

E-mail received on February 12, 2016 for testimony on February 10, 2016

Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – Thank you for allowing me to testify concerning H.584, An Act Relating to Miscellaneous

Timber Harvesting, Forestry, and State Lands Issues. There were several questions raised during my testimony. The purpose of this email is to provide answers to those questions.

1. What do we think is the most important part of H.584? – This is not an easy question to answer as there are many good proposals in H.584. We appreciate the recognition in the bill that forestry operations are adversely impacted by the encroachment of urban, commercial, and residential land uses that result in forest fragmentation and erode the health and sustainability of remaining forests. We also appreciate the recognition that public and private forests constitute unique and irreplaceable resources, benefits, and values of statewide importance; contribute to the protection and conservation of wildlife habitat, air, water, and soil resources of the State; mitigate against the effects of climate change; and result in general benefit to the health and welfare of the people of Vermont. Below are the H.584 proposals that we think are most important:

- Tracking of forest extraction via harvest notification and trip tickets will enable the Agency of Natural Resources to track and monitor forest extraction amounts and trends across the state. This will also enable them to monitor and enforce Acceptable Management Practices for Protecting Water Quality and adherence to accepted silvicultural practices as defined by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Harvest notification will also work to strengthen the collection of land gains tax on timber sales on land subject to the land gains tax.
- The proposed language on page 32 is good in that it clarifies that a municipal panel may impose reasonable conditions on a decision related to land development to protect wildlife habitat, threatened or endangered species, or other natural, historic or scenic resources. Municipalities should have options for conditioning land clearing that is related to land development versus forestry. Forestry operations and the development of forest roads may just be precursors to land development, and these activities should fall under municipal regulation if it is clear that the intent of the activity is for land development.
- The suggested language on pages 46-48 clarifying that land acquired by the Agency of Natural Resources that is enrolled in the Current Use Program shall be exempt from the levy of a land use change tax if the land is being acquired for public ownership. This should also include land that is acquired by the Green Mountain National Forest for public ownership.

2. Provide an explanation of the \$19.5 million in funding for VHCC from the real estate transfer tax. – This is one of the recommendations that came from the Forest Roundtable. I spoke to Jamey Fidel and he has agreed to get the details to the Committee.

3. What should be the target percentage of Vermont land that should be forested? – As I stated during my testimony, we should not be focused on a particular percentage. The issue that should be focused on is “intact contiguous forests”. The percentage of intact forests in Vermont has been declining. Intact forests, not just large areas of trees, are critical to providing clean water, protecting against floods, providing wildlife habitat and migration corridors, supporting biodiversity, and absorbing CO₂. I spoke to Commissioner Snyder and he agreed to provide more detail about this to the Committee.

4. How long does it take a forest to recover from being fragmented? – I spoke to Commissioner Snyder about this question and he will respond to the Committee.

5. What percentage of the proposed Exit 4 Development is forestland? – I spoke to Brian Shupe and he stated that the amount of forestland in the proposed Exit 4 Development is minimal. He will get back to the Committee with more details if requested.

I am available to answer additional questions if you have them.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify on this important bill and for your focus on protecting Vermont's remaining forests.

Mark Nelson
Chair
Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club