



Testimony from Lisa Sausville, Executive Director, Vermont Coverts in support of H.355

April 21, 2015

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on H.355. My name is Lisa Sausville and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife. We are a Vermont non-profit established in 1985 through the extension office to educate landowners about sound forest management and wildlife stewardship. To date more than 600 landowners have been through our intensive 3-day training and are our Cooperators and many others have been through our Stewardship workshops.

Landowners have the opportunity to produce income from timber sales, develop better wildlife habitat, enjoy more hunting opportunities and provide a better environment for all of us by protecting soil and water resources through good woodland management. Unfortunately, far too few landowners realize that they can have these benefits and even if they do, how to go about managing them. To garner ecosystem benefits a landowner will likely need to turn to a professional. Forester Licensing would ensure that foresters in Vermont are meeting a minimum level of understanding and continuing education experience to carry out these objectives.

As part of the Coverts Training we offer a presentation on working with professionals. In it we outline the differences between the county forester, a procurement forester who works for the mill, and a consulting forester. We explain that anyone in Vermont can hang out a sign that says they are a forester. The state maintains a list of foresters that a landowner can get from their County Forester. However the County Forester cannot comment on the merits of anyone on the list. It is entirely up to the landowner to ferret out the qualifications of a forester. In our Cooperator Training we suggest criteria a landowner should look for and ask about a forester's qualifications – education and experience. Licensure would help to weed out those that aren't qualified under a set of minimum guidelines. Forester Licensing will not damage those foresters practicing properly but it can offer to landowners a selection of professionals that have a universal credentialing system, continued learning and a system that allows them a re-course if they feel they have been wronged.

It is a difficult and important step for a landowner to choose a forester. Often their land is their largest asset. Licensing foresters would assure landowners that those on the list have met baseline criteria as they, the landowners, look to do their best in managing their woodlands. Thank you for considering this issue.