

S.100

Introduced by Senators Galbraith, Ashe, Ayer, Benning, Campbell,
Cummings, Doyle, Fox, French, Hartwell, Kitchel,
McCormack, ~~Mullin~~, Pollina, Sears, Starr, Westman, White,
and Zuckerman

Referred to Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

Date: February 12, 2013

Subject: Conservation and development; Act 250; natural resources; forests;
wildlife habitat

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to preserve the
integrity of Vermont's forests by setting a state policy against fragmentation
and by amending Act 250 to expand its jurisdiction to include development
within a forest of 1,000 acres or more and to modify the Act 250 criteria to
protect forest integrity.

An act relating to forest integrity

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

1 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

2 The General Assembly finds:

3 (1) Vermont's forests are a unique resource that provides habitat for
4 wildlife, a renewable resource for human use, and jobs for Vermonters in
5 timber and other forest-related industries.

6 (2) Large areas of contiguous forest are essential for quality wildlife
7 habitat, to implement best practices in forest management, and to preserve
8 Vermont's scenic qualities.

9 (3) The division of forests into lots for house sites or other construction
10 fragments Vermont's forests and reduces their value as wildlife habitat, for
11 forest industries, and to Vermont's tourist economy.

12 Sec. 2. 10 V.S.A. § 2601a is added to read:

13 § 2601a. POLICY; FOREST INTEGRITY; NONFRAGMENTATION

14 (a) The State of Vermont shall preserve Vermont's forests in large
15 contiguous blocks without permanent roads, buildings, or other construction in
16 order to:

17 (1) provide habitat for wildlife, especially animals that range over large
18 areas of land, including bear, moose, bobcat, lynx, and deer;

19 (2) protect the watersheds and Vermont's streams and rivers so as to
20 maintain the quality of Vermont's waters and to reduce the risk
21 of flooding; and

~~(3) preserve the scenic qualities of the Vermont landscape.~~

(b) The State of Vermont shall implement the policy stated in this section through all agencies whose activities affect the State's publicly and privately owned forests, including the Department as set forth in this chapter, and through its political subdivisions pursuant to 24 V.S.A. chapter 117 (municipal and regional planning and development).

Sec. 3. 10 V.S.A. § 6001(3)(A) is amended to read:

(3)(A) "Development" means each of the following:

(i) The construction of improvements on a tract or tracts of land, owned or controlled by a person, involving more than 10 acres of land within a radius of five miles of any point on any involved land, for commercial or industrial purposes in a municipality that has adopted permanent zoning and subdivision bylaws.

(ii) The construction of improvements for commercial or industrial purposes on more than one acre of land within a municipality that has not adopted permanent zoning and subdivision bylaws.

(iii) The construction of improvements for commercial or industrial purposes on a tract or tracts of land, owned or controlled by a person, involving more than one acre of land within a municipality that has adopted permanent zoning and subdivision bylaws, if the municipality in which the

1 ~~proposed project is located has elected by ordinance, adopted under 24 V.S.A.~~
2 ~~chapter 59 of Title 24, to have this jurisdiction apply.~~

3 (iv) The construction of housing projects such as cooperatives,
4 condominiums, or dwellings, or construction or maintenance of mobile homes
5 or trailer parks, with 10 or more units, constructed or maintained on a tract or
6 tracts of land, owned or controlled by a person, within a radius of five miles of
7 any point on any involved land, and within any continuous period of five years.

8 (v) The construction of improvements on a tract of land involving
9 more than 10 acres that is to be used for municipal, county, or state purposes.

10 In computing the amount of land involved, land shall be included that is
11 incident to the use such as lawns, parking areas, roadways, leaching fields, and
12 accessory buildings.

13 (vi) The construction of improvements for commercial, industrial,
14 or residential use above the elevation of 2,500 feet.

15 (vii) Exploration for fissionable source materials beyond the
16 reconnaissance phase or the extraction or processing of fissionable source
17 material.

18 (viii) The drilling of an oil and gas well.

19 (ix) The construction of a building, structure, or permanent road,
20 including a driveway, any portion of which is within a forest that, as of the

~~effective date of this subdivision (ix), consists of 1,000 acres or more of
contiguous forestland.~~

Sec. 4. 10 V.S.A. § 6001(35) is added to read:

(35) "Fragmentation of forestland" means the separation of forestlands
by buildings, roads, or other physical structures or by other human-made
alterations to land such as clearing.

Sec. 5. 10 V.S.A. § 6086 is amended to read:

§ 6086. ISSUANCE OF PERMIT; CONDITIONS AND CRITERIA

(a) Before granting a permit, the district commission shall find that the
subdivision or development:

* * *

(9) Is in conformance with a duly adopted capability and development
plan, and land use plan when adopted

* * *

(C) Productive forest soils; forest integrity. A permit will be granted
for the a development or subdivision of productive forest soils only when it is
demonstrated by the applicant that, in addition to all other applicable criteria,
either, the subdivision or development each of the following is met:

(i) If the application involves the development or subdivision of
productive forest soils, the development or subdivision either will not result in
any reduction in the potential of those soils for commercial forestry; or:

- 1 ~~(i)(I) the development or subdivision will not significantly~~
2 interfere with or jeopardize the continuation of agriculture or forestry on
3 adjoining lands or reduce their agricultural or forestry potential; and
4 ~~(ii)(II) except in the case of an application for a project located~~
5 in a designated growth center, there are no lands other than productive forest
6 soils owned or controlled by the applicant which are reasonably suited to the
7 purpose of the development or subdivision; and
8 ~~(iii)(III) except in the case of an application for a project~~
9 located in a designated growth center, the subdivision or development has been
10 planned to minimize the reduction of the potential of those productive forest
11 soils through innovative land use design resulting in compact development
12 patterns, so that the remaining forest soils on the project tract may contribute to
13 a commercial forestry operation.
14 (ii) The development or subdivision will not contribute to the
15 fragmentation of forestland.

16 * * *

17 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

18 ~~This act shall take effect on July 1, 2013.~~

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds:

(1) Vermont's forests are a unique resource that provides habitat for wildlife, a renewable resource for human use, jobs for Vermonters in timber and other forest-related industries, and economic development through a productive forest products industry.

(2) Large areas of contiguous forest are essential for quality wildlife habitat, to preserve Vermont's scenic qualities, to implement best practices in forest management, and to ensure the continued economic productivity of Vermont's diverse forest products industry.

(3) The division of forests into lots for house sites or other construction fragments Vermont's forests and reduces their value as wildlife habitat, for forest industries, and to Vermont's tourist economy.

Sec. 2. REPORT; FOREST FRAGMENTATION IN VERMONT

On or before January 15, 2015, the Commissioner of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall submit to the House and Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife, and Water Resources a report assessing the current and projected effects of fragmentation on Vermont's forestlands, and providing recommendations, including regulatory and nonregulatory mechanisms, and legislation if appropriate, for how to best protect the integrity of Vermont's forestlands and preserve large blocks of contiguous forestland.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2014.