

Dear Senator Bray,

I am writing about H.857 "An Act Relating to Timber Harvesting" that is on today's Calendar for Second Reading. My wife and I are forestland owners in Shrewsbury, and we urge you to support H.857 as reported by the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee and to oppose the amendment proposed by the Senate Appropriations Committee to delete the "Harvest Notification; Pilot Program" provisions in Sections 5, 6, and 7. Let me briefly give you our reasons.

The Harvest Notification concept offers a valuable mechanism both for helping landowners make informed decisions about their woodlands and for enabling our State forest managers to obtain presently-unavailable data about timber harvests and the economic contribution of Vermont's private forestland. H. 857 establishes a voluntary pilot program to test the practicality and utility of this concept. The pilot will sunset in 2018 with a report to the Legislature. Proposed rules for any ongoing harvest notification can be evaluated in light of the pilot program and legislative report. The information submittal requirements are minimal and in no way a paperwork burden for landowners or foresters.

Our perception of the need for this program is based on our experience and observation of badly performed timber harvests on our own and adjoining property. In our case, improper logging by the previous owners was so destructive of a formerly healthy mixed hardwood forest - with highgrading, extensive damage to remaining trees, blockage of streams by improvised crossings, and eroding logging roads - that we were left with a significantly degraded woodland. Since purchase in 2003 we have updated our Forest Management Plan with the principal objective of restoring the economic and ecological value of our forest. Similar, albeit worse, harvesting occurred on the property of our adjoining landowner. Our neighbor hired a forester who prescribed extensive cutting of any conceivably marketable timber he could extract, leaving a sparsely-stocked stand of inferior trees which will take decades before again becoming a productive forest or supporting economical forestry operations.

Our predecessor owners did not retain the highly-qualified consulting forester who prepared their Use Value plan to oversee the timber harvest, and our neighbor's forester has, not surprisingly, opposed the harvest notification concept. In both cases, however, these landowners - and we as successors and adjoining - would have benefitted from a simple harvest notification program that would have supplied guidance on silviculturally-sustainable, environmentally-compliant, and contractually-secure timber harvest. Vermont's forest health and forest economy would have benefitted in turn. It is just such benefits that a pilot harvest notification program will bring, and we hope you will support its enactment as part of H.857.

Please let us know the outcome of Senate action on H.857 and how you decide to vote on retaining the Harvest Notification Pilot Program provision.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Gibson

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