

## VPR Commentary Series – Susan Morse

by Tom Slayton

Friday, August 16, 2013

### [Listen to the Commentary](#)

It's hard to describe wildlife expert Susan Morse in a few words, because she's done so much. She is, in fact, a nationally recognized expert on a wide variety of wildlife, ranging from moose and bear in Vermont to mountain lions in the far west.

She's an environmentalist par excellence, a scientist and teacher who is also a top-notch tracker. She's won several major awards for her work, including, most recently, Unity College's 2013 Environmental Leader Award. Through Keeping Track, the non-profit organization she established in 1994, Morse has trained literally thousands of citizen scientists in hundreds of local workshops, and has helped conserve more than 33,000 acres of land in New England, California, and Quebec.



Susan Morse and her colleague, Bell, doing mountain lion research in Utah.

But lately Sue Morse is worried that Vermont may be abandoning its environmental traditions and commitments.

This state has a great environmental image, Susan Morse suggests. "But are we actually sustaining that image?" she asks. "I would say 'no.'"

Morse believes that the biggest threat to the untrammelled environment that she loves is the cultural apathy and ignorance that allows people to accept looming environmental disasters such as global warming with hardly a second thought.

"For the benefit of all life, we really must change our ways," Morse says. "But people really don't want to do that."

One of her most recent frustrations is the erection of huge mountaintop wind turbines that she believes contribute little to reducing society's carbon footprint, and do great environmental damage to high-altitude forests and wildlife

One of Sue Morse's core beliefs is that people should be in charge – but more and more, they're not. She puts much of the blame for Vermont's declining environment on state and federal politicians who are willing to cut unwholesome deals – official and unofficial - with corporate interests.

Vermonters have forgotten how unique and naturally blessed Vermont is, she feels – and they need to fight for their environment. She believes passionately that Vermonters need to get reacquainted with their mountains and rivers – with the land that sustains them – and begin protecting them again.

Morse has led the charge for conserving the wild lands near her home in the foothills of the Green Mountain range. She inspired and helped start the Chittenden County Uplands Project, which, through the Vermont Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy and other organizations has conserved more than 10,000 acres of unfragmented wildlife habitat between Mount Mansfield and the Winooski River.

And right now, she's busy with another project – a book that will teach land managers, citizen scientists and others how to identify, understand and conserve wildlife habitat, wherever it occurs. It's an implicit written statement of the concern that has driven Susan Morse for most of her adult life, a concern she puts most succinctly:

"It's time for us to stop taking from the planet," she says, "and start giving back."