

30 by 30
House Committee on Environment and Energy
Hal Ellms, President, Pinnacle Outdoor Group, Inc.
February 1, 2023

Madame Chair, Committee members, thank you for inviting me here today to speak about this important topic.

My name is Hal Ellms and I am the founder and owner of Pinnacle Outdoor Group. Pinnacle Outdoor Group is a leading manufacturer's rep. agency in the Outdoor recreation industry. We handle the wholesale sales function for 5 national brands including everyone's favorite, Darn Tough Vermont socks. My company operates in 10 northeastern states and is proudly based here in Middlesex, Vermont.

First off, thank you all for taking on this important yet complicated issue of conservation. The outdoor recreation industry in Vermont exists almost entirely within our forests and waterways. Vermont is a world class destination whose brand image is directly related to the landscape and the natural beauty that we are so fortunate to have. This image and vibe are in large part responsible for the \$1.5 billion in annual spending on activities related to outdoor recreation in our state. Per capita, Vermont has the most residents who identify as outdoor recreation enthusiasts, just behind Alaska.

Beyond the economic impact, recreation also plays a significant role in creating prosperous communities. Healthy and safe communities that are places of opportunity. They are places we want to live in and take care of, they are also places where people want to visit and do business. Vermont is made up of communities such as this.

If we look at the simple and commonly accepted definitions of community we find;

1. A group of people living in the same place.
2. A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

While these definitions are true and accurate, there is another, expanded definition that I support and it comes from the noted forester and conservationist, Aldo Leopold who speaks of his land ethic, and I quote "*the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land*". I appreciate the fact that the bill contains the spirit of this definition.

I'm sure we can all agree that Vermont is a very desirable place to live. As such, our communities will grow, in some cases dramatically over the decades to come. Climate migration is real and Vermont will be on the receiving end. Private landowners will play a critical role in this process. Intergenerational land transfer trends point to this clearly.

To control the impact of growth we need sound policies that include the comprehensive definition of community offered previously. We need to acknowledge the importance of biodiversity as it exists within our working lands. If we allow our forest to become more and more fragmented, biodiversity suffers, wildlife suffers, communities suffer. I would hope that this bill moves us in the right direction.

It's been stated that Vermont needs 40,000 housing units to accommodate relatively short-term growth. Let's create policies that make it possible to site these housing units where they make sense, in and around our downtowns where services and public transportation can be created and maintained. This not only creates more healthy and vibrant communities but it also helps to protect the lands that we rely on for many for many benefits.

Conservation is clearly a thorny issue. Reasonable people can disagree on what exactly this term even means or how it is appropriately applied. As an example, the Current Use Program has been a tool in use since 1980 with what I believe can be categorized as a level of success, others I expect might see it in a different light.

In closing, where do we find common ground as a community? What are the next generation stewardship tools that can be used to meet the challenges and opportunities we face? Some of these answers lie within the working forest model that currently exists in Vermont. We have rich history of forest products including lumber, firewood, and maple syrup. I would also suggest that outdoor recreation should be viewed as a forest product. The forest hosts our ski trails, bike trails, and walking paths. Vermont's land and waters provide a backdrop for hunting, fishing, and birding here in Vermont. These activities are part of Vermont's DNA and play a major role in defining our communities across the state.

Again, thank you for the effort that the committee is putting forth on the 30 by 30 initiative. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my views. Bringing stakeholders together to design a plan that involves all perspectives will surely lead to success. If I can be of assistance in this process please don't hesitate reach out.