2021 through end of the school year in 2022, the seventh-grade students at Harwood Union Middle School explored the web of water, and life, that surrounds their school. The exploration culminated in a month-long artist-in-residency project in March, 2022.

The Watershed Project, a collaborative effort between Friends of the Mad River and Friends of the Winooski, brought two teaching artists, Renee Greenlee and Alissa Faber, to Harwood. They led a project that brought artistic expression and

watershed science together. The Lozelle Brook, which runs through a wooded area behind the school and is crisscrossed by Harwood's cross-country trails, became the muse for the students' artistic exploration of their place in the watershed. The

students created watershed-inspired art that combined block prints, screen prints, and poetry. The art was installed



"A place that connects us all, a place that we call home, that is the Mad River Watershed," says Harwood student Marley Greene.

on wooden signs throughout the trail network.

The idea of a watershed can be a little abstract. It's not always easy to picture the huge basin formed by the surrounding mountains or the path all the streams and brooks take before they reach the Mad River (and the Winooski

River and Lake Champlain beyond). This is where art, storytelling, and getting outside can make a big difference. A personal connection to nature is not only good for you, but it also tends to lead to more active participation in caring for the environment.





PO BOX 255 WAITSFIELD, VT 05673

Friends is dedicated to stewarding the Mad River Valley's healthy land and clean water for our community and for future generations. We build diverse partnerships of neighbors, businesses, towns, and other organizations.

Together, we learn about the health of the land and water; conserve our natural resources; and celebrate this special place.

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(802) 496-9127

info@friendsofthemadriver.org

HEALTHY **LAND**. CLEAN **WATER**. VIBRANT **COMMUNITY**.

Community Climate Conversations

This summer, we joined up with the Mad River Valley Planning District to host a pair of Community Climate Conversations. Between the two events we hosted more than 150 people at the Lareau Farm in Waitsfield. Community members joined us to hear from some of the state's leading climate experts and engage in lively discussions about what a changing climate means for the Mad River Valley.

On July 5th, our first event was headlined by Dr. Gillian Galford and Dr. Stephen Posner, lead authors on the recent Vermont Climate Assessment, and was moderated by Heather Furman, state director of the Nature Conservancy in Vermont. A light rain fell as the presentation got underway, and Heather Furman invited attendees to find hope in spite of the challenges climate

change poses. Drawing from the words of the Nature Conservancy's chief scientist, Katharine Hayhoe, Furman shared, "The number one thing you can do to address climate change is talk about it."

On August 9th, we were joined by Jane Lazorchak and Marian Wolz from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Over the last few years, the two of them have helped realize the Global Warming Solutions Act through the development of the Climate Action Plan and the launch of the Vermont State Climate Action office.. The Climate Action Plan

outlines the State of Vermont's comprehensive approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to building more resilient communities that can stand up to the expected impacts of a changing climate. Their presentation tracked the growth of the plan from its

origin in the Global Warming Solutions Act. They also made it clear that addressing climate change is a broad effort that will require participation across every level, from individuals to towns to statewide initiatives. We all have a part to play. Stay tuned for more climate and community resilience events in 2023.

