

A Longtime State Advocate for Wetland Protection Retires

The Vermont Wetlands Program (VWP) – staffed with 5 full-time employees – manages more than 391,000 acres of significant wetlands and wetland buffer throughout the State of Vermont. The character required to direct a program with the demands encountered by the wetlands section is one of strength and perseverance and Alan Quackenbush has been an ideal match.

Self-effacing, soft-spoken and committed, Alan has devoted the last 23 years of his life to protecting a natural resource that has a reputation as an underdog. While rivers and lakes are esteemed for their aesthetic and recreational values, wetlands are just now receiving the credit they deserve as powerhouses of water quality protection, wildlife habitat and flood resiliency.

In many ways Alan compares to his charge by taking on the great task of protecting a vital public resource despite not always receiving praise from the public or private interests for his work. He has been a fair regulator, dedicated scientist and a kind supervisor.

His curiosity in science was spurred by a biology teacher who was passionate about using knowledge as a tool for discovery. After years as a social worker in child protective services for the State of Vermont in Brattleboro, Alan decided that it was time he reacquainted himself with the scientific discipline.

In 1986 he enrolled in the University of Vermont and earned a Masters of Science in the Botany Program studying sediment influence on periphyton in Wolcott Pond. From there he started his 23-year tenure with the State of Vermont in 1990 with the Department of Environmental Conservation working in the Acid Lakes Program. He continued his career with the Biomonitoring and Aquatic Studies Section as an aquatic biologist and in 1996 was hired full-time as a wetlands program coordinator. In 2005 he replaced Carl Pagel as the Wetlands Section Chief. After many years of steadfast work he will be retiring in December.

During his time as a section chief Alan was instrumental in strengthening the Vermont Wetland Rules. In 2010 the rules expanded to cover all significant wetlands in addition to wetlands previously mapped by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Despite the extra workload incurred as a result, Alan strove to be a voice for wetlands. Beth Connor of the Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection's Biological Monitoring Unit worked with Alan in wetland monitoring and assessment workgroups and describes his steadfastness: "In the face of various slowdowns and roadblocks over the years, he never lost sight of his end goal to protect and expand the understanding of wetlands across Vermont and the region."

Alan took part in ANR's Climate Change Team and in his free time conducted the Christmas Bird Counts on Camel's Hump for National Audubon for many years. In 1994 he and a few neighbors got together to conserve a traditional swimming hole on Ridley Brook and as a result founded the Duxbury Land Trust.

When asked what he'd be doing with his new found time during retirement, Alan responded with eagerness that he plans to explore more of Vermont with his wife Audrey, get back into shape - too many long hours in the office - and continue to conserve and protect Vermont's amazing underdogs, the wetlands.