

# YELLOW WOOD NOTES

An Occasional Publication  
for the Benefit of  
Our Clients, Colleagues, and Friends

Summer 1999

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We Welcome Your Comments

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Over the last three years, Yellow Wood Associates (YWA) has developed a track record for providing rural communities and decision-makers with economic data and analyses to inform decisions about proposed commercial and recreation area development. YWA's work in this area typically culminates in written and oral testimony before state, regional, or local decision-making or permitting agencies.

YWA approaches forensic research with the objective to provide more and better information for community residents, local businesses, and those in decision-making roles. We try to increase the ability of our clients and other community members to question and critique data and assumptions, both ours and those of the other parties. We do this by pointing out the underlying assumptions, omissions, and inconsistencies in the information presented in support of the proposal.

When our work includes gathering site-specific information on social and economic impacts, we present the data and analysis in clear, non-technical terms and make our assumptions and methods as transparent as possible. Over the past three years, YWA has researched and

analyzed the impacts of various proposed developments such as, WalMart, ski area expansion, and sewer line expansion.

YWA has reviewed and critiqued economic impact statements provided by WalMart during their attempts to locate stores in St. Albans, Vermont and Lake Placid, New York. (WalMart has not located in either community to date.) Recently, YWA completed an economic and fiscal impact assessment of a WalMart proposed for Potsdam, New York on behalf of a consortium of businesses from the towns of Potsdam and Canton.

YWA has also reviewed and analyzed Killington, Ltd.'s application for an Act 250 Master Permit for compliance with Act 250 criteria on behalf of the Vermont Natural Resources Council. We focused specifically on the project's potential to impact the local and regional economy. We prepared written testimony and testified before District #1 Environmental Commission.

On behalf of Middlebury business people, YWA prepared an independent analysis of the potential economic impact of a proposed national chain hotel at the outskirts



*Work:*

## Focus on Forensic Research

of town on the existing lodging industry, surrounding areas, and downtown Middlebury. This included reviewing lodging statistics and patterns of growth and change, investments in Middlebury's downtown and returns on investment, and state policy in regard to promoting the vitality of Vermont's downtowns. The analysis was used as testimony before the local planning commission.

YWA is currently preparing written and oral testimony which critiques a fiscal impact analysis prepared by the Town of Milton, Vermont to support their proposed extension of sewer service along a state highway through the community. Our analysis, prepared on behalf of the Conservation Law Foundation, will be used in the Act 250 review of the proposal.

We do this work because we believe that without independent research, it is difficult for community members and decision-makers to know how to evaluate the claims made by developers and retailers. Yellow Wood Associates endeavors to provide the information needed for improved local and regional decision-making.

### **!!! Job Announcement !!!**

#### ***Program Coordinator for Sustainable Agriculture Organization.***

The Regional Farm & Food Project of Albany NY seeks an individual with demonstrated ability as coordinator, educator, or organizer to organize and implement educational programs, coordinate several annual special events and fund-raisers, conduct outreach, build relationships, and work with volunteers. Full - time position as part of a 2-person staff. Contact Shannon Hayes at 518-234-2105 or email at maiaharbol@aol.com.

### **About Yellow Wood Notes . . .**

Yellow Wood Notes is a twice yearly publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. Our purpose in publishing this newsletter is to maintain contact and share ideas with friends, colleagues, and clients. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. is a private, for-profit firm specializing in rural economic research and training for community capacity building. We provide clients with customized analyses and models of successful intervention in rural areas around the U.S. and abroad. Our clients include small towns; non-profit organizations; federal, state, and county governments; foundations; and the private sector.



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## Walking the Lake Champlain Basin

On behalf of the Lake Champlain Byways Project, YWA has developed an Access database that centralizes information about walking trails and village walks throughout the entire Lake Champlain Basin. The database provides a detailed, yet flexible way to collect and organize the walking resources in the Basin.

With the support of the Byways Steering Committee and Task Group, YWA has inventoried over 100 trails and village walks. We are debuting the use of ArcView in this project to create a series of electronic maps illustrating trail and walk locations throughout the region which includes VT, NY, and Canada. The database and maps are the foundation for the upcoming publication of a walking resources guidebook for the Lake Champlain Basin.

YWA looks forward to offering our clients spatial analysis capabilities as we develop our skills with ArcView.

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## Suggested Reading

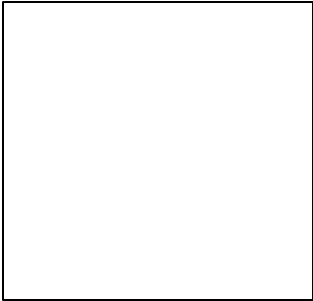
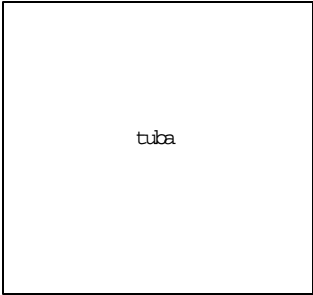
*Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World* by Alan Weisman. Chelsea Green Publishing Company. White River Junction, VT. 1998. Alan Weisman takes us to the remote Llanos, the barren, rain leached savanna of western Columbia to visit a village called Gaviotas. Amidst one of the harshest climates on earth, a village of visionaries gather to make sustainable development and appropriate technology real and part of their everyday lives. The Gaviotas farm soilless gardens, use solar steam kettles for cooking, connect water pumps to seesaws that fill tanks while children play, and continue to develop many other ingenious ways to improve their quality of life. ~ Travis Marcotte

*Lessons From the Art of Juggling* by Michael Gelb & Tony Buzon. Crown Publishing, 1994. The authors use juggling as a learning metaphor within this fun, lighthearted how-to guide. Key lesson: as important or more important than keeping all the balls in the air, is learning to drop them with grace. ~ Debra Mason

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# Puzzler

Look at each frame and figure out what phrase it represents. Answers are on Page 4. (*Mind-Bending Puzzles by Terry Stickels from Frame Games Knowledge Cards, Pomegranate, Box 6099 Rohnert Park, CA 94927*)

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Satan	c a U G H T	Marianas Trench
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4. 

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## Evaluation Tool Focuses on Networks & Relationships

The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) was created in 1995 by the state legislature as a private nonprofit with the dual goals of creating and retaining quality jobs and conserving Vermont's social and natural environments. VSJF works toward these goals by providing grants and technical assistance to groups of Vermont businesses and business organizations.

Yellow Wood Associates is designing a unique evaluation tool to

use with the 23 business groups who have received assistance within VSJF's first two years of operation. The evaluation tool first assesses the development and status of networks between groups of businesses and their suppliers, employees, product developers, markets, technical assistants, and financiers. Then the tool examines relationships between network building and outcomes in terms of improvements in job quality, the environment, and the connections between businesses and communities.

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## *Update on Our Work:* Training Expands to Non-Profits & Government

This spring we had the opportunity to introduce our measurement training to staff of Rural Development Initiatives, Inc. (RDI) in Oregon. One of the aspects RDI staff found most intriguing was the exercise on assumptions (see page 9). In preparing for this work, we finally developed a complete workbook on the measurement process designed to be used in training trainers.

Also this spring, we offered a workshop, "You Get What You Measure" for state government employees at Vermont's Cyprian Center, a state personnel training center. Follow-up from this workshop has included working with an eight person unit of the Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, Waste Prevention Section to reframe their annual work plan in terms of goals, indicators, measures and actions. We will be repeating an expanded version of the Cyprian Center workshop in the fall.

In addition, we will be bringing our training to the Vermont Department of Agriculture which has recently received a large appropriation from the state legislature to develop a strategic marketing plan for agriculture. The planning process will in-

volve agriculture development staff and industry participants with the goal of strengthening the voice of the agricultural sector as a whole.



In May, we offered a short workshop, "Integrating Social Responsibility Into Your Business Plan: How Do You Know When You're Doing Good?" at the annual meeting of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility. Workshop participants developed ideas for concrete steps they could take to measure

progress toward the socially responsible goals of their businesses.

Participants determined that, for example, if your goal is to be a company staffed by people with a commitment to the environment, one indicator of progress toward that goal would be if the company incorporates diverse environmental views into the management process. Measures might include the diversity of views of outside advisors to the board and the frequency with which they are consulted, the variety of environmental commitments through volunteering or other contributions made by staff, or the diversity of environmental views discussed around the coffee machine.

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### An Alternative to Traditional Strategic Planning

We began our workshop at the Cyprian Center by asking participants to reflect on their experiences with strategic planning and, specifically, on what worked and what didn't. Here is what they said:

#### What Worked

Being organized and documenting as you go along  
Taking time to develop a mission up front  
Finding the right process for your group  
Team-building and sharing to create energy  
Easy access to data  
Measureable goals  
Variety of approaches including drawing pictures  
Visible end product with actions taken based on plan  
Annual planning tied to an annual review  
Good facilitation

#### What Didn't

There is a lack of long term commitment and/or resources  
It's a disjointed process that happens meeting to meeting  
There is confusion over language and meaning  
There are disconnects between "number" people and "word" people and between concrete and abstract thinkers  
It's often a topdown process, faddish not evolutionary  
It's difficult to get people to participate and engage  
It can be anxiety producing and overwhelming  
It won't work if people don't share the vision  
Measuring success is a challenge

*Does any of this ring a bell for you? If so, you may find our process an effective alternative to strategic planning.*

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## Training & Our Approach To Research

For the past several years, YWA has offered training to community groups and non-profit organizations in how to measure progress toward their goals. The more of this type of training work we have done, the more we find it becoming an integral part of all our work, including our research work, with clients. For example, when clients come to us with a research project in mind, we always ask them to explain to us their goal, that is, the condition they are hoping to achieve

for themselves, their organization, and/or their community. We find many groups have never articulated their goal. Next we ask how the work they would like us to do will contribute to their goal. Then we ask them to examine their assumptions about how our work may contribute. Only when we and they are comfortable that there is a clear connection between what we will do and the conditions they wish to create, do we proceed with the research.

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## *Update on Our Work:* Facilitation Services in Demand

This spring has seen a marked increase in the demand for our services as facilitators. We have worked with the National Network of Forest Practitioners to facilitate a series of three sessions, in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine called "Under One Roof." These sessions were designed to bring together people with a personal commitment to the Northern Forest who are active in many different aspects of the forest economy and who do not usually go to meetings! In other words, the NNFP wanted to engage in conversations with people across sectors and professions to see what, if anything, we all have in common in terms of our vision for the Northern Forest.

Rather than the usual cursory introductions, we asked each participant to tell the story of their lives in relation to the Northern Forest in five minutes or less. The stories we heard were fascinating. One woman, a Maine native, told us that, although she grew up in rural Maine in a forest-dependent community, she knew virtually nothing about the wood products industry until recently because her family wasn't directly involved in it. Another told us of how her interest was sparked by inheriting forest land and trying to figure out what to do with it. Several others who now represent industry organizations said their involvement was basically a fluke of the job market.

Yet despite the diversity within and between the groups, all three groups arrived at remarkably similar results suggesting that the key leverage points for achieving healthy forests and healthy communities is a combination of education and adding value locally. Participants felt that sharing information between the many relevant initiatives across the Northern Forest could accelerate the rate of change.

We've also facilitated a series of focus groups on starting a value-adding forest land owners cooperative to be coordinated by the Maine Low Impact Forestry Project of the Hancock County Planning Commission. Participants included around 30 land owners with varying levels of experience in forest management. One thing came out loud and clear -- these owners want to be involved in making sure their resources are managed well. They don't want to be kept on the sidelines!

*Block print from an original drawing  
by Sam Ratner*

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## Examining Assumptions: *What Makes You Think So?*

Assumptions drive much of our behavior, both individually and collectively. Local officials assume the town can't handle the liability problems associated with a public beach. Consequently, even though this is a high priority for local residents, political leaders refuse to act. A little research would show that the liability issue is indeed manageable, and has, in fact, been overcome by many other towns. But the false assumption keeps the question from even being asked - and leaves residents without public access to the waterfront.

We use the exercise below in our work with community groups and organizations.

### *Everyday Assumptions*

- 1. Take a couple minutes to write down one or two assumptions which govern your behavior in ways not necessarily related to work. For example many people assume that if they don't get at least 8 hours of sleep, they'll be useless the following day; or, that if a friend doesn't respond to their phone call it means they are angry.*
- 2. Now think about what would happen if you were to change your assumption. How would your life be different?*
- 3. Think of one thing you might do to test your assumption.*

One of the ways we prevent ourselves from learning is by assuming that we already know the answer. We all make assumptions every day. Since we can't know everything, we need to make assumptions to survive. Unfortunately, often our assumptions are wrong.

We have worked with many rural communities over the years and every one has had some assumption or myth about itself and what is possible that had to be re-examined and overcome before learning could happen and progress toward goals could be made. The measurement process described in previous issues of Yellow Wood Notes provides a powerful way of identifying and testing self-limiting assumptions.

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## Local Retailing of Dairy Products in Pennsylvania

YWA has recently begun work to investigate the feasibility for direct producer retailing of value-added dairy products in Union County, Pennsylvania. Union County has a number of factors in its favor for the production and marketing of value-added dairy products. Casual observation suggests that area residents are enthusiastic about local farm products. Union County is an excellent location for agri-tourism and regional shipping, and has a large base of small to medium-sized dairy farms. The major Northeastern markets are all within a day's truck trip.

Working with the Union County Chamber of Commerce, Planning Commission, and Conservation District, as well as Penn State Cooperative Extension, YWA will conduct a targeted literature review, demographic analysis, identification of market opportunities, and telephone surveys with potential buyers to determine key characteristics of demand. The study will also examine various models of local retailing of value-added dairy products in rural regions, including but not limited to Community Supported Agriculture, variations on the cooperative model, and door-to-door delivery.

Answers to Puzzlers on Page 5:

1. He's feeling left out.
2. Little Big Horn
3. Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea
4. Fourth Down

### Article Published

An article by Shanna Ratner is featured in a recent edition (Vol. 13, No. 3) of *Rural Development Perspectives* published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Multi-Agency Service Teams: A New Approach in Maine to deliver Technical Assistance to Rural Manufacturers," is based upon the results of a project evaluation conducted by YWA in 1995.

In 1994, the State of Maine began an experiment to improve the coordination of technical assistance to wood products manufacturers. State

and federal agencies worked with colleges, private consultants, and nonprofit organizations to target assistance to the particular needs of the wood products industry.

Results were generally positive, but showed that assistance must be carefully matched to the needs and desires of the individual firm. In addition, service providers from different disciplines and agencies must develop teamwork attitudes and skills in order to achieve effective coordination and results.

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## Staff Notes

### U *Outgoing* V

Francis Young left YWA this spring after working as our office manager/staff assistant for over a year. Francis, a new grandmother, is now spending more time with her family and working in her garden.

“I learned a lot during my time at Yellow Wood. The position was very challenging and I enjoyed the variety of tasks...everything from sharpening pencils to rather complex spreadsheet work.”

We want to congratulate Francis on her new granddaughter, Ivy, and wish her well.

### V *Incoming* U

YWA is pleased to announce the addition of Patricia A. Boudreau as Office Manager to the firm. Patty, a lifelong resident of Enosburg, has worked primarily in the St. Albans area in the banking industry. She has studied with the American Banking Institute and is a graduate of the Zenger-Miller Frontline Leadership Program.

Patty’s community involvement includes volunteer work for the Enosburg Falls Lions Club, the Vermont Dairy Festival, and the Miss Vermont Scholarship Organization.



## Applying Outcome Funding to Sustainable Agriculture

Shanna Ratner has been working with the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (NESARE) as a member of the Administrative Council’s Design Team to consider how the concepts of Outcome Funding might be applied to SARE’s grantmaking activities. Outcome Funding is a tool developed by the Rennselaerville Institute in New York to help investors identify the outcomes they hope to achieve through their grantmaking, the specific changes in behavior needed to achieve these outcomes,

and the activities that will lead to behavior change.

In the Outcome Funding framework, grantmakers see themselves as investors and grant recipients as implementors who form a partnership to achieve shared outcomes. If properly applied, the Outcome Funding framework is a tool that can help both funders and grantees move beyond counting beans toward measuring progress toward meaningful outcomes.



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