

June 15, 2020

Dear Senate President Pro Tem Ashe, Chair Bray and Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee members,

Thank you for the work you have done during the COVID pandemic to protect the health and welfare of Vermonters. During the hardest days, getting out into the woods has been a priority to many. To that end, we are also grateful the Vermont Senate is working on important policies that relate to the woods, how to maintain the viability of forests and forest based enterprises in Act 250.

Vermont's forests provide many values:

Vermont's forests are a major driver of our economy. Forest based manufacturing, recreation, and tourism employ approximately 13,000 Vermonters and *contribute about \$1.5 billion in revenue to the state every year.*

Vermont's forests provide a rich array of important ecological functions. They support wildlife habitat, protect water quality and help insulate communities from the effects of extreme weather, such as flooding. *According to the Gund Institute every acre of forestland provides approximately \$318.50 worth of benefits for services like rainfall regulation and flood control on an annual basis.*

Vermont's forests reduce carbon pollution. They remove an estimated 75,000 metric tons of carbon and 1,610 metric tons of other pollutants from the atmosphere each year – *a function that would be worth about \$16 million if we paid for these pollution control services out-of-pocket.*

Yet the continuation of these successes cannot be taken for granted, especially since for the first time in over a century Vermont's forests are declining in extent.

With this in mind, we are writing in support of policies that maintain or increase the contribution of our forests to the state's economic, ecological, and cultural wellbeing. The Forest Roundtable members signed onto this letter support current legislative efforts to modernize Act 250 to both (1) address forest fragmentation to maintain the integrity of our forest land base and, (2) support forest based enterprises such as forest processing by addressing policies related to hours of operation and other challenges that influence the economic viability of our working forests.

These provisions in Act 250 are supported by your own good work: In 2016, the Vermont General Assembly made the following legislative findings in Act 171:

- Private and public forestlands constitute unique and irreplaceable resources, benefits, and values of statewide importance; contribute to the protection and conservation of wildlife habitat, air, water, and soil resources of the State; mitigate the effects of climate change; and benefit the general health and welfare of the people of the State;
- Forestry operations are adversely affected by the encroachment of urban, commercial, and residential land uses throughout the State that result in forest fragmentation and conversion and erode the health and sustainability of remaining forests; and
- As a result of encroachment on forests, conflicts have arisen between traditional forestry land uses, and urban, commercial, and residential land uses convert forestland permanently to other uses, resulting in an adverse impact to the economy and natural environment of the State.

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The conversation about fragmentation is not new. It has been happening for over a decade. Beyond efforts in the Vermont Legislature for the past seven years to understand the increasing fragmentation of our forests, The Forest Roundtable and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources have put out multiple reports outlining strategies to maintain the economic and ecological integrity of our forests.¹

For example, in 2007, the Forest Roundtable convened with approximately 100 participants including consulting foresters, professional planners, government officials, landowners, representatives from the forest products industry, conservation groups, rural economic development, and researchers at academic institutions. Together, the Roundtable published a Report on Parcelization and Forest Fragmentation. The report includes 27 priority recommendations. One of the priority recommendations was to “identify and correct gaps in Act 250 and other land use regulations to attenuate the rate of parcelization and forest fragmentation in Vermont.” Other Roundtable recommendations have focused on supporting the forest products industry as a way to strengthen the viability of working forests.²

In Vermont, we value well-planned development and a growth pattern of supporting downtowns and village centers surrounded by rural countryside. If we are smart about our future, we can continue to accommodate new housing while ensuring that our forests provide for diverse forest products, modern and efficient wood energy, intact wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, clean healthy water, carbon storage and sequestration, and many other values.

Please support the forest provisions mentioned above in your work on Act 250.

Thank you,

- Alex Barrett, Consulting Forester at Long View Forest
- Audubon Vermont
- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers – VT Chapter
- Beverley C. Wemple, PhD, Professor and Chair, Department of Geography, University of Vermont
- Bob Williams, The Ames Companies
- Carolyn Loeb, M.S. Field Naturalist Program at the University of Vermont
- Cold Hollow to Canada
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Dr. Anthony D’Amato, Professor, Forestry Program and UVM Research Forest Director, Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont
- Dr. William S. Keeton, Professor of Forest Ecology and Forestry, University of Vermont (signing independently)
- Ehrhard Frost, Landowner & Forester, Full Circle Forestry, LLC.
- High Meadows Fund
- Hugo Liepmann, Forest Roundtable Member
- Jas Smith, Conservation Forestry Manager, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

¹For example see

https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/About_the_Department/News/Library/FORREST%20FRAGMENTATION_FINAL_rev06-03-15.pdf

² <https://vnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Forest-Roundtable-Report.pdf>

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- Jonathan Gibson, Forest Roundtable Member
- Lynn Levine, Forester, Nature Connect and Heartwood Press
- Mark Nelson, Forest Roundtable Member
- Matthew Hoffman, Rural & Natural Resource Sociologist
- North Woods Forestry
- Robert Lamb, EcoForesters
- The Nature Conservancy in Vermont
- The Trust for Public Land
- Thomas Kennedy, Forest Roundtable Member
- Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission
- Vermont Conservation Voters
- Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife
- Vermont Land Trust
- Vermont Natural Resources Council
- Vermont Woodlands Association