

# Wind

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

It's a Sunday morning in August in Vermont. Last night's storms and heavy rain have left the forest shrouded in fog, concealing the trees as if to protect them, give them a chance to heal from nature's rage. It's a calm moment, full of grace.

When the sun peeks over the mountain like it means no harm, the fog lifts too. So trusting it vanishes like the strange language of dreams. Breezes stir and the sun rises up on hind legs ready to breathe fire again.

Somewhere in this forest whitetail deer listen, their ears moving front and back. To them wind sounds like danger coming from all directions. Spooked even by breezes, they get no peace, not even here on conserved land in northern Vermont, the edge of their range, the last place they can survive winter.

This forest is under siege. Instead of heading to the hills with guns--a familiar Armageddon refrain--people from ruined places come here armed with fat bikes and skis and other cleated things to conquer mountains. It's a GPS invasion. Ridgelines are mapped for multi-use, all-season trails. The maps are distributed and interest is created by holding events like scavenger hunts for alcohol stashed under overhangs in wildlife corridors. This is the invaders' blueprint for staking claim: identify undeveloped land, map it, distribute the maps and create interest--all in the name of community, all in the name of conservation. But these trails lead to a secret, terrible fate.

Years ago when we bought this land and then conserved it with a prominent Vermont land trust, we never dreamed we'd spend our last decade living in fear like renters hiding a beloved dog the lease doesn't allow. Except in our case it's a forest, not a dog, in danger.

Our land is conserved into perpetuity and that's exactly, and ironically, the reason it's been targeted.

We had no idea how corrupt people could be, how conniving. It took a windfarm scar seven miles long, one that can be seen from space, to tell us; it took the words of a brave, elderly woman testifying before the legislature about the tragedy and arson that befell her 600 acre farm; it took an arrogant power company and a land trust that answers to no one. It took the leveling of mountain tops.

Later today a young woman from that land trust will walk by our house twice looking like an unhappy landlady wanting to intimidate and instill fear. Her eyes will be focused straight ahead and set for battle. Standing as still as a deer in the forest, I'll watch her. She'd see me if she turned her head but she won't. She will only want me to see her.

