Dear Vermont Legislator:

Forests define the Green Mountain State!

Forests encompass 75% of the state and are vitally important for our economic and ecological wellbeing.



Our forests are a <u>major driver of our economy</u>. Forest based manufacturing, recreation, and tourism employ approximately 13,000 Vermonters and contribute about \$1.5 billion in revenue to the state every year.

Our forests also provide a <u>rich array of important ecological functions</u>. They support wildlife habitat, protect water quality and help insulate communities from the effects of extreme weather, such as flooding. According to the Gund Institute every acre of forestland provides approximately \$318.50 worth of benefits for services like rainfall regulation and flood control on an annual basis.

In addition, Vermont's forests remove an estimated 75,000 metric tons of carbon and 1,610 metric tons of other pollutants from the atmosphere each year – a function that would be worth about \$16 million if we paid for these pollution control services out-of-pocket.

Vermont's forests are productive in many respects. From supporting forest products, including maple syrup, to the leaf-peeping economy, to providing ecosystem services and recreational opportunities like hiking, skiing, hunting, and wildlife watching, forests contribute to the health and wellbeing of our state.

It is important to note that in recent decades, we have improved how our forests are managed. Because of the Current Use Program and technical assistance efforts, more forests are being managed in accordance with management plans. The utilization of Acceptable Management Practices helps maintain water quality on logging jobs. More landowners are managing their woodlands for wildlife and biodiversity, and every year more forestland is conserved due to landowners working proactively with conservation groups.

Yet the continuation of these successes cannot be taken for granted, especially since <u>for the first</u> <u>time in over a century our forests are actually declining in extent</u>. While it is hard to pin down the exact amount of acreage that has been lost, between 1982 and 1997, 51,000 acres were converted to other land uses. A more recent Forest Service report suggests that Vermont may have lost up to 75,000 acres of forestland from 2007 to 2013, although the Forest Service does not report this as a statistically significant change due to the margin of error in the analysis. Regardless of the actual number of forest acres lost in recent years, there are certainly reasons to be concerned about the impacts of forestland conversion.

From above, the Vermont landscape has an appearance of densely forested lands; however a closer look at the surface reveals that our forests are being compromised and fragmented by rural sprawl. Data from the Forest Service demonstrates that we lost five percent of forests over 100 acres in size between 2001 and 2006. Other research indicates the amount of forested parcels larger than 50 acres that were undeveloped decreased by about 34,000 acres between 2003 and 2009.

In Vermont, we value well-planned development and a growth pattern of supporting downtowns and village centers surrounded by rural countryside. If we are smart about our future, we can continue to accommodate new housing while ensuring that our forests provide for diverse forest products, modern and efficient wood energy, intact wildlife habitat and clean, healthy water.

Vermonters overwhelmingly value our working lands, our rural character, natural environment, and forested hills and iconic mountains. We have an incredible opportunity to be proactive and develop lasting policies that will keep our forests intact.

With this in mind, it is important for policy makers to play a positive role in maintaining or increasing the contribution of our forests to the state's economic, ecological, and cultural wellbeing. Therefore, the undersigned organizations and individuals <u>call on the Vermont Legislature to support</u> a stakeholder process to develop legislative recommendations to maintain the integrity of Vermont's forests into the future.

Vermont Natural Resources Council The Nature Conservancy of Vermont Vermont Land Trust Vermont Woodlands Association Vermont Audubon The Trust for Public Land /Vermont Office Upper Valley Land Trust The Lyme Timber Company National Wildlife Federation, Northeast Regional Center Green Mountain Division Society of American Foresters Forest Guild Vermont Coverts Vermont Conservation Voters Vermont Council of Trout Unlimited Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund The Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club North Woods Forestrv Meadowsend Timberlands Ltd. Green Mountain Club The Working Lands Coalition Rural Vermont The Conservation Fund Conservation Law Foundation NorthWoods Stewardship Center Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences Northeast Master Logger Certification The Trust to Conserve Northeast Forestlands **Conservation Collaboratives** Two Countries. One Forest Northern Forest Center New England Forestry Foundation

Wildlife Management Institute Little Hogback Community Forest Cold Hollow to Canada, Inc. Green Mountain Conservancy New England Backcountry Hunters & Anglers Vermont Center for Ecostudies Highstead William Keeton on behalf of the UVM Rubenstein School Forestry Program Robert Moses, President of Britton Lumber Company Doug Britton, Britton Lumber Company Jeffrey Smith, Butternut Hollow Forestry Rodney Elmer, Mountain Deer Taxidermy Eric Zencey, Fellow of the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics* Bob Lloyd, Forest landowner and President Emeritus of Vermont Coverts Steve Faccio, Conservation Biologist, Vermont Center for Ecostudies Rosalind Renfrew, Vermont Center for Ecostudies Marc Lapin, Faculty, Program in Environmental Studies, Middlebury College Beverley Wemple, Associate Professor, Geography and Natural Resources, University of Vermont Eric Palola, Guanacaste Dry Forest Conservation Fund* Leo Laferriere, Retired consulting forester Farley Brown, Faculty at Sterling College* Kathy Doyle, Doyle Ecological Services and Visiting Instructor, Middlebury College Lynn Levine, Consulting forester, Forest*Care and Heartwood Press John M. Fogarty, Fogarty Forestry, LLC John McNerny Forest landowner, and Past President of Vermont Coverts Leon Whitcomb and Rhoda Bedell, Forest landowners Leslie and Jim Morey, Forest Landowners Hugo Liepmann, Forest Landowner Don Dickson, Member of Forest Roundtable

*Reflects the support of the individual and not necessarily the organization.