

# VERMONT CURRENT

SPRING/SUMMER 2025 NEWSLETTER



Vermont River  
Conservancy

PROTECT. RESTORE. CONNECT.



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Conservation Director



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## REFLECTIONS

**Climate Change. Vulnerable Communities.** These phrases may be scrubbed from our national lexicon, but they won't be scrubbed from our work.

This year we celebrate 30 years of accomplishments at the river's edge: more than 100 swimming holes and paddlers' trails where communities will always have free access to splash in their backyard waters, restored floodplains and protected wetlands where highwater will always be able to spread and slow, mossy old forests welcoming back another year of long-eared bats and spring warblers.

Far from pulling back, we're doubling down. Because every climate model predicts that Vermont will see more floods and more "no swimming" signs warning of toxic algae – human-exacerbated climate impacts that are absorbed by our rivers and felt by our communities.

To maximize our impact for the next 30 years, we've spent the winter hip deep in data and analytics, mapping areas we'll prioritize based on geomorphology, hydrology, and alluvial soils. But we also know these hard sciences aren't the full story, which is why we're incorporating social sciences to make sure we do our best for people: Whether you're a family in temporary housing, a new American with a primary language other than English, or a senior who rents, we are working to make sure your community is not overlooked as we address flood mitigations and prioritize public access to rivers.

Where we stand at the nexus of land, water, and communities, our work to protect and restore rivers is critical to mitigating climate change and keeping all of our communities safe, especially those who have been systemically overlooked.

**Onward,**

*Kassia Randzio*      *Erin De Vries*





## MISSION

PROTECT  
AND RESTORE  
RIVERS FOR  
PEOPLE AND  
WILDLIFE

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### STAFF

Erin De Vries, *Conservation Director*  
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**Photos:** Daniel Chaplin, Jim Deshler,  
Jay Ericson, Bradford Winn

## CONSERVATION

# For the People

**When Daniel and his mom first set eyes on the farm, it seemed like paradise: a quiet little valley, clear water running down from the forested hills, rich soils, and one of the most historic barns around – everything one would hope for in a family farm. Along with his mom and growing family, Daniel put in the sweat equity to restore the 1820s farmhouse, till the land, and bring the farm back to life.**



The North Branch of the Winooski flooding across Daniel's front yard.

But too often over these nearly 30 years, Daniel looked across the land only to be greeted by too much water: of the 17 floods he endured, 5 filled the basement. In just the last two years, 2 floods filled the house with standing water, destroying everything – the welder, furniture, memories. Now their beloved home is mold-infested and no longer safe. **Nearby, willows took root, moose returned, and beavers moved in, quickly creating a series of stepped dams, bringing the river's natural wetlands back to life.**

After too many floods and too much grief, Dan decided the land would make a better floodplain than a farm, and luckily, Worcester's selectboard agrees. Just one challenge: A small town with only a few part-time staff already navigating several FEMA projects, Worcester wasn't sure they could help Daniel through the buyout paperwork. This is where our staff stepped in to help Daniel and the town navigate these complexities. **Yes, the town might lose a little tax revenue via a buyout, but they'd gain something far more valuable: a floodplain where the river can overflow, spill across the land, slow, and store water during floods.**

Letting this land be open space means Highway 12 is less likely to wash out, helping keep the major roadway open during emergencies. It means homes downstream are less likely to flood, keeping the community safer. These intangibles – the increased safety of not flooding – are big savings for a small town, and we're glad we could play a role in helping Daniel's family and the Town of Worcester find a path forward together.

**Not too far away, Barre is navigating more than 20 buyouts like this – places where homes have flooded again and again, and residents are ready to move to higher ground.** We're stepping up to help the city think about what to do with this newly open space, in part with an eye to river access as part of a Friends of the Winooski River-led river recreation master plan. Knowing it's too easy for city staff already stretched thin to simply plant grass seed, we're helping the city figure out the best ways to make these lands even more flood resilient – from planting riverfront trees and shrubs, to removing artificial banks, to restoring wetlands.



Daniel is seeing more and more moose as the river's natural wetlands come back to life.



Building a colorful archway to welcome people to a riverfront trail in Barre.

**Ultimately, we're helping the city envision a string of riverfront parkland that protects homes from the next big flood and gives people places to enjoy cool, clear waters.**

Farther northeast, where Millers Run meanders through Sheffield farmland en route to the Connecticut River, we've made sure the riverbanks will always be surrounded by trees and shrubs, and the river can always flood across the land. **Conserving these natural floodplains makes everyday life better for people nearby, particularly for friends and neighbors who are older, don't have a car to flee floods or get to services, or don't have internet at home, all factors that make flood recovery even more challenging.**

These kinds of places – homes, farms, cities, and towns that flood and flood again – are too costly to bail out time and time again, and there's far more community value to the land when it can be restored back to the floodplain it once was – places where rivers can spill over their banks, slow across the land, store water during floods, and keep our communities safer.

**These are just a handful of the stories behind our conservation work, where people and science – climate change and vulnerable communities – are intertwined at the rivers' edge.**

## WATER WINS

**As much as we love celebrating newly completed conservation easements – hard work that rightly deserves a round of high fives – we know it's just the beginning of the conservation journey, not the end. We don't just check the boxes and move on, we commit to doing our best by that land forever. Nature does a great job restoring itself on its own, but sometimes it needs a little kickstart.**

### 1,574 trees and shrubs

In April we planted more than 1,000 trees, each a little sprig of hope for our rivers. Their roots will hold riverbanks in place, and their trunks will slow floodwaters. Plus, they'll help connect wildlife habitat. When we visited some of these spots this winter, we saw wildlife prints pacing back and forth at the edge of nearby forests, seemingly mustering the courage to brave the treeless gaps. Now, seamless forest cover will help wildlife access the water's edge. **A huge thanks to the dozens of school kids, college students, and volunteers who got their hands dirty planting trees rain or shine.** Our rivers are healthier thanks to your hard work!

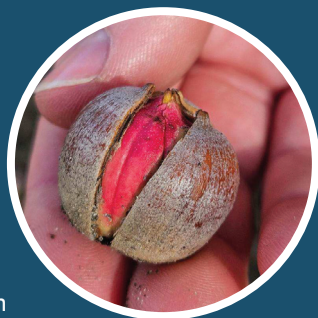


### Beaver Camp

Beavers are some of the best river engineers around, and we're eager to let them do what they do best: build dams and wetlands to hold water during droughts and floods, restore nutrient-rich soils, and create habitat for everything from veggie-eating moose to meat-eating pitcher plants. Our staff spent 2-days at beaver camp to learn more about these incredible engineers, steps we can take to help ease human beaver conflicts, and what we can do to welcome beavers back to more riverlands.

### A Million Seed

We hosted Northwoods Stewardship Center and Intervale Center for a campout – not for the sake of s'mores and ghost stories, but for scoping out Southern eco-type trees for seed collection. Across Vermont, a lot of native plants are sourced from only a handful of nurseries. Anyone who's sat through Bio 101 knows diversity is key, which is why we'll be helping start-up nurseries collect a range of seeds from our conservation lands – so that offspring from the big old silver maples and red oaks we protected years ago can help add to the seedling gene pool.



### Ancient Wood Turtles

These endangered reptiles grew up alongside dinos, but to survive another million years, they're going to need soft, sandy riverbeds to lay their eggs – the same kinds of places where people have built-up roads and buildings, stiff competition for these little guys. And now they have to contend with invasive knotweed taking over favorite sandy beaches needed for nesting. UVM student Maddie Curtis helped us research wood turtles' habitat needs, outline steps we can take to improve their sandy beaches, then got out on the ground to remove vegetation so that these sites are ideal for turtle nests. We're rooting for you, hatchlings!



# 30 YEARS STRONG!

Our work started three decades ago when volunteers joined together to protect a place on the Dog River that had hosted generations of swimmers cooling off, anglers casting for trout, and paddlers launching kayaks. When private landowners threatened to post “no trespassing” signs, volunteers stepped in to secure public access, forever. We continue in this tradition today, working to make sure all people, no matter their background, can access a most universal resource — water — for swimming, angling, and paddling. We’ve grown to protect and restore more than 100 places along rivers, wetlands, and headwater forests, building on a strong foundation of volunteers, community members, and supporters that make it all happen.



## Join us for a celebration in a community near you!

We’re hosting 6 months of activities — a chance to get your boots wet and connect with our growing community of river-lovers, discuss big ideas with our book group, or listen and learn via virtual webinars.

### Spring - Summer, 10+ Field-based River Tours

Over the coming months, we hope to see you at or one (or more!) of our staff-led river tours. From north to south, from beavers to birds, there’s a river tour for you. Each tour is a chance to gain new perspective on a corner of Vermont you know well, or an excuse to adventure to a new favorite spot.

#### October 29, online

##### Seek Higher Ground: The Natural Solution to Our Urgent Flooding Crisis

Through photos and stories, award-winning author and photographer Tim Palmer will share how U.S. efforts to control floods through dam and levee construction have been, at best, inadequate, and how the endless cycle of floods, damage, recovery, and repeated losses can best be ended through the protection of open space on floodplains and through voluntary relocation of homes and businesses from hazard-prone areas.

#### November 19, online

##### A Year in Review, and the Outlook Ahead

Join us day or evening to hear our top highlights from 2025 and get an insiders’ glimpse into the work ahead for 2026.

#### December 6, online

##### Conservation Plan Reveal

Be the first to get a glimpse into our 5-year conservation plan complete with maps, photos, stories, and more. See where we’re focusing our efforts, and get a glimpse of the science and people behind these priorities.

Find full descriptions, meet-up times, and more at [vermontriverconservancy.org/news/30](https://vermontriverconservancy.org/news/30)



***“An estate plan affords me the ability to bestow gifts to those that have been a meaningful part of my life. That’s why I’ve included Vermont River Conservancy in my will, so that the rivers I love will continue to be protected after I’ve passed. It comforts me to know that I’ll have given back more than I have taken from this world”***

- Dave Hajdasz, author and swimming hole proponent

We invite you to include Vermont River Conservancy in your will or estate plans, or simply name Vermont River Conservancy as a beneficiary on an IRA, bank account, or insurance policy.

To share your intent, discuss options, and learn more, reach out to Kassia: (802) 229-0820 or [kassia@vermontriverconservancy.org](mailto:kassia@vermontriverconservancy.org). **And thanks!**

