

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**IMAGE CAPTION:** [Apologies for the poor quality]: *Closing on the Little River project, L-R, Heather Furman, SLT Executive Director, Elaine Nichols, SLT Attorney, and landowners, Jeff Nicholson, Darrow Mansfield and Shauna Larson.*

### **Stowe Land Trust Completes First River Corridor Easement in Vermont**

April 30 2008 – Stowe Land Trust closed on its first river corridor conservation easement on a 2,000 foot stretch of the Little River this week and is the first stand-alone river corridor easement in Vermont. Designed through collaboration between the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation’s River Management Program (DEC), Vermont Land Trust, and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the River Corridor Conservation Easement took over a year to develop. Existing farm easements in Randolph and Fairfield were amended to provide added protection for streams and rivers. The stand-alone easement was made available to a number of conservation organizations around the state and gives land trusts and government agencies the ability to purchase *channel intervention* and *riparian management* rights within traditional river floodplains also known as the “meander belt” or Fluvial Erosion Hazard Area (FEHA). In addition, it prohibits development in the FEHA and any adjacent lands covered by the easement, aiding in river recovery from past bad management, channel straightening and gravel removal.

“Zoning alone does not prohibit development in the floodplain” said Heather Furman, SLT’s Executive Director who facilitated the project with 3 landowners. “River floodplains are routinely encroached upon by development and then those investments need to be protected. Even today we continue to armor (rip-rap) river banks to protect floodplain development that never should have been built there in the first place.”

According to the DEC, Vermont tax-payers spend an average of \$18 - \$20 million per year to keep rivers straightened and static in the landscape. But changing hundreds of years of development can’t happen overnight and stream-side roads and buildings require rivers to stay put. There are some locations however, where the river can have access to its floodplain and those are the locations the DEC has identified as critical to helping the river reach a state of equilibrium. “We identified the parcels just south of the River Rd. Bridge in Stowe as a prime location for the Little River to dissipate some of its energy,” said Mike Kline, the DEC’s River Management Scientist who pioneered the drafting of the river easement. “A river’s energy stays within the channel and becomes more powerful if it doesn’t have access to its traditional floodplain, and this can lead to more devastating floods, wiping out roads and scouring away prime agricultural soils.”

Stowe Land Trust conserved just under 10 acres on either side of the Little River. The easement prohibits landowners from rip-rapping the river banks and from encroachments that may affect the river’s ability to meander naturally in its floodplain. The project was funded by the DEC and the Stowe Conservation Commission.