



Lincoln AgriSource, LLC

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Thank you to Chairmen Starr and Durfee for coordinating this hearing to discuss the impact of the weather on the forest economy and to their respective committees for their time and attention today.

For the record, my name is Sam Lincoln. I own and operate a Master Logger certified mechanized timber harvesting business in Randolph Center. I am part of a multi-generational family that owns farm and forestland and the proud father of two sons - 17 and 20 years old - that are building their own careers working the land in Vermont. I have worked on timber harvesting projects for over 50 individual landowners within 15 miles of my home in the past 25 years, many of them repeat clients during that time (including three legislators), and generated millions of dollars in revenue for them. In addition to our agricultural enterprise, I conservatively estimate that I've spent well over 17,000 hours in a machine working in the forests of central Vermont, not including the time planning, coordinating, and managing timber harvests, attending training, and advocating for the sector as a volunteer.

How do professional logging contractors perform their work? Planning and logistics.

Timber harvesting requires preparation. That includes meeting with landowners, consulting foresters, regulatory foresters and permitting from wood fired electric plants, walking the site multiple times to observe conditions and upload operational plans to maps on our smartphones, all to ensure a properly executed harvest will take place. Communicating with sawmills, log buyers and brokers to understand up to the minute market conditions before calculating the potential income and expenses of the job to prepare a stumpsage proposal. Talking with equipment and log haulers, quarry operators and dump truck drivers to get all the necessary equipment and supplies onsite at just the right time, and then haul the forest products away to the market. Preparing a closeout plan to be certain that when your tracks are swept out as you leave the job, that water quality is securely protected until the next harvest. Knocking on the door of abutting landowners to introduce yourself, explain the temporary disturbance, answer questions, and put a face to the name on your sign at the roadside. As they say, "A job well planned is half done."

What have logging contractors been experiencing? Significantly fewer workable days.

Business owners like me can manage logistics, but not the weather. Professional loggers depend on the additional requirement of suitable ground conditions, such as dry or frozen soil, to avoid soil and root damage, or creating the potential for erosion. Unlike the controlled environments of factories or offices, we must adapt to weather and manage around ground conditions to meet a large array of expectations. If those conditions are not suitable, we shut down operations, which immediately and directly impacts our finances relative to the frequency and duration of unsuitable conditions. While the average Vermonter going to work at a regular 9 to 5 job accumulates 240 workdays in a year, the weather historically allows for 160-180 timber harvesting days.

This summer, when we returned to work, it started raining, steadily. I was shut down two weeks prior to the July 10th flood event. Conditions were too wet to operate at all. On a job that should have taken three weeks, after nine weeks, I produced the equivalent of three day's work in normal conditions. I had to implement temporary closeout measures to protect the trails from erosion and move my equipment off the site and start at a new jobsite, where we had better, but limited, operations. From the period

between June 1 and October 1 of 2023, I worked 23 days of production. In the six weeks between Thanksgiving to New Years, we worked 13 days due to continuous rain and above freezing temperatures. When we can work, production is low due to the need to lay down brush armoring, or “corduroy,” to distribute the weight of equipment in wet areas of the trail network; frequently install temporary waterbars in advance of severe rain events; spreading mulch for erosion control; installing culverts and bridges; creating diversion ditches; and many other practices to manage the extraordinary amount of water coming off the hills and out of the ground.

The prolonged wet weather reduced this to 121 days in 2022 and 104 days in 2023. This represents a 35% drop compared to a typical year. In FY23, my timber harvesting revenue decreased by 22%, with an 82% drop from June 1 to October 1. To stay afloat, I used savings, did excavation work to repair roads for the town highway department, split firewood nights and weekends, and borrowed money from my line of credit.

Why is our work important?

While carrying out this work and managing for a host of important goals, including forest health, water quality, and wildlife habitat enhancement, Vermont logging contractors are responsible for the production of two very important things – \$27 million in stumpage revenue to forest landowners and the creation of raw materials used in products that are essential for human existence. We learned during the pandemic that forest products from Vermont are transformed into medical supplies, food packaging, heating hospitals, schools and homes, building temporary medical sites, bedding for livestock, and many other examples that we take for granted, until in just one day, it’s all exposed for being vulnerable to uncontrollable forces.

What we’re asking for.

I communicated with the administration, legislators, representatives of the federal delegation, and non-profit organizations that were raising money for flood relief to determine if anything could be done for our sector. Our damages have primarily been to business revenue, not physical damage to buildings, land, or equipment, and therefore, not eligible for any funds that have been distributed. Our sector has been denied relief, when agricultural producers, a vitally important companion working lands sector, has received millions in programmatic relief, headline promises of more from the federal delegation, and fundraising and grants from non-profit organizations. I do not dismiss or diminish the serious needs and impacts that so many Vermonters have experienced from the floods in 2023, but I do not understand why our sector has not had any relief funds committed or adapted to it. I am extremely reluctant to request taxpayer dollars for my business, but I know my example is common and widespread across the state. Many businesses like mine are in jeopardy, and many are already dispersing equipment. I respectfully request that you at least make our sector and revenue losses eligible for any additional relief programs or funds that are appropriated as soon as possible.

Before taking any questions, I’ll mention that the next witness, Dana Doran, executive director of the Professional Logging Contractors of the Northeast, is here today to introduce himself and the new organization that Vermont loggers and log haulers are joining. The PLC’s policy proposals were developed in direct response to the weather and economic situation we’re facing and with the assistance of Representatives Lipsky and Sims, H.624 was recently introduced, which we look forward to discussing with you.