

## **Conservation of the Green River Meadows in Guilford, Vermont**

Linda and Steven Lembke

### Part 2: Steven Lembke

Hello again, and thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for taking the time to hear our story. Linda has told you about the land. I'm going to take a few minutes to tell you about the project and its funding.

Linda and I have been interested in conservation and water related issues for many years and we serve on several local, regional and State boards related to these issues. Linda is a member the Guilford Conservation Commission and represents Guilford on the regional Green River Watershed Alliance. I am Guilford's Floodplain Administrator and sit on the Natural Resources Committee of the Windham Regional Commission, the Connecticut River Advisory Commission, and the Connecticut River Joint Commissions.

In these positions we have been involved with a wide variety of conservation and water related projects. As you well know, when it comes to water quality, flood resilience, ecology and conservation, there is no lack of good projects, but there is often a lack of funding to bring those ideas and projects to fruition.

The Green River Meadows Project started out the same way. It was a good idea with a simple goal, but no clear path for funding. Our goal was to acquire the property and conserve it in perpetuity. We knew that doing so would accomplish the following:

1. Provide public access to the River and its recreational offerings **[Photo 5]**
2. Provide a natural town gathering place for individuals and groups
3. Create an area for hands-on environmental education
4. Protect one of the region's most vital floodplains
5. Help preserve the Green River as a source of quality drinking water
6. Provide for limited haying by a local farmer **[Photo 6]**
7. Create an interconnected trail system for hiking, skiing and snowshoeing
8. Protect critical wildlife connections to the river corridor **[Photo 7]**
9. Protect an area designated as one of the top five conservation projects in the Green River watershed.

This was clearly a small piece of property with a big environmental impact, but like other good conservation projects, it came with seemingly impossible funding barriers. Following our initial funding research, we were pretty disheartened, but that all changed when the Vermont River Conservancy brought VHCB into the picture. VHCB and VRC staff reviewed the project and the history of the property, both on paper and on site. The history of the property resulted in the need for a Brownfields study to

determine the toxicity, liability and salability of the property. Fortunately, after several months of testing, those reports all came back favorable and VHCB committed to providing 60% of the funds needed to acquire the land. This commitment was the catalyst we needed to believe the project was truly possible.

With this funding wind at our back and strong endorsements from our Town's Selectboard, local and state conservation groups and interested individuals, a group of determined citizens is now busy securing the remaining funds. We anticipate that the land will be transferred and under a conservation easement by September of this year.

VHCB is one of the few organizations that provides funding for land acquisition and the funding they provide goes even farther as it is multiplied by additional funds raised locally. We are very grateful for the existence and funding vision of VHCB. Without their encouragement and commitment, the conservation of this piece of land and all its attributes would not have happened.

Years ago, someone asked Warren Buffet how much money he planned to leave to his children: He said, "**enough so they feel they can do anything, but not so much that they can do nothing.**" The VHCB funding did the same for us. VHCB funding energized us and allowed us to believe that with hard work and commitment we could bring this project to completion, but they didn't give us so much that we could get by with doing nothing. For that we are very grateful on many levels.

Thank you.