

Building Community
through Conservation:
Lessons from 30 Years



Gus Seelig

Rhode Island Land & Water Conservation Summit
March 10, 2018

Willoughby Peaks, Westmore

2,695 acres of conserved forestland



The Nature Conservancy photo

- Helps protect water quality with 2.7 miles of frontage on Long Pond
- Permanent public recreational use of 5 miles of popular trails
- Haystack Mountain, Mount Pisgah, and Bald Mountain used by an average of 1,750 hikers annually

VHCB Results through December 2017

2003-2018

- 6,000 homes
- 373 farms; 64,015 acres
- 66,000 acres natural areas
- 41 historic public buildings
- 700 Viability Program participants
- State investment: \$172 million
- \$1 billion in leverage

1987-2002

- 6,610 homes
- 318 farms; 100,000 acres
- 220,000 acres natural areas*
- 28 historic public buildings
- State investment: \$150 million
- \$400 million in leverage

* includes a special 133,000-acre acquisition

Changes Since 2003

- Farm & Forest Viability Program initiated (has served 700 farm, food, and forestry enterprises through 2017)
- Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value added to easements
- Stewardship: water quality; flood resilience; cell towers; renewable energy; changing farm configurations
- Farm to Plate Program enhances diversified agriculture
- Farmland Access Program established
- Food Systems enters the language; Food Hubs grow
- Forest fragmentation
- Climate Change



Flooding in the state capitol of Montpelier due to ice jams in 1992.



Water Street, Northfield

Northfield, Vermont

- Population: 6,200
- \$2 million in property damage
- 14 homes on Water Street eligible for FEMA buyout
- Partnered with Friends of the Winooski (watershed organization)
- Floodplain restoration to increase flood storage protecting downtown
- New town park
- Community design charettes
- Landscape design classes with Norwich University students



Design for the new Water Street Park



New park on the Dog River nearing completion



**Route 100, Rochester VT
September 2011**



Rochester FEMA buyout site design phase



Rochester Riverside Park

A wooden post stands in a lush green field. The post has a square wooden cap at the top. Attached to the post is a rectangular sign with a white border. The sign features a white arrow pointing upwards, followed by the text 'IRENE HIGH WATER MARK' and 'AUG 28, 2011'. To the right of the post, a gravel path leads away from the viewer, curving towards the right. The background is filled with dense green trees and bushes, suggesting a forested area. The sky is overcast and grey.

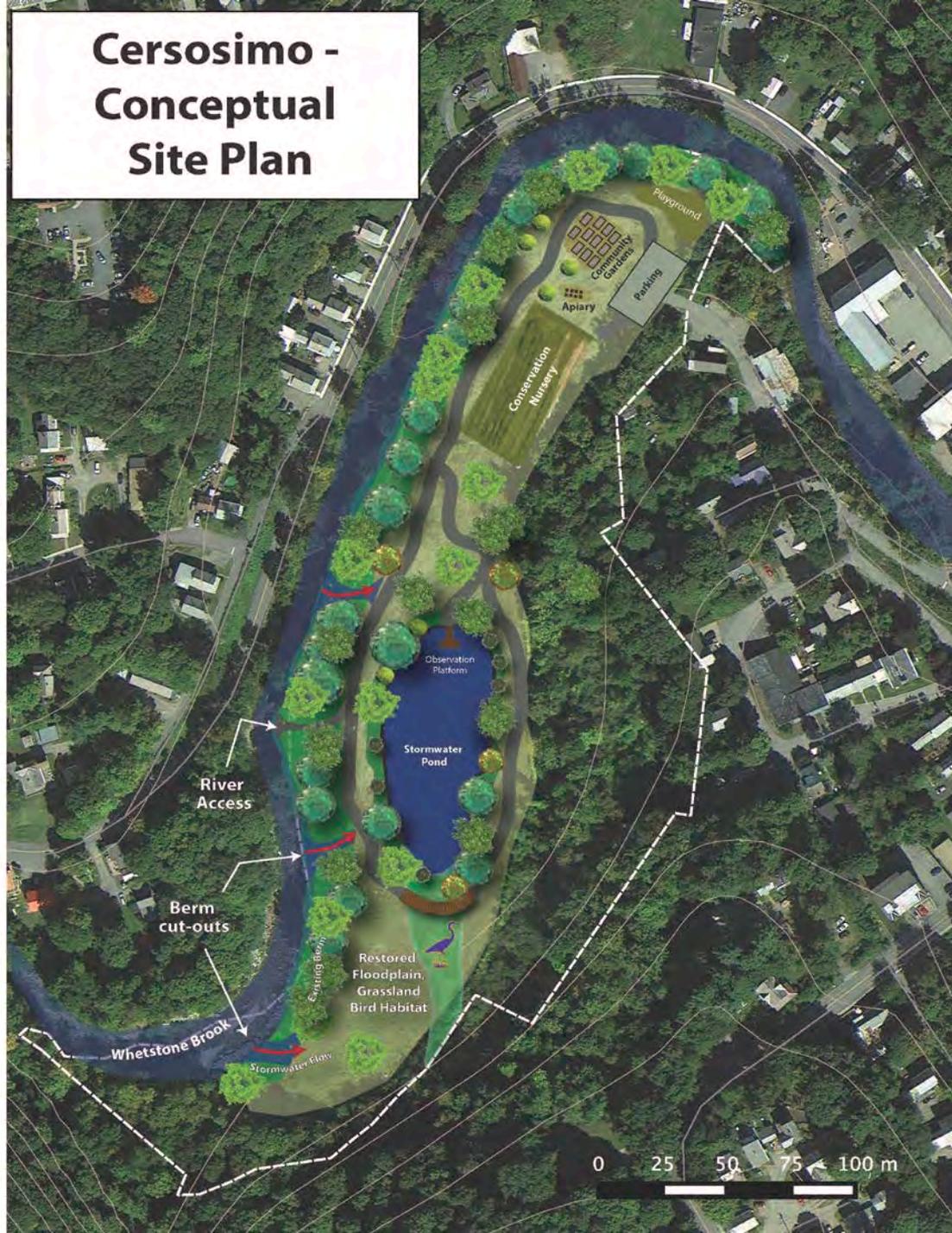
↑
IRENE HIGH
WATER MARK
AUG 28, 2011

Access trail to the White River



Flooding at a development housing seniors and disabled persons during Tropical Storm Irene, 2011.

Cersosimo - Conceptual Site Plan



Along the Whetstone Brook in Brattleboro, the Vermont River Conservancy is helping the town acquire a former floodplain parcel that has been filled in over the years. The parcel will be restored to its former level, potentially lowering downtown flood levels by 4-5 feet while also providing for storage and treatment of stormwater runoff from the surrounding neighborhood. A new neighborhood park will feature riverside walking paths and a community garden. Funding from VHCB, the town, and the Agency of Natural Resources Ecological Restoration Program.

Red Clover Commons



- Developed by Brattleboro Housing Partnerships and Housing Vermont, replacing housing lost during Tropical Storm Irene.
- 55 homes with rental assistance for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- VHCBC's investment leveraged nearly \$12 million in federal funding and private investment.
- The old buildings that were flooded will be removed to restore the site to a natural condition and provide flood storage for Brattleboro.

2017
Best Overall
Passive House
Building
Passive House Institute US



Elm Place in Milton, Vermont's First Passive Apartment Building

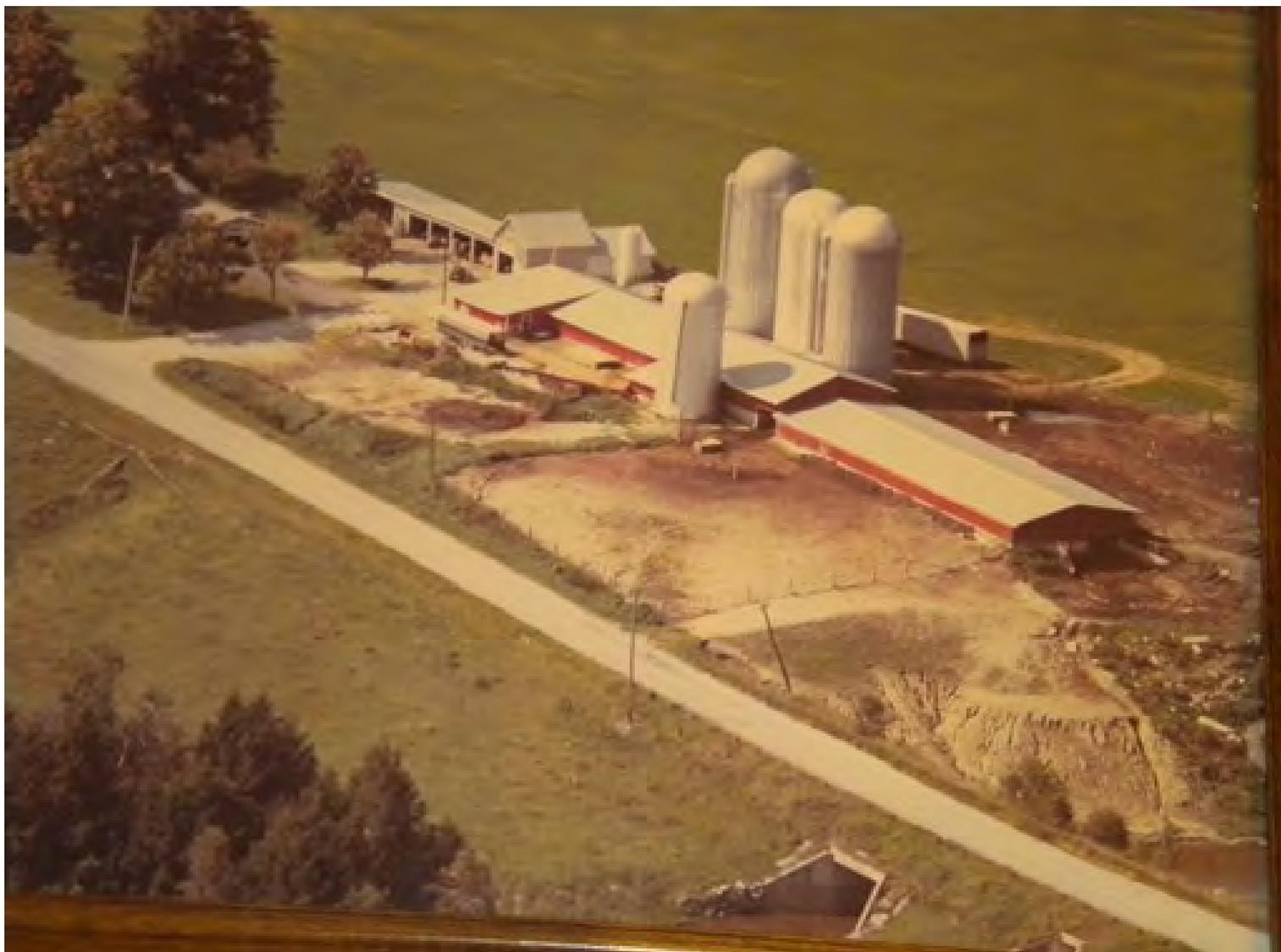
The Cathedral Square Corporation developed senior housing in Milton with a focus on using as little energy as possible. Natural day light is maximized and air source heat pumps heat and cool the building. Indoor air quality is excellent thanks to low VOC paint and carpeting. Recognized nationally with an award for its innovative design by the Passive House Institute US.



Jacob Hannah for the New York Times

Net zero energy capable modular homes manufactured in Wilder, Vermont. With VHCB support, 34 homes have been placed across Vermont and in two mobile home parks, replacing older mobile homes. Inset: Resident Alexis Laberge monitoring energy use; Alexis and her daughter.





Aerial view of the Choiniere barnyard in 1999, before conservation practices.



Choiniere Family Farm, Highgate Mississqoui Bay Watershed

The Choinieres implemented numerous conservation practices: installed buffers along the river, cattle lanes and fencing, and kept manure under cover using bedded pack barns. The farm now produces milk without feeding grain. The Choinieres are in the process of purchasing a neighboring conserved farm. They also recently sold a river corridor easement along the Rock River, allowing the river to meander and maintaining a 50-foot vegetative buffer along the river banks.

Barup Farm, Cambridge



Herb and Carol Barup's 169-acre farm has frontage on the Lamoille River and its North Branch. The easement includes 50-foot riparian buffers on all surface waters and 25 acres of wetland protection zones. In addition, the Department of Environmental Conservation holds a river corridor overlay easement protecting the river's natural meander belt.



Dorset Peak Jerseys, Danby Water Quality Grant



In the Otter Creek subwatershed of Lake Champlain, Caleb and Jessie Smith raise heifers and milk 65 cows. VHCB Water Quality grant funds will support building a new freestall barn and covered barnyard, year round manure storage, and associated pumping and transfer facilities. The new manure collection and storage system will reduce run off and improve water quality.



2009: Vermont Farm to Plate

“Agricultural lands and soils will be available, affordable, and conserved for future generations of farmers and to meet the needs of Vermont’s food system.”

Statewide plan with 10-year goals/vision:

- Increase economic development in Vermont’s food and farm sector.
- Create jobs in the food and farm economy.
- Improve access to healthy local foods.

Farm to Plate results to date:

building a network and working toward common goals

- The farm and food economic sector employs more than 64,000 Vermonters. 6,400 new jobs were added between 2009–2016.
- Since 2009, the percentage of Vermont households that are food insecure has dropped from 13.6% to 11.4% (29,754 households).
- The Farm to Plate network has helped bring partners together, increasing cross-team collaborations working with farmers to improve environmental stewardship and address water quality.
- Through a task force on Farmland Access and Succession planning for farm & food businesses, partners work together to strategically target farmers and farm businesses looking toward retirement/transition with new owners/operators.



JD and Cheryl DeVos conserved 191 acres of their farmland in 2004. In 2012, they opened Green Mountain Organic Creamery, bottling their own dairy products. They worked with VHCB's Farm & Forest Viability Program to plan for the new business expansion.



JD and Cheryl DeVos at their Green Mountain Organic Creamery. Chocolate milk! Maple milk! Butter, buttermilk, cream, whole milk, 2% milk, 1% milk, etc.



Vermont farmers are expanding and diversifying, developing new markets and products. Jericho Settlers' Farm is a 200-acre farm producing 25 acres of certified organic vegetables, flowers and herbs for year-round CSA programs, farmstands and wholesale customers.



Sheep grazing at Jericho Settlers' Farm.
Inset: the farmers, their children, and solar panels.

Jon Wagner-Herbert and Karin Bellemare **Bear Roots Farm, Barre**

- Added two walk-in coolers, a wash stand, a farmstand, and an additional hoop house to extend the growing season
- Met production and sales goals for 2015, entered new markets in 2016 to grow their wholesale production
- Expanded into small fruit production in 2016
- Purchasing additional conserved farmland in 2018, allowing for further expansion.

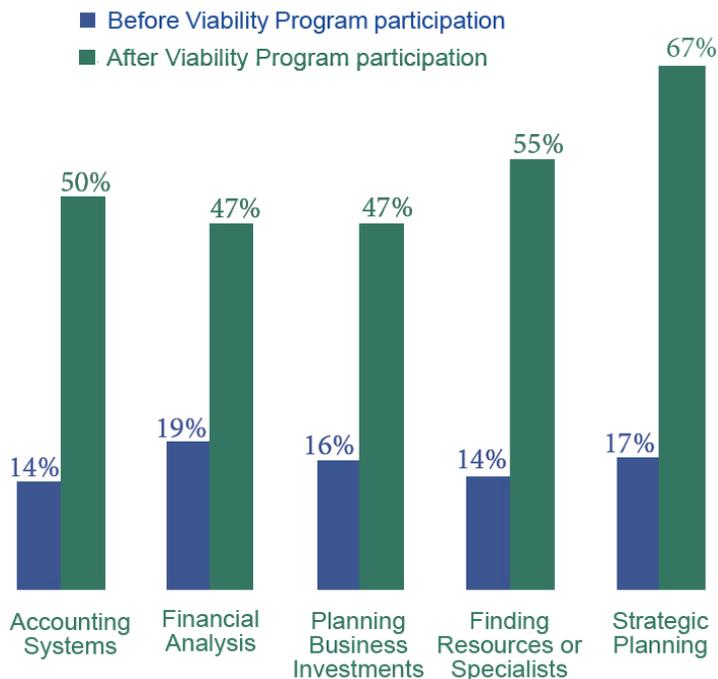


- Selling organic vegetables to restaurants, farmers markets and directly
- Purchased their conserved farm through VLT's Farmland Access Program with business coaching from VHCB's Farm & Forest Viability Program



VHCB Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program in 2017

The percent of farmers who report high skills in:



- 51 farms enrolled for a business/transfer plan
- 40 farms in a second year of planning
- 54 farms received shorter-term planning assistance
- 2 food hubs received one-on-one technical assistance
- 9 forest products businesses enrolled
- 58 loggers attended 2 business workshops
- 21 forest landowners and estate attorneys attended succession planning workshops
- 8 forest landowning families received succession assistance



The town of Westford worked with the Vermont Land Trust to conserve a new town forest and adjacent farmland. Citizens came out to celebrate at an opening event.



Beginning in 1994, in the southeastern towns of Athens, Grafton, Brookline, Rockingham, Westminster, a largely volunteer-run organization has conserved 1,938 +/- acres. These publicly-accessible lands include a 25-mile hiking trail system and wildlife sanctuary.



Friends of Bolton Valley Nordic & Backcountry



The “Old Goats” started a local effort to conserve backwoods ski trails near Bolton Valley. Joining forces with the Vermont Land Trust, they raised over \$1 million to conserve 1,144 acres of with a 90-kilometer Nordic and backcountry trail system.

Kingdom Trails Association, East Burke



- With a 110-mile trail network, drawing more than 80,000 riders a year to the Northeast Kingdom, Kingdom trails is a low-impact, high-value economic driver.
- Recreation users—hikers, skiers, cyclists, hunters, etc.—pump an estimated \$2.5 billion in consumer spending annually into Vermont's economy.
- Kingdom Trails hosted one of the largest mountain bike expos in North America in 2016, drawing 5,800 riders, spectators and vendors over 3 days.



rock steady

TAPPING MILLSTONE TRAILS' SECRET INGREDIENT

KEVIN JACQUES IS DRESSED LIKE A GNOME AND RUNNING through the woods with a hatchet again. He's got the pointy hat, fake beard, red flannel shirt and everything. It's got to be hot in all that wool, but Jacques is committed to the character, hiding behind trees and threatening us with his hatchet. The last time he dressed like a gnome was for a video to commemorate the opening of Millstone Trails' newest singletrack, the Angry Gnome. In the video, Jacques chases two mountain bikers down the trail's bridges and switchbacks, throwing small explosives at them. While the video is rated "T" for terrible, the Angry Gnome trail is helping to put Millstone Trails, a small, volunteer-built system on quarry land in working-class Barre, Vermont, on the proverbial map.

BY GRAHAM AVERILL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS MILLIMAN

The November 2016 issue of Biking, a national magazine, featured a story on the trail system in the **Barre Town Forest**, a regional mountain biking destination.



Buttermilk Falls, Ludlow



Solar array on the barn roof at a conserved, demonstration goat dairy.

Hill Farmstead Brewery, North Greensboro



Premier brewer in Vermont, earning recognition for creating some of the best beers in the world!





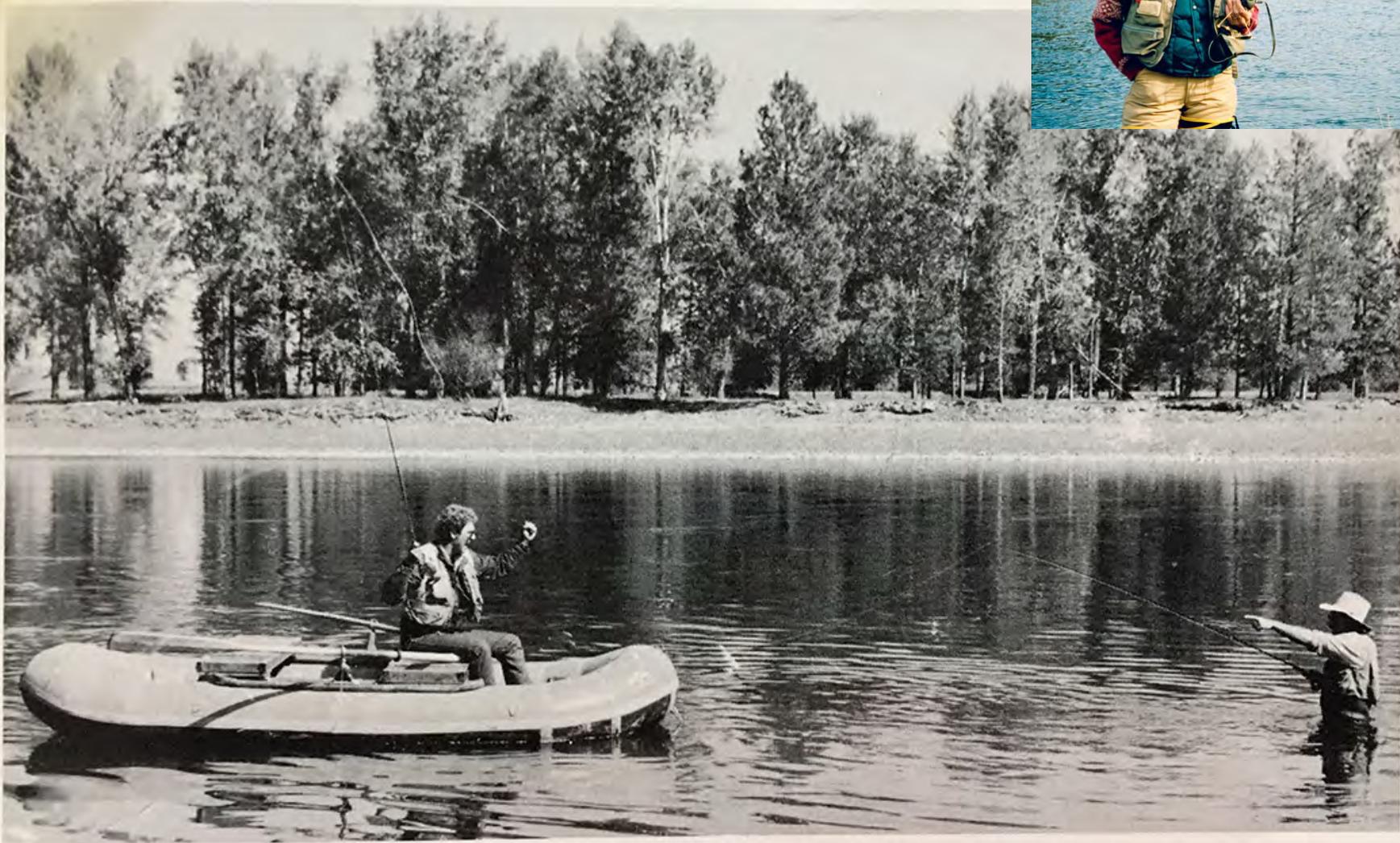
Lessons Learned

- Perseverance and commitment
- Build community capacity
- Invest in partnership
- Invest in people who work the land
- Embrace multiple public goods
- Conservation is economic development
- Conserved lands support healthy communities
- Flexibility is essential when perpetuity is the goal



Earth, which has seemed so large
must now be seen in its smallness.
We live in a closed system, absolutely
dependent on Earth and on each
other for our lives and those of
succeeding generations. The many
things that divide us are therefore
of infinitely less importance than
the interdependence and danger
that unite us.

from the message to "our 3.5 billion neighbors
on planet Earth" by biologists from six countries
meeting in Menton, France, May, 1970.



Row vs. Wade: The Great Western Fishing Controversy