

April 7th, 2016

Lynn McNamara's Testimony

Hello my name is Lynn McNamara and I am the Critical Lands Manager for The Nature Conservancy. We are the largest conservation organization in the world with offices in 33 countries and all 50 states. Our Vermont chapter has helped protect over 300,000 acres of land, 1,200 miles of shoreline and owns and manages 55 natural areas throughout Vermont, 37 of which I am directly responsible for. We are a private landowner and pay taxes on more than 25,000 acres in VT and these lands are open to the public for recreation such as hiking, skiing, hunting, etc.

In the past few years we have experienced at least 4 timber thefts. The most recent was this past winter at our Long Pond Natural Area in Greensboro. We initially became aware of the theft in the course of our regular monitoring of our boundary a few weeks ago. I visited the site with our forester Ross Morgan just this past Tuesday. Over 100 trees, mostly cedar and fir but some larger veneer-quality maples were illegally harvested and moved in broad daylight across an abutting property owners land.

- These small and localized thefts are difficult to detect and prosecute but are endemic throughout the state (reference map).
 - We own over 300 miles of boundary and try to walk it all at least once every 5 years with only two full time staff members dedicated to stewardship.
 - The penalties for timber theft are currently so low that they are not a deterrent. We have not pursued most of the timber thefts on our property because the legal fees involved end up being much higher than any compensation we will receive. This is common knowledge in the logging community and the more dishonest landowners and loggers out there know they will likely get away with smaller thefts (less than \$5,000).
- Reference the other timber thefts we have experienced:
 - 4 in the last 10 years all over the state. 2 in NEK, 1 Upper Valley, 1 southern Champlain Valley.
 - We only pursued the largest at Sheridan Mountain where the neighbor created a false survey of our property and that of his elderly neighbors. He claimed about 20 acres of our land and heavily cut it. We only legally pursued defending our boundary but spent so much in legal fees that we decided it was too costly to also pursue the timber theft.
- Whenever we find a timber theft at one of our preserves, I'm initially really sad, then angry, but lately I've just become discouraged. This happens all too frequently and the lack of consequences just emboldens those dishonest loggers to continue to take from their neighbors. We feel that real penalties will let the public know that timber theft is a very serious matter and will prevent cases like this in the future.