

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/12/2026 5:00:00 AM

First name: Eric

Last name: Sorensen

Organization:

Title:

Comments: So yesterday and this morning I was reading Veronica Magner's final report/thesis on the Escarpment and fir and then planned to submit comments on the Northern Escarpment Ecological Restoration and Fire Resilience Project. But I see that I am a day late in the comment period. So although you may not be able to consider my comments formally, I wanted to give you a few thoughts for your personal consideration.

One of my favorite state-wide inventories when I worked with Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department was of oak forests. It lasted several years and I visited oak and pine dominated natural communities all over the state. The project included mapping of natural communities, plots to be used in classification analyses, vegetation and rare plant inventories, breeding bird surveys, and general wildlife observations. The results were incorporated into the 2019 edition of Wetland, Woodland, Wildland. The results are also in a report prepared for USFWS who supported to work with a State Wildlife Grant.

I have also visited many of the Escarpment natural communities that the subject project pertains to. They are exceptionally beautiful and interesting place, both because of their community composition and structure, and because of the dramatic settings in which they occur.

I remain unconvinced about the fear of "mesofication" and that we should be doing something to reverse this trend for most community types. Pitch Pine-Oak-Heath Rocky Summit and Dry Pine-Oak-Heath Sandplain Forest are two exceptions, where fire is a prominent natural process. Indigenous peoples and their use of fire to promote openings and woodlands is sure an important part of our ecological history, but I do not believe that manipulation to maintain those anthropogenically-influenced communities is necessary or prudent in this time of rapid climate change. Veronica Magner discusses edaphic factors several times and I think this is important. The extended summer droughts we have had in the past 20 years or more are dramatic in the effects they have on the shallow-soil communities of the Escarpment and other settings [mdash] oaks and pines have died and outcrops expanded as a result in some locations. My experience is that red oak, white oak, black oak, and chestnut oak all regenerate (seedling and sapling) on dry/shallow soil controlled sites, with deer browse being the primary factor limiting their regeneration. Fire does not seem to have played a role in many of these sites. I believe that our forests, woodlands, and openings are going to be most resilient to climate change if we allow them to evolve in species composition, vegetation structure, and soil structure in response to the processes that they experience, especially in remote settings like the Escarpment. Management to retain the species composition and structure of communities that may be the partly the result of Indigenous peoples' actions does not seem wise at this time. (I would make an exception for fire-adapted communities like sandplains, which are primarily in developed areas where natural fires are unlikely to occur, and for pitch pine which has such a strong fire association.) I love these dry Escarpment communities, but I believe that ecological nostalgia is partly at work in trying to maintain natural communities that may be anthropogenically influenced and are likely to be more resilient if allowed to evolve without manipulation.

I think the use of glyphosate or triclopyr as a management tool in these natural settings would be irresponsible. There is plenty of evidence now on the adverse effects of at least glyphosate [mdash] I have not looked into triclopyr.