

For the VCS Conservation Almanac May 30, 2008 We at Sheriff's Meadow are writing this open letter to the island community in order to further clarify recent actions that have taken place on Foundation land that have been the cause of great concern to numerous people. We are sorry for the distress that this has caused. We would like the opportunity to explain our property stewardship procedure to you.

When SMF acquires a property we undertake a thorough inventory of the plants and animals, birds, moths and the types of habitat that exist upon it. We also pay close attention to the donor's intentions and any state or local regulations and from all these parts compile a management plan that suits that particular property. The plans might range from doing essentially nothing and letting the natural flow of succession occur, to stepping in to maintain, or in some cases restore, meadows and natural sand plain habitats. There are numerous ecologically accepted ways to achieve the latter objective. These include cutting down trees, mowing brush and grasses, burning fields, removing plants and grazing livestock. Each property defines which means are appropriate for it. Burning, for instance, would not be acceptable in the field at the southern end of the Caroline Tuthill Preserve as it is too close to development. In other instances, when we have plans to mow and burn a field grown in with viburnum and huckleberry, the removal of some of those plants prior to burning may be appropriate. When woody vegetation is transplanted, we replace the soil with sand, the preferred substrate for sand plain grasses. Many of the native grasses and plants we want to encourage thrive on impoverished soil - on better soils, they will lose in competition to non-native grasses.

In the case of both of the properties in question, the field at the Caroline Tuthill Preserve and Priscilla Hancock Meadow, we

have as a clear objective the preservation and maintenance of open fields. We have not had the manpower nor machinery in place to do this on our own. In our obligation and need to manage our properties, we have had ongoing relationships with respected, professional landscape contractors. When it is appropriate to remove trees and invasive species, and/or conduct mowing as part of the management plan, we have at times entered into handshake arrangements with contractors. Those arrangements allow the contractors to take a number of species that have marketable value in their business in return for mowing and clearing on the property. Except in the case of our long standing, annual 'free tree day' at Nat's Farm, we do not deal with, or normally know, the identity of landowners who may be receiving any of the trees or plants removed from our property.

That said, while the recent occurrences of tree and shrub removal may have been in accordance with our internal management plan, there were numerous areas of omission and a lack of oversight. We take these errors seriously. We apologize to our supporters, to those who have entrusted their properties to us, and to all the conservation-minded citizens of Martha's Vineyard. We have heard particular distress about "strip-mining," using one paper's choice of words, from another island property and we want it to be clear that that property is not owned or controlled by us. Unfortunately, the decision to feature the photograph highlighting the sod removal on the front page has made that image the photographic poster child of the story.

What is now important is how Sheriff's Meadow reacts and learns from this experience. Our new Executive Director, Adam Moore, had already called a halt to this type of arrangement before the present incident became public, and has prepared a

draft outlining new written procedures to govern our practices in stewardship matters that involve third parties. Those procedures will be presented to the Board of Directors for review and adoption. We have mapped and photographed the affected areas and are developing a remediation plan. Adam and our President, Steve Crampton, have met with Tim Simmons of the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. We have promised the Foundation's full support in implementing and overseeing restorative efforts if they are called for.

We would be pleased to hear from you. If you have any questions, suggestions or criticism for Sheriff's Meadow, please do telephone Adam at (508) 693-5207, or email him at [moore@sheriffsmeadow.org](mailto:moore@sheriffsmeadow.org).

Sincerely, Emily Bramhall Vice-President