

TO: Senate Committee on Government Operations  
FROM: Put Blodgett, President, Vermont Woodlands Association  
RE: 11.355 Forester Licensure

April 19, 2016

My name is Put Blodgett. I grew up on a dairy farm in Bradford and still own 670 acres of forestland there which has been a certified Tree Farm since 1961. I have been involved with the woods since my father put me to work burning logging slash as a child. I am currently serving as President of the Vermont Woodlands Association, a forest landowners organization of approximately 900 members.

I would just like to mention that 75% of Vermont is covered with trees. 80% of that forested land is privately owned. Quality management of those forests is of crucial importance to both the landowners and to the economy of Vermont!

Before the supervision of Current Use took so much of their time, County Foresters wrote our rudimentary management plans, marked the timber to be cut and oversaw our operations. Consulting foresters have now filled this need.

But I know of two cases in Vermont where the consulting forester cut a client's timber and pocketed the money. In one case the client was kicked out of Current Use because of the improper harvesting—a double whammy! In the other case, the Consulting Forester is STILL practicing! Licensing doesn't guarantee good behavior, but loss of license would prevent an individual repeating unethical behavior.

It is important that the licensing board be a state entity with the state's enforcement powers. A few years ago, a forester was going to be kicked out of the Consulting Foresters Association of Vermont for malpractice. He threatened a lawsuit. The Association did not have the financial resources to go to court and neither did the individual foresters on the ethics committee. CFAV dropped the action and that forester continues to practice. The CFAV has long advocated for forester licensing.

Licensing provides a client with confidence that the consulting forester has the necessary education, training and experience to provide competent advice. It is about credentials, NOT about how a forester practices forestry. Vermont and Rhode Island are the only New England states that do not require forester licensing.

A benefit of forester licensing renewal for landowners would be the 24 hours of Continuing Education requirement to keep foresters up-to-date on forestry issues.

Paul Harwood has been a professional forester since 1975—teaching at UVM, as a veneer buyer, State Lands Forester, County Forester, and owner of a private consulting forestry business since 1989. He is vice-president of the Vermont Woodlands Association and 2015 National Outstanding Tree Farm Inspector. He is unable to be here today, but has given me permission to make these quotes: "In the last ten years or so, I have witnessed a gradual transition toward an erosion of ethics and what appears to be a diminished regard for sound forest practices and a

heightened emphasis on short term revenue generation at the expense of long term forest management. Land and timber values have risen dramatically and it has become much more important that the forest resources that are so important to the economy of Vermont be protected for the long term by people qualified to steward the resource. I support forester licensing. I think its time has come."

Trevor Evans is VWA's Treasurer, a former Vermont and Regional (13 northeastern states) Outstanding Tree Farmer. He is on the road, but has given me permission to quote from his response to a consulting forester opposed to licensing: "First, foresters in my book are professionals just like a lawyer, doctor, engineer, surveyor, et al. My forester is responsible for my largest asset from many aspects including financially and environmentally. He is my agent and has a fiscal responsibility for critical decisions regarding this asset.

As a retired licensed civil engineer in five states, I would like to pass on some additional thoughts. Yes, filling out the paper work for licensing is a pain but is one time and necessary. The fees are nominal as a percentage of your income. The annual CEU requirements will help keep all foresters current and even raise the bar higher for our profession. Next, Vermont foresters are limiting their geographical boundaries for employment since the other states cannot give reciprocity for an unlicensed professional forester. Licensing as in any other profession sets the bar for standards and regulations and gives Vermont an enforcement arm to meet minimum standards for Vermont's largest asset. And finally from my viewpoint as a landowner, it will put a stop to loggers going to my friends and neighbors and claiming that they are foresters or that they do not need foresters."

An email survey monkey to VWA members resulted in 68.69% of the first 100 answers being in favor of forester licensing, 29.29% opposed and 2.02% no opinion. The survey monkey was only employed for the first 100 responses.

The VWA board had 9 members in favor of forester licensing, 1 in favor of the principle, but concerned about specifics of the bill and one vote in opposition.

There are three issues I hope you will examine: Page 2, line 20—'sustainable' needs to be better defined; Page 2, line 21—will wildlife biologists and water resources specialists need licensure and Page 6, line 4—a more balanced view would result if the three foresters were specified from public, private and industrial practices.

If a \$200 license fee every two years was divided by the number of a consulting forester's clients, the additional cost to a client should not be of much concern.

In closing, I would like to commend the Office of Professional Regulation for its thorough investigation of the complex subject of forester consulting! And I would like to quote two sentences from its report: "It is OPR's recommendation that foresters be regulated through licensure" and "Licensure is appropriate to eliminate unqualified individuals from holding themselves out to the public as foresters."