

DATE: April 14, 2016  
TO: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
FROM: Put Blodgett, President, Vermont Woodlands Association  
RE: H.789

I remember an adage told me by a friend a few years ago: "Failing to plan is planning to fail".

Over the last few years, Vermont has been losing forested acreage. Nationally on a percentage basis of forested cover, the Green Mountain state now ranks fourth, after Maine, New Hampshire and West Virginia. Sprawl, both commercial and residential, is fragmenting our landscape into parcels too small to support forest management and wide-ranging wildlife.

A variety of wildlife requires a variety of habitat—ranging from openings to edge habitat, to early-successional forests to areas of mature trees. This requires well-managed timber harvesting. The expense of moving equipment, creating a landing and a truck road to it, and the radiating skid trails preclude this management on small parcels.

Large timber holdings or an aggregation of several smaller parcels can provide the connectivity for wildlife travel and a wider gene pool for survival.

Vermont ranked first among the fifty states for popularity of wildlife viewing and this should not be forgotten for its benefit for its residents and tourists.

However, I do find on page 12 under Definitions (10) "Land Development" to be much too restrictive. Among many other restrictions, it doesn't allow for any changes to existing uses of buildings or land.

Also on page 12 (34) I would add "logging roads" after recreational trails, and in (35) A habitat connector may include recreational trails "and logging roads". A logging road is no more distracting to wildlife than a riding or ATV trail and allows management of the forested area.

It is admirable to "protect forestland from fragmentation and promote habitat connectivity" but it bothers me greatly that town and regional planning boards can designate certain areas for development and other areas for agriculture or forestry and the resulting enhanced value for those areas designated for development and the decreased value of agriculture and forested areas for those owners.

But, the greater, long-term good for the state, its citizens, and the visitors so important to its economy, requires that sprawl and forest fragmentation be curtailed.