

Conservation of the Green River Meadows in Guilford, Vermont

Linda and Steven Lembke

Part 1: Linda Lembke

[Maps and Photos Distribution]

Steve and I are pleased to be here today to testify on behalf of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. We will be sharing a conservation story from the geographic margins of our state. Our home is on the Green River in the town of Guilford about a mile north of the Massachusetts border. The property we are working to conserve is also on the Green River about two miles north of our home. I will begin our testimony with a history of the property. Steve will follow with a review of our work with the Vermont River Conservancy and VHCB.

- When we first settled in Guilford in 1977, the property we are now calling **Green River Meadows** was a long and pleasant hayfield set between river and road a mile south of historic Green River Village. The landowner operated a small car repair business there for many years, but the business changed dramatically in the early 1990s when the owner decided to become a metal recycler and the hayfield became a repository for junk cars, buses, trailers and fuel tanks. The property was known throughout town as **Squires Junkyard**. [Photo 1]
- Concerned neighbors, ourselves included, began looking into Vermont's junkyard regulations and working with the landowner and our Selectboard to establish a plan of compliance. The town of Greenfield, 15 miles to the south, was especially concerned as 30% of their water supply is drawn from the Green River north of their town line.
- Two years of negotiations followed, including a massive cleanup facilitated by the Windham Solid Waste Management District, but the landowner was unable to meet the requirements of running a legal junkyard and the property went up for tax sale in 2003. [Photo 2]
- It was purchased by Jay and Halina Jerardi, long-time seasonal residents. Over the next 5 years, they finished the cleanup of the field, removing hundreds of tires and many dumpsters full of metal debris. Gradually the land returned to its former state, and with much gratitude became known as the **Jerardi Property**.
- In 2011, Tropical Storm Irene hit the Green River watershed with full force and we saw firsthand the importance of its undeveloped floodplains. The Jerardi Property was covered with several feet of water and we were fully aware of the environmental damage that would have occurred had the junkyard still been in place. [Photo 3]

- In 2014, the Green River qualified for one of the state's first geomorphic studies following Irene. In the Green River Corridor Plan that resulted from this study, the Jerardi Property was designated as one of five priority projects because of its role as the last major floodplain before the valley narrows and the river continues its long journey toward Greenfield. **[Photo 4]**
- We also dealt with the spread of knotweed on this property after Irene and worked with the state biologist and a crew from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to remove first-year knotweed plants before they became established. We were successful and invasives on the property are small in number. **[Photo 3]**
- And so we reach 2016, when the Jerardis, now nearing their 80s, decided to sell the land, and neighbors began talking about options for conserving it. Our research led us to the Vermont River Conservancy and its director, Steve Libby. We have clear memories of our first meeting with Steve, standing in the cold at the edge of the property and talking about its values to our community -- its role as an undeveloped floodplain; its connection to Green River Village and other conserved properties in the watershed; and its potential as a place for hiking trails, river access, and community gathering. For the last 2 years we've worked closely with Steve on conserving this property. Steve Lembke will now tell you about this work and VHCBC's important role.