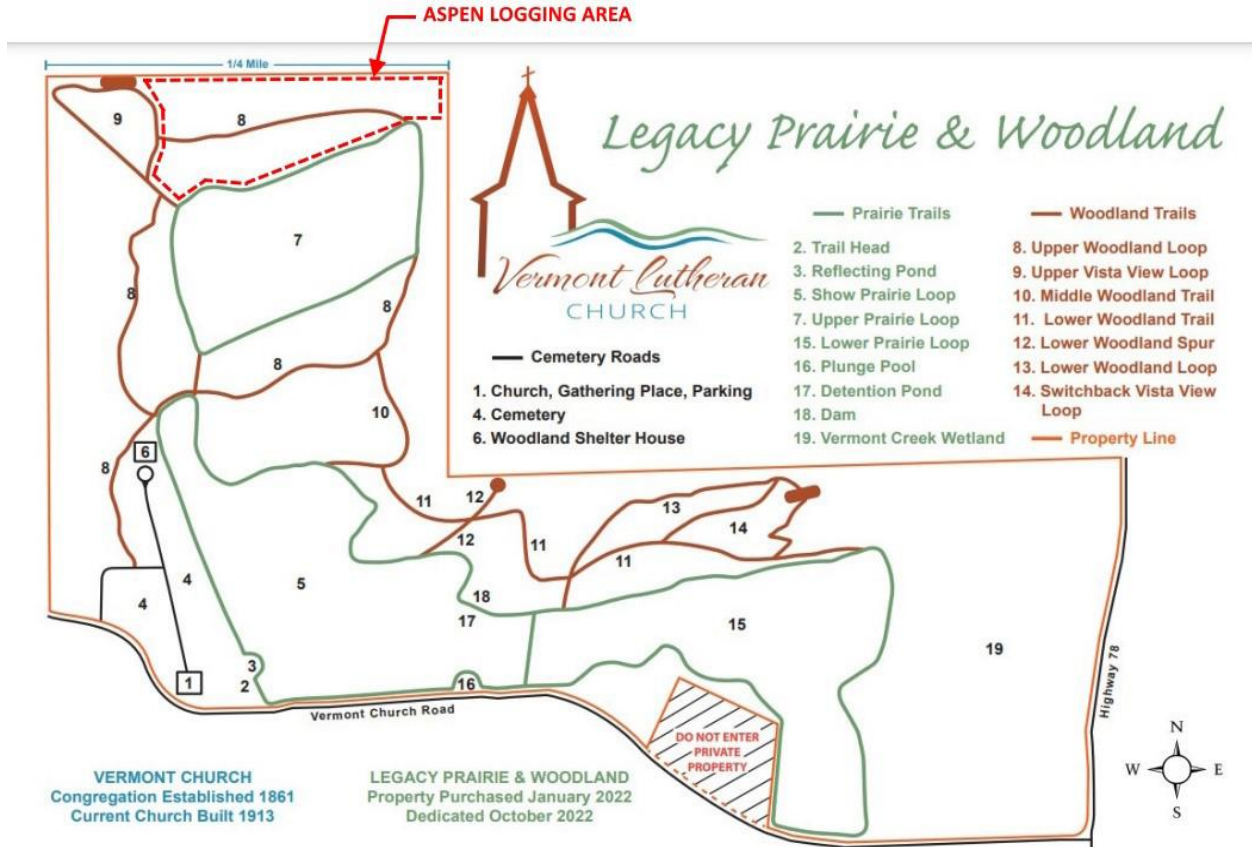


Legacy Prairie & Woodland Update, May 2026

By, Peter Antonie

This month's update will cover the final phase of the tree removal project that was completed in the northwest portion of the woodland, provide a quick report about the first prairie burn that took place in mid-April, and describe development projects that recently took place on the new property.



Grotegut Logging removed many Aspen/Poplar trees on our property from the woodland area designated on the map. These trees were removed in accordance with the Forestry Management Plan we commissioned in 2023 through a grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Due to their age, the trees posed a liability concern of dropping limbs or falling. Many of them had hollow trunks and had no saleable value.

By the time Grotegut got to our project, we were experiencing warmer than normal weather and the ground began to thaw. Almost 30% of the felled trees were unusable and not saleable due to advanced decay. Grotegut dragged them to the southern border of the logging area along the prairie trail, as shown in the following picture.



Because the ground had thawed, we didn't want to bring in heavy equipment to remove those tree trunks and ruin the prairie trail. We will wait until next winter, when the ground is frozen, to remove them and some of the large branches.

A sign is being placed along the prairie trail to explain all of this to users of the trail.

Here is a view of the woodland trail that runs through the middle of the Aspen logging area.



The branches and debris are being left in place as a deterrent for deer so that new growth Aspen, Poplar and Oak trees have a chance to mature.

Short term, the management plan was to remove the old Aspen and Poplar trees to open the canopy. Long term, removing those trees allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor. The Aspen and Poplar trees will send up new sprouts, and we will get Oak trees growing in this section of woodland that couldn't get a start before.

Prairie burn – We have approximately 35 total acres of prairie in three distinct sections of former farm fields. The first section at the top of the hill, north of the cemetery, was planted primarily in prairie grasses with a scattering of forbs (flowers). The section near the church was planted with a seed mix of many forb varieties and grasses. The third section that runs down to the wetland was planted in a seed mix with more grass species than forbs. All sections of the prairie areas were planted in late 2022.

Prairies are commonly burned to discourage woody shrubs and weeds and to encourage the prairie plants to flourish. We planned to burn one section of the prairie this year and begin rotation such that in three years each section will have been burned, and the rotation can begin again. The section of prairie near the church was the first section burned.

The prairie burn took place in early April so that we didn't interfere with the Bluebirds who would be looking for nesting in the Bluebird houses later in the month. And we had a plan in place to protect their houses from the fire in the prairie.



New Property Development: We've been hard at work on several projects aimed at developing the former Cushman property.

Earlier, we provided information about the demolition of the Cushman house and garage, along with clearing brush and taking down unwanted trees that got us to a "clean slate" state so that the site can be made ready for visitors.

To get the site prepared for planting this spring, we needed to level the former homesite and reinforce the steep slope along the edge of the driveway. We brought in loads of fill for that purpose. That fill is not the best soil for supporting planting grass and flowers on the hillside. Grading the lower portion of the property along Church Road provided the opportunity to "borrow" excellent, seed-free soil to create the last layer of fill for the slope. By doing so, the low area that is evident behind the grader in the picture creates a natural retention pond.



This retention pond will serve to hold runoff from the slope and road, help keep the prairie trail dry, and most importantly allow that runoff water to slowly infiltrate the ground. As that water slowly filters downhill, it will be cleansed and help keep the water quality in Vermont Creek pristine. The committee plans to plant some native water-loving plants around the retention pond like Blue Iris, and/or Cardinal Flower, Blue Vervain. etc.

Here is what the completed work on a portion of the hillside looks like from Vermont Church Road





This picture shows the view to the north and east from the former home site.

We kept the former well and electric utility for the pump and installed a constant pressure tank underground so that we would have water to use on the property.



We also installed two connections to the well: one that you see with a lever action spigot that a hose can be connected to; the other, which will also have a lever action spigot to which a feeder line will be connected to a drinking fountain/dog water station.

Now that we had the site ready for seeding, the first step was to create a good seed bed by working up the soil using a Harley Rake, as seen in this photo.





We also used the Harley Rake to repair an area along Vermont Church Road that had been damaged by the heavy equipment going in and out of that area.

Once the seed bed areas were ready it was time to begin hydroseeding. This process uses a slurry of water, seeds, ground up wood chips, fertilizer, and a colored tacky agent – to hold the slurry on the sloping ground – sprayed out of a high-pressure hose.



We used a mix of Fescue grass seeds, that will grow densely and help hold the soil on the slope, and some flower seeds for a splash of color.





This “finished product” view of the east side of the hill shows the blue-green tacky agent which turned tan after a couple of days. The hydroseeding extended around to the north facing slope, too. Now all we need is some gentle spring rain to get everything to grow!

A New Name: Rather than referring to this as “the former Cushman property,” we’d like to give a new name to this spectacular 3-acre parcel. Historically, the former farm and this parcel were owned by Pastor John Fjeld (Field), who was recruited to come from Norway to serve the fledgling Vermont Church congregation in the 1880’s. So, names like Fjeld’s View, Fjeld’s Point, Fjeld’s Hill and Heritage Hill have come to mind. What do you think? What do you prefer? Or do you have a name you think would be a good fit?

Future updates and questions: We know there is a great deal of interest in the Prairie & Woodland, and we will continue to provide regular updates. To contact the Legacy Fund Committee (LFC) with questions or suggestions, email the church or speak with an LFC member: Peter Antonie, Greg Herrling, Larry Ziemer, Leonard Schaub, Karsten Haugen, Jim Herrling, or Gary Olsen.