

Flood relief for logging contractors –

- Due to excessive precipitation, including the floods in July and December of 2023, and a lack of frozen conditions over the last two winters, logging contractors have experienced 16 consecutive months of unsuitable ground conditions for harvesting and hauling timber from Vermont’s forests.
- Many timber harvesting operations were shutdown entirely for weeks before and after the July flooding and only worked sporadically in a four-month (July-October) period. Logging contractor damages have primarily been revenue loss (as opposed to property damage) which is uninsurable.
- These small rural businesses have experienced as much as a 30% revenue loss for 2023, with the total revenue loss in the hundreds of thousands of dollars *per business*.
- The administration was asked to include losses for logging contractors in the BEGAP relief program in July, but were told that revenue loss was not being included in any of the programs. The federal delegation was also approached, but there are no federal programs for logging contractors without new legislation, therefore they could not offer any relief.
- HAFF voted unanimously earlier in the session to support a relief effort, with a request for \$1 million to be appropriated for a **one-time (not ongoing)** logging contractor relief program among the priorities they sent to House Appropriations for BAA, but it was not included in the BAA.
- I ask that the General Assembly fund this relief program in the FY25 budget.

Harvesting Adaptation and Resilience Program (HARP) –

- As a result of the severe rain events and prolonged periods of saturated soils in Vermont during 2023, the unprecedented warm winter of 2022/2023, and an ever-changing climate, the cost of water quality protection is rapidly increasing for timber harvesting.
- Logging contractors are expected to absorb these costs for pre-harvest preparation that will protect soils and infrastructure and reduce and/or eliminate sedimentation and phosphorous runoff, during and after harvests. They need financial assistance to ensure the most durable practices are consistently implemented at the beginning of any harvest.
- H.624, as introduced in the HAFF Committee by Reps. Sims and Lipsky, proposes to create Harvesting Adaptation and Resilience Program (HARP), a new program that replicates similar work successfully carried out in the New York City watershed to support forest operations and the protection of the water supply.
- HARP will provide payments to logging contractors for specific materials and practices that can be utilized for forest road construction, land preparation, culverts, and sediment control in advance of harvest implementation. Examples include erosion control measures on skid trails (mulch, seed, waterbars, straw wattles); right sized culverts, geotextile fabric, and gravel or stone on access roads and landings; and bridges for temporary stream crossing structures during logging. This program will ensure logging contractors can continue to affordably implement water quality protection measures and enhance ecosystem protection.
- This program also provides parity in the working lands. Millions of dollars are spent on necessary agricultural water quality protection programs, but only tens of thousands are spent to assist forestry operations.
- HARP funding for statewide implementation would cost \$2.5 million annually. Each dollar invested in this resiliency program is also a dollar invested in clean water, climate resilience, the working lands, and rural economy.
- I respectfully ask that funding for this program be included in the 2025 Budget once the bill moves forward from HAFF.