

Conservation Commission Views on the route 5 corridor issue

The Conservation Commission is, as the rest of you are, charged with not only considering the route 5 corridor at this time, but we are also charged with a long view, a view of how it will look to future generations, how it will be used to support all kinds of life in perpetuity. The Conservation Commission is committed to working with people and with the other town boards on options to resolve these issues so individuals do not face hardship as a result of actions that might be taken. I know this may be hard to hear, but we all have to let go of ownership issues for the short term and think of ourselves as stewards of this glorious corridor for the long term.

Let me say first that the Connecticut River Corridor is beautiful. It perfectly reflects the rural character of Dummerston which, according to results from two surveys, is very important to the people of Dummerston. And it is just "up the road" from a horrific series of strip malls and developed ugliness and sprawl—on prime agricultural lands. The same is true of route 119 in Hinsdale. The development on route 119 in Hinsdale is an example of how quickly commercialization can take place on a heavily traveled road. It would be so easy for the route 5 corridor to become an extension of Brattleboro. If any of you have been in Lawton Rugs lately, you can get a view of what the Brattleboro North looked like in the 1960's.

I am sure that all of you have studied the Connecticut Valley and Eastern Hills section of the Commissions' Biodiversity Inventory Report. And you understand that this valley was a lake 12,000 years ago, flooded to 370 feet.

These lake deposits have given us rare, rich agricultural soils. The Conservation Commission supports the preservation of these soils. In our view, we are in a brief time span where people can use fossil fuels to bring food in from all over the country and all over the world. Down the road this may not be the case. There is more and more focus on local foods, as there should be. Once this land is developed and the topsoil removed, it can never be restored. We must preserve these lands so they can be used to raise food in the years to come. We are delighted with the conservation of Sweet Tree Farm. It is a big step in the right direction. It is important to conserve the Walker Farm, the Jillson Farm, the farmland of the Houghton, Barrett and Howe properties, and other similar properties for continuing agricultural use. The town needs to come up with ways to do this fairly that meet everyone's needs.

Another result of the historic glacial lake are the alluvial deposits that are providing sand and gravel to the town. This is a non-renewable resource. We have to figure out what we are going to do when these resources are depleted. Perhaps we even have to decide if we really want to deplete these resources. There will be no deposits here for future generations—until after the next glacial interlude. The clay varves at the confluence of where Canoe Brook flows into the Connecticut also deserve protection as a historic feature.

The southeastern corner of the town contains enduring features that are not found on land that has been conserved elsewhere in the state. The VT Nongame and Natural heritage program recommends making these areas priorities for conservation. This area includes a combination of features—slope, soils, elevation, bedrock, soft deep

sediments, ct river floodplain, glacial lake and river deposits that has the capacity to grow great big trees. The state has asked us to give this area priority in land use planning.

We need to be especially watchful of the Canoe Brook corridor that is a known wildlife connector because of its steep, hemlock covered banks and the Salmon Brook corridor.

We need to be mindful of the preservation of edge habitat and small blocks of forest. People may have the idea that the conservation commission is only interested in letting forests "do their own thing". This is not true. We are supportive of good forestry practices that support native species and that may also have commercial value.

The Conservation Commission supports possible housing initiatives at the northern end of the corridor.

The Conservation Commission also supports the preservation of Dutton Pines as a small, accessible park because of its location and historical usage since the late 19th century.

Just because something has been in state hands does not mean we can ignore it. We saw this with the proposal to remove the CCC buildings at Dutton Pines. We are deeply concerned with the invasive species that might overtake the rare, small silver maple, ostrich fern-riverine community along the river at the Dummerston Landing.

The Conservation Commission is responsible for the natural resources of the town both for now and in the future. We are committed to

learning all we can about these natural resources, sharing what we have learned about these resources with Dummerston residents and to working with individuals, groups and town boards to make decisions that will benefit life in Dummerston for generations to come.