

Opening onto Lake Champlain, Melita's property has been farmland, a productive apple orchard, and a summer camp over its history. Today it features sprawling old hardwoods and a regrowing example of the clayplain forest, the original forest type in much of the Champlain Valley.

MEET THE LANDOWNER

Melita loves working in and around beautiful landscapes.

She has made it her business as a landscape gardener. When it comes to her own land, however, she doesn't view it as business. Melita purchased a little over 100 acres on the shores of Lake Champlain in 2019. Her goal is to restore old agricultural and recreational land to its natural forest. She wants to take the time to understand the land and the big-picture vision for its future. As the child of beef farmers, she wants her land to support local farms. It is also important to Melita that her restoration work supports water quality in Lake Champlain, provides habitat for local wildlife, and protects fragile or unique natural communities. Melita sees this work as her legacy and she's happy to take her time and get it right.



Melita Bass stands in front of the hayfield she aims to restore to clayplain forest.

AT A GLANCE

PROPERTY / PROJECT ACREAGE

106 acres (4 acres managed in project)

LOCATION

Shoreham, VT

FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Tree planting

Invasive management

Patch cut

PARTNERS

Vermont Family Forests

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

Vermont's Women and Our Woods

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.

HOW HAS THIS LAND BEEN MANAGED?

When Melita bought this property, invasives had already started taking over the abandoned apple orchard and agricultural lands. Bush honeysuckle and common buckthorn, two invasive plants that have become common in Vermont, are well established on the property. Other invasives including multiflora rose and Japanese barberry are present in lower quantities. Common treatment for invasives typically involves the use of pesticides. Given the proximity to sensitive waterways, Melita does not want to use any pesticides on the land. Instead, she and her forester, Kathleen Stutzman of Vermont Family Forests, are focused on manual and mechanical removal in targeted areas and protecting and repopulating native plants.

Melita worked with NRCS to complete a 4-acre patch cut to create habitat for Golden-winged Warblers. These threatened songbirds thrive in the dense brush that grows within a few years from a patch cut. She began working with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) in 2021 to control the invasive plants. In 2023, Melita worked with WOW-VT and VYCC to complete a demonstration project on the land. Melita selected a 4-acre parcel of hayfield sitting on the lakeshore to restore to clayplain forest. The VYCC crew planted 350 native trees, which will help stabilize the lakeshore and promote water quality. The crew then returned to remove buckthorn along Lake Champlain, and create an environment for native species to repopulate.



Before (above) and after (below) VYCC planted 350 trees in the former hayfield.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

The WOW-VT demonstration project was one small piece of Melita's larger vision: to restore the forest, improve water quality in Lake Champlain, and enhance wildlife habitat for species such as the Golden-winged Warbler. Her advice to other women landowners is, "Take time to learn about the land; take time to plan." She will do just that and continue to work with VYCC to manage invasive plants and get to know the land as she works towards her vision of restoring this beautiful property.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Vermont Family Forests

Melita worked with forester Kathleen Stutzman of Vermont Family Forests to develop and help implement her forest management plan.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Melita has a contract with NRCS to receive funding to create habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler and pay for the native trees planted by the VYCC crew.

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

VYCC is a non-profit organization that provides young people with skills and experience implementing conservation and restoration practices. A crew from VYCC planted 350 trees and controlled invasives on the property as part of a partnership with WOW-VT.

Vermont's Women and Our Woods (WOW-VT)

WOW-VT secured funding from the US Forest Service to pay for VYCC to complete demonstration projects on women-owned and women-managed land.

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