

1 H.624

2 Introduced by Representatives Sims of Craftsbury, Lipsky of Stowe, Anthony
3 of Barre City, Boyden of Cambridge, Brennan of Colchester,
4 Buss of Woodstock, Demrow of Corinth, Harrison of
5 Chittenden, Parsons of Newbury, Pearl of Danville, Rice of
6 Dorset, Templeman of Brownington, and Williams of Granby

7 Referred to Committee on

8 Date:

9 Subject: Conservation and development; timber harvesting; water quality;
10 financial assistance

11 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes multiple
12 provisions related to the support of the forest economy in the State. The bill
13 would require the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to establish and
14 administer the Forest Management and Climate Resilience Grant Program to
15 provide financial assistance to logging contractors to ensure implementation of
16 effective water quality protection and climate adaptation practices on harvest
17 sites. The bill also would require the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and
18 Recreation (Commissioner) to coordinate and oversee the creation of an
19 economic impact and workforce availability study of professional logging and
20 trucking in Vermont. In addition, the bill would require the Commissioner to

1 establish a program to provide free safety training to logging contractors and
2 timber truckers.

3 An act relating to providing financial assistance to the forest economy

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

5 Sec. 1. FOREST MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE GRANT
6 PROGRAM

7 (a) As used in this section:

8 (1) “Forest product” means logs, pulpwood, veneer, bolt wood, wood
9 chips, stud wood, poles, pilings, biomass, fuel wood, maple sap, or bark.

10 (2) “Forestry operation” means activities related to the management of
11 forests, including a timber harvest; pruning; planting; reforestation; pest,
12 disease, and invasive species control; wildlife habitat management; and
13 fertilization. “Forestry operation” includes the primary processing of forest
14 products of commercial value on a parcel where the timber harvest occurs.

15 (3) “Logging contractor” means a business that is primarily engaged in
16 timber harvesting, is responsible for harvesting operations from stump to
17 roadside, and maintains direct contractual relationships with landowners.

18 (4) “Timber” means trees, saplings, seedlings, bushes, shrubs, and
19 sprouts from which trees may grow, of every size, nature, kind, and
20 description.

1 (5) “Timber harvest” or “harvest timber” means a forestry operation
2 involving the cutting and transport of timber or forest products.

3 (b) The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall establish and
4 administer the Forest Management and Climate Resilience Grant Program to
5 provide financial assistance to logging contractors to ensure implementation of
6 effective water quality protection and climate adaptation practices on harvest
7 sites. The Program shall provide financial assistance to logging contractors for
8 the following:

9 (1) implementation of accepted management practices (AMPs) on
10 harvest sites to enhance water quality protection and climate adaptation
11 measures before forest operations take place;

12 (2) purchase by logging contractors of materials or practices that can be
13 used for forest access road construction, landing preparation, bridge
14 construction or installation, culvert protection or installation, and sediment
15 control in advance of harvest implementation in order to comply with the
16 AMPs and other potentially applicable water quality requirements; and

17 (3) financial assistance or cost share for a logging contractor to be
18 Master Logger Certified by third-party entities, such as the Northeast Master
19 Logger Certification Program of the Trust to Conserve Northeast Forestlands.

1 (c) The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation may establish criteria
2 for eligibility under the Forest Management and Climate Resilience Grant
3 Program, including priority of assistance and application requirements.

4 (d) In addition to other funds appropriated to the Department of Forests,
5 Parks and Recreation in fiscal year 2025, \$5,000,000.00 from the General Fund
6 is appropriated to the Department to implement the requirements of this
7 section.

8 Sec. 2. FOREST ECONOMY IMPACT STUDY

9 (a) The Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall coordinate
10 and oversee the creation of an economic impact and workforce availability
11 study of professional logging and trucking in Vermont. The study shall:

12 (1) assess the overall annual contribution of logging businesses and
13 timber trucking to the economy of the State of Vermont;

14 (2) estimate the number of logging businesses, timber trucking
15 businesses, and other associated logging businesses in the State;

16 (3) estimate the number of persons directly or indirectly employed by
17 logging businesses, timber trucking, and associated logging businesses in the
18 State, including an estimate of the labor income paid in the aggregate and as
19 average employee wages by these businesses;

20 (4) assess the workforce availability for logging businesses, timber
21 trucking and associated logging business, including average age of the current

1 workforce and an estimate of the number of loggers, truckers, and mechanics
2 that will be available to the forest economy workforce in 10 years;

3 (5) estimate the State and local taxes paid by logging businesses, timber
4 trucking businesses, and other logging associated businesses; and

5 (6) summarize the workplace injuries incurred by logging and timber
6 trucking businesses and the effect of injuries and training on workers'
7 compensation insurance rates.

8 (b) To conduct the study, the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and
9 Recreation shall collaborate with the Professional Logging Contractors of the
10 Northeast, the University of Vermont's School of Forestry, the University of
11 Vermont Center for Rural Studies, and other interested parties.

12 (c) The Commissioner may contract with consultants or other persons with
13 knowledge and expertise of economics and the logging and timber trucking
14 industries to complete the study or components of the study required under this
15 section.

16 (d) On or before January 1, 2025, the Commissioner shall submit the
17 completed study to the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and
18 Forestry and the Senate Committee on Agriculture.

19 (e) In addition to other funds appropriated to the Department of Forests,
20 Parks and Recreation in fiscal year 2025, \$100,000.00 from the General Fund

1 is appropriated to the Department to implement the study required by this
2 section.

3 Sec. 3. SAFETY TRAINING FOR LOGGING AND TIMBER TRUCKING

4 (a) The Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall establish a
5 program to provide free safety training to logging contractors or timber
6 truckers and their employees in order to improve workplace safety, reduce
7 injuries and insurance claims, and lower insurance costs.

8 (b) The Commissioner shall coordinate with the Professional Logging
9 Contractors of the Northeast (PLC) and other interested parties to design, host,
10 and implement safety training for logging contractors, timber trucking firms,
11 and their employees in Vermont. At least four logging and two trucking safety
12 trainings will be conducted annually under the program.

13 (c) The Commissioner shall coordinate with PLC to organize a safety
14 committee that shall include contractors, insurance agents, insurance
15 underwriters, and other stakeholders to assist in the planning of annual
16 trainings. The safety committee shall design or inform the trainings required
17 under this section.

18 (d) When funds are available under this program, the Commissioner may
19 provide financial assistance for logging contractors to become Master Logger
20 Certified by the Trust to Conserve Northeast Forestlands so that logging

1 contractors qualify as safety certified logging contractors as defined by the
2 Department of Financial Regulation.

3 (e) In addition to other funds appropriated to the Department of Forests,
4 Parks and Recreation in fiscal year 2025, \$100,000.00 from the General Fund
5 is appropriated to the Department to implement the safety training and other
6 requirements of this section.

7 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

8 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.