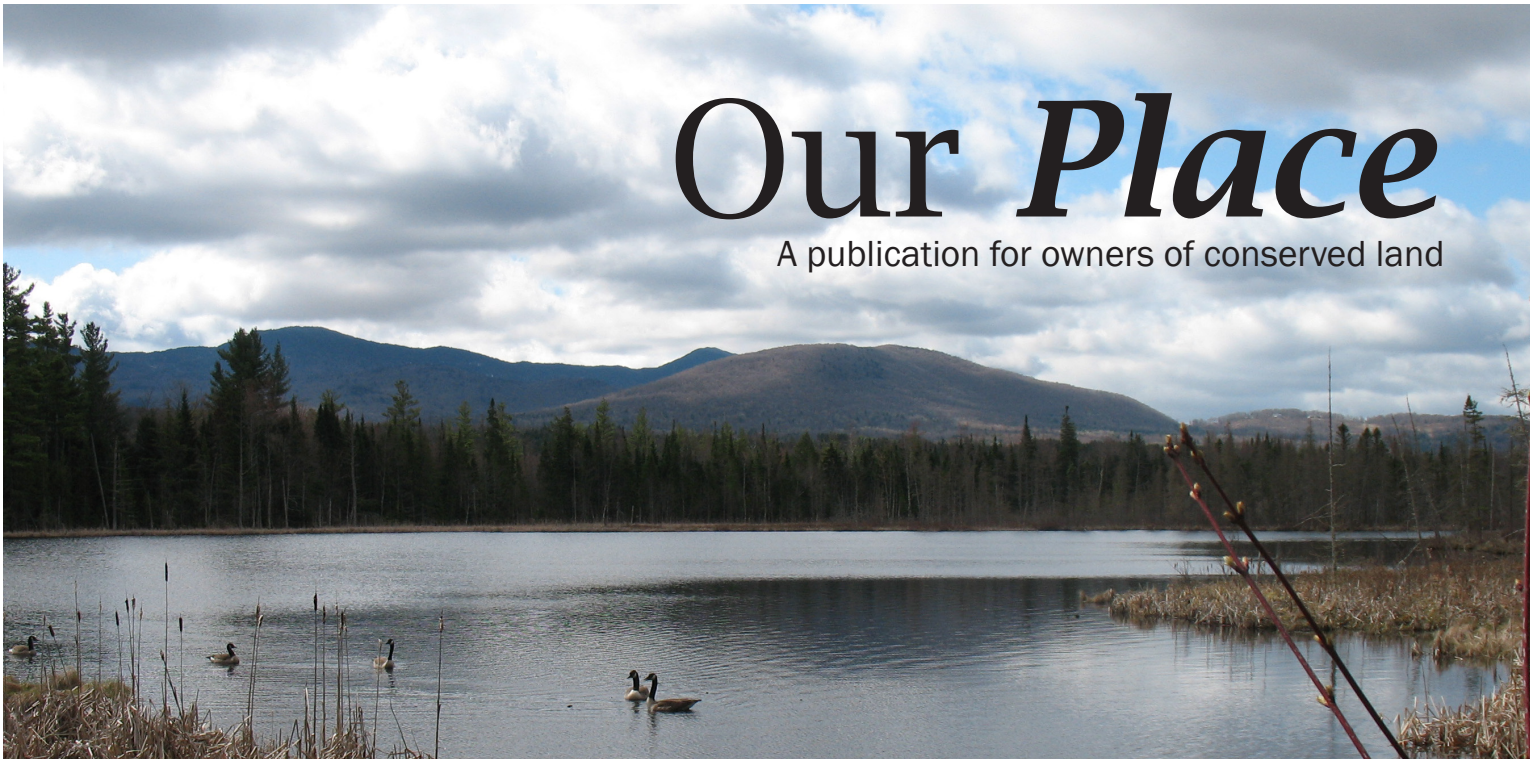


Our *Place*

A publication for owners of conserved land



Managing Your Land for Wildlife Habitat

Ron Stancliff grew up in a farmhouse near Joe's Pond in Morristown, Vermont. Ron can recall fond memories of his father and uncle fishing for bull pout on summer evenings. In 2005, Ron and his wife Judy donated a conservation easement to Stowe Land Trust that protects Joe's Pond and an adjoining hayfield from development. When asked about his decision to conserve 32 acres of his family's land he said, "I have hunted this area for grouse, rabbits and waterfowl and have formed an attachment and respect for keeping land open to all."

On a recent walk with Ron, he described some of the changes he has seen while growing up near Joe's Pond. "There used to be so many more animals here, lots of Bluebirds and large flocks of turkey." Nancy Allen, a soil conservationist with USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), joined us on the walk around Joe's Pond to talk about conservation practices to enhance wildlife habitat on the property.

Nancy explained that the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) was designed to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners for developing, improving or managing wildlife habitat on their lands. Some of the changes Ron has seen are due to changes in land use patterns like residential development. However, the transition from old fields to young forest and young forest to mature forest can alter species diversity as well.

Through WHIP, NRCS has prioritized management of grasslands, old fields and thickets, mast stands and fruit trees, riparian areas and rare natural communities that support species of concern. By managing their land for wildlife habitat, landowners are ensuring healthy populations of species of concern like game birds, black bear, deer, grassland birds, waterfowl and other aquatic species.

The conserved Joe's Pond property is made up of field, mature forest, riparian forest and a large wetland complex. Because there was such a diverse range

of habitat types on the property, Nancy described several conservation practices that could be implemented.

Fruit and mast producing trees like cherry and beech that appeared frequently during our walk are an important food source for wildlife. NRCS recommends releasing the trees by girdling or removing surrounding trees to allow more sunlight to reach the mast producing tree and increase its production and survival. When done strategically, a landowner can implement this practice while meeting their seasonal firewood needs.

The forest edge is a really dynamic place for wildlife because it represents where two habitats come together. Soft edges or gradual transitions from field to forest are considered better for wildlife. Nancy suggested that Ron consider softening the transition from forest to field by clearing approximately 20 feet into the forest along the field edge to create a younger forest also known as early successional habitat.

Do you have a question about the conservation easement on your property?
Call Stowe Land Trust, we would be happy to answer any questions you have about your land.

Managing Land for Wildlife Habitat

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Nancy noted that the riparian buffer and adjoining forest showed few signs of invasive plant infestation. Other landowners, not so fortunate, are good candidates for assistance from NRCS to implement an invasive plant control project. Eradicating invasive plants allows native plant species to restore themselves in areas like riparian buffers where animals look for nesting habitat and food.

WHIP is a cost share program. NRCS partners with willing participants to develop a conservation plan that includes conservation practices such as those previously mentioned and an implementation plan over a period of up to 10 years. Participants in the program agree to maintain the practices laid out in the plan and NRCS agrees to provide technical assistance and payments to assist with implementing the conservation practices.

“People want to talk about their land, its history and the stories it evokes,” said Nancy about working with private landowners, “providing technical assistance



Ron Stancliff stands at the edge of Joe's Pond with Nancy Allen from NRCS.

to landowners to help them learn is one of the greatest benefits of this program.”

To learn more about WHIP or other cost share programs with NRCS, visit their website <http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/> or contact Stowe Land Trust at 802.253.7221.

Is your conserved property on the market?
Are you thinking of selling
your conserved land?

Stowe Land Trust would like to know
so we can welcome new landowners to
our stewardship program.

Call Stowe Land Trust at 802.253.7221.

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