

April 23, 2014

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy hearing on H.329, Draft 9.1

My name is Put Blodgett. I am currently serving as president of the Vermont Woodlands Association and as co-chair of the Current Use Tax Coalition.

During last week's hearing on H.329, Senator Galbraith asked for specific examples of towns over-assessing land in UVA for the purpose of obtaining a larger reimbursement from the state. In Waitsfield in 2009 a forest parcel in UVA was valued at \$400,000. The parcel was later valued at \$185,000 by the state, a reduction of 54%. At Waitsfield's tax rate at the time of \$1.62, taxes would have been \$6,480 on the \$400,000 value but were \$2,997 on the \$185,000, meaning the state was paying \$3,483 on \$215,000 of non-existent value. The Senate Panel heard similar allegations at its fall hearings, especially during the Ferrisburgh hearing.

In his testimony to minimize the problem of "parking" land for development, Senator Starr quoted figures from 2012, a year in which development had not recovered from the recession and which had the second lowest number of acres withdrawn over a nine-year period. Where "parking" occurs, it enrages the local taxpayers. Witness the Westman Amendment that was passed in response to a subdivided current use parcel in Senator Westman's district.

As further evidence of the "parking" problem, I would refer the Senators to the 15 examples of subdivided land still in UVA that was handed out by Tom Vickery, former president of VALA, at the Senate Panel hearing in Barton on September 24.

More specifically on this bill, on page 5, lines 4 and 5, I am concerned about "no management activity report shall be received later than March 1".

Most Vermont forest landowners have less than 100 acres and their forest management plans call for harvesting every 12-15 years. We all are aware of April 15, but to expect forest landowners to remember to file a management activity report February 1 every 12-15 years is counting on better memories than most of us have. A one-month extension to March 1 does nothing to jog that memory.

Would this committee give consideration to something like "After providing 30 days notice to the owner, the Director shall remove from use value appraisal an entire parcel of managed forest land and notify the owner when the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation has not received a required management activity report"?

On page 11, line 21, "ed" should be added to the word "reach".