



CASE STUDY

# BARBARA ORLOVSKY

## CRAFTSBURY, VT

**Barbara Orlovsky is slowly bringing a property back to wholeness again.** Nicknamed The Ledges for its steep rocky cliffs, it sustains patches of yew, hornbeam, basswood, and black cherry trees on its forested slopes. The nearby wetlands help create habitat for many songbirds, black bear, and moose.

## MEET THE LANDOWNER

**Barbara describes her land as her fourth child.** She grew up with free rein to explore her parents' 400-acre property in Lamoille County. After leaving Vermont in 1957, she used family inheritance to buy her own land in 2005, which she named The Ledges. "Trees and plants were my childhood companions. I feel what the land is doing. It's a living whole that I'm allowed to spend time in and with." But the steep acreage had been far from whole for many years. Previous owners allowed extensive logging that significantly damaged the land and the forest. With the mapping program Avenza, she spent over thirty hours (cumulatively 17 miles) walking up and down The Ledges, trying to visit every acre. She took 473 digital notes on wildlife signs, plant life, and ecology to log the special, fragile, and intimate features of the land. She hand-planted a hay meadow near her cabin and, though nearing 80, regularly wields a scythe and chainsaw as needed. Spending time in and around the land helps inform necessary choices about how to manage the forest. She does this work with her three grandchildren in mind, envisioning their future explorations of the land.



Steep cliffs form The Ledges, giving the landscape character and striking views all year round.

## AT A GLANCE

### PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

**137.63 acres (135.63 actively managed)**

### LOCATION

**Craftsbury, VT**

### FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

**Patch cut - 2 acres**

**Mast Tree Release - 72 acres**

**Trail work - 1320 linear feet**

### PARTNERS

**David McMath, forester**

**Pelland Forestland Management**

**Audubon Vermont**

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

## WOMEN & OUR WOODS

**Vermont's Women & Our Woods (WOW-VT)**

is a collaborative women-centered community that shares information, resources, and support for people who care about and steward Vermont's forests. WOW-VT has developed a series of case studies to highlight a variety of management activities being conducted on women-owned or women-managed woodlands to highlight successes, share lessons learned, and identify resources available.

**To learn more visit [wowvt.org](http://wowvt.org).**

WOW-VT is led by steering committee members from VT Woodlands Association, VT Coverts, VT Land Trust, VT Department of Forests Parks and Recreation, VT Fish and Wildlife Department, and Audubon Vermont.

## HOW HAS THIS LAND BEEN MANAGED?

**The focus for the land is recovery.** Barbara asked Audubon Vermont to conduct a bird habitat assessment in 2014. The assessment found 29 species of birds, some “species of concern,” by sight and sound. This and Barbara’s extensive notes informed her work with her forester, David McMath, to develop and implement her 2016 forest management plan. Between 2005 and 2014, Barbara heard fewer warbler species singing in the woods by the cabin and down the ledges. Some species of warblers rely on young forests and moist thickets. She worked with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to complete a 2-acre patch cut on the edge of her wetlands, spurring the successional growth of shrubs and berries. She is considering similar measures in the upper woods.

**NRCS funding also partially supported a mast tree release and the rehabilitation of logging roads between 2011-2014.** Mast trees (beeches, hop hornbeams, and black cherries) feed bears, partridge, turkeys, and songbirds. With Barbara, NRCS selected 30 healthy mast trees for release, and marked surrounding trees to be girdled or cut. Increasing seed and fruit production improved animal habitat in those sections of the forest. The road work repaired deep gullies caused by erosion and allowed Barbara to travel to outer corners of the parcel to observe and plan its care. As she ages, she uses an ATV to reach remote sites. By design, the trails respect seeps and other wet areas and are built with minimal disruption to well-established trees.



Barbara has harvested cherry (shown above) and other high-quality hardwoods for furniture and other woodworking projects.



An ancient hemlock sits at the bottom of the property.

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

**Barbara’s goal is for “the land to grow according to its own rules.”** She won’t interfere except when taking what she needs for firewood and woodworking or for repairing past damage or improving wildlife habitat. When she first stayed on the property, there was no running water or electricity. She recommends the same experience for any new landowner. “To be alone in the land and with the land for a time during which you put yourself at its mercy. To simply say, ‘I’m here with you,’ and listen to the response from all around.” She hopes her family and others continue to learn from The Ledges for years to come, through the rare experience of immersion in the forest.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

### **David McMath, Licensed Consulting Forester**

David McMath worked with Barbara to develop her initial forest management plan and implementation efforts.

### **Tyler Pelland, Pelland Forestland Management**

Starting in 2022, Tyler Pelland took over the management planning and implementation efforts on the property.

### **Audubon Vermont**

Audubon Vermont conducted a bird habitat assessment on Barbara’s property to inform the Forest Management Plan and support future bird habitat.

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

Barbara received funding through the NRCS to complete forest management and restoration activities.