

# HOWL creating safe, rural women's land

By Marianne Milton

"HOWL if you want to Help Open Women's Land" is what the flyer says, and the Grandmother Council directing Howl, a project of Commonwoman, really is open to any woman who wants to be involved in creating safe rural women's land. Commonwoman is the feminist group committed to building women's community, that publishes the currently dormant newspaper by the same name.

A piece of land bordering Camel's Hump State Park, about 20 miles southeast of Burlington, Vt., has been selected as the site of the Howl project and is being held until a lease is drawn up. The lease is expected to be signed in time for women to be on the land in some capacity this spring.

"The land has something for everyone," said Alverta, one of three women I spoke with on the Grandmother Council. The land that was finally chosen after two years of looking comprises 200 acres and includes fields, woods and streams. Because the land borders on state forest, which is protected against building, women on the land will be assured that the surrounding area remains rural. The property is on a town road, and a house and barn with electricity stand on the land; these features will help make the land accessible, particularly to less abled women who might otherwise be unable to use it.

The women on the Grandmother Council are devoting their efforts now to two main tasks: networking "to all of our connections that go to Boston and beyond," said Ioota, and placing announcements in selected women's publications, such as Sinister Wisdom and Vermont Woman.

They're also raising money, primarily through tax-deductible

donations, in order to buy the land outright, which they expect to do within the next few years. No private ownership is being considered in this project. Either Commonwoman will own the land, or a land trust will be created, to hold the land forever for the common good of all women who seek access to it.

"We don't want the issue of having to pay the rent to divide us. It's been a source of divisiveness for many women's lands," said Leah Wittenberg, founder of Commonwoman.

*'The land has something for everyone... A lot of women don't even know what they want from the land yet. They just want the land to happen.'*

Women meet monthly in the Grandmother Council. So far, these have been "vision meetings" to plan what will happen on the land; in these meetings, women are "operating on hope, not fear," said Ioota. The vision for the land is very much in process, but possible uses suggested so far include festivals, gatherings, educational events, cross-country skiing, camping, living and farming.

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So far, 15 to 20 women have been involved in the Council, which is open to all women. The women range in age from their early 20s to 62; some are Black, some are white, of different ethnicities; diverse class backgrounds and professions are represented; and some of the women are differently abled. The women thus far involved are predominantly lesbians. Because it is vital that all women feel welcomed to the land, the women I spoke with expressed concern about making an

issue out of this fact. Leah's response was, "The truth of the matter is: who wants to live on women's land? Lesbians."

Some decisions have been reached by the Grandmother Council, which makes all decisions by consensus. A basic philosophy has been adopted: respect for the land. And several purposes and guidelines have been outlined for the use of the land. As they appear in the flyer:

1. Earth first: trusteeship of the land
2. Sacred wimmin's land
3. Residential, recreational, vocational, cultural, educational networking
4. Safe space for wimmin and children
5. Diversity -- outreach, non-exclusionism
6. Good neighbors

Beyond these basics, plans for the land will depend on women's input to the Grandmother Council. The women I spoke with believe that there is a trust level and calmness among the women in the Burlington area that indicate that women will come together to make this land work.

"Given the state of the world, it's necessary to live out our visions," Ioota added.

Some women envision some separatist (women-only) space, with other areas open to men who are visiting women on the land, as long as the safety of women and children can be maintained. Some women are envisioning a community of older women living there, but Alverta, an older woman, expressed concern that "we might need to be closer to services, which almost always requires living in a city." Some women are thinking about contacting ArcheDykes, a group of lesbian architects at MIT, to plan any construction that takes place on the land.

Remembering the intense time that

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Ladies Night Wednesdays

Boys Night Out Thursdays

135 Pearl Street Burlington

# VERMONT RESOURCES

<p>ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) 43 State Street Montpelier, VT 05602 (802) 223-2348</p> <p>Amelia Earhart Box 746 Lebanon, NH 03766 (603) 632-7146</p> <p>Burlington Women's Council City Hall Burlington, VT 05401 (802) 658-9300 ext. 125</p> <p>Colors (bar) 20 Elliot Street Brattleboro, VT 05301 (802) 254-8646</p> <p>Gay/Lesbian AA/Alanon. Western Avenue, Solar Hills Mansion Brattleboro, 05301 Saturdays at 8 pm</p> <p>Gay/Lesbian AA Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8 pm Baird 318, Medical Center Hospital Sundays at 1 pm King Street Youth Center Burlington</p> <p>Integrity (Lesbian and gay</p>	<p>Episcopians, open to all) Box 126 Burlington, VT 05402</p> <p>Interweave RD 2, Box 86A Newport, VT 05855</p> <p>Kwanzaa Box 583 Burlington, VT 05402 (black, native American and third world cultural, educational and resource group)</p> <p>National Association of Social Workers/ Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee c/o Box 147 Woodstock, VT 05091</p> <p>PADS (Burlington area women's group) c/o Mary Bentley PO Box 242 Winooski, VT 05404</p> <p>Peace and Justice Center 186 College Street Burlington, VT 05401 (802) 863-8326</p> <p>Pearl's (Bar) 135 Pearl Street Burlington</p>	<p>(802) 863-2343</p> <p>RAGS (Rutland Area Gays) Box 147 Rutland Center, VT 05736</p> <p>SAM (Social Alternatives for Gay Men) Box 479 Norwich, VT 05055 meets 7.30 pm Tuesdays</p> <p>UVM-GLSA (University of Vermont Gay and Lesbian Student Alliance) Box 87, Wright Hall, Redstone Campus UVM Burlington, VT 05405 (802) 656-0723</p> <p>Vermont AIDS Action Committee c/o VLGR Box 281 Hinesburg, VT 05461</p> <p>VG (Vermont Gay Volleyball) Box 248 Hinesburg, VT 05461 (recreational volleyball for all level players, every Sunday 6-8 pm in Burlington)</p> <p>Vermont Interfaith Coalition</p>	<p>Lesbian and Gay Concerns c/o Philip Roberts 7-C Blair Road Essex Junction, VT 05452</p> <p>VLGR (Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights) Box 281 Hinesburg, VT 05461 (political advocacy, speakers community resources, information)</p> <p>Women's Health Center 336 North Avenue Burlington, VT 05401 (802) 863-1386</p> <p>Women Helping Battered Women P.O. Box 1535 Burlington, VT 05402 hotline (802) 658-1996 office (802) 658-3131</p>
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'Out in the Mountains,' Resource/Calendar will list, free of charge, any groups or events of interest to lesbians and gay men. If your group is not included here, or if you have an upcoming activity you would like to see listed send the details to: 'Out in the Mountains,' Box 438, Hinesburg, VT 05461.

Listings should be received by the 15th of the month prior to publication and should include a contact name and phone number so we can confirm the listing.

## Women's land created

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the Burlington women's community went through during the existence of Redbird, a closed women's land collective in Vermont that existed from 1974 to 1979, the women I spoke with talked about how much the community had learned about group process and living together then. Many of the women who went through that time together still live in Burlington and are a stabilizing force in the women's community. Leah concluded, "I would like to challenge women who read this article to look at their hopes as well as their fear."

For more information, contact Howl Project, c/o Commonwoman, P.O. Box 242, Winooski, Vt. 05404.

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