

February 11, 2021

To: Members of the Vermont Finance Committee

From: Heath Bunnell

Kirby, VT.

Dear Committee Members,

I am a lifelong Vermonter, married and father of two daughters. I'm a member of the Vermont Forest Products Assoc. as well a number of other forest products associations in New England. I am a Master Logger certified through the Trust To Conserve New England Forestlands. I am a timber landowner in Vermont which is why I'm writing this to let you know how important it is to keep the Ryegate Power Plant in operation.

I myself employ twelve people who are Vermonters. I also make payments to twenty-five different Vermont loggers and truckers. I log for approximately seven different Vermont landowners each year. Ryegate Power Plant provides a valuable source of income for all these employees, landowners, loggers, truckers, foresters and many other businesses. My business alone contributes over 3.7 million dollars a year into the local economy. Without the Ryegate Power Plant my available input in this economy will drop drastically – and I am just one of many. This issue does not impact loggers alone. It will have a wide reaching effect on all the local business that we deal with.

Ryegate Power Plant is also one of the largest tax payers in the Town of Ryegate and therefore is a huge benefit to this rural area of Vermont which has much less tax dollars available than the western side of the state.

For more information on the other values of having the Ryegate Power Plant, there is an article regarding the past award they received for Outstanding Mill/Use of Wood. You can get information on this article from the Northeastern Loggers Association or from the Vermont Forest Products Association.

There are two other issues I hope the committee will address in its legislation. One, I would like to see that the power plant be required to make it's payments to their wood providers on a weekly basis to insure a reliable source of income. Two, that the rate paid by the power plant has a bottom line cap so that it cannot drop to such a low figure that it is no longer feasible to pay the landowner any monetary value. With a "too low" price rate, by the time the harvesting and trucking costs are expensed out, there will be nothing left for the landowner. When the landowners lose any value in the low grade timber their management plans are negatively affected. To make the overall timberland more productive in order for higher grade timber to grow, the low grade timber must be removed. Any revenue lost can also affect their ability to pay mortgages and taxes and could have a negative effect on their ability to not have to fragment their land or their ability to even hold on to their lands for future generations. Ryegate Power Plant is a great asset that we cannot afford to lose.

Thank you for your time in considering this letter.

Heath Bunnell – Kirby, Vt.