

Report of the Montpelier Conservation Commission for the City of Montpelier Year 2008 Annual Report

The Montpelier Conservation Commission (MCC) is charged with advising the City Council, the Planning Commission and other city officials on issues concerning Montpelier's natural resources and engaging residents to protect and enhance the City's natural environment. This year's highlights are described below:

Montpelier BioBlitz

The Conservation Commission was one of the major sponsors of the Montpelier BioBlitz, an inventory of all living organisms in the City that was conducted over a 24-hour period on July 11-12, 2008 from a base of operations at the North Branch Nature Center. Nearly 200 scientists and another 200 citizen volunteers from around the region, including participants from some seven states, the Smithsonian, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and Baker University in Kansas, inventoried over 1500 species from all kingdoms of life. The inventory included 86 species of birds, 4 species of fresh-water sponges, 41 species of bees, 271 species of moths, 488 plant species, four or five species of tardigrades (water bears), a lichen species previously undocumented in Vermont, and several species of damselflies and dragonflies previously undocumented in Washington County. A complete list of the results and a photo slideshow can be viewed at <http://www.northbranchnaturecenter.org/bioblitz/results.html>. The event was co-sponsored by many local businesses and hundreds of Montpelier residents took part in the event.

EnvisionMontpelier

The Conservation Commission is an active participant in envisionMontpelier, a long-term, visionary planning project designed to lay the groundwork for strategies and activities that will contribute to Montpelier becoming the country's first sustainable state capital. Several Commission members participated on Natural Environment Committee to establish goals relating to air & climate, land and soils, biodiversity, food, water, energy, waste management and education. The Commission continues as an active participant at envision stakeholders meetings to establish strategies and activities to accomplish these goals.

High School Students to join the Conservation Commission

The City Council approved the Conservation Commission's request to allow two high school students to join as members of the Commission. The Commission responded to a request by Matt McClane from Montpelier High School's Community Based Learning Program to place students on a number of community boards (including the Planning Commission, the School Board, and the Reparative Justice Advisory Board). The Commission is excited to begin working on issues important to our high school students, and is pleased that four students have already expressed an interest in serving on the Commission.

Main Street Middle School Natural Community Curriculum

The Commission supported a grant application to the Mazer Foundation (part of envisionMontpelier) by North Branch Nature Center to support development of 7th and 8th grade science teacher Eli Rosenberg's biannual "Blue Marble" (natural communities) curriculum at MSMS. With support from AmeriCorps/VISTA staff, 70 7th and 8th grade students spent one day each week during the month of May visiting different natural communities around Montpelier to collect baseline data in preparation for the July Bioblitz. The curriculum will include students collecting data every other year to establish a useful historical record and provide an effective hands-on approach to learning about natural communities.

Water Quality Monitoring

The Conservation Commission supported the mid-Winooski Partnership by providing an Americorps/VISTA member to process all of the water samples generated by the newly established community water monitoring program. Water samples were taken from 12 known swimming areas in and around Montpelier and its watersheds over a 4 month period. The water was tested for total coliform, E. coli, and phosphate levels. The water quality monitoring documented elevated bacteria levels following severe rainstorms that resulted in the closure of a number of swimming areas during the summer months.

Montpelier Conservation Fund

The first application to the Montpelier Conservation Fund was received from the Cross Vermont Trail Association (CVTA) to support acquisition of trail easements for the portion of the trail that passes through Montpelier. The Cross Vermont Trail will eventually run across the state from Burlington to Wells River and utilizes an abandoned railroad bed for much of the distance. The Conservation Fund Advisory Board recommended that \$3300 of the Fund be committed to this project for use by the CVTA, which was subsequently approved by the City Council. The Conservation Fund was created after a petition effort by coordinated by the Conservation Commission which created a \$40,000 fund for conserving lands and waters within the City for agricultural, forest, wildlife, recreational or natural area use.

Riverbank Enhancement

A huge amount of work along Montpelier's rivers was completed thanks to the leadership of AmeriCorps/VISTA members Katie McKinstry and Scott Courcelle and work crews provided by the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) and the International Volunteers for Peace. Highlights of the work include planting riparian buffers and re-grading the riverbank abutting the Peace Park, pruning and weeding Mill Pond Park, installing beaver protection screens along the Winooski under the I-89 overpass, removing invasive species, including Japanese knotweed, bush honeysuckle, goutweed and wild chervil along numerous stretches of the riverbank, refreshing the tree nursery, transplanting some young hardwood trees from Hubbard Park to banks of the North Branch and Winooski rivers and conducting important trail work in the North Branch Park.

Berlin Pond Watershed Conservation Project

The Berlin and Montpelier Conservation Commissions continued the partnership with the Vermont Land Trust to conserve priority parcels in the Berlin Pond Watershed, using information from the recent natural community mapping project and geographic information systems (GIS) analysis of parcel and stream data which identified priority parcels in the watershed for conservation. A 48 acre parcel that adjoined two previously protected parcels was conserved and added to the Berlin Town Forest to bring the total of conserved land in the 6660 acre watershed to over 1400 acres. Berlin Pond is the primary drinking water supply for the City of Montpelier and portions of the Town of Berlin.

Celebrate the Winooski

The Conservation Commission, along with Friends of the Winooski River, co-sponsored the eleventh annual "Celebrate the Winooski" festival in September. The aim of the festival is to boost stewardship of the Winooski River and its tributaries through river clean-up, education, and celebration. Although the annual cleanups are resulting in cleaner rivers, trash continues to be an ongoing concern. Citizens are encouraged to contact their legislators to support a bill requiring a deposit on tires (similar to the bottle bill) that was initially proposed by the Montpelier High School Earth Group.

Commission members, alternates and liaisons during all or part of the year included Geoff Beyer, Ken Jones, Ken Matzner, Roy Schiff, Kris Hammer, Emma Lynn Melvin, Karen Freeman, Anthony Iarrapino, Bill Finnegan, Devon Brownlee, Katie McInstry, Scott Courcelle, and Linda Henzel. The Conservation Commission is an active group of enthusiastic Montpelier residents who are eager to assist the City in protecting its valuable natural resources. The Commission meets at 7:00 pm at City Hall on the second Thursday of every month. All meetings are open to the public. For more information contact Kris Hammer at 223-0577 or kris.hammer@verizon.net. We welcome the participation of each and every resident.

Kris Hammer, Chair
Montpelier Conservation Commission