

I am Tucker Riggs with LSF Forest Products

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

We are a small community scale sawmill in Fletcher sawing apx 500,000 bf of softwood a year supplying the timber frame industry, local contractors and homeowners.

We are a family run sawmill that my father started just over 20 years ago, shortly after he started the sawmill, I moved back to Vermont from Virginia to work with him. I had spent 9 years in school and working in the forest products industry in NY, Maine and Virginia. From that point we have slowly grown and found our niche as a go to supplier of timbers to the timber frame industry in northern Vermont and beyond.

We have seen steadily increasing demand for our products and are in the final phases of expansion plans to double our capacity to around 1 million board ft of production a year meet demand. The expansion planning has been an eye-opening process, we have spent \$40,866.48 in direct permitting costs, between engineering, consulting and permit fees for this phase of the project and close to \$70,000 in permitting costs when you factor everything in. We have been quoted and plan to spend an additional \$100K in infrastructure work to come in compliance with the permits.

From where I sit, much of the Act 250 permit is quite redundant to our conditional use permit and process that the town has us go through. In the town of Fletcher, when we apply for an amendment to our conditional use permit, there is a warned public hearing with the development review board and any neighbors that have an interest or problem with the permit can have their say. I feel as though this is where a reasonable conversation can be had with your neighbors who will be affected by the operation.

The permit hurdle is one of the largest deterrents to getting a sawmill operation off the ground in Vermont. Running a small sawmill is much like running a dairy farm, margins are tight, the work is hard but rewarding and it is a chosen way of life not one that you go into to become rich. We attribute so much value to the open farm and forest landscape in Vermont yet we have made it close to impossible for a new sawmill operation to get off the ground.

As you can tell, I like to tie the forest products industry to farming, as a farm is as close as you can get to a sawmill in my mind. We are both taking resources grown from the land around the operation, all be it a sawmill is on a 40 year rotation of that resource vs a yearly rotation of a corn field. If as a government we were to ask a farm to keep the land in production but through regulation and lack of investment all the corn, hay and other products that they grew was shipped to our neighbors in NY, NH and out of the country to Canada to then be processed in to milk. This is where the forest products

industry is today. We value keeping the land forested and undeveloped however we are ok with that resource leaving the state and someone else processing and thus profiting from it.

Sawmills are one of those businesses that define a rural working landscape. For centuries they have been a staple of the rural economy, providing jobs, allowing folks to utilize a local resource, promoting good forest stewardship and providing an outlet for a renewable resource that is grown right here in our back yard. In the town of Fletcher in the 1990's we had two working sawmills in town and five working mills within 10 miles of our location. Currently there are only three working sawmills in Franklin County including LSF. I am an open book as to what we have gone through and how we run our business, and have people come to our mill multiple times a year to talk with me about starting or growing an operation like ours. We typically have a great chat until close to the end of the conversation when I bring up the permit hurdle they will face to get off the ground or to take the next step. All have either chosen to either stay small and fly under the radar, trying not to upset any neighbors, or they choose not to pursue their dreams of starting and running a small sawmill in Vermont.

From where I sit the difference between a sawmill, modern dairy farm operation and a modern sugaring operation are few. All three are utilizing and adding value to a resource that is grown here in Vermont. All make up and contribute to the fabric of our rural economy and working landscape. All have an impact on our neighbors with large truck traffic, noise, wear and tear on the roads and utilizing community resources. Yet the sawmill is the only one required to go through the ACT 250 process to get off the ground and operate.

Without the ACT 250 permit hurdle we would foster an environment where a small sawmill would be able to get off the ground and invest in starting and growing an operation, not trying to figure out how they are going to pay for and navigate the current state of obtaining an ACT 250 permit.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to tell you about H.128 will be a change for the better for the forest products industry in the State of Vermont.