

April 13, 2016

H.789 An act relating to **forest integrity and municipal and regional planning**

My name is Mark Doty, I am community affairs manager for Weyerhaeuser, which owns and manages timberland in the Northeast Kingdom. We have foresters and wildlife biologists on staff, our lands are SFI certified and our lands are enrolled in the UVA program. I am sorry that I cannot be with you today.

We appreciate the time and effort put into this issue and the support for working forests. We would encourage the committee to consider including all aspects of the bill in the study provision, given that the ANR Forest Health and Integrity recommendations came out in March.

The goals of the study are “to protect forestland from fragmentation and promote habitat connectivity”. The goals for the changes to regional and municipal planning within the bill are the same. Would it not be prudent to have a comprehensive study and consideration of all aspects of the bill, including the regional and municipal planning along with the ACT 250 and Chapter 117, subchapter 7 (bylaws), providing a comprehensive evaluation and report?

Questions and concerns with the regional and municipal planning sections such as the 3 following issues could be addressed in the study. I offer some thoughts and suggestions for consideration;

1 - Forest roads play an important role in the management of forests. Though recreational trails are clearly included in the definitions of “Forest block”, “Forest fragmentation”, and “Habitat connector”, forest roads are not. To provide clarity that forest roads are an important part of silviculture and management, we suggest including forest roads in those definitions or in the definition of accepted silvicultural practices.

2 - Habitat Corridors; Good forestry is good for wildlife, including wildlife habitat corridors. Working forest keeps forest as forest and maintains healthy forest. We suggest that including the active management of habitat corridors will better maintain their long term health and viability. Support for this can be found in the bill language such as;

GOALS - Page 3 (c)(6)(C) Vermont’s forestland should be managed so as to maintain and improve forest blocks and habitat connectors. This would appear to support that the habitat connectors should be managed as the forest blocks are, which is through accepted silvicultural practices. Thus the **“use exempt from regulation under subsection 4413(d) of this title”** should be added to the definition (36) **“Habitat Connector”** as it was to the definition of “Forest Block”.

ELEMENTS OF A REGIONAL PLAN – Page 7 (a)(2)(F) and THE PLAN FOR A MUNICIPALITY – page 9 (a)(2)(D) Indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests. A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the (regional planning commission or municipality). Active management appears to be recommended for habitat connectors as well as forest blocks, thus the **“use exempt from regulation under subsection 4413(d) of this title”** should be added to the definition (36) **“Habitat Connector”**.

3 - Where does it need to be applied? Parts of the state that are developed and high growth areas should be the focus of these fragmentation considerations by the planners. Parts of the state that have a higher density of wildlife than people and areas already protected from development should not require this type of planning. The study committee could recommend how to define the geographic areas.

Thank you for your consideration of including regional and municipal planning within the study to provide a comprehensive consideration and report.

