



Date: April 9, 2015

From: Jamey Fidel, General Counsel/Forest and Wildlife Program Director, VNRC

Re: H.355

Vermont Natural Resources Council supports the licensing of foresters in Vermont.

We commend the Office of Professional Regulation for doing a thorough report on the question of whether to license foresters in Vermont. The report explains the myriad values of forests and some of the primary threats to maintaining the integrity of Vermont's forests.

The report also lays out the important responsibilities of forests and emphasizes that "managing forests sustainably requires an understanding of the ecological, social and economic systems necessary to simultaneously maintain forest health and provide the array of benefits" described in the report. It is for this reason that we support a licensing program to equip foresters with a basic level of understanding to carry out these responsibilities.

I have talked to foresters about the question of whether to license foresters. The response I often hear is other states in New England do it (VT and Rhode Island are only states that don't). If the program is set up to help the overall credibility of the profession, and require a minimum level of competency and accountability, this will benefit forestland owners that rely on professional foresters to maintain the health and long-term economic viability of their forests.

In regards to H.355, we do not have many suggestions on ways to improve or modify the legislation, but offer the following comments:

- Continuing education should be a requirement under licensing. Beyond coursework related to the profession of forestry, silvicultural practices, and best practices for maintaining forest health and responding to new challenges such as forest pests and climate change, continuing education should include courses on ethics.
- Qualifications for Licensure – We support H.355's flexibility in allowing foresters with a bachelor or associate degree in forestry to qualify, with certain caveats regarding experience and passage of SAF Certified Forester examination. We also support allowing foresters with a forestry-related degree to qualify for licensure. If a resource professional has a degree in forest ecology for example, they may have the skills and experience to practice forestry, and they should not be disqualified from practicing forestry.