

H.857

An act relating to timber harvesting

The Senate proposes to the House to amend the bill by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

* * * General Policy and Enforcement Provisions * * *

Sec. 1. 10 V.S.A. § 2600 is added to read:

§ 2600. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Private and public forestlands:

(A) constitute unique and irreplaceable resources, benefits, and values of statewide importance;

(B) contribute to the protection and conservation of wildlife habitat, air, water, and soil resources of the State;

(C) mitigate the effects of climate change; and

(D) benefit the general health and welfare of the people of the State.

(2) The forest products industry, including maple sap collection:

(A) is a major contributor to and is valuable to the State's economy by providing jobs to its citizens;

(B) is essential to the manufacture of forest products that are used and enjoyed by the people of the State; and

(C) benefits the general welfare of the people of the State.

(3) Private and public forestlands are critical for and contribute significantly to the State's outdoor recreation and tourism economies.

(4) Forestry operations are adversely affected by the encroachment of urban, commercial, and residential land uses throughout the State that result in forest fragmentation and conversion and erode the health and sustainability of remaining forests.

(5) As a result of encroachment on forests, conflicts have arisen between traditional forestry land uses, and urban, commercial, and residential land uses convert forestland permanently to other uses, resulting in an adverse impact to the economy and natural environment of the State.

(6) The encouragement, development, improvement, and preservation of forestry operations will result in a general benefit to the health and welfare of the people of the State and the State's economy.

(7) The forest products industry, in order to survive, likely will need to change, adopt new technologies, and diversify into new products.

Sec. 2. 10 V.S.A. § 2601 is amended to read:

§ 2601. POLICY AND PURPOSES

(a) The conservation of the forests, timberlands, woodlands, and soil and recreational resources of the ~~state~~ State are hereby declared to be in the public interest. It is the policy of the ~~state~~ State to encourage economic management of its forests and woodlands, to sustain long-term forest health, integrity, and

productivity, to maintain, conserve, and improve its soil resources, and to control forest pests to the end that forest benefits, including maple sugar production, are preserved for its people, floods and soil erosion are alleviated, hazards of forest fires are lessened, its natural beauty is preserved, its wildlife is protected, the development of its recreational interests is encouraged, the fertility and productivity of its soil are maintained, the impairment of its dams and reservoirs is prevented, its tax base is protected, and the health, safety, and general welfare of its people are sustained and promoted.

(b) The ~~department~~ Department shall implement the policies of this chapter by assisting ~~forest land~~ forestland owners and lumber operators in the cutting and marketing of forest growth, encouraging cooperation between forest owners, lumber operators, and the ~~state~~ State of Vermont in the practice of conservation and management of ~~forest lands~~ forestlands, managing, promoting, and protecting the multiple use of publicly owned forest and park lands; planning, constructing, developing, operating, and maintaining the system of ~~state~~ State parks; determining the necessity of repairs and replacements to all ~~department-owned~~ Department-owned buildings and causing urgent repairs and replacements to be accomplished, with the approval of the ~~secretary of administration~~ Secretary of Administration, if within the limits of specific appropriations or if approved by the ~~emergency board~~ Emergency Board; and providing advice and assistance to municipalities, other

political subdivisions, ~~state~~ State departments and nongovernmental organizations in the development of wholesome and adequate community or institutional recreation programs.

(c) The Commissioner shall implement the policy established under this section when constructing the provisions of this chapter related to the management of forestlands and the construction of chapters 85 and 87 of this title.

Sec. 3. 10 V.S.A. § 2602 is amended to read:

§ 2602. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

(1) “Agency” means the ~~agency of natural resources~~ Agency of Natural Resources as created by 3 V.S.A. chapter 51 of Title 3.

(2) “Department” means the ~~department of forests, parks and recreation~~ Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation within the ~~agency of natural resources~~; Agency of Natural Resources.

(3) “Commissioner” means the ~~commissioner of the department of forests, parks and recreation~~; Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

(4) “Secretary” means the ~~secretary of the agency of natural resources~~ Secretary of Natural Resources.

(5) “Forest product” mean logs; pulpwood; veneer; bolt wood; wood chips; stud wood; poles; pilings; biomass; fuel wood; maple sap; or bark.

(6) “Forestry operation” means activities related to the management of forests, including a timber harvest; pruning; planting; reforestation; pest, disease, and invasive species control; wildlife habitat management; and fertilization. “Forestry operation” includes the primary processing of forest products of commercial value on a parcel where the timber harvest occurs.

(7) “Timber” means trees, saplings, seedlings, bushes, shrubs, and sprouts from which trees may grow, of every size, nature, kind, and description.

(8) “Timber harvest” means a forestry operation involving the harvest of timber.

Sec. 4. 10 V.S.A. § 2608 is amended to read:

§ 2608. ENFORCEMENT; PENALTIES; LIABILITY

~~(a) Enforcement of the provisions of this chapter or any regulations or proclamations promulgated~~ rules adopted hereunder shall be in accordance with the provisions of ~~3 V.S.A. § 2822(e)~~ chapter 201 or 211 of this title.

~~(b) A person who violates any provision of this chapter or regulations or proclamations promulgated hereunder, or neglects or refuses to assist a fire warden when called upon to do so as provided in section 2644 of this title, shall be imprisoned not more than 30 days or fined not more than \$ 50.00, or both. Such person shall be liable for all damages resulting from a violation to be recovered in a civil action under this statute by the person injured.~~

Sec. 5. DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS, PARKS AND RECREATION

HARVEST NOTIFICATION REPORT

On or before December 15, 2016, the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation (Commissioner) shall submit to the House Committees on Natural Resources and Energy, on Agriculture and Forest Products, and on Appropriations and the Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and on Appropriations a report recommending implementation in the State of a harvest notification program. The report shall:

(1) Recommend how a harvest notification program would be structured and implemented under which a landowner or timber harvester notifies the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation of the commencement of a timber harvest. The recommendation should address:

(A) how a harvest notification would be provided to the State;

(B) who should provide notice of a harvest;

(C) when a harvest notification should be provided, including the harvest threshold for notice and any exemptions to notification;

(D) how a harvest notification should be provided to the Commissioner; and

(E) any additional elements necessary to implement the recommended harvest notification program.

(2) Summarize the environmental and economic benefits to the State of the recommended harvest notification program, including whether the recommended harvest notification program would increase compliance with the Acceptable Management Practice for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont.

(3) Estimate the staff and additional funding needed to implement the recommended harvest notification program.

(4) Propose how implementation of the recommended harvest notification program would be funded.

(5) Propose draft legislation to implement the recommended harvest notification program.

Sec. 6. [Deleted.]

Sec. 7. [Deleted.]

Sec. 8. [Deleted.]

* * * Maple Sugar Production on State Lands * * *

Sec. 9. 10 V.S.A. § 2606b is amended to read:

§ 2606b. ~~LICENSE OF FOREST LANDS~~ FORESTLANDS FOR MAPLE

SUGAR PRODUCTION

(a) The ~~general assembly~~ General Assembly finds and declares that:

(1) Maple sugaring is an important cultural tradition of Vermont life that should be maintained and encouraged.

(2) Maple sugaring is an important component of the agricultural and forest products economy in Vermont and is increasingly necessary for farmers that must diversify in order to continue to farm in Vermont.

(3) Maple sugaring is a sustainable use of ~~forest land~~ forestland.

(4) State ~~forest land~~ forestland should be managed and used for multiple uses, including maple sugar production.

(b) It is hereby adopted as ~~state~~ State policy to permit limited use of designated ~~state-owned~~ State-owned land under the jurisdiction of the ~~department~~ Department for maple sugar production.

(c) ~~Beginning on July 1, 2009, pursuant~~ Pursuant to guidelines developed jointly by the ~~department of forests, parks and recreation and the Vermont maple sugar makers' association~~ Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, in consultation with the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association, the ~~department shall~~ Department may issue licenses for the use of ~~state forest land~~ State forestland for the tapping of maple trees, the collection of maple sap, and the transportation of such sap to a processing site located off ~~state forest land~~ State forestland or to sites located on ~~state forest land~~ State forestland if approved by the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner. All tapping of maple trees authorized under a license shall be conducted according to the guidelines for tapping maple trees ~~agreed to~~ established by the ~~department and the Vermont maple sugar makers' association~~ Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation,

in consultation with the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association. Each person awarded a license under this section shall maintain and repair any road, water crossing, or work area according to requirements set by the ~~department~~ Department in the license. Each license shall include such additional terms and conditions set by the ~~department~~ Department as may be necessary to preserve forest health and to assure compliance with the requirements of this chapter and applicable rules. A license shall be issued for a fixed term not to exceed five years and shall be renewable for two five-year terms subsequent to the initial license. Subsequent renewals shall be allowed where agreed upon by the ~~department~~ Department and the licensee. The ~~department~~ Department shall have power to terminate or modify a license for cause, including damage to forest health.

* * *

(f) ~~There shall be an annual license fee~~ A per tap license charge shall be imposed based on the number of taps installed in the license area. ~~The per tap fee for a license issued under this section shall be one quarter of the average of the per pound price of Vermont fancy grade syrup and the per pound price of Vermont commercial grade syrup as those prices are set on May 1 of each year. The fee set each May 1 shall apply to licenses issued by the department for the succeeding period beginning June 1 and ending May 31. The~~ Commissioner shall establish this per tap license charge at a reasonable rate

~~that reflects current market rates. Fees~~ Charges collected under this section shall be deposited in the ~~forest parks revolving fund~~ Lands and Facilities Trust Fund established under section 2609 of this title and shall be used by the department to implement the license program established by this section 3 V.S.A. § 2807.

~~(g) On or before January 15, 2010, the commissioner of forests, parks and recreation shall submit to the senate and house committees on natural resources and energy and the senate and house committees on agriculture a report regarding the implementation of the requirements of this section. The report shall include:~~

~~(1) A copy of the guidelines required by this section for issuing licenses for the use of state forest land for maple sap collection and production.~~

~~(2) A summary of the process used to identify parcels of state forest land suitable for licensing for maple sap collection and production and the process by which the department allocated licenses.~~

~~(3) A summary of the licenses issued for maple sap collection and production on state forest land.~~

~~(4) An estimate of the fees collected for licenses issued under this section.~~

~~(5) A copy of any rules adopted by or proposed for adoption by the commissioner to implement the requirements of this section. [Repealed.]~~

* * * Working Group on Intergenerational Transfer of Forestland * * *

Sec. 10. DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS, PARKS AND RECREATION;

WORKING GROUP ON INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFER OF
FORESTLAND

(a) On or before August 1, 2016, the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall establish a working group of interested parties to develop recommendations for a statewide program to improve the capacity of providing successional planning technical assistance to forestland owners in Vermont.

The working group shall:

(1) develop recommended priorities for succession planning for forestland owners;

(2) develop strategies for improving conservation investments or incentives that facilitate the intergenerational transfers of intact forestland;

(3) develop other strategies for lessening the impact of estate taxes or other pressures that could lead to the breaking up and subdivision of intact forest parcels;

(4) develop recommended legislative changes that may be needed to implement its recommendations and strategies; and

(5) identify fiscal issues related to its recommendations.

(b) On or before December 15, 2016, the Commissioner shall submit a report to the House Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and on

Ways and Means and the Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and Finance that shall include the working group's findings and any recommendations for legislative action.

* * * Forest Fire Wardens; Fire Suppression; Open Burning * * *

Sec. 11. 10 V.S.A. chapter 83, subchapter 4 is amended to read:

Subchapter 4. Forest Fires and Fire Prevention

§ 2641. TOWN FOREST FIRE WARDENS; APPOINTMENT AND
REMOVAL

(a) Upon approval by the ~~select-board~~ selectboard and acceptance by the appointee, the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner shall appoint a town forest fire warden for a term of five years or until a successor is appointed. A town forest fire warden may be reappointed for successive five-year terms by the Commissioner or until a successor is approved by the selectboard and appointed by the Commissioner. The warden may be removed for cause at any time by the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner with the approval of the ~~select-board~~ selectboard. A warden shall comply with training requirements established by the ~~commissioner~~ by rule Commissioner.

(b) The ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner may appoint a forest fire warden for an unorganized town or gore, who shall ~~hold office until he or she resigns or is removed for cause~~ serve for a term of five years or until a successor is appointed. An appointed forest fire warden for an unorganized town or gore

may be reappointed for successive five-year terms by the Commissioner until the Commissioner appoints and the unorganized town or gore approves a successor. The warden may be removed for cause at any time by the Commissioner with the approval of the unorganized town or gore. The forest fire warden of an unorganized town or gore shall have the same powers and duties as town forest fire wardens and shall be subject to the requirements of this subchapter.

(c) When there are woodlands within the limits of a city ~~or incorporated village~~, the chief of the fire department of such city ~~or village~~ shall act as the city or village forest fire warden with all the powers and duties of town forest fire wardens.

(d) When the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner deems it difficult in any municipality for one warden to take charge of protecting the entire municipality from forest fires, he or she may appoint one or more deputy forest fire wardens. Such wardens under the direction of the fire warden shall have the same powers, duties, and pay and make the same reports through the fire warden to the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner as forest fire wardens.

(e) The ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner may appoint special forest fire wardens who shall hold office during the pleasure of the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner. Such fire wardens shall have the same powers and duties throughout the ~~state~~ State as town forest fire wardens, except that all expenses

and charges incurred on account of their official acts shall be paid from the appropriations for the ~~department~~ Department.

§ 2642. SALARY AND COMPENSATION OF TOWN FOREST FIRE
WARDENS

(a) The salary of a town forest fire warden shall be determined by the selectboard members for time spent in the performance of the duties of his or her office, which shall be paid by the town. ~~He or she shall also receive from the town the sum of \$0.15 for each fire permit issued.~~ In addition thereto, he or she shall receive from the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner ~~\$20.00~~ \$30.00 annually for ~~properly making out and submitting reports of fires in his or her district~~ fulfilling the requirements of section 2645 of this title and keeping the required ~~state~~ State records. He or she shall also receive from the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner ~~\$15.00~~ \$30.00 per diem for attendance at each training ~~meeting called~~ required by the ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner. He or she shall also receive annually an amount of \$10.00 for each fire report that is submitted by the forest fire warden under section 2644 of this title.

(b) ~~The pay of a warden of an unorganized town or gore and his or her assistants, including patrolmen, and all expenses incurred by him or her in extinguishing forest fires, as provided for by the Commissioner, including employment of a person to assist him or her, on the approval of the Commissioner, shall be paid by the State from the monies annually available~~

~~from taxes in the unorganized town and gore, and the Commissioner of Finance and Management shall issue his or her warrant therefor. [Repealed.]~~

~~(c) A person employed by a warden to assist him or her in extinguishing a forest fire as authorized under section 2644 of this title, shall be paid at the same rate per hour as is paid for labor upon highways. A minimum of two hours' pay for the first hour or any portion thereof shall be allowed persons who are officially summoned to assist in the extinguishment of forest fires. When a warden employs men or women in extinguishing a fire in a municipality adjoining his or her own, the expense incurred shall be paid by the municipality in which the work was done at the rate of pay prevailing in the municipality where the laborers reside. A municipality wherein such warden resides shall forthwith pay the warden and assistants for their services, and the municipality may recover the expense thereof in a civil action on this statute from the municipality where the work was done. [Repealed.]~~

§ 2643. TOWN'S LIABILITY FOR EXTINGUISHING SUPPRESSION OF FOREST FIRES; STATE AID

~~(a) For the purpose of extinguishing forest fires, a town shall not be held liable in any one year for an amount greater than ten percent of its grand list. A municipality in which a forest fire occurs shall pay the cost to suppress a forest fire that occurs on land that is not owned by the Agency of Natural Resources, including the costs of personnel and equipment. The~~

Commissioner may, according to the Department fire suppression reimbursement policy, reimburse a municipality for all or a portion of the costs of suppressing a forest fire on land that is not owned by the Agency of Natural Resources.

~~(b) The state shall reimburse a town for its forest fire suppression costs in excess of ten percent of its grand list and for one half its forest fire suppression costs up to and including ten percent of its grand list when the bills are presented to the commissioner by December 31 of each year with proper vouchers and in a form approved by him~~ For the purpose of suppressing forest fires on lands owned by the Agency of Natural Resources, the State shall reimburse a town for all its forest fire suppression costs at a rate determined by the Commissioner according to the Department fire suppression reimbursement policy. If the total acreage of a forest fire is determined to be partially on land owned by the Agency of Natural Resources and partially on land owned by another party, the Commissioner shall, at a minimum, reimburse the town at a rate determined by the Commissioner according to the Department fire suppression reimbursement policy for costs incurred by the municipality on land owned by the Agency of Natural Resources.

(c) For any forest fire on lands owned by the Agency of Natural Resources to be considered eligible for reimbursement from the State, a town forest fire warden shall have reported the forest fire to the Commissioner within 14 days

of extinguishment of the fire as required under section 2644 of this title. For reimbursement of fire suppression costs for forest fires on land owned by the Agency of Natural Resources, the town forest fire warden and the Commissioner or designee shall approve the costs before submission to the municipality for payment. The town forest fire warden may submit to the State on an annual basis a request for reimbursement of fire suppression costs on lands owned by the Agency of Natural Resources. The State shall reimburse a town for all applicable forest fire suppression costs when the reimbursement request is presented in a form approved by the Commissioner to the Commissioner by December 31 of each year.

§ 2644. DUTIES AND POWERS OF FIRE WARDEN

(a) When a forest fire or fire threatening a forest is discovered in his or her town, the town forest fire warden shall enter upon any premises and take measures for its prompt control, suppression, and extinguishment. The town forest fire warden may call upon any person for assistance. ~~He or she may arrest without warrant any person found in the act of violating a provision of law or proclamation pertaining to forest fires.~~ The town forest fire warden may choose to share or delegate command authority to a chief engineer of a responding fire department or, in the chief's absence, the highest ranking assistant firefighter present during the fire.

(b) A town forest fire warden shall keep a record of his or her acts, ~~the amount of expenses incurred,~~ the number of fires and causes, the areas burned over, and the character and amount of damages done in the warden's jurisdiction. Within two weeks after the ~~discovery of such~~ extinguishment of a fire, ~~he or she~~ the town forest fire warden shall report the same fire to the ~~commissioner on forms which shall be furnished by him or her~~ Commissioner, but the making of ~~such a report~~ under this subsection shall not be a charge against the town.

(c) ~~During the danger season and subject to the approval or direction of the commissioner, a warden shall establish a patrol in dangerous localities, and the expense for the same shall be paid as expenses for fighting fires. Wardens shall receive the same pay for time spent in posting notices, patrolling or in making investigations of damages done that they receive for time spent in actual fire fighting.~~ [Repealed.]

§ 2645. OPEN BURNING; PERMITS

(a) Except as otherwise provided in this section, a person shall not kindle or authorize another person to kindle a fire in the open air for the purpose of burning natural wood, brush, weeds, or grass ~~or rubbish of any kind except where there is snow on the site, without first obtaining permission from the fire warden or deputy warden of the town, stating when and where such fire may be kindled~~ without first obtaining permission from the town forest fire warden

or deputy forest fire warden, stating when and where such fire may be kindled.
Wood, brush, weeds, or grass may not be burned if they have been altered in
any way by surface applications or injection of paints, stains, preservatives,
oils, glues, or pesticides. Whenever such permission is granted, ~~such~~ the fire
warden, within 12 hours, shall issue a written permit “Permit to Kindle” for
record purposes stating when and where such fire may be kindled. ~~Permission~~
~~shall not be required for the kindling of a fire in a location which is 200 feet or~~
~~more from any woodland, timberland or field containing dry grass or other~~
~~inflammable plant material contiguous to woodland.~~ With the written approval
of the secretary, during periods of extreme fire hazard, the commissioner may
notify town fire wardens that for a specified period no burning permits shall be
issued. ~~The wardens shall issue no permits during the specified period.~~

(b) ~~Whenever the commissioner deems that the public safety of any town~~
~~or portion of a town of this state does not require the protection provided by~~
~~this section, he or she may cause the town fire warden of any such town to post~~
~~notices to that effect in not less than five conspicuous places in such town.~~

[Repealed.]

(c) The provisions of this section will not apply to:

(1) ~~To areas posted in accordance with subsection (b) of this section~~ the
kindling of a fire in a location where there is snow surrounding the open
burning site;

(2) ~~To~~ fires built in stone arches, outdoor fireplaces, or existing fire rings at state State recreational areas or fires built in stone arches, outdoor fireplaces, or fire rings on private property that are not located within woodland, timberland, or a field containing dry grass or other flammable plant material contiguous to woodland;

(3) ~~To fires built in special containers used for burning brush, waste, grass or rubbish when conditions are deemed satisfactory to the town fire warden~~ the kindling of a fire in a location that is 200 feet or more from: any woodland, timberland, or field containing dry grass or other flammable plant material contiguous to woodland; or

(4) ~~To~~ areas within cities or villages cities maintaining a fire department.

(d)(1) As used in this section, “natural wood” means:

(A) trees, including logs, boles, trunks, branches, limbs, and stumps;

(B) lumber, including timber, logs, or wood slabs, especially when dressed for use; and

(C) pallets that are used for the shipment of various materials, so long as such pallets are not chemically treated with any preservative, paint, or oil.

(2) “Natural wood” shall not mean other wood products such as sawdust, plywood, particle board, or press board.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of the air pollution control officer to prohibit open burning in accordance with the rules adopted under chapter 23 of this title.

* * *

§ 2648. SLASH REMOVAL

(a) A person may cut or cause to be cut forest growth only if all slash adjoining the right-of-way of any public highway, or the boundary lines of woodlots owned by adjoining property owners, is treated as follows:

(1) All slash shall be removed for a distance of 50 feet from the right-of-way of any public highway or from the boundary lines of woodlots owned by adjoining property owners.

(2) All slash shall be removed for a distance of 100 feet from standing buildings on adjoining property.

~~(b) Owners or operators of timber or woodlots shall leave the main logging roads through cut-over areas free from slash so that tractors may pass over these roads unobstructed in order to carry men and supplies and fire fighting equipment to fire suppression crews. [Repealed.]~~

(c) If in the opinion of the town forest fire warden there is no fire hazard as a result of a cutting, the warden may issue, upon request, a statement relieving the operator of the conditions required in this section.

Sec. 12. DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS, PARKS AND RECREATION;
POLICY FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF FIRE SUPPRESSION
COSTS

(a) On or before January 1, 2017, the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, in consultation with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and other interested parties, shall develop a policy that provides the criteria the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall use in determining whether and how to reimburse towns for the costs of fire suppression. The policy shall include criteria for:

(1) whether and how to reimburse a municipality for the costs of forest fire suppression incurred on lands not owned by the Agency of Natural Resources; and

(2) determining the rate a municipality shall be reimbursed for fire suppression costs incurred on lands owned by the Agency of Natural Resources.

(b) The Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall submit the reimbursement policy developed under subsection (a) of this section to the Senate and House Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations.

Sec. 13. 10 V.S.A. § 2515 is added to read:

§ 2515. INTERCOMPACT LIABILITY—ARTICLE XV

The provisions of Article IX of this compact that relate to mutual aid in combating, controlling, or preventing forest fires shall be operative as between any state party to this compact and any other state that is party to a regional forest fire protection compact in another region provided that the legislature of such other state shall have given its assent to the mutual aid provisions of this compact.

* * * Forest Integrity; Municipal and Regional Planning * * *

Sec. 14. 24 V.S.A. § 4302(c) is amended to read:

(c) In addition, this chapter shall be used to further the following specific goals:

* * *

(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, forests, and other land resources.

* * *

(C) Vermont's forestlands should be managed so as to maintain and improve forest blocks and habitat connectors.

* * *

(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

(A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and ~~forest~~
~~lands~~ forestlands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low
overall density.

* * *

Sec. 15. 24 V.S.A. § 4303 is amended to read:

§ 4303. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions shall apply throughout this chapter unless the
context otherwise requires:

* * *

(10) “Land development” means the division of a parcel into two or
more parcels, the construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration,
relocation, or enlargement of any building or other structure, or of any mining,
excavation, or landfill, and any change in the use of any building or other
structure, or land, or extension of use of land.

* * *

(34) “Forest block” means a contiguous area of forest in any stage of
succession and not currently developed for nonforest use. A forest block may
include recreational trails, wetlands, or other natural features that do not
themselves possess tree cover, and uses exempt from regulation under
subsection 4413(d) of this title.

(35) “Forest fragmentation” means the division or conversion of a forest block by land development other than by a recreational trail or use exempt from regulation under subsection 4413(d) of this title.

(36) “Habitat connector” means land or water, or both, that links patches of wildlife habitat within a landscape, allowing the movement, migration, and dispersal of animals and plants and the functioning of ecological processes. A habitat connector may include recreational trails and uses exempt from regulation under subsection 4413(d) of this title. In a plan or other document issued pursuant to this chapter, a municipality or regional plan commission may use the phrase “wildlife corridor” in lieu of “habitat connector.”

(37) “Recreational trail” means a corridor that is not paved and that is used for hiking, walking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, all-terrain vehicle riding, horseback riding, and other similar recreational activity.

Sec. 16. 24 V.S.A. § 4348a(a)(2) is amended to read:

(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses, that:

(A) ~~indicating~~ Indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural lands identification process established in 6 V.S.A. § 8), residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, areas reserved for flood plain, and areas identified by the State,

regional planning commissions, or municipalities, ~~which that~~ require special consideration for aquifer protection; for wetland protection; for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors; or for other conservation purposes;

(B) ~~indicating~~ Indicates those areas within the region that are likely candidates for designation under sections 2793 (downtown development districts), 2793a (village centers), 2793b (new town centers), and 2793c (growth centers) of this title;

(C) ~~indicating~~ Indicates locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact, as determined by the regional planning commission, including flood control projects, surface water supply projects, industrial parks, office parks, shopping centers and shopping malls, airports, tourist attractions, recreational facilities, private schools, public or private colleges, and residential developments or subdivisions;

(D) ~~setting~~ Sets forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity, and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services;

(E) ~~indicating~~ Indicates those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them which may include

transfer of development rights, acquisition of development rights, or farmer assistance programs.

(F) Indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests. A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the regional planning commission.

* * *

Sec. 17. 24 V.S.A. § 4382(a)(2) is amended to read:

(2) A land use plan:

~~(A) consisting of, which shall consist of~~ a map and statement of present and prospective land uses, that:

~~(A) indicating~~ Indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural lands identification process established in 6 V.S.A. § 8), residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, and open spaces, areas reserved for flood plain, and areas identified by the State, the regional planning commission, or the municipality that require special consideration for aquifer protection; for wetland protection; for the

maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors; or for other conservation purposes;

(B) ~~setting~~ Sets forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity, and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and service;

(C) ~~identifying~~ Identifies those areas, if any, proposed for designation under chapter 76A of this title, together with, for each area proposed for designation, an explanation of how the designation would further the plan's goals and the goals of section 4302 of this title, and how the area meets the requirements for the type of designation to be sought.

(D) Indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests. A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the municipality.

Sec. 18. STUDY AND REPORT; LAND USE REGULATION; FOREST
INTEGRITY

(a) Creation. There is created a Study Committee on Land Use Regulation and Forest Integrity to study potential revisions to 10 V.S.A. chapter 151 (Act 250) and to 24 V.S.A. chapter 117, subchapter 7 (bylaws) to protect contiguous areas of forestland from fragmentation and promote habitat connectivity between forestlands.

(b) Membership. The Committee shall be composed of the following members:

(1) the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation or designee.

(2) the Commissioner of Housing and Community Development or designee.

(3) the Chair of the Natural Resources Board or designee;

(4) a current officer of a municipality, appointed by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;

(5) a representative of the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, appointed by that Association;

(6) a representative of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, appointed by that Council, to represent the Council and to provide input from the Vermont Forest Roundtable;

(7) a representative of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board established under 6 V.S.A. § 4606, appointed by that Board;

(8) a representative of the Vermont Forest Products Association, appointed by that Association; and

(9) a representative of the Vermont Woodlands Association, appointed by that Association.

(c) Powers and duties. The Committee shall study potential revisions to Act 250 and 24 V.S.A. chapter 117, subchapter 7 (bylaws) to protect contiguous areas of forestland from fragmentation and promote habitat connectivity between forestlands. This study shall include the following:

(1) a review of the relevant provisions of Act 250 and 24 V.S.A. chapter 117 as they exist on passage of this act;

(2) a development and review of options to revise Act 250 and the bylaw provisions of chapter 117 to protect forestland from fragmentation and promote habitat connectivity;

(3) an evaluation of the impact of those options on land use;

(4) a recommendation on whether to make such revisions and the reason for the recommendation and, if the recommendation is affirmative, the revisions that the Committee suggests be made; and

(5) a review of the definitions added by Sec. 15 of this act to 24 V.S.A. § 4303 and the amendments made by Secs. 16 and 17 of this act to 24 V.S.A.

§§ 4348a and 4382, a recommendation on whether to make revisions to these provisions and the reasons for the recommendation and, if the recommendation is affirmative, the revisions that the Committee suggests be made.

(d) Assistance. For purposes of scheduling meetings, preparing its recommendation on whether to make statutory revisions, and preparing any recommended legislation, the Committee shall have the assistance of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. The Committee also shall be entitled to the technical and professional assistance of the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Natural Resources Board. The Committee shall be entitled to assistance from the Department of Taxes, including assistance from consultant economists with expertise on tax and finance issues related to forestlands. If the Committee recommends legislative changes, the Committee shall have the assistance of the Office of Legislative Council and the Joint Fiscal Office for the purpose of preparing recommended draft legislation and fiscal analysis.

(e) Report. On or before January 1, 2017, the Committee shall submit its written recommendation and any proposed legislation to the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources, the House and Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy, and the House Committee on Agriculture and Forest Products.

(f) Meetings.

(1) The Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall call the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before July 15, 2016.

(2) The Committee shall select a chair from among its members at the first meeting.

(3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

* * * Municipal Regulation of Forestry Operations * * *

Sec. 19. 24 V.S.A. § 4413(d) is amended to read:

(d)(1) A bylaw under this chapter shall not regulate:

(A) required agricultural practices, including the construction of farm structures, as those practices are defined by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets ~~or~~;

(B) accepted silvicultural practices, as defined by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, including practices which are in compliance with the Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont, as adopted by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation; or

(C) forestry operations.

~~(1)(2) For purposes of~~ As used in this section;

(A) “farm Farm structure” means a building, enclosure, or fence for housing livestock, raising horticultural or agronomic plants, or carrying out

other practices associated with accepted agricultural or farming practices, including a silo, as “farming” is defined in 10 V.S.A. § 6001(22), but excludes a dwelling for human habitation.

(B) “Forestry operations” has the same meaning as in 10 V.S.A. § 2602.

~~(2)(3)~~ A person shall notify a municipality of the intent to build a farm structure and shall abide by setbacks approved by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets. No municipal permit for a farm structure shall be required.

~~(3) A municipality may enact a bylaw that imposes forest management practices resulting in a change in a forest management plan for land enrolled in the use value appraisal program pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 124 only to the extent that those changes are silviculturally sound, as determined by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and protect specific natural, conservation, aesthetic, or wildlife features in properly designated zoning districts. These changes also must be compatible with 32 V.S.A. § 3755.~~

(4) This subsection does not prevent an appropriate municipal panel, when issuing a decision on an application for land development over which the panel otherwise has jurisdiction under this chapter, from imposing reasonable conditions under subsection 4464(b) of this title to protect wildlife habitat, threatened or endangered species, or other natural, historic, or scenic resources and does not prevent the municipality from enforcing such conditions,

provided that the reasonable conditions do not restrict or regulate forestry operations unrelated to land development.

* * * Land Use Change Tax; Transfer of Lands to State
and Federal Forest * * *

Sec. 20. 32 V.S.A. § 3757 is amended to read:

§ 3757. LAND USE CHANGE TAX

(a) Land which has been classified as agricultural land or managed forestland pursuant to this chapter shall be subject to a land use change tax upon the development of that land, as defined in section 3752 of this chapter. The tax shall be at the rate of 10 percent of the full fair market value of the changed land determined without regard to the use value appraisal. If changed land is a portion of a parcel, the fair market value of the changed land shall be the fair market value of the changed land as a separate parcel, divided by the common level of appraisal. Such fair market value shall be determined as of the date the land is no longer eligible for use value appraisal. This tax shall be in addition to the annual property tax imposed upon such property. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require payment of an additional land use change tax upon the subsequent development of the same land, nor shall it be construed to require payment of a land use change tax merely because previously eligible land becomes ineligible, provided no development of the land has occurred.

* * *

(f)(1) When the application for use value appraisal of agricultural and forestland has been approved by the State, the State shall record a lien against the enrolled land in the land records of the municipality ~~which~~ that shall constitute a lien to secure payment of the land use change tax to the State upon development. The landowner shall bear the recording cost. The land use change tax and any obligation to repay benefits paid in error shall not constitute a personal debt of the person liable to pay the same, but shall constitute a lien which shall run with the land. All of the administrative provisions of chapter 151 of this title, including those relating to collection and enforcement, shall apply to the land use change tax. The Director shall release the lien when notified that:

(A) the land use change tax is paid;

(B) the land use change tax is abated pursuant to this section;

(C) the land use change tax is abated pursuant to subdivision 3201(5)

of this title;

(D) the land is exempt from the levy of the land use change tax pursuant to this section and the owner requests release of the lien; or

(E) the land is exempt from the levy of the land use change tax pursuant to this section and the land is developed.

(2) Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to allow the enrollment of agricultural land or managed forestland without a lien to secure payment of the land use change tax. Any fees related to the release of a lien under this subsection shall be the responsibility of the owner of the land subject to the lien.

(g) Upon application, the Commissioner may abate a use change tax levy concerning agricultural land found eligible for use value appraisal under subdivision 3752(1)(A) of this title, in the following cases:

(1) If a disposition of such property resulting in a change of use of it takes place within five years of the initial assessment at use value because of the permanent physical incapacity or death of the individual farmer-owner or farmer-operator of the property.

(2) If a disposition of the property was necessary in order to raise funds to continue the agriculture operation of the seller. In this case, the Commissioner shall consider the financial gain realized by the sale of the land and whether, in respect to that gain, payment of the use change tax would significantly reduce the ability of the seller to continue using the remaining property, or any part thereof, as agricultural land.

(h) Land condemned as a result of eminent domain or sold voluntarily to a condemning authority in anticipation of eminent domain proceedings is exempt from the levy of a land use change tax under this section.

* * *

(j)(1) Land transferred to the ~~United States~~ U.S. Forest Service is exempt from the levy of a use change tax under this section, provided ~~all~~ one of the following ~~apply~~ applies:

(~~1~~)(A) land transferred is eligible for use value appraisal at the time of the transfer;

(~~2~~)(B) the transfer is in consideration for the receipt from the ~~United States~~ U.S. Forest Service of land of approximately equal value, as determined by the Commissioner; ~~and~~ or

(~~3~~)(C) the landowner has submitted to the Commissioner in writing a binding document that would substitute the land received for the land transferred to the Forest Service, for the purposes of this chapter.

(2) Land acquired by the Green Mountain National Forest for public use is exempt from the levy of a use change tax under this section.

(k) Conservation and preservation rights and interests held by an agency of the United States or by a qualified holder, as defined in 10 V.S.A. chapter 34, shall be exempt from the levy of a use change tax. Upon request of the agency or qualified holder, the Commissioner may petition the Director to release the conservation and preservation rights and interests from any lien recorded pursuant to this chapter.

(l) Land acquired by the Agency of Natural Resources; the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation; the Department of Fish and Wildlife; or the Department of Environmental Conservation for public uses, as authorized by 10 V.S.A. § 6303(a)(1)–(4), is exempt from the levy of a land use change tax under this section.

* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 21. EFFECTIVE DATES

(a) This section and Secs. 10 (intergenerational working group) and 18 (forest integrity study and report) shall take effect on passage.

(b) Secs. 1–4 (general policy and enforcement), 5 (harvest notification report), 9 (maple sugar production on State lands), 11–13 (fire wardens; fire suppression), 14 (forest integrity; purpose; goals), 19 (municipal regulation of forestry operations), and 20 (land use change tax) shall take effect on July 1, 2016.

(c) Secs. 15 (forest integrity; definitions), 16 (elements of a regional plan) and 17 (plan for municipality) shall take effect on January 1, 2018. Secs. 15–17 shall apply to municipal and regional plans adopted or amended on or after January 1, 2018.