

# Our Place

A publication for owners of conserved land



## Storm Damage to Forests: Information and Resources for Landowners

As winter gives way to spring, signs emerge from the snow-pack reminding us of the severe windstorm Lamoille County experienced last fall. Wind gusts up to 90 miles per hour snapped and tipped trees and broken branches were scattered all over the landscape.

Of the five properties owned by Stowe Land Trust, Kirchner Woods was the only one to sustain damage from the windstorm. Hundreds of trees snapped or were blown over in the neighborhood of Kirchner Woods.

Because of the public trails, our first response and highest priority was to make sure that trails were clear and safe for visitors. However, this event led us to ponder how other landowners were able to respond to the damage. Did they know who to call, how to hire someone to clean up, and how to minimize the risk of damage in the future?

We contacted Ray Toolan, Lamoille and Orleans County Forester, to ask him a few questions about how landowners can be more prepared for an event like this in the future.

### **SLT: What do County Foresters do?**

**RT:** My primary function is to assist forest

landowners in making informed decisions about their forest lands. I also administer the Use Value Appraisal Program for Lamoille and Orleans County. I am available for site visits on request to diagnose insect and disease problems and similar issues.

### **SLT: What site conditions cause trees to tip in strong winds?**

**RT:** As you can probably surmise, trees are held in place by their roots. If the roots have good, deep soil to anchor in then the tree will be more resistant to wind-throw. Thin soils, wet soils and the “lack of company” all contribute to making a tree more susceptible to wind-throw. By “lack of company” I am referring to what happens when a thinning or harvesting occurs that leaves remaining trees overly exposed on sites with thin and/or wet soils.

### **SLT: Are there actions landowners can take to minimize the risk of damage during a windstorm?**

**Ray:** Understand the characteristics of your forest. How the woods are thinned and/or harvested may play a large part. Areas that are prone to wind-throw often exhibit evidence of previous events. “Pits and mounds”



are featured that indicate wind-throw in the past.

### **SLT: What is the first thing someone should do if they discover damage to a single tree or to their woodlot?**

**RT:** That depends in large part as to what the damage is. If it is just a few trees, the damage caused by trying to salvage them might exceed the value of the trees salvaged. If the damage is extensive, a planned salvage cut should be considered with a lot of thought going into how to keep the trees still standing to remain in an upright position.

### **SLT: Should landowners have all downed or damaged trees removed?**

**RT:** Downed trees provide habitat for a variety of animals and also return nutrients to the soil as they break down, so leaving them causes no harm. If they are obstructing roads or trails but are not enough to warrant salvage, then simply cutting them out of the roads and trails would be adequate.

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.

**SLT: Is professional assistance available to help with damage assessments and other steps necessary to respond to damage from a windstorm?**

**RT:** Yes. The county forester is available to visit the land and offer recommendations. We are not normally allowed to conduct timber sales however. There are a number of very competent consulting foresters that can be used to oversee a proper salvage operation if it is called for. If the land is in the Use Value Appraisal program, an amendment to the plan will need to be filed.

**SLT: Is there any financial assistance available to landowners with wind storm damage to their woodlot?**

**RT:** At this time, the only cost-share program I am aware of is through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), a part of the US Department of Agriculture. There is money available to help clean up damaged sugar bushes as sugaring is considered an agricultural use.

**SLT: What, if anything, should landowners do once the damage is cleaned up?**

**RT:** This question assumes the damage will be cleaned up which may not always be the best solution. Any time a stand is opened up, creating more room around trees, there is an increased risk of wind-throw. There is little that can be done other than to monitor your woods as the remaining trees adjust.



**Do landowners know who to call, how to hire someone to clean up, and how to minimize the risk of damage in the future?**

Contact County Forester, Ray Toolan, for more information or questions about how to manage your forest land.

Raymond J. Toolan, County Forester  
Lamoille & Orleans Counties  
29 Sunset Drive, Morrisville, VT 05661  
802-888-5733  
raymond.toolan@state.vt.us

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.

Would you like to stay informed about Stowe Land Trust projects?  
Become a member today.

Visit us online at [www.stowelandtrust.org](http://www.stowelandtrust.org) or send in a check.

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

*Newsletter for Owners  
of Conserved Land!*

STOWE LAND TRUST  
PO Box 284  
Stowe, VT 05672  
(802) 253-7221  
(802) 253-2642 (fax)  
[www.stowelandtrust.org](http://www.stowelandtrust.org)