

Testimony by Kate Wanner, Project Manager at The Trust for Public Land
On Behalf of the Vermont Forest Partnership
Supporting Vermont's Forests in the FY20 budget
February 21, 2019

My name is Kate Wanner, and I have been working to conserve Vermont's forests for the last 14 years as a staff member at The Trust for Public Land. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee this morning. I am here representing the Vermont Forest Partnership, a coalition of five organizations including Audubon Vermont, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, Vermont Land Trust, and Vermont Natural Resources Council. The Partnership was established in 2015 to ensure a future in which Vermont's forests continue to contribute to the health and well-being of our state. As a coalition, we work to address mounting concerns about the impacts of forestland conversion. Although from above, the Vermont landscape has an appearance of densely forested lands, a closer look at the surface reveals that our forests are being compromised and fragmented by scattered, unplanned development. Our goal is to prevent forest fragmentation through sound policy, the conservation of important forestland, and public awareness about the risks of fragmentation.

Vermont's forests are fundamental to who we are as a people and as a state and are key for the success and health of our rural communities.

Rural Community Development: Our forests are a vital component of Vermont's critical forest products, outdoor recreation and tourism sectors, which contribute billions of dollars to the state's economy annually.

Natural System Investment: Our state's forests are a critical natural system investment. Protecting our forests will provide wildlife habitat, restore our watersheds to health and help to ensure clean air and water across the state.

Climate Change & Resilience: Healthy forests are also the single most effective step we can make in carbon storage as a way to fight climate change, while also increasing the resilience of our communities against the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather associated with climate change.

Our rural communities are in transition and as members of the Vermont Forest Partnership, we want to urge you to support essential state programs that help sustain our forests and rural community development.

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. Now is the time to continue to invest in Vermont's working and natural landscape, and celebrate Vermont's historic downtowns and village centers through VHCB in a manner that supports our economy and our quality of life. We respectfully urge you to fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board at the level set by statute, which is an amount equal to 50% of Property Transfer Tax revenues. Now is the time to support VHCB at its complete statutory share, which for FY'20, is \$21.8M.

Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board. Now is the time to expand the Working Lands Enterprise Program with a \$3,000,000 investment annually for 5 years. This will support forest products diversification, value added development, innovative entrepreneurship, new business development, and new production on and from Vermont Working Lands, to strengthen and grow this sector and keep our natural resource-based economy strong and healthy.

Agency of Natural Resources. We also urge the House Appropriations committee to increase the appropriation of funds for the Agency of Natural Resources, and especially the Forests, Parks and Recreation Department and the Fish and Wildlife Department. Without adequate funding and staffing, ANR will not be able to ensure that our forests and fish and wildlife populations remain healthy and productive, and our investments in the outdoor recreation, tourism, and forest products economy remain strong.

Thank you for your time.