



Vermont River
Conservancy

PROTECT. RESTORE. CONNECT.

VERMONT CURRENT

FALL/WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER



Erin De Vries
Conservation Director



Kassia Randzio
Development and
Operations Director

REFLECTIONS

The Multiplier Effect: The principle that one investment catalyzes another; a chain reaction wherein good begets good.

We're living this out in the Missisquoi, where this summer we helped multi-generation farmers protect their homestead with a conservation easement that allows them to farm *and* allows the river to move, shift, and change across the land, setting the river on a path towards restoration. Now we're helping them protect another place where, with our easement, the too-wet soils will now recover their former wetlands. Downstream, where a tributary jumped its channelized banks in the 2024 floods, discovering new braided channels, we're working with the landowner to keep it that way – to make sure the river can continue on its path to restoration.

Nearby, we've built an accessible path to the rivers' edge, and now there's talk of keeping it going – a greenway through forest and alongside wetlands that will connect the community with its river, along with the chance to protect hundreds more acres.

It's the multiplier effect – one conservation success begets another.

This is the approach we're bringing statewide via our new conservation plan, which will focus our work in a handful of watersheds over the next several years. To get there, we merged the science of fluvial geomorphology with social values mapping, and identified key places where we can lead multiple strategic projects in single places to catalyze exponentially greater benefits for healthier rivers and thriving communities.

For our rivers,

Kassia Randzio *Erin De Vries*



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/VTRivers /vt_rivers

We’re moving!

Beginning December 1, 2025 our headquarters in Montpelier will be moving to a sunny new space overlooking the North Branch of the Winooski. Any mail sent to 29 Main Street will be forwarded to our new address at **50 State Street**.

Photos: Mink and wood turtles: Emanuel Soza-Foias. Back bottom: Evan Kay. All other images are VRC staff photos.

CONSERVATION

Protect It, and They Will Come

“Look! Egg shells! The turtles were here!” We made these wood turtle nesting beds in May, when the Orianne Society helped us pick the almost perfect spot a turtle might want to lay its eggs – southwest facing, sunny, sandy, and easy for turtles to see from the river. Recent floods replenished deposits of fresh, sandy soil that would make for easy digging and warm incubation, an affirmation of rivers’ life-giving floods. Almost perfect because the land was riddled with knotweed. The plant’s invasive bamboo-like shoots were already tall enough to shade the soil and their knotty roots would block any turtles from digging sandy nests.



University of Vermont student Emily DiGiacomo face to face with citizen science.

Wood turtles have it hard. After 10,000 years in Vermont, populations are dropping, putting them on a watchlist – species of greatest conservation need. The trouble is, these reptiles’ ideal homes match perfectly with people’s ideal development sites: easy access to water, rich soils, shallow banks, plenty of sunshine. Floodplains. The same places we’ve put our roads, railroads, houses, plowed fields, and parking lots. This competition for homeground – habitat loss – was the original blow to wood turtles. Now there are fast-moving, turtle-crushing cars. Pile on the illegal pet trade, where they’re prized for their vibrant orange skin, along with climate change, which makes it harder to keep eggs at a constant 82° for 60 days. Add the standard threats of raccoons and foxes with their own families to feed, and wood turtles’ future looks pretty dire.

But we’re helping them chart a new course, and working with the Orianne Society to test out a new recipe for success. First, we protect land they love – riverbends and meanders where water spreads and slows. Then we

give the land the gift of time, a rewilding that welcomes nature back to the former farmland, and removes the dangers of tilling and harvesting.

Last spring, we took things one step further. We started with a simple idea: if we keep weeds from overtaking the turtles’ beds, the sandy soils will welcome them when they’re ready to lay their eggs. With the help of University of Vermont students, we cut through jungles of knotweed, pulled up the roots, then sifted through the sand one fistful at a time to be sure we didn’t leave a single knotweed root behind. Through sweat and meticulous work, we enhanced a half dozen sandy, warm, weed-free beds, and hoped the turtles would find them.

And find them, they did! Of the multiple beds, each a chance for a turtle to lay up to a dozen eggs, one looked unused, a couple were likely lost to predators, and others showed signs of prints when turtles laid their eggs. Late October, we revisited the beds for some fall weeding and stumbled upon a nest: two decayed unborn turtles; two hatched eggs, the



Collecting data in hopes of learning even more ways to help protect this rare species.



Two warmed hatchlings, ready to spend the next four years in the river.

turtles long gone; and two chilly eggs with tiny turtles still inside. It seems the mama dug so safely deep that the eggs would never hatch in the autumn chill. What could we do, but warm those still-body hatchlings in our hands, and hope for the best?

Meanwhile, we turned our sights to the river, wading in to see if we might find one or two adult turtles, and add their data to the scientific record: weigh, measure, record, release. One temporary captive pulled her head into her shell in textbook turtle defense, another zoomed as fast as turtles zoom in a straight line to the river, another stretched its neck unbelievably beyond its shell to get a good look around. Keeping watch over this turtle corral, the two hatchlings began to wiggle their miniature legs in our palms: two more turtles to send off into the river.

Sitting in the October sunshine, corralling these rare turtles, it was hard to imagine the same spot July 2023 when this floodplain that nurtures these turtles had also nurtured the community when it needed it most: by storing 40 million gallons of floodwater, and helping protect thousands of people downstream from even worse flood damage.

At this bend in the river, nature is taking hold – as floodplain, wetland, turtle nursery – and this recipe may be exactly what saves us – turtles and people alike.

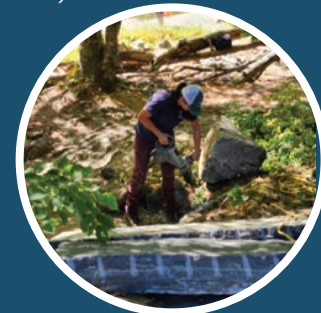
NEW AND IMPROVED BUCKET LIST

We got our start 30 years ago when “no trespassing” signs threatened to block communities from swimming holes and paddlers’ spots where families had splashed for generations. Working with visionary community leaders, we’ve protected more than 60 places where people will always have access to local rivers, and right now we’re working to add public access to yet another half dozen rivers.

This year we spruced up several of these sites to make them more welcoming and accessible for all to enjoy. Meet these new and improved places to walk, splash, fish, or paddle – places to add to your weekend bucket list.

Big Falls Eddy, North Troy

Downstream of Vermont’s highest undammed waterfall, you’ll find a quiet eddy where you can swim, fish, paddle, and picnic. Thanks to frequent flooding and a rich wetland, the soils are home to Jurassic-like ostrich ferns that grow 3-4 feet tall, and a towering canopy of silver maples. Enjoyed by the community for generations, visitors will now be welcomed by an improved parking area, and a wide flat path to a river overlook, with benches and giant stone steps beckoning visitors to experience the floodplain forest and wander down to the river.



Leatherneck Landing, Richford

Whether you’re paddling the full length of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, out for a day trip, angling for trout, or looking for a lovely spot to sit by the river, you’ll find a beautiful trail, picnic table, and kiosk ready to welcome you along the Missisquoi River. Protected years ago, we worked with the landowners to create healthier habitat and an even better paddlers’ camp, planting conifers that will grow tall surrounding the campsite, and red osier dogwood and willows along the river’s edge – a win-win for paddlers *and* perch.



Rainbow Rock, Chester

Just minutes after we installed a kiosk here, a car driving by screeched to a halt. “This is open to the public?” Yes! With colorful bedrock outcrops and a deep swimming hole, Rainbow Rock has been a favorite Williams River swimming hole for generations. And now that there’s a sign, it’s ready to welcome new splashing swimmers, fetching dogs, and lucky anglers.



Thunder Head View, Hancock

This bend in the river has been open to the public since a post-Tropical Storm Irene buyout, when our conservation efforts helped convert it from a salvage yard to a restored floodplain and riverfront park, but it sorely needed some TLC. We’ve recruited stalwart volunteers to help care for the site, and this summer we built an accessible trail, picnic table, and sign – finishing touches that we hope inspire many more people to enjoy this special place.



Explore More!

Find a new swimming hole, fishing site, or paddlers’ trail using our interactive map.

vermontriverconservancy.org/sites



THE GREEN RIVER'S GREEN HEADWATERS

The cold, clear waters of the Green River start in the forests of Guilford, Halifax, and Marlboro, where seeps, springs, and wetlands trickle into streams under the shade of old trees. These wet places teem with plants and aquatic life, feeding and slaking the thirst of forest animals from mink to moose, bobcat to bear. The Green River headwaters are crucial locally for water quality, wildlife habitat, and flood resilience – and important regionally as part of a climate-resilient wildlife corridor that extends from New York through Massachusetts and into Vermont.

This year, with support from The Nature Conservancy, we're protecting several hundred acres here, and will be working with local neighbors to protect hundreds more acres in the years ahead. These headwater forests will allow complex root systems and spongy organic soils to develop over time, storing rainfall and snowmelt that will improve resilience in times of flood and drought.

When a black bear drinks from one of these newly protected streams, she won't know that we're looking out for her – but we are. And when these streams flow into Massachusetts, they'll bring clean water to tens of thousands of people in the city of Greenfield – a gift from these protected forests.



A young explorer takes a close look at a red-bellied snake along the upper Green River.

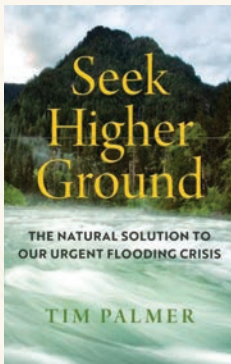
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Reading the River: A Book Group Series Exploring Life with Flooding Rivers

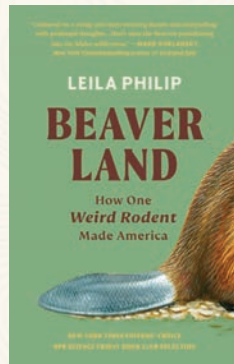
Dive into the powerful currents of story, science, and solution with a book and speaker series that explores how we live with and connect to rivers. We'll gather in small groups to read and discuss, then bring books to life via online presentations from authors and experts, open for anyone to tune in from home. Whether you're a river enthusiast, a concerned neighbor, or simply curious about how stories can shape our understanding of water and place, this series offers a chance to connect, reflect, and imagine a more flood-resilient future — together.

All are welcome. No expertise required — just a love of reading and a willingness to wade in.

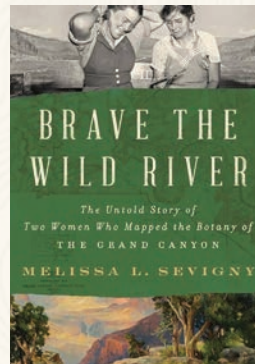
DECEMBER



FEBRUARY



MARCH



Learn more, catch up on recent author talks, and register for upcoming events.

vermontriverconservancy.org/news

Give a tax-deductible gift today to protect land along rivers, plant trees, remove derelict dams, help otters and wood turtles, and bring joy to swimming holes:

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More information at vermontriverconservancy.org/donate or by emailing kassia@vermontriverconservancy.org. **Thank you!**

