

1) H126---The Biodiversity Bill---Small Farm Action Days Testimony 4/18/23

2) The story is told that we have entered into the Anthropocene---the age when the impact of human activity is now equal in magnitude to the geologic forces that shaped and determined the evolution of life forms through the eons of Earth's past. It would be an understatement to say that the Anthropocene has not been good for life in general. In fact, we are in a die-off---the sixth mass extinction---with an estimated one million species predicted to be gone by 2050. 70% of all mammals have disappeared since the 1970's. Humans and their domesticated animals now make up 90% of all terrestrial mammalian biomass. Songbirds have declined by 40% in our region. We are said to be in an insect Armageddon---with regions such as Germany's Black Forest reporting drops in population as high as 75%.

3) It is tempting to think that our brave little state is so small that any efforts we make to mitigate climate change and ecological collapse are too small to be meaningful. But on a living planet in which all life cycles are inter-connected; is there really any place on earth that is ecologically insignificant?

4) I think our little microcosm of Cedar Mountain Farm at Cobb Hill co-housing in Hartland is a neat experiment in forward-thinking land management (not perfect but a good working model). Our 275 acre land base is in an agricultural conservation easement with the Upper Valley Land Trust (the agreement includes recreational access in the form of hiking & X-country ski trails + hosting a section of the VAST trail network). Both farm & forest are enrolled in UVA and the NRCS-Conservation Stewardship Program.

5) We milk twenty cows and make aged raw milk cheese. We have sixty acres in pasture, hay & crop land---where we are introducing elements of agroecology & agroforestry into every aspect of the farm with: intensive management grazing, micro-wetland protection, a pond installation, riparian buffer, silvopasture, pollinator hedgerow, coppiced windbreak, no-till vegetable production & alley cropping.

6) Within our 200 acres of community-managed forest we practice Ecological Forest Management. We have a 25 acre (bird friendly) sugar bush, a shitake mushroom CSA, and about 30% of the woods deemed ecologically sensitive for passive management (very steep)---the rest of the forest is managed for invasive removal, soft & hard mast release, identifying legacy trees, establishing regeneration gaps, lots of snags and down trees, diversity of stems & canopy---and we harvest about 10 cords firewood annually as part of our UVA management plan. This is an example of a productive working landscape that is guided by a conservation ethic focused on restoration of landscape function and creation of bio-diverse habitats.

7) Vermont's woodlands are part of a much vaster system in the northeast comprising 26 million acres of mixed hardwood & boreal forests. This northern forest system is already helping to address climate change through carbon sequestration and an array of other ecosystem services and is a crucial reservoir of biodiversity---but all this will be lost if these forests are developed or unsustainably managed.

8) Currently, 75% of our Vermont forest is in family ownership. We need to understand that all those privately-owned forests are a part of this greater system. Vermont already has 26% of it's land protected under a variety of conservation agreements. 15% of our land base is public---with almost 10% under state or federal control. We can easily meet the 30 x 30 goal by simply halting logging on all the public land within the boundaries of state and national forests. H126 is only asking for 10% conserved

as wilderness---with the other 40% continuing as working forests and farms managed with the best conservation practices.

9) This doesn't have to entail the "not-in-my-backyard" syndrome. 96% of all timber harvested in state is already from private lands. We can sustain a planned local harvest while managing for biodiversity by adopting Ecological Forest Management---and eventually making it a requirement for enrollment in UVA. We could also offer landowners a 2nd tier of enrollment by creating additional tax abatement to enrollees who opt for permanent conservation---thereby providing an annual benefit in addition to a one time payment for the sale of development rights.

10) In accordance with the amendment introduced by the House Ag, food resilience & forestry committee, H126 should include conserved farm land within it's inventory but only those conserved farms that have adopted certifiable soil health and water quality practices. The mandate embedded in H126 to create an inventory of conservation resources and produce a road map to the 50 x 50 goal could be greatly facilitated by the development of a State-wide Land Use Plan.

11) Climate scientists the world over have declared that a transition to regenerative land management and habitat restoration must begin now in order to stave off the worst effects of irreversible abrupt climate change. Here in Vermont, the conservation of forest *and* farm land proposed by H126 may be our last best chance to ensure the continuance of a vibrant rural economy and to pass on a livable planet to the next generation.

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