

V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

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VI. RURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION IN THE MAD RIVER VALLEY

Date: Thursday, December 13, 7:00 P.M.

Place: Mad River Barn, Rte 17, Fayston.

Speakers: Virginia Farley, Central Vermont Director, Vermont Land Trust.
Austin Cleaves, Chairman, East Montpelier Board of Selectmen.

This is the last in a series of six Valley Forums sponsored by the Mad River Valley Planning District to discuss relevant issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. All forums are free and open to the public, and are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on the many issues challenging our future.

The towns in the Mad River Valley have been fortunate in that past development, with few exceptions, has occurred in a relatively controlled, concentrated fashion. This good fortune is due in large part to thoughtful growth management decisions on the part of the towns and the lack of recent expansion activity at the major local ski area. Because of these factors, much of the Valley's rural character and aesthetic charm remains today.

Unfortunately, recent trends reflect an increasing suburbanization of the countryside. This is occurring as a result of the incremental subdivision of large tracts of undeveloped land, often times prime agricultural and scenic open lands. While local and state regulation can be an effective means of minimizing the adverse impacts of large scale development, it is more difficult to address scattered, incremental development through

regulation. Therefore, if the ongoing erosion of the Valley's rural character is to be halted, alternatives to regulatory methods of land preservation are necessary.

As a response to the growing concern over the loss of the Valley's rural character, the Mad River Valley Planning District initiated the Rural Resource Protection Program. The Resource Program will serve as the sixth, and final, topic of the Valley Forum series.

The Rural Resource Program, a cooperative effort between the Planning District and the Vermont Land Trust, was initiated with the designation of the Planning District as a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 1987. The first project undertaken as a CLG was the Rural Resource Protection Plan, which was completed by the Land Trust in September, 1988. Funded through grants from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, the Preservation Trust of Vermont and the Claneil Foundation, the Rural Resource Protection Plan was an attempt to catalog the character defining elements of the Valley's rural landscape, and provide strategies for preserving that character.

Recent activities of the Rural Resource Protection Program have focused on the implementation of the policies set forth in the Rural Resource Plan. These efforts have included:

* A broad historic preservation program which resulted in the nomination of Warren Village and a Rural / Agricultural

Historic District in Waitsfield to the National Register of Historic Places in July, 1989, as well as the nomination of the Knoll Farm in Fayston;

- * The creation of the Mad River Recreation Pathway Committee, which is pursuing a footpath along the Mad River, was first proposed in the Protection Plan;

- * A publication entitled "*Archeology in Vermont's Mad River Valley from Paleo-Indian Times to the Present*" was funded through a grant from the Division for Historic Preservation;

- * The establishment of a Conservation Project Development Fund, through a grant from the Fund for Vermont's Third Century, to assist with costs associated with land saving actions;

- * The development of a rural resource data base and Rural Resource Partnership Program intended to initiate an ongoing dialogue with owners of important resource properties in the Valley, and to provide information and assistance to them regarding voluntary conservation and development options for their properties.

- * Through the efforts of the Vermont Land Trust, and the Town of Warren's Conservation Fund, over 700 acres of Resource properties have been permanently protected in the Valley.

Integral to the success of the Rural resource Program is the ongoing participation of the Vermont Land Trust.

Virginia Farley of the Land Trust, and principle author of the Rural Resource Protection Plan, will provide an overview of the Rural Resource Program. Virginia will also discuss the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund, as well as the Land Trust's other land protection efforts in the Valley, including their recent success in obtaining an option to purchase a critical farm property in Waitsfield.

Also speaking on Thursday will be Austin Cleaves, Chairman of the East Montpelier Board of Selectmen, who is active in that town's effort to preserve its rural character through the protection of its farmland. Mr. Cleaves will be discussing these efforts, including the Town Farmland Protection Fund launched two years ago to purchase development rights on important agricultural lands.

These forums are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on several issues of importance to the Valley. They provide Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss specific issues of concern. Presentations and discussions will then be summarized and compiled in a single document which could serve as an agenda for future action, and as a source of information to assist with future decision making.

All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

The Mad River Valley Forum Series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.