



The Secret Nature Trail

by Jeanette Malone

Did you know about the new Nature Trail located behind The Richmond Elementary School (RES) and The Camel's Hump Middle School (CHMS)? Not many folks do because it is located out of view, tucked on the hillside of a small forested area teeming with robust vegetation and signs of wildlife. In 2010, The Richmond Elementary School was awarded a grant from the Four Winds Institute to create a classroom in nature and retreat from the school's close proximity to the highway.

Two teams of Vermont Youth Conservation Corp (VYCC) students and their leaders helped design the trail and turn it into a loop covering as much wooded area on school property

as possible. The VYCC paid special attention to minimizing erosion, maximizing exploration potential, and enhancing a small wildlife opening.

Many loads of wood chips to define the trail and make it erosion resistant were donated by Treeworks and taken from trees on the school property. The generous support of the CHMS maintenance staff enabled the labor-intensive work of the VYCC crews to spread wood chips on the entire trail. A circle of log benches cut by Clifford Lumber and constructed by the VYCC provide a focused learning area for classes to use.



This new trail enriches the learning opportunities at RES, CHMS and the Our Community Cares Camp. Young explorers have already had many hands-on natural science lessons through the Four Winds Nature Program at RES. In addition both science and creative writing subjects at these two schools are able to tap inspiration from nature without having to travel afar.



Many VYCC crew members were once students at either RES or CHMS, which gave them the opportunity to give back to their very own community. The VYCC students practiced leadership skills while celebrating Earth Day this spring with a group of first graders. They helped little hands get dirty and connected to nature by planting berry bushes to attract wildlife followed by leading games and a treasure hunt to imagine the life of animals living in this special habitat so

close to school. Who knew this was possible in a such a discreet part of our school grounds?

The future of the trail is exciting as we continue to work with the VYCC to build the wildlife potential while also maintaining the trail to keep it safe and explorer friendly. If you would like to help care for the trail and connect students or other community members to it, please contact the school's Nature Program coordinator.