
Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Conservation and development; economic development; Vermont Forest Future Program; Vermont Forest Future Action Plan

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

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

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Private and public forestlands:

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

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

(C) mitigate the effects of climate change; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 82. VERMONT FOREST FUTURE PROGRAM

§ 2531. VERMONT FOREST FUTURE PROGRAM; ACTION PLAN

(a) Creation. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program, in consultation and collaboration with the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, shall establish the Vermont Forest Future Program to strengthen, modernize, promote, and protect the forest products industry in Vermont.
(b) Intended outcomes. The intended outcomes of the Vermont Forest Future Program are to:

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

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

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

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

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

(1) identify infrastructure investment and funding to support and promote Vermont forest products enterprises, including existing and potential
funding sources that forest products enterprises can access to obtain necessary
capital to sustain and modernize equipment and forestry practices;

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

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

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

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

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

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

(8) recommend consumer education and marketing initiatives.

(e) Development of Action Plan. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
Program shall develop the Action Plan and all subsequent revisions through the
use of a public stakeholder process that includes and invites participation by
interested parties representing all users of Vermont’s forests, including
representatives of forest enterprises, State agencies, investors, forestland owners, recreational interests, wood products manufacturers, higher education representatives, and environmental organizations. In the development of the Action Plan and any revision, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program shall consult and collaborate with the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation as the State entity with authority over management of State forests and promotion of the forest economy.

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

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

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

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

(4) identifying opportunities for all State agencies to engage with and enhance the Vermont forest economy, including:
(A) economic development and business assistance from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development;

(B) workforce training and technical education programs from the Agency of Education;

(C) motor vehicle and roadway weight limits enforced by the Agency of Transportation;

(D) advanced wood heat development opportunities supported by the Department of Public Service;

(E) workforce development and support offered by the Department of Labor;

(F) environmental permitting reform and permitting assistance from the Agency of Natural Resources and the Natural Resources Board; and

(G) other appropriate opportunities identified by the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund Program;

(5) supporting initiatives that improve the marketing of forest products from Vermont to consumers within the State and outside the State;

(6) supporting education and workforce development initiatives that address skill and labor needs of forest enterprises; and

(7) informing forestry investors of the information collected in order to facilitate the availability of forest sector financing.
(g) Administration. To accomplish the requirements of this section and achieve the goals of the Program, the Vermont Forest Future Program may:

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

(2) hire or assign staff;

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

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

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

Sec. 3. IMPLEMENTATION

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

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

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

(b) Any recommendation submitted under this section shall include recommended appropriations sufficient to implement the recommendation or the Action Plan as a whole.
Sec. 4. APPROPRIATIONS

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

Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2022.