



# Stewardship Monitoring Report

## *Property Information*

(1) **Name of Property:** Wheeler Property and Monitor Barn

(2) **Property Ownership:**

RLT  Private

If privately owned, record name and address of current owner:

Name(s): Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

Address: 1949 East Main Street, Richmond, Vermont 05477

Contact Name and Phone Number: Tom Hark: 802.434.3969, Fax.802.434.3985

(3) **Has there been a change in ownership since last report?**

Yes  No

If yes, include recording information below:

## *Visit Report* .....

(4) **Date and Time of Inspection:** Monday 10/22/2007

(5) **If privately owned, was owner contacted prior to visit (if yes how)?**

Yes  No

I contacted VYCC Operations Manager John Leddy, prior to the visit and arranged a stewardship tour with him and other members of VYCC's Land Use Committee.

(6) **Did owner (or representative) accompany the monitor?**

Yes  No

If yes, who accompanied? John Leddy, Operations Manager; Keegan Tierney, Program Coordinator; Justin Kenney, AmeriCorps Operations; Bradley Materick, Trails Manager. Additional RLT members in attendance were Brad Elliot and Wright Preston.

(7) **Describe how the land is currently being used (in restricted area only).** Give specific detail about **agricultural** and **forest** uses if applicable:

The property covers approximately 233 acres. Most of the property is forested (upper elevations). There is little merchantable timber on the property. Lower elevations are primarily open field, agricultural (~35 acres of which ~25 acres are in corn production), the West Monitor Barn and parking. Eight lean-tos have been installed along the west border where old field meets forest.

Installation of a total of ten lean-tos had been proposed, as well as several cabins. VYCC Operations Manager John Leddy believes that plans for the additional lean-tos and the cabins is

now on hold, at least until a more accurate trails and lands assessment is completed. RLT should be contacted prior to final site selection for the cabins.

**(8) Monitor's best assessment of whether the terms of the conservation restrictions are being observed:** (if No, explain below or on attachment)  **Yes**  **No**

A) The property generally appears to be maintained in a manner consistent with common conservation restrictions, however, significant trail work (repair, rerouting and potentially decommissioning) is *still* needed at the locations identified in the previous two stewardship monitoring reports (2005, 2006). Repairs at these locations (see sites 1-6 on attached map) are needed to restore and/or maintain forest and water quality and to prevent further soil erosion on the property. RLT should request that VYCC provide a written, time-sensitive, action plan for trail repair before the end of the year.

B) Evidence indicates that ATVs are still active on the west-side logging road—though the activity does not appear to occur as far up the trail (north) as in previous years. Trail improvements (along northern boundary with Prelco lands) by Vermont Area Snowmobile Travelers (VAST), and new gates (along western and northern boundaries) installed by RLT and VAST appear to be limiting some ATV access and damage.

An ATV barrier should also be installed at the northern end of the narrow—often wet—trail in the ravine between rocky ridges with significant wildlife sign (see site #4 on attached map). Consider steps to reduce erosion. Also, potential ATV access from trails connecting to Farm Bureau property. Trails may require additional signage and barriers to prevent unwanted ATV usage.

C) If not under agriculture, the open field areas should be brush-hogged every third year as stipulated in the conservation easement (sec II.2) to prevent woody vegetation to maintain the open condition.

**(9) Did you note any possible violations of the terms of the conservation restrictions?** (If yes, explain below or on attachment)  **Yes**  **No**

Property boundary encroachment of the Wheeler Property by neighboring property owner (Mr. Craig Cowles) has changed, but remains an issue. The fence that Mr. Cowles had previously installed and maintained extending into the Wheeler Property (north side of Cowles property) and the oil tank that was leaning against the Cowles fence (see 2005 and 2006 stewardship reports) have been removed. Re-grading and landscaping along the border between the VYCC parking area and Mr. Cowles property now appears to prevent Mr. Cowles from parking/storing vehicles and equipment on the VYCC side of the property boundary.

A survey monument engraved with the license number 695 and installed by VYCC in summer 2007 at the northeast corner of Mr. Cowles property (see site 7 in attached map) has again been broken off. Its top was found under a nearby tree (figure 1) and should be re-attached alongside a stake to mark its position. The top of the survey monument was given to Tom Hark.

Mr. Cowles appears to be maintaining a lawn for private use north of the property line and north of a line of spruce trees planted to delineate the boundary (figure 2). This land could otherwise be included in the acreage assigned to production agriculture.

Considering the terms of the conservation easement, Mr. Cowles' previous history with boundary disputes, and his threats to take protected VYCC property via adverse possession (see 2005 stewardship report), VYCC should immediately inform Mr. Cowles in writing that he is unlawfully using VYCC lands. VYCC might discuss with RLT and VHCB the possibility of giving Mr. Cowles a letter granting temporary permission to continue mowing the land, in order to guard against later claims of adverse possession. RLT should be copied on all correspondence with Mr. Cowles about this and related issues.

No other conditions were noted on the Wheeler Property that clearly appeared to be a violation of conservation restrictions were observed.



Figure 1. broken survey monument at the northeast corner between the VYCC and Cowles properties 10/22/2007



Figure 2. encroachment on conserved VYCC property at border between VYCC and Cowles properties 10/24/2007

#### (10) General Remarks:

- A) The exotic, invasive shrub Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) was found growing in the northwest portion of the property (site 8 in attached map). Japanese barberry forms dense stands in natural habitats including canopy forests, open woodlands, wetlands, pastures, and meadows and alters soil pH, nitrogen levels, and biological activity in the soil. Once established, barberry displaces native plants and reduces wildlife habitat and forage. Prevention of seed production should be a management priority as birds readily spread seeds. Because barberry can re-sprout from root fragments remaining in soil, thorough removal of root portions is important. Manual control works well but may need to be combined with chemical in large or persistent infestations.

The largest plants were covered with a blue tarp found nearby. These plants and others in the area should be removed before they can spread and the surrounding area should be checked for additional plants. Follow-up checks of these and for additional plants should be made for two years to ensure that dormant seeds haven't sprouted.

- B) VYCC has installed two stations of a challenge course (sites 9 in attached map). One station includes a cable strung high between two trees located in the lean-to area. The other station

consists of several logs on the ground that are used for balancing activities. This station is set in the old field just off the property on the Farm Bureau land within the area of the RLT easement. Neither station appears to be causing harm to the properties.

- C) VYCC has hired Bradley Materick to conduct a trails assessment for the property. RLT should provide assistance to Mr. Materick as needed to help him complete the assessment so that VYCC can move quickly to address the trail problems noted above. With this said, RLT should also inform VYCC that the trail maintenance problems are of the highest priority and that further delays cannot be tolerated.
- D) VYCC's management plan for the Wheeler property, dated 08/01/2007 is a welcome change from the past years of operation without such a document. While good, the document does not yet provide a clear picture of VYCC's plans for the property or an assessment of the potential impacts to the property. RLT should work with VYCC on improving the management plan according to the process laid out in section G. Management Plan Update Process.

VYCC Operations Manager John Leddy and I have tentatively agreed to plan a meeting of the VYCC Lands Team and RLT Stewardship Committee to discuss the current management plan before the end of 2007.

**(11) Attachments** (Note how many of each - leave blank if none):

2 Photos                      1 Maps                      \_\_\_ Drawings

\_\_\_ Other (describe \_\_\_\_\_)

**(12) Name of Monitor:** Jon Kart

Signature:  Date: 10/24/2007

# Stewardship Recommendations for the Wheeler/VYCC Property based on the 10/22/2007 RLT Monitoring Visit.

Base map from 2002 Wheeler & Farm Bureau Assessment by LIA Consultants

