



## Steve Parren: Protecting Species Diversity

"I didn't do any of this work alone. Every accomplishment that I've had has been the result of joint efforts with a lot of very dedicated people." This is the first thing that Steve Parren wanted me to know, and the way that he has gone about his work for over twenty years. Steve is a big proponent of partnerships. He is also a program administrator, a grant and project manager, a rare species biologist, a representative to ANR's Climate Change Team, part of the Wildlife

Action Plan Revision Team, and one of the primary people charged with implementing recovery plans for Vermont's endangered and threatened species. And he is convinced that in order to successfully protect the natural world we have to feel connected to it first.

"It comes down to values." Steve explains. "We're scientists but if people don't care, then none of the work that we're doing matters in the long run. What matters is that people make a connection with the natural world, whatever that means to each individual." It turns out that Vermonters, by and large, care a great deal. But you have to invite them in, and you have to be inclusive. "Projects are so much stronger when you have good working relationships. It is important to recognize and appreciate people when they do act. Acknowledgment of the efforts of others is crucial."

I ask Parren what he is really excited about these days and he responds immediately. "I'm excited about the work that I'm doing with spiny softshell turtles. The female turtles don't start reproducing until about 12 to 14 years of age, and I've been working on nesting success for about that long." Parren explains. "This means that soon, very soon - within the next year or two - we should see the populations begin to respond. I should have a metric soon that I can use to measure the success of the recovery effort."

Parren doesn't have the opportunity to get out into the field as often as he would like. More of his time is taken up by program administration and planning. There has been a shifting in focus from individual species work to broader, more sweeping efforts such as landscape blocks and climate change adaptation strategies.

"I see a change taking place from an individual species focus to more of a landscape focus. Because of the intense pressures populations, habitats, and landscapes are facing, we aren't able to adequately address each individual species or community. Instead we are doing things at multiple scales. The fine filter stuff and at the same time a broadening to look at what has to happen in order to protect habitats and landscapes, so that there are places that act as refugia as external stressors continue to mount."

I ask Parren about some of these stressors and he is clear, "There are multitudes that we see; land development, traffic, invasive species and emerging diseases are all real threats. And on top of these, climate change. I see climate change as a capstone on top of all of these other issues. Climate change will have an additive effect on every other stressor out there. There are going to be winners and there are going to be losers. I'm very nervous about it."

On the bright side, there are many ways to help support the work of wildlife conservation. As a final question, I ask Parren what the rest of us can do in our own lives that will support conservation work. "Everything," he replies. "We're all part of the issues. How much are we

personally conserving? Where are we shopping and what are we eating? Are we investing in solar, hybrids, renewables? Are we managing our homes in wildlife-friendly ways? Are we supporting organizations that do good work? You can do many things that will help." Parren says. "Don't transport firewood. Battle invasives in your own community. Make a donation to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. Join the conservation commission. Get involved. It's going to take all of us to change things."

Steve Parren sums this all up neatly in his final sentence. "We have to be aware of our impact first, and that comes from caring. Get outside and make a connection. People have to care in order to save anything."