

1 H.566

2 Introduced by Representatives Sims of Craftsbury, Partridge of Windham,  
3 Anthony of Barre City, Austin of Colchester, Bock of Chester,  
4 Bongartz of Manchester, Brumsted of Shelburne, Campbell of  
5 St. Johnsbury, Feltus of Lyndon, Harrison of Chittenden,  
6 Kimbell of Woodstock, Masland of Thetford, Norris of  
7 Shoreham, Pajala of Londonderry, Patt of Worcester, Rogers of  
8 Waterville, Sibilina of Dover, Surprenant of Barnard, White of  
9 Bethel, Williams of Granby, Wood of Waterbury, and  
10 Yantachka of Charlotte

11 Referred to Committee on

12 Date:

13 Subject: Conservation and development; economic development; Vermont

14 Forest Future Program; Vermont Forest Future Action Plan

15 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to require the  
16 Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program, in consultation and collaboration  
17 with the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, to establish the Vermont  
18 Forest Future Program to strengthen, promote, and protect the forest products  
19 industry in Vermont. To implement the Program, the Vermont Sustainable  
20 Jobs Fund Program would be required to develop the Vermont Forest Future  
21 Action Plan.

1 An act relating to the establishment of the Vermont Forest Future Program

2 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

3 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

4 The General Assembly finds that:

5 (1) Private and public forestlands:

6 (A) constitute unique and irreplaceable resources, benefits, and  
7 values of statewide importance;

8 (B) contribute to the protection and conservation of wildlife habitat,  
9 air, water, and soil resources of the State;

10 (C) mitigate the effects of climate change; and

11 (D) benefit the general health and welfare of the persons of the State.

12 (2) The forest products industry, including maple sap collection:

13 (A) is a major contributor to and is valuable to the State's economy  
14 by providing nearly 14,000 jobs for Vermonters, generating \$2.1 billion in  
15 annual sales, and supporting \$30.8 million in additional economic activity  
16 from trail uses and seasonal tourism;

17 (B) is essential to the manufacture of forest products that are used  
18 and enjoyed by the persons of the State; and

19 (C) benefits the general welfare of the persons of the State.

20 (3) Private and public forestlands are critical for and contribute  
21 significantly to the State's outdoor recreation and tourism economies.

1           (4) Private and public forestlands and forestry operations are adversely  
2           affected by the encroachment of urban, commercial, and residential land uses  
3           throughout the State that result in forest fragmentation and conversion and  
4           erode the health and sustainability of remaining forests.

5           (5) As a result of encroachment on forests, conflicts have arisen between  
6           traditional forestry land uses and urban, commercial, and residential land uses  
7           that convert forestland permanently to other uses, resulting in an adverse  
8           impact to the economy and natural environment of the State.

9           (6) The encouragement, development, improvement, and preservation of  
10          forestry operations will result in extant, intact, and functioning forests that will  
11          provide a general benefit to the health and welfare of the persons of the State  
12          and the State's economy.

13          (7) To strengthen, promote, and protect the Vermont forest products  
14          industry, the State should establish the Vermont Forest Future Program.

15          Sec. 2. 10 V.S.A. chapter 82 is added to read:

16                   CHAPTER 82. VERMONT FOREST FUTURE PROGRAM

17                   § 2531. VERMONT FOREST FUTURE PROGRAM; ACTION PLAN

18           (a) Creation. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program, in consultation  
19           and collaboration with the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation,  
20           shall establish the Vermont Forest Future Program to strengthen, modernize,  
21           promote, and protect the forest products industry in Vermont.

1        (b) Intended outcomes. The intended outcomes of the Vermont Forest  
2        Future Program are to:

3            (1) increase sustainable economic development in Vermont’s forest  
4        economy;

5            (2) encourage the use of sustainable and responsible forest management  
6        practices in the management of the forest resources of the State; and

7            (3) develop and prepare a workforce to support the Vermont forest  
8        economy into the future.

9        (c) Action Plan requirements. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund  
10       Program, in consultation and collaboration with the Commissioner of Forests,  
11       Parks and Recreation, shall create the strategic Vermont Forest Future Action  
12       Plan for implementation of the Vermont Forest Future Program. The Action  
13       Plan shall be designed to strengthen modernize, promote, and protect the  
14       forests products industry in Vermont. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, in  
15       consultation with the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, shall  
16       review the Action Plan periodically and shall update the Action Plan at least  
17       every 10 years.

18       (d) Action Plan content. The Vermont Forest Future Action Plan shall:

19            (1) identify infrastructure investment and funding to support and  
20       promote Vermont forest products enterprises, including existing and potential

1 funding sources that forest products enterprises can access to obtain necessary  
2 capital to sustain and modernize equipment and forestry practices;

3 (2) propose policy or regulatory recommendations to support and  
4 strengthen the Vermont forest economy;

5 (3) identify recommendations to support education and development of  
6 the workforce of Vermont forest enterprises;

7 (4) propose alternatives for the modernization of transportation and  
8 regulation of Vermont forest enterprises, including permit modernization;

9 (5) identify methods or programs that Vermont forest enterprises can  
10 utilize to access business assistance services;

11 (6) recommend how to maintain access by Vermont forest products  
12 enterprises to forestland while maintaining the stewardship and conservation of  
13 Vermont forests as a whole;

14 (7) propose methods to enhance market development and manufacturing  
15 by Vermont forest enterprises, including value chain coordination and regional  
16 partnerships; and

17 (8) recommend consumer education and marketing initiatives.

18 (e) Development of Action Plan. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund  
19 Program shall develop the Action Plan and all subsequent revisions through the  
20 use of a public stakeholder process that includes and invites participation by  
21 interested parties representing all users of Vermont's forests, including

1 representatives of forest enterprises, State agencies, investors, forestland  
2 owners, recreational interests, wood products manufacturers, higher education  
3 representatives, and environmental organizations. In the development of the  
4 Action Plan and any revision, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program  
5 shall consult and collaborate with the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and  
6 Recreation as the State entity with authority over management of State forests  
7 and promotion of the forest economy.

8 (f) Use of Action Plan. As an ongoing task, the Vermont Forest Future  
9 Program shall use the information gathered for the Action Plan and updates to  
10 the Action Plan to identify methods and the funding necessary to strengthen  
11 the links among landowners, forest professionals, producers, processors,  
12 partners, markets, and supporting agencies and organizations, including:

13 (1) collaborating with the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation  
14 to support and grow the Vermont forest economy;

15 (2) supporting the work of the Working Lands Enterprise Board to  
16 strategically invest in forest enterprises and service providers;

17 (3) collaborating with the Department of Buildings and General Services  
18 to increase State procurement of Vermont forest-based products;

19 (4) identifying opportunities for all State agencies to engage with and  
20 enhance the Vermont forest economy, including:

- 1           (A) economic development and business assistance from the Agency  
2           of Commerce and Community Development;
- 3           (B) workforce training and technical education programs from the  
4           Agency of Education;
- 5           (C) motor vehicle and roadway weight limits enforced by the Agency  
6           of Transportation;
- 7           (D) advanced wood heat development opportunities supported by the  
8           Department of Public Service;
- 9           (E) workforce development and support offered by the Department of  
10          Labor;
- 11          (F) environmental permitting reform and permitting assistance from  
12          the Agency of Natural Resources and the Natural Resources Board; and
- 13          (G) other appropriate opportunities identified by the Vermont  
14          Sustainable Jobs Fund Program;
- 15          (5) supporting initiatives that improve the marketing of forest products  
16          from Vermont to consumers within the State and outside the State;
- 17          (6) supporting education and workforce development initiatives that  
18          address skill and labor needs of forest enterprises; and
- 19          (7) informing forestry investors of the information collected in order to  
20          facilitate the availability of forest sector financing.

1       (g) Administration. To accomplish the requirements of this section and  
2       achieve the goals of the Program, the Vermont Forest Future Program may:

3           (1) create an advisory panel with representatives from forest enterprises,  
4       forestland owners, related businesses, recreational interests, State agencies, and  
5       conservation organizations;

6           (2) hire or assign staff;

7           (3) seek and accept funds from private and public entities;

8           (4) serve as the administrative support for the Vermont Forest Industry  
9       Network; and

10          (5) utilize technical assistance, loans, grants, or other means of support.

11       Sec. 3. IMPLEMENTATION

12          (a) The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program, after consultation and  
13       collaboration with the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, shall  
14       submit to the General Assembly:

15           (1) draft recommendations for the Vermont Forest Future Action Plan  
16       on or before July 1, 2023; and

17           (2) a final report and recommendations for the Vermont Forest Future  
18       Action Plan on or before January 1, 2024.

19          (b) Any recommendation submitted under this section shall include  
20       recommended appropriations sufficient to implement the recommendation or  
21       the Action Plan as a whole.



1       Sec. 4. APPROPRIATIONS

2           In addition to any other funds appropriated to the Vermont Sustainable Jobs  
3       Fund Program in fiscal year 2023, there is appropriated from the General Fund  
4       to the Program \$250,000.00 in fiscal year 2023 for the purpose of the  
5       implementation of the Vermont Forest Future Program and issuance of the  
6       Vermont Forest Future Action Plan required by 10 V.S.A. § 2531.

7       Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

8           This act shall take effect on July 1, 2022.