



# STEWARDS OF THE LAND

*A publication for owners of land conserved with the Vermont Land Trust*

Winter 2007

Vermont Land Trust | 8 Bailey Avenue | Montpelier, Vermont 05602 | 800-639-1709 toll-free

## River Restoration: *Benefits of a New Voluntary Provision*

By Sheila McGrory-Klyza

**T**ired of pouring money into your river banks? For landowners looking to protect their farmland from flooding or erosion, VLT offers a new voluntary provision. Together with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, VLT developed a new tool to help farmers create a “Meander Belt” protection area around their river banks. By doing so, landowners can realize significant benefits, while at the same time preventing catastrophic floods from destroying property downstream.

The causes of flooding and erosion go back a long way to the original clearing of the land and the channeling of rivers to build roads. Consequently Vermont’s rivers are straighter than they once were, and also flow much faster. This increased speed causes downcutting and the loss of floodplains. Farmers, in an effort to protect their land, have armored their riverbanks, but these short-term fixes only exacerbate the problem; erosion, trenching, and flooding strike downstream, either on their own property or on another farmer’s land. Fortunately



*Eroding farmland along a stream bank has led the Boomhowers in Fairfield to adopt a voluntary Meander Belt provision.*

farmers can break this destructive cycle and allow natural processes to prevail, thereby protecting their own and others’ valuable farmland.

Under the Meander Belt provision, farmers voluntarily agree to add language to their conservation easements, stating that they won’t build within a certain distance of the river, and will let the river flow freely. Existing and temporary structures are exempt.

“If we can find opportunities for

rivers to move naturally and reestablish floodplains, that will help repair damage that was done in the past. There are ample opportunities throughout the state for people to voluntarily comply,” says Liz Thompson, VLT/TNC Conservation Biology Partnership Director. “Allowing a river to meander naturally doesn’t interfere with farming and the landowners will be doing something for the good of all Vermont, not just their own property.”

If a landowner has cause to stabilize the bank, he or she would need to work with the Agency of Natural Resources, which encourages the use of natural methods, such as planting trees. “We can help landowners get out of the repair-and-wash-away cycle by looking at other considerations that result in a more sustainable management paradigm,” says Mike Kline of the Department of Environmental Conservation. “Farmers

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### Resources and Technical Assistance

**River Management Program**, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

**Clean and Clear Action Plan**, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**, Vermont Agency of Agriculture

**Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program**, US Fish and Wildlife Service

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**, US Department of Agriculture



# Vermont Land Trust

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## River Restoration

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are taking some of the biggest losses. If they can back away from trying to manage the river themselves, we can help them protect their land and get some economic assistance.”

Financial incentives for farmers are available through the state’s Clean and Clear Action Plan, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and federal programs. However, allowing rivers to meander on their own provides important long-term benefits

to farmers, such as soil conservation and productivity. “We need to look at the big picture,” says Kline. Ecological benefits will be reaped as well by protecting wildlife habitats and riparian ecosystems.

Sonny and Carolyn Boomhower of Bittersweet Valley Farm in Fairfield recently decided to voluntarily adopt the Meander Belt provision. Doing so has helped them solve an erosion and water quality problem before it got any worse on their 265-acre dairy farm. A stream running through a pasture had washed out and was eroding part of a meadow where their cows graze.

“This is just a slight change in our easement, but it will make a big difference

in preventing the banks from washing out,” says Carolyn. According to her, one of the main benefits of compliance was the collaboration with state partners, thereby making it easier to abide by state requirements. “Everybody sat down together at the table and worked things out. We’ll get the problem solved once and do it right. Everybody can win.”

Carolyn had only good things to say about the process and praised all the people who were involved, from VLT to the volunteers who planted willows on their property. “It was all done with a great deal of concern and respect. Everybody wants to do the right thing and keep this farm functioning.”

## Celebrate Vermont’s Relationship with the Land and The Vermont Land Trust at 30 Years

### • MARK YOUR CALENDARS •

VLT invites you to celebrate our 30th Anniversary and Vermont’s relationship with the land. Throughout the month of June 2007 we will host events on conserved land across the state. Please call Annie at 800-639-1709 if you’d like to participate in the activities.

Events culminate with a public celebration at **Shelburne Farms on June 16th**. Come experience one of Vermont’s most scenic and public conserved places and celebrate land conservation in Vermont with activities, music, and food. We hope you can make it!

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