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Charlotte Dairy Farm and Forestland Protected From Development

March 11, 2009



Charlotte—The Charlotte Land Trust, the Lewis Creek Association, The Nature Conservancy, and the Vermont Land Trust today announced the conservation of 201 acres of farmland and forestland in the southern reaches of the Town of Charlotte.

Marty Illick, director of the Lewis Creek Association, heard of the pending subdivision of the Burleigh Farm, which is located on Spear Street just south of Prindle Road. "I noticed the surveyors flags and saw the line stretching up through an area of mature woodland," said Illick. "At the very next opportunity I spoke with the Burleigh family and impressed on them my belief that there were other options that could not only improve farm viability, but also protect the forestland for future generations."

Sheila Burleigh, who works on the farm with her brother, Gary, and father Arthur, joked that just a couple of years ago Art Burleigh, then in his mid-eighties, began thinking of retirement. Subdivision of the forestland into high-end home sites seemed to be the only option available to recapitalize the farm. Assembling an array of partners that also included the Town of Charlotte, Illick presented the family with a creative alternative — conserving the farm with the Vermont Land Trust and selling the forestland to The Nature Conservancy.

By selling a conservation easement on 73 acres, the Burleighs were able to keep the farm in the family and secure its future as a local farm resource. The Burleighs have been connected to the land since the 1920s when Art moved there as a child. Art and his late wife Martha became the owners of the farm in the 1940s, and today his son, Gary, operates an 80-head dairy operation. It was the family's love of their farm and deep connection to the land that inspired them to sell the development rights for far less than their market value.

"The Burleighs should be commended for their generosity in accepting less than the appraised value for the development rights," remarked Allen Karnatz of the Vermont Land Trust. "High land values in Charlotte make it difficult to protect good farmland. And thankfully the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Town of Charlotte, and farmers like the Burleighs are making sure farming is part of the town's future."

"Fifteen years ago ecologists identified the Burleighs' forestland as 'a resource of statewide significance'," noted Joan Allen, Associate Director of Land Protection with The Nature Conservancy. "The woods are exceptional. With an abundance of nut



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producing trees, rich limey soils, rock outcrops, and vernal pools, they provide habitat for so many species including bobcat, mink, bats, deer, migratory songbirds, salamanders, wildflowers, and herbs.”



Sheila Burleigh continued: “We love this place, and we did not want to see the forestland cut up. We became convinced that The Nature Conservancy shared our values and would be a good neighbor and steward of the land.”

In a spirit of collaboration, funding for the project came from many sources. The Burleighs sold both the farmland easement and forestland at far below market value, and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Town of Charlotte provided essential funds without which this project would have failed. Contributions from the Clean and Clear program, and efforts by the four conservation organizations, raised 90 percent of the funds needed. Despite these difficult economic times private individuals and local foundations rallied to raise nearly all of the remaining \$95,000. Just \$7,000 more is needed to declare this project a success.

This project, which abuts 80 acres already conserved by the Town of Charlotte, advances protection of one of the largest forested blocks in the Champlain Valley—more than 1,500 acres that stretches to the north and east of the project site, including 1.6 miles of Lewis Creek. Walkers and wildlife watchers can access conserved and open lands to experience the quiet forest environment that once stretched from the Green Mountains to the shores of Lake Champlain.

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