

Dear Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife, my email is related to discussions about the Use Value Appraisal (UVA). Thank you for taking up the discussion and accepting testimony about UVA and wild forests.

It is time to recognize the need to change UVA in order to address the challenges of climate change and the biodiversity crisis, and to reach the goals set out in the Vermont Conservation Design for restoring old forests. UVA should support forest owners that wish to allow their forests to grow without the requirement to log them. Forests that grow old without active logging, i.e. wild forests, support the full range of Vermont's native biodiversity. They clean our air and water, store more carbon and protect our communities from floods and droughts better than logged forests.

When UVA was established it was intended to help protect all forests, not just those managed for wood products. Over the years, UVA has increasingly narrowed to suit the timber industry. Today, UVA is overwhelmingly focused on timber extraction to the detriment of the other purposes that continue to be mandated by the legislation that originally enabled the program.

Amending UVA is a matter of tax equity and landowner rights as well as the right thing to do for the environment. The purpose of the Use Value Appraisal program is to keep Vermont forested. No Vermonter who struggles to afford their taxes should be forced to choose between logging their forests or selling their property. All Vermont landowners with 25 acres or more of forestland should qualify for a new wild forests category of UVA, regardless of where their property is located or other criteria. In addition, any landowner who has put a "forever-wild" easement on their property should also be allowed to enroll their land in UVA. The proposal put forth by Forest Parks and Recreation falls well short of meeting this goal.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter and for your consideration of my comments.

Mark Nelson

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*"The wildlife and its habitat cannot speak, so we must and will." ~ Theodore Roosevelt*