

Hello Rep. Lanpher,

I'm writing about H.126 which was passed out of Amy Sheldon's Committee and is now in Appropriations (as well as Ag). A few quick comments:

Sec. 2801 defines three categories of conservation land, the most important of which are "ecological reserve areas" and 2802 sets 30% by 2030, and 50% by 2050 goals. These are the core of the bill and must be maintained.

I have two concerns. First, what is urgently needed now is a clear Legislative directive, mandate if you will, that the Agency of Natural Resources move forward, by date certain and with public participation in a rulemaking process, with designation of ecological (and biodiversity) conservation areas on State land. Yes, an inventory process is needed first (Sec. 2803), but this does not need to be tied to nor wait on the elaborate 14-component Conservation Plan in Sec. 2804. VHCB is already undertaking such a plan, and the responsibility for designating and managing conservation reserves on public land rests with ANR which already has a long-range planning process. Let's keep our eyes on the prize - permanent land protection - and not get distracted by prescribing yet another "plan" for work that is already being done.

Secondly - and this is both a money matter for Appropriations and also a bit politically fraught, I question the \$75,000 appropriation in Sec. 4 of the bill. I very, very strongly support genuine and maximum government effort for engagement and participation of the public in agency decision making. In fact, ANR has no clear requirement to do this, which is one reason for the lack of accountability for the excessive logging that's now occurring in State Forests. But I think \$75,000 is more than needed for the targetted audience as now stated. The sum should be reduced or the education and outreach effort expanded specifically to include young people and Vermonters who are presently, as well as historically, economically disadvantaged and who are not accustomed or able to participate in policy discussions about use of our natural resources.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Gibson  
Shrewsbury, VT