

Faith in Vermont
By Margaret Chadwell

In an ideal world, people would recognize and admit to the damage they have caused our planet. However, with the state of denial that many people are in, that ideal seems near impossible. This rejection, regarding the tragic conditions of our earth and its inhabitants is a detrimental mindset. Looking at a place like Vermont, the stereotype generally depicts a 'green state,' as compared to others, but we are not as green as we think we are. In the past 38 years, Vermont has endured countless changes, many that were beneficial, but none that didn't come with a cost. "It is troubling... that we see these and other changes occurring at the expense of the environment, our culture, and many aspects of our quality of life" (Disappearing). To me, a sustainable Vermont would be a place where those losses were restored, a place that was environmentally enlightened, and a place where people become activists for the health of our planet.

To live in Vermont, is a privilege I take too often, for granted, as do many others. Unfortunately, with the pressing issue of Climate Change, seemingly invisible on some people's radars, Vermont is and will continue to suffer the repercussions of our actions.

Statistics bring to mind the drastic changes Vermont has already experienced; in 1970, Vermont's population was approximately 444,330; in 2007, it had risen to 621,254, a 40% increase. A significant jump in population, such as that, strongly affects our land because land that was once used for the housing of our wildlife is now developed and cluttered with buildings (Disappearing). It seems inevitable that Vermont's population will rise, but that unavoidably comes with a price; the continuation of destruction of our woods and wildlife habitats.

A place near and dear to many Vermonters' hearts could potentially be subject to that kind of devastation. Vermont is being eyed down by a wealthy Utah man, David Hall, who has purchased land in Tunbridge, South Royalton, Strafford and Sharon. "Hall envisions a series of villages, ultimately encompassing one 20,000 person community, spanning 5,000 acres, including the 450 acres he recently purchased in Sharon" (Midura). Worry has been uttered from communities across Vermont; people are outraged by the thought of dramatically transforming what is a largely wooded area of undeveloped land (Midura). There is a limit to how much people can selfishly harm our planet, it should have stopped a long time ago, but clearly people aren't getting the message; Hall being one. I have enough faith in Vermonters to believe that we will protest this grotesque idea until it is put to rest. We must be advocates for the well-being of Vermont, and largely, the Earth.

Vermont's resources, like in any state or place, are finite. To greedily cultivate and destroy 5,000 acres of land can't become a reality. With a continual increase in developing our land, it prompts a whole other slew of environmental challenges, such as global warming. This is due to the accumulative carbon emissions generated from the nonstop construction of new homes

and businesses. Additionally, this drives many other concerns, such as land fragmentation, storm water runoff, low water quality, and loss of wildlife habitat (Disappearing).

In a report called *Disappearing Vermont?*, it enforces the severe changes in which Vermont has suffered, through statistics. For instance, Vermont is robbed of 4,881 acres of land each year due to development. At this pace we will have lost 125,000 acres by 2030, just 14 years away. Along with this, over the past 37 years Vermont has undergone many more worrying changes. For example, the number of vehicle miles traveled increased from 2.9 billion to 7.7 billion, a growth of 250%. Our endangered species list has gone from 143 to now 195 species that are extremely threatened by our environment. Lastly, our temperatures have risen by about 4.5degrees F (Disappearing). These are the facts people need to be educated on. We must recognize that "...with global warming, what affects the planet affects Vermont, and what we do in Vermont affects the planet" (Disappearing). Even if the effects aren't at our doorstep, we cannot resort to mentality of, 'out of sight, out of mind.'

Addressing Climate Change is nothing short of a daunting task, but that's hardly an excuse. In order to begin cleaning up the mess we have made, people must be aware. With awareness comes the time when change can take place. We, the state of Vermont, must divest from our oblivion, engage in change, and become familiar with the soil in which we live off of and walk upon. That defines a sustainable Vermont.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

-- Margaret Mead

Works Cited

Midura, Kyle. "Utah Man Eyes Upper Valley for Utopian Community." *WCAX.com*. Frankly Media, 28 Mar. 2016. Web. 9 Mar. 2016.

Disappearing Vermont? A Report of Fifty Indicators That Show What Is Happening to Vermont's Environment and Way of Life. Rep. VSPop.org, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.