



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

A newsletter of Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

Volume 71 Summer 2026

THE POWER OF ONE CONVERSATION

Agencies and organizations across the country, and here in Vermont, are investing significant resources into reaching new woodland owners wanting to help them become effective stewards. Vermont Coverts has long known something important: the most powerful tool for influencing forest management comes from another landowner, a neighbor or a trusted friend.

For more than 40 years, our Cooperator network has been helping landowners learn from other landowners. Long before “peer-to-peer outreach” became a recognized strategy, Coverts Cooperators were sharing stories, hosting walks, answering questions, and demonstrating what good stewardship looks like on the ground.

This continues today and the impact of this work cannot be overstated. Peer learning complements professional technical assistance by creating local networks of trust, hands-on learning opportunities and ongoing support.

Every time you talk with a neighbor about controlling invasive plants, explain why you worked with a forester, share the benefits of a habitat improvement project, or discuss the importance of keeping forests as forests, you are helping shape the future of Vermont’s landscape.

Often, those conversations happen over a fence line, during a walk in the woods, at the transfer station, town meeting, or just while chatting with a friend. They may seem small, but collectively they have tremendous influence.

Research shows that landowners are more likely to take action on their property when they hear from someone they trust, someone who has faced the same decisions and challenges they are facing. That’s exactly what makes Coverts so successful.

We see examples of this every day.

Hank Butler’s (2023 Fall) work in his town forest helps demonstrate the value of active forest stewardship and wildlife habitat management. Community members can see firsthand how thoughtful management creates healthier forests and benefits wildlife.

Doreen and Bruce Jones (2019 Spring) welcome people to their property for woodland walks sharing their land management strategies. By opening their woods to others, they are sharing how an individual property owner implements forest management.

In Shrewsbury, Weezy Duda (2017 Fall) coordinates the delivery of Coverts Welcome Bags to new residents, creating connections and helping newcomers learn about their community and the importance of stewardship. A simple act of welcome that opens the door to larger conversations about forests, wildlife, and caring for the land.

These are just a few examples of what Cooperators do every day across Vermont.

Some of your work is highly visible like hosting workshops, leading walks, serving on conservation commissions, or speaking at community events.

Other efforts happen quietly. Managing your own land thoughtfully. Controlling invasives along the roadside. Creating habitat for wildlife. Talking with a neighbor who is wondering whether to hire a forester.

One of the challenges of measuring the impact of the Cooperator network is that many of the most important interactions never make it into a report or spreadsheet. We can count workshops, the number of people who attend, and volunteer hours, but it is much harder to capture the conversations that happen at the

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MISSION: Together we enlist and support Vermont landowners in a long-term commitment to maintain and enhance diverse wildlife habitat and healthy ecosystems.

NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Rich Chalmers, Class of 2005 Spring



The evening of April 19th was a dramatic one for those of us in Central Vermont, particularly where we live in Williamstown and the surrounding towns. What at first looked like just another severe thunderstorm morphed

into an EF-1 tornado with estimated 90 mile per hour winds and quarter-sized hail.

It sounded like rocks being thrown at the house. It dented the standing seam roof, the car, also breaking its rear window, and punching holes in our neighbor's siding.

The woods took a beating as well, especially on higher elevation western facing slopes. I was expecting to see large areas of downed trees, like you see in the photos of wind shear events. However, the effect was more hyper local, tree specific, with much of the woods relatively unscathed, except by hail.

The hardwoods had not yet leafed out so the wind passed through their branches, limiting the impact to cleaving particularly bad joints. The softwoods took the brunt of the force, each in their own way. White pines snapped at weaknesses or bad joints but generally stayed standing. Spruce and fir blew over with their roots attached.

We humans generally do not like this sort of change. We tend to be attached to the way things are, at least in the woods, and view these changes as damage. Maybe it relates to our primeval sense of safety in the familiar, in order, neat and trim.

But Coverts has been changing how I view, understand, and relate to the woods. Through the Cooperator Training plus decades of workshops, concepts such as "wildlife likes it messy" and "it depends" are having their effect.

The Coverts Book Club, for example, has exposed me to fascinating explorations of our natural world, broadening my horizons and enriching my perspective. This is particularly true for Ethan Tapper's *How to Love a Forest* and Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Serviceberry*.

The Coverts' Ecological Forestry advanced training, with UMass Extension Forester Paul Catanzaro and UVM's Forestry Program Director Tony D'Amato, was an eye-opening look into the future of forest stewardship. Their new book, *Tending Your Forest*,

drives home the complexity of our forest ecosystems, the interconnected nature of all its parts, and the role we can play in their stewardship.

I could not attend their book readings in person but was excited to catch the recording of the webinar sponsored by Coverts and the Vermont Land Trust (available on the VLT YouTube channel). Paul and Tony's emphasis on continuity, complexity & diversity, forest time, and context within the larger landscape, provide a valuable framework to approach the future of our forests.



Tornado induced habitat enhancement on Rich & Ann Chalmers' land in Williamstown

The pre-Coverts Cooperator Rich Chalmers might have viewed the storm's effects as damage or loss. The continuously and very humbly learning Coverts Cooperator Rich Chalmers was encouraged. We are one step further along the path of moving this mostly single age recovering forest on its journey towards greater health and diversity, better supporting the wildlife, plants and organisms that live here.

Thank you to all the amazing resource professionals who are helping us understand these concepts. To the Coverts Cooperators who continue to connect, learn and share about forest stewardship. And to the indigenous peoples, whose knowledge and perspectives enrich our ability to steward the land.

Join us as we continue to explore these concepts at our annual meeting on August 29!

Sincerely,

Rich Chalmers

Rich Chalmers, President



Keep Vermont Coverts growing strong!

THE POWER OF ONE CONVERSATION

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post office, a community breakfast, or while talking with a neighbor. These informal exchanges often plant the seeds for future action.

This is why we encourage Cooperators to continue sharing their experiences whenever opportunities arise. You never know which conversation will inspire the next stewardship project, conservation easement, invasive species removal effort, or wildlife habitat improvement. Change begins with a simple conversation between neighbors. The cumulative impact of these conversations is one of the greatest strengths of the Coverts network.

As Vermont experiences a transfer of forestland ownership and welcomes new landowners every year, the

need for trusted voices has never been greater. Many people care deeply about their woods but don't know where to begin. Your experiences, your examples, and your willingness to share what you've learned helps to bridge the gap to understanding the opportunities.

The strength and magic of Vermont Coverts lie in the connections made during the Training and the resulting network of dedicated Cooperators spread across the state who continue to inspire others through their actions and commitment to stewardship.

So, as you work in your woods, host a walk, pull invasive plants, or simply strike up a conversation with a curious neighbor, remember that you are part of something much larger. You are helping ensure that Vermont's forests remain healthy, diverse, and productive for future generations.



Vermont Coverts
Woodlands for Wildlife

ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 2026

5:00PM – 8:00PM

**KEHOE CONSERVATION CAMP
CASTLETON**

Join us to connect, share and learn! Meet the newest class of Cooperators and visit with other alumni. We'll have a great speaker and time to learn from each other. Fee: \$30, includes dinner. We hope you can join us!

Not able to attend? Please fill out and return the proxy note below. Your proxy is important to ensure that we gather a legal quorum to conduct elections to the Council. Proxies can be e-mailed or mailed and must be received by August 27. Send proxies to lisa@vtcoverts.org or mail to VT Coverts, PO Box 328, Vergennes, VT 05491.

Annual Meeting Registration

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Number Attending: _____ Amount Enclosed @ \$30/person): _____

PROXY

I, _____, a member of Vermont Coverts, hereby constitute Tim Stout or Deidre Schiela as my lawful proxy to attend and vote on my behalf at the Annual Meeting of Vermont Coverts held on Saturday, August 29, 2026 or at any adjournment thereof.

Given this _____ day of _____, 2026
(day) (month)

Signature: _____



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

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VT COVERTS ANNUAL MEETING AUGUST 29, 2026 DETAILS INSIDE

HELP US GROW!

The Coverts Council Development Committee is looking into foundation support and needs your help. If you are on a foundation board or have a connection to a foundation that addresses environmental issues, we would appreciate talking with you. Our charge as a committee is to find foundations that might be interested in supporting Coverts' work. Once a foundation and its funding objectives are identified, Coverts will be in a position to consider approaching them IF their grant-making objectives and Coverts' needs are well matched. If you can help, please contact John Hawkins (jfhawkins@gmail.com).