

Testimony of John B. Meyer, Consulting Forester
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
S. 100
2/4/14

I am representing myself, but I bring a perspective gleaned from sitting on the Boards of the Vermont Forest Products Association and the Vermont Woodlands Association.

S.100 has a seemingly noble goal: discourage forest fragmentation, and I appreciate the exemption of roads and structures used solely for forestry purposes. But it appears to be over-kill for a perceived problem that in fact may not exist, and it may trigger a host of unintended consequences for landowners and indeed the public. For example:

1. 1000 acres is not a large forest when seen as an aggregate of many smaller parcels owned by landowners who will find themselves suddenly caught in the net of this bill, and they will be unhappy.
2. Relatively speaking, 1000 feet is not a long distance on large aggregations of forestland, and many landowners will find themselves entangled with Act 250 in situations for which it was never intended.
3. The exemption of roads used solely for forestry is unworkable. Most forest roads, although built for initial forestry purposes, soon become part of an integral network of trails used by all sorts of recreational interests. Do these roads then become subject of an Act 250 entanglement?
4. If VAST wants to build a groomed trail across a landowner's land that falls within the criteria of this bill, does that landowner then require an Act 250 permit?

Although I'm sure there are some alarmists who perceive the sky is falling and that Vermont's forests are disappearing, in my 35 years experience as a forester managing over 30,000 acres of private forest land, most of which is situated in large contiguous blocks, I have seen no problem that would necessitate a bill such as this. S. 100 appears to be a state over-reach into an issue that may best be dealt with at the local level.

I would much prefer the legislature invest its limited energy into issues such as use value appraisal, a program that really does make a difference discouraging forest fragmentation, or forest health programs to combat far worse and more devastating threats such as the impending Asian Long-horned Beetle and Emerald Ash Borer infestations. Additionally, if we are to "preserve the integrity of Vermont's forests," as the statement of purpose of S.100 purports to do, the legislature should find ways to encourage investment in our forest products industries and expansion of those markets. Public policy needs to encourage additional private investment in Vermont's working forests. I am afraid S.100 is yet another piece of ultimately misguided legislation that will have the opposite effect.