

Testimony: House Ag and Forestry Committee February 22, 2018

Good Morning and Thank you.

My name is Colleen Goodridge of Goodridge Lumber of Albany, VT, a family sawmill business owned and operated by my 3 adult sons and 4 other employees specializing in the production of white cedar lumber products processed from locally harvested white cedar logs.

I was brought up on a dairy farm in Irasburg beginning at age 5 and participated in all farm operations. I was an early education teacher after obtaining an Associate's Degree and wound up helping to start a sawmill business 44 year ago-beginning with a \$500 sawmill under a make-shift shanty.

I continue to be actively involved in all aspects of the business including log buying, manufacturing and sales and I enjoy working with my family in a business that uses a renewable natural resource.

Current leadership positions include-Vermont Forest Products Association, V.P., Vermont Stewardship Committee member, Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Advisory Board member, Advisory board member for North Country Career Center Forestry, Agriculture & Water Resources and also Lake Region Union High School Vo-Ag Advisory Board, "Northern Logger Magazine" – president and also past president of Northeastern Loggers Association.

**Goodridge Lumber** – process between 1 to 1.2 million board ft. annually with the logs being obtained within a 75-mile radius – very local. We work with approximately 100 landowners, foresters, loggers and truckers on a yearly basis. Our products are both retail and wholesale and are shipped throughout New England. The mill also supports their 8 employees and their families – now in its 44<sup>th</sup> year in business – the third generation beginning to work in the business.

Strange career? Not really – agriculture and forestry are very similar. Challenges in forest products business – high cost of doing business, securing raw materials, high cost workers comp and other insurances, wood markets, permitting and regulatory issues, taxes, maintaining a workforce.

### **Act 250 and Goodridge Lumber**

Sometime between the \$500 sawmill under a shanty (1974) and where we were in 2013 an Act 250 Permit should have been obtained. After this discovery – Goodridge Lumber embarked on their permit process – beginning April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and obtaining our permit on October 23, 2014 – 18 months. Forged ahead – if too expensive or too restrictive – this 40-year-old business would close.

\*Scenic Beauty Aesthetics – no undue adverse effect

\*Complaint = neighbor Mr. Green – Act 250 coordinator "log pile eyesore"

### **Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law and Order #7R1347**

**Goodridge Lumber, Inc., Colleen Goodridge and CDMB Goodridge LLC, Albany, VT**

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35.) The log piles and the mill on the Goodridge property are important symbols of the working landscape and forest products industry which the Agency of Natural Resources promotes through its work and mission.

The Goodridge mill is an important demonstration mill in northern Vermont. The mill has provided support through educational projects related to working forests on State Lands, and support to ANR via its County Foresters. The mill was recently recognized for their contributions to the forest products industry by the State of Vermont with a \$30,000 grant from the Working Lands grant program. The ANR appreciates this mill's contribution to the preservation of the working landscape and also to the public education of the importance and broader understanding of working landscape. Maintaining visibility of aspects of the working landscape is important as it conveys a sign of a healthy wood products industry and more largely a sign of a healthy working forest landscape. In order to preserve the working landscape, it is important that the public have the opportunity to

both see the working landscape and to experience the working landscape. Providing the public with opportunities to visit an active harvest or an operational sawmill, and/or regularly see signs of a working landscape, such as log trucks on roads, landings off of roadsides, and log piles in front of mills are all tools for educating the public and increasing appreciation for the working landscape. In this context, the Goodridge mill provides a positive aesthetic experience. It is important to maintaining the visibility of the mill and consider the aesthetic appeal of the mill itself, especially in relation to the broader landscape in the Northeast Kingdom.

This item was crucial in keeping Goodridge Lumber operating and we hope it will serve as a guide for the future in determining the importance of all forest-based activities.

#### **Prime Ag Soils – Aren't forestry and agriculture the same?**

(\*\*\*Comments – The determination of ag soil status took almost 7 months! It was difficult to project possible mitigation fees that might have been incurred and the effect it would have on the viability of the business.)

Sawmill area mapped as prime but in reality, was not. 1.43-acre log storage area – is prime ag – can store logs with no ground disturbance such as gravel road or building. If change in use = amendment to permit – probable mitigation fees.

\*If process becomes too expensive or restrictive, we will cease to operate as a business – the economics show it won't work – expenses more than income.

**Hours of Operation:** Mon – Friday 7 am to 5 pm; Saturday 8 am to noon.

No sawing or planing on national holidays – 4 national holidays we normally operated – loss of 4 days of production for the year = \$25,000 to \$30,000 in income.

**Forest operations, as farming operations, are extremely weather dependent** – seasonal. Any rules/regulations need to be flexible to ensure that work can be completed in a timely manner working with weather conditions – otherwise people can't make their living.

Example: 1.) 80% of logs obtained by Goodridge Lumber are brought in between December and mud-time; weather dependent-no logs, no income. Work responsibly.

2.) Trucker – 60% income is in winter months – no truck, no income.

3.) Chips at the farm – In 2015, 50 boxes at \$360 per box = \$18,000. Hold up/neighbor blocks road – late start harvesting, started to send chips, town road foreman not flexible-stay off roads. After mud time market gone – shipped in August – dried out – took what \$ you could get, which about paid the trucking - \$15,000 loss of income to logger and landowner.

4.) Current rain/warm weather – get out logs – flexible truck – or loss.

**The cost of going through the Act 250 process** for Goodridge Lumber was about \$100,000 with \$69,000 used for land purchase, with \$30,000 of that amount being provided by a Working Lands Grant. We feel that if this application had been submitted before the identity of the core values of Vermonters-their farms and forests-through the Council of Rural Development survey, and the creation of the Working Lands Legislation the outcome of this application would have been much different – we probably would not be operating.

**The Vermont Council on Rural Development is a nonprofit convener of rural policy.**

The Council on Rural Development (2007-2009) was the largest-scale analysis of public values outside of politics in the history of Vermont. It found that the working landscape was a core public priority, supported by 97% of Vermonters. "The bottom line is that agriculture and forest-product development are the foundations of the core essence of Vermont -the beauty of the land, the mix of farm fields and woodlands that surround us -that are essential to our quality of life and recreation. The working forest in Vermont is no accident; it is the result of innumerable economic decisions made by generations of rural families as they make a living from the land. *Their stewardship contributes much to us all and the importance of these families and businesses, providing an economic foundation to our working landscape, needs to be accepted, appreciated, valued and supported or face being lost forever.*" Goodridge Lumber is one such economic anchor in the Northeast Kingdom that needs that support.

Or face being lost...concerns-

1. 2 Act 250 Permit applications for sawmills since 1974
2. "Grandfathered" mills are closing
3. Aging workforce/early retirement
4. Loss of wood markets
5. Future work force?? Will there be an industry for them?
6. Harvest summary report – 97 in 2011; 44 in 2017

**Opportunity** – Today determine the viability of the forest products industry of tomorrow. We need to act now.

The forest products industry is critically important culturally, environmentally, and economically for all Vermonters!