

Testimony in Support of S. 1 Baseload Renewable Power Portfolio Requirement  
As passed by the Senate  
Renewing the Ryegate Power Plant legislation  
March 2021

My name is Alan Robertson. I'm a retired professional engineer and own and have managed 60 acres of forest in Sheffield, Vermont for over 35 years. I've been a member of the Vermont Woodlands Association for over 35 years and have been the Secretary for over 15 years; I have also been the Co-Chair of the Vermont American Tree Farm System program for over ten years. I'm honored and pleased to provide the following testimony on behalf of the **Vermont Woodlands Association** (VWA) for the enactment of senate Bill 1. (I have previously testified in favor of both this bill and previous bills for this facility earlier this year and on 13 February 2020.)

VWA is a Non-Profit (501(c) (3)) association of approximately 1000 landowners dedicated to the health and enhancement of the working forest in Vermont. Through education, outreach, and advocacy we are a Voice for Healthy Forests in the Green Mountain State. VWA believes in the sustainable management of our private forests, but successful management needs good markets for wood products, and most notably right now in Vermont, good markets for low quality wood. At present the low quality wood market is suffering due to past political decisions including New Hampshire's failure to support their biomass power plants, and for the past year, the fallout from the Covid 19 virus. Not only does forest management suffer because of this but so, too, do the harvesting industry and all their employees. **This plant's consumption of low quality wood represents a critical component in the forest products economy.**

The VWA board has discussed and reviewed the Ryegate legislation several times since 2020. We note that the Ryegate operation wood procurement policies are very similar to the exceptional Burlington Electric Department operation, and that the plant has invested in air quality upgrades. We also understand the management is seriously exploring ways to utilize the waste heat product generated by the plant- a very worthy goal. Given the need for a robust low quality wood market in order to further the Associations mission of sustainable forestry on private lands, **we are very supportive of the continued operation of the Ryegate plant.**

To emphasize the need for the Ryegate plant I would like to add the following additional comments:

- I had a small logging job (approx. 1 acre) done in July 2020 on one of my S-F stands severely damaged by a wind event on 29 May 2020. It was a very small harvest but the logger did develop a couple of truckloads of hardwood pulp, even after leaving a lot of coarse woody debris. The market was so glutted with low quality wood- because of the lack of markets- that one load ended up piled on the property- in the way of the planting I want to accomplish. I was eventually able to have my site contractor haul it

away for firewood. This illustrates both the amount of legitimate low quality wood out in our forests as well as what careful landowners are experiencing in their efforts to perform well-managed sustainable silvicultural prescriptions.

- The renewable energy program in Vermont has been an exceptional success with such facilities as BED, Ryegate, and the school heating program. But it clearly can grow as the availability of low quality wood from carefully managed forests, even with the introduction of upcoming carbon sequestration programs, is still not remotely fully utilized. I note that one of the questions asked repeatedly by legislators is, aren't there other markets/ways to deal with the low quality wood? The answer is yes there are, theoretically, other technical/market solutions including more efficient combined heat and power plants (CHP-type facilities, which we included in past testimony and recognized in the present legislation), Biochar production facilities, an enhanced school and municipal heating program, a robust pellet industry, and possibly other technologies. But all of those facilities require a state environment receptive to such siting and construction and that is a very difficult process in Vermont due, in no small part, to the permitting environment. **That leaves Ryegate and BED as the only serious facilities to handle low quality wood at present.**
- Most of what gets hauled out of the woods by the forest products industry is low value wood. But by doing this the remaining forest is of better quality and primed for future higher quality stems. If this wood isn't removed the labor and equipment needed to do logging and trucking can't economically survive simply in the sustainable harvest the higher quality stems. The result is the loss of the logging industry- jobs and equipment- and eventually the loss of the entire forest products industry.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide this testimony; if you have any questions or need any further information please feel free to contact me,

-AMR-

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