



# LEGISLATIVE REPORT: ENROLLMENT OF RESERVE FORESTLAND

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*Pursuant to Sec. 4 of Act 146, 2022*

**Submitted to:**

House Committee on Environment

House Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

Senate Committee on Finance

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## Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Background and Purpose of Report .....	3
Act 146 Legislative Report .....	3
Use Value Appraisal and Creation of Reserve Forestland Subcategory.....	4
Reserve Forest Enrollment.....	6
New Enrollments .....	6
Existing Enrollments .....	7
Current Enrollment of Reserve Forestland .....	7
Impacts on Managed Forestland Enrollment .....	8
Tradeoffs with Active Management for Forest Products .....	8
Contributions to Old Forest Characteristics .....	11
Utilization of the Reserve Forestland Subcategory .....	12
Strategies to Promote Utilization of Reserve Forestland .....	13
Strategies for Long Term Enrollment .....	14
FPR Evaluation of Reserve Forestland Subcategory .....	16

## Executive Summary

Act 146 (2022) added the **Reserve Forestland** subcategory to Vermont's Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program to support the development of old forest conditions and functions while preserving working lands as the primary focus of Managed Forestland. This report, prepared by the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR), evaluates enrollment trends, impacts, and strategies for long-term management.

Since opening in July 2023, **55 parcels totaling 11,378 acres** have enrolled or are in process, including 36 parcels transitioning from other UVA subcategories and 19 new enrollments. Enrollment has increased annually, and parcels are generally well-suited to support old forest characteristics, averaging 218 acres—larger than typical UVA parcels. Nearly **10,100 acres** are being managed for old forest conditions and functions, with a limited **Productive Forestland Tradeoff** of 5,308 acres, meaning Reserve Forestland enrollment has minimal impact on working lands.

Factors limiting enrollment include eligibility thresholds, awareness, planning complexity, plan update cycles, and landowner objectives. FPR recommends continued **education, outreach, and use of complementary programs** such as conservation easements and cost-share to support long-term stewardship.

FPR concludes that Reserve Forestland is **functioning as intended**, providing a viable pathway to old forest development while maintaining the integrity of Vermont's working forest base. Continued monitoring and incremental enrollment are expected to advance both ecological and program objectives.

# Background and Purpose of Report

## Act 146 Legislative Report

In May 2022, Act 146 amended Vermont's Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program by adding a new Managed Forestland subcategory called **Reserve Forestland**. The purpose of this new subcategory is to recognize and encourage the accrual of old forest conditions and functions<sup>1</sup>—at a scale and in a pattern currently lacking across Vermont's landscape—while doing so in a measured and conservative manner that preserves working lands as the primary focus of the Managed Forestland category within the UVA Program.

In addition to creating the Reserve Forestland subcategory within Managed Forestland, Act 146 requires the Commissioner of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR), in consultation with the Director of Property Valuation and Review, to submit a report on the enrollment of Managed Forestland in the UVA Program. The report must include:

- 1) a summary of how enrollment of managed forestland in the UVA Program has changed since passage of this act, including whether owners of managed forestland changed the status of enrollment of their land to Reserve Forestland or ecologically significant treatment areas;
- 2) the number of persons enrolling land in the UVA Program as Reserve Forestland;
- 3) any other information that the Commissioner determines is relevant to the ongoing enrollment of Reserve Forestland in the UVA Program, including any relevant information regarding any impacts to the overall managed forestland category;
- 4) recommendations on how to promote the long-term enrollment of land in the Reserve Forestland category of enrolled land in order to attain old forest conditions or functions and values; and
- 5) a recommendation on how to protect or conserve the functions and values of significant and sensitive acres enrolled as Reserve Forestland when the owner of the land wishes to amend the category or subcategory of enrollment.

This report satisfies this requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> Characteristics of old forests include large old trees, spatial variability in tree density and size, abundant downed deadwood, multiple canopy layers, large standing dead trees, unique plant communities (understory plants, mosses, lichens). With enough old forest characteristics, they can provide important contributions to native biodiversity, wildlife habitat, hydrologic regulation, carbon storage, and forest resilience.

## Use Value Appraisal and Creation of Reserve Forestland Subcategory

The primary statutory purpose of UVA is to preserve the working landscape and the rural character of Vermont (32 V.S.A. § 3750). Statute (32 V.S.A. § 3751) further elaborates on the purposes to include the following objectives:

- Keep Vermont's agriculture and forestland in production.
- Protect natural ecological systems.
- Prevent accelerated conversion to development.
- Achieve equitable taxation.
- Assist in preservation and protection of scenic resources.
- Assist Vermonter's in planned orderly growth.

More than 2,000,000 acres of forestland among 16,000 forestland parcels are enrolled in forestland category of UVA and subject to a forest management plan consistent with certain standards established by the Commissioner of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the forestland enrolled in the program is managed for forest products like timber, firewood, veneer, chips, pellets, or maple sap, among other compatible objectives. However, sites with ecologically significant conditions, or sites with limited potential to grow and manage sawtimber, and some open lands, are also eligible and enrolled in the forestland category of UVA. The creation of the Reserve Forestland subcategory of Managed Forestland (the primary forestland enrollment category in UVA) provided an opportunity for certain parcels, meeting a minimum threshold of ecologically significant and sensitive conditions, to be enrolled in UVA and managed for old forest conditions and functions.

During the legislative process and development of the management standards that would apply to Reserve Forestland, the following factors were considered:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Property Valuation and Review Annual Report, 2024: <https://tax.vermont.gov/sites/tax/files/documents/RP-1295-2025.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Considerations for a Reserve Forestland Subcategory in Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program, 2021: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/House%20Natural/Use%20Value%20in%20Vermont/W~Michael%20Snyder~Vermont%20Department%20of%20Forests,%20Parks,%20and%20Recreation%20Report%20->

- 1) Old forest is a valuable and underrepresented condition in Vermont. [Vermont Conservation Design](#) sets a target of approximately 9% or 419,000 acres of Vermont's forestland to be in an old forest condition within highest priority forest blocks. An estimated 239,000 acres are currently conserved in a manner likely to support development into old forest.<sup>4</sup>
- 2) Preservation of working lands is a primary purpose of UVA. Passive management, often an appropriate management strategy for old forests that involves little or no vegetative management, can present significant tradeoffs with working lands objectives by eliminating stewardship for and harvesting of local renewable products on certain lands, thereby reducing some of the ecological, social, and economic benefits that activity provides.
- 3) Passive management has not historically been an eligible management strategy at the parcel scale on private ownerships within the UVA program. However, achieving old forest conditions and functions typically requires large acreages that exceed what can be realized on individual parcels.
- 4) Working lands are critical to Vermont. They support the state's culture, economy, and many of the ecosystem services and ecological values Vermont prioritizes.
- 5) Vermont's forest economy is under increasing pressure from cultural, economic, and climate-related forces that threaten its long term vitality.<sup>5</sup>
- 6) All forest conditions provide value. Young, maturing, old – managed and unmanaged – each make unique contributions to the ecological, social, and economic benefits that forests provide.
- 7) UVA enrollment is essential to achieving statewide forest goals. Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) sets targets of 3-5% young forest (depending on biophysical region). Likewise, as noted previously, VCD sets a target of

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[%20Considerations%20for%20a%20Reserve%20Forestland%20Subcategory%20in%20Vermont's%20Use%20Value%20Appraisal%20Program~1-19-2022.pdf](#)

Report Regarding Enrollment of Reserve Forestland in Use Value Appraisal, 2023:

[https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/doc\\_library/Reserve%20Forestland%20Final%20Report%202022.pdf](https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/doc_library/Reserve%20Forestland%20Final%20Report%202022.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Implementing Vermont Conservation Design, 2025:

<https://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Conserve/VT%20Conservation%20Landscape-level%20Design/Implementing%20VCD%20->

[%20Land%20Conservation%20Priorities%20for%20Act%2059%20-%20March%202025\\_0.pdf](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Vermont Forest Futures Strategic Roadmap – Current Conditions, 2023:](#)

<https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/documents/VFF-Current-Conditions.pdf>. Though published after passage of Act 146 and creation of Reserve Forestland, this document contextualizes concerns about the forest economy that were important in establishing the need for a limited eligibility of parcels in the Reserve Forestland subcategory.

approximately 9% (or 419,000 acres) of Vermont's forestland to be in an old forest condition within highest priority forest blocks. Reserve Forestland can support the goals of Act 59, including conserving 50 percent of Vermont's landscape by 2050. Because the majority of Vermont's private forestland (2 million of 3.6 million acres) is enrolled in UVA, the state can only meet its forest condition targets if the management strategies needed to attain them are eligible in UVA.

These factors demonstrate the importance of implementing the Reserve Forestland subcategory in a balanced manner – one that allows some parcels to become eligible for management for old forest within UVA while complementing, and not unduly compromising, the program's working lands purpose.

The Reserve Forestland subcategory was authorized by Act 146, with the standards defined in 2022 taking effect July 1, 2023.<sup>6</sup>

The design and implementation of the Reserve Forestland subcategory were therefore carefully considered to advance old forest objectives while minimizing tradeoffs with working lands goals. The report required by Act 146 and presented here evaluates whether that intended balance is being achieved.

## Reserve Forest Enrollment

Enrollment in Reserve Forestland opened on July 1, 2023.

There are two ways that land can be enrolled in Reserve Forestland:

- 1) **New enrollments:** previously unenrolled and eligible land, landowners can apply for enrollment in the UVA program as Reserve Forestland.
- 2) **Existing enrollment:** land already enrolled in another UVA subcategory transitions to enrollment as Reserve Forestland.

### New Enrollments

To enroll forestland into the UVA program for the next tax cycle, a landowner submits an application to the Department of Taxes - Property Valuation and Review by September 1, and the specific forest management details to FPR by October 1.

There have been three application cycles since Reserve Forestland opened for enrollment. The first round of application occurred on September 1, 2023, shortly after the subcategory

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<sup>6</sup> Reserve Forestland Standards: <https://fpr.vermont.gov/document/reserve-forestland-standards>

opened on July 1, 2023, meaning there was limited opportunity to take full advantage of the first enrollment year. However, interest and enrollment in the subcategory increased in each of the two following years.

### Existing Enrollments

Properties already enrolled in UVA can change enrollment subcategories on a rolling basis. The opportunity to transition enrollment to Reserve Forestland began on July 1, 2023.

Changes in enrollment can coincide with a landowner’s forest management plan update cycle (plans are updated once every 10 years), or plans can be updated early. Because landowners usually pay licensed foresters to update their management plans, most will wait to incur these costs until the next scheduled update.

Forest management plan updates are due annually by April 1, prior to the expiration of the previous 10-year plan. Since Reserve Forestland enrollment became available, there have been two update cycles (2024 and 2025). Because landowners often begin plan updates six months to a year in advance, many arrangements for 2024 updates were already underway by July 1, 2023.

In total, just over 3,000 forest management plans were updated across the 2024 and 2025 cycles.

### Current Enrollment of Reserve Forestland

Since enrollments in Reserve Forestland began in 2023, 55 parcels totaling 11,378 acres have been enrolled or are in the process of enrollment.<sup>7</sup> Of these enrollments, 36 parcels (7,933 acres) transitioned from another UVA subcategory, while 19 parcels (3,445 acres) are new enrollments in the program (Table 1).

**Table 1. Forestland parcels enrolled (or in the process of enrolling) in Use Value Appraisal as Reserve Forestland since 2023.**

Existing vs. New	# of Parcels	Total Acres
Previously Enrolled in UVA	36	7,933
New to UVA	19	3,445
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>11,378</b>

<sup>7</sup> Totals are as of 11/2025 and include all parcels for which enrollment in Reserve Forestland is in process. Some Reserve Forestland enrollments have approved forest management plans, but formal processing of enrollment by the Tax Department is forthcoming.



Enrollment activity increased over time, with only two parcels transitioned into Reserve Forestland in 2023, compared to 22 enrollments in 2024 and 31 enrollments in 2025 (Table 2).

**Table 2. Enrollments in Reserve Forestland by year.**

Enrollment	2023	2024	2025	Total
Previously Enrolled in UVA	2	14	20	36
New to UVA		8	11	19
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>55</b>

## Impacts on Managed Forestland Enrollment

For purposes of this report, the impacts of enrolling land as Reserve Forestland will be categorized as:

- 1) Tradeoffs with active management for forest products.
- 2) Contribution to old forest conditions and functions.

### Tradeoffs with Active Management for Forest Products

Broadly, management for old forest characteristics and forest products are not mutually exclusive and can be complementary. Reserve Forestland is not a “no-management” subcategory. It requires management of introduced invasive plants, implementation of water quality practices, and, in some cases, active management to enhance old forest characteristics. Management of some lands enrolled in Reserve Forestland will include harvesting of sawtimber in a manner that accelerates accrual of old forest characteristics (to reduce competition among trees, so they grow bigger faster, or to establish young trees, a fundamental characteristic of old forests in the Northeast).

That said, management for old forest characteristics often involves retaining more trees for longer periods than would occur when actively managing a forest to maximize production. Passive management (very limited vegetative management) is also a common strategy for developing old forest characteristics. Where passive management is applied, management for sawtimber typically does not occur, and tradeoffs are more pronounced. Collectively, this continuum of reduced management for sawtimber is referred to as the **Productive Forestland Tradeoff**.

Not all land enrolled on Reserve Forestland parcels is part of this tradeoff. Some portions of parcels with Reserve Forestland enrolled could not, or did not need to, be managed for forest products prior to creation of the Reserve Forestland subcategory. Other portions will be managed for sawtimber. Conditions and enrollment subcategories that do not contribute to the Productive Forestland Tradeoff include:

- 1) **Significant and Sensitive Conditions:** Prior to creation of the Reserve Forestland subcategory, land contributing to Significant or Sensitive Conditions (e.g., wetlands, steep slopes, Ecologically Significant Treatment Areas, Special Place and Sensitive Sites) was eligible for UVA enrollment and not necessarily required to be managed for sawtimber.
- 2) **Open/Idle Agricultural Land:** Parcels enrolled in UVA may include limited amounts of Open or Idle Agricultural Land (e.g., old pasture or brush-hogged meadow). This land is not required to be managed for forest products and is not considered a tradeoff.
- 3) **Productive Forestland:** Parcels may enroll land in multiple UVA subcategories. Some parcels with Reserve Forestland also enroll Productive Forestland, which must be managed for sawtimber. These acres are not considered a tradeoff.
- 4) **Agricultural Land:** While no parcels enrolling Reserve Forestland have also enrolled Agricultural Land, if a portion of a parcel were enrolled as Agricultural Land it would not constitute a tradeoff.

To quantify the Productive Forestland Tradeoff, or the acreage of land that could be managed for forest products, but may not be for the foreseeable future, the following formula is applied:

$$\text{Enrolled Acres of Reserve Parcel} - (\text{Acres of Significant/Sensitive Conditions} + \text{Productive Forestland} + \text{Open Land}) = \text{Productive Forestland Tradeoff}$$

These tradeoffs occur at multiple geographic scales but are often felt locally. County-level and statewide totals are presented in Table 3.

**Table 2. Productive Forestland Tradeoff among parcels with Reserve Forestland enrolled in UVA.**

County	# Parcels	Total Acres	Sig/Sens	Open Land	Productive Forestland	Productive Tradeoff
Addison	1	88	85	0	0	3
Caledonia	3	540	209	0	0	331
Chittenden	6	1,717	752	148	0	817
Franklin	4	341	154	34	15	138
Grand Isle	1	80	50	6	0	24
Orange	4	1,965	657	28	448	832
Orleans	4	315	205	4	14	92
Rutland	2	533	237	9	273	15
Washington	11	2,900	1,263	66	0	1571
Windham	11	1,717	790	56	0	871
Windsor	8	1,182	502	59	7	614
<b>Statewide Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>11,378</b>	<b>4,902</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>5,308</b>

Current Reserve Forestland enrollments represent approximately 0.3% of all forestland parcels in UVA (approximately 16,000 parcels) and 0.6% of total enrolled forestland acreage (approximately 2 million acres).

During the legislative process, FPR estimated the potential number of parcels, acres, and Productive Forestland Tradeoff if, hypothetically, all eligible parcels were enrolled. To date, just over 1% of estimated eligible parcels have enrolled, and less than 2% of the estimated potential Productive Forestland Tradeoff has been realized (Table 4).

**Table 3. Current Reserve Forestland enrollments relative to estimated potential total enrolled parcels, acres, and Productive Forestland Tradeoff.**

	Parcels	Acres	Productive Forestland Tradeoff
<b>Estimated Reserve Forestland Potential (statewide)</b>	4,120	691,183	295,144
<b>Current Reserve Forestland Enrollments</b>	55	11,378	5,308
<b>% Realized</b>	1.30%	1.60%	1.80%

In the context of the full program and landscape, FPR and county foresters administering the forestland components of UVA agree that current Reserve Forestland enrollments are not large enough to constitute a significant near-term loss of working lands potential.

## Contributions to Old Forest Characteristics

Multiple enrollment subcategories can be managed for old forest characteristics, including Reserve Forestland and several of the Ecologically Significant Treatment Area (ESTA) subcategories. A total of 8,239 acres, among 55 parcels are enrolled as Reserve Forestland and managed primarily to develop old forest characteristics. An additional 1,846 acres are enrolled as ESTAs and managed for their ecologically significant conditions. While ESTAs are not always managed specifically for old forest characteristics, review of the plans indicates that most ESTA acreage within current Reserve Forestland parcels will be managed for natural processes consistent with old forest development. Among the parcels with Reserve Forestland enrolled, just less than 10,100 acres are managed for old forest characteristics (Table 5).

**Table 5. Number of Reserve Forestland parcels and respective acreage contributing to accrual of old forest characteristics.**

Plan Year	Number of Parcels	Ecologically Significant Treatment Acres	Reserve Forestland Acres	Acres Managed for Old Forest
2023	2	97	132	229
2024	22	833	2,132	2,965
2025	31	916	5,976	6,892
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>1,846</b>	<b>8,239</b>	<b>10,085</b>

Forest processes that create old forest conditions and functions operate at multiple scales, including large landscapes. Larger blocks of old forest, and therefore larger parcels managed for old forest, have greater potential to provide the suite of old forest benefits for Vermont. The parcels enrolled as Reserve Forestland vary in size. More than one third are less than 100 acres, nearly half are between 100 and 500 acres, and a few parcels exceed 500 acres. (Table 6).

**Table 6. Number of parcels enrolled as Reserve Forestland by parcel size.**

Parcel Size	# of Parcels
<100 acres	22
100-500 acres	30
500+ acres	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55</b>

More than half of Reserve Forestland parcels exceed 100 acres, and some exceed 1,000 acres. The average Reserve Forestland parcel is 218 acres, larger than the average forestland parcel enrolled in UVA (approximately 125 acres), increasing their potential to provide old forest ecological values.

In a survey of county foresters administering the forestland components of UVA, they indicated that parcels enrolling in Reserve Forestland are generally well suited to management for old forest characteristics. They noted that these parcels often contain unique ecological features, barriers to timber management, and strong landowner commitment. In several cases, parcels are already exhibiting elements of old forest structure.

While the management plans for many parcels are limiting active management of the forest overstory, several have prescribed active management on Reserve Forestland to accelerate old forest characteristics or are managing for sawtimber on some portions of the enrolled property, while managing for old forest on other portions.

This diversity of approaches is encouraging in that it can support a range of economic and ecological benefits while meeting landowner objectives. However, FPR also recognizes that there is room for increased utilization of the Reserve Forestland subcategory to make more progress towards achieving old forest targets in Vermont.

## Utilization of the Reserve Forestland Subcategory

Several factors limit enrollment and utilization of this subcategory:

- 1) **Eligibility Thresholds:** Act 146 established minimum thresholds for Reserve Forestland eligibility. Parcels under 100 acres must have at least 50% of enrolled acres in Significant and Sensitive Conditions; while parcels 100 acres or larger must have at least 30%. The requirement that a parcel meet a minimum threshold of these conditions (e.g., steep slopes, wetlands, riparian areas) limits the number of eligible parcels. While this threshold limits enrollment and use of the subcategory, it also is critical to supporting the working lands purposes of the program.
- 2) **Awareness and Familiarity:** Reserve Forestland is a new enrollment option. For decades, UVA required management for sawtimber, an expectation well understood by landowners and licensed foresters. Despite significant training and outreach

about this new subcategory, familiarity, comfort, and adoption will increase gradually, limiting pursuit of this option in the near term.

- 3) **New Standards and Planning Complexity:** Reserve Forestland has distinct management planning requirements. Managing for old forest characteristics—such as structural complexity, dead wood, snags, and diverse age classes—can involve both passive and active management and requires new evaluation approaches. These elements may be unfamiliar to forest management plan preparers, increasing planning costs and reducing the frequency with which foresters recommend this option.
- 4) **Plan Update Cycles:** Forest management plans are costly and updated on a 10-year cycle. Most landowners will only consider Reserve Forestland at the time of plan renewal. If they are unaware of this option during that window, enrollment may be delayed for another decade, limiting annual uptake.
- 5) **Landowner Objectives:** Many landowners can meet their objectives for resilience, forest health, and sawtimber without enrolling in Reserve Forestland. As a result, not all landowners with eligible parcels are interested in this subcategory.

## Strategies to Promote Utilization of Reserve Forestland

Enrollments in this subcategory are low relative to the estimated total enrollment potential (Table 4). In theory, utilization could be increased by addressing the factors discussed above, such as lowering eligibility thresholds or reducing planning requirements. These changes might reduce planning costs for landowners, expand eligibility, and lessen resistance among plan preparers. However, making such adjustments at this early stage could undermine the careful balance with the program's working lands goals and weaken the standards designed to ensure that management of Reserve Forestland meaningfully supports old forest characteristics.

To date, twenty-eight licensed foresters have prepared plans for Reserve Forestland enrollment. Nine foresters have done so in multiple years, and ten prepared their first Reserve plans in 2025. This reflects a growing and accessible group of foresters equipped to prepare Reserve Forestland plans, identify suitable parcels, and advise landowners considering this enrollment option.

Nearly all thirteen FPR county foresters have reviewed at least one Reserve Forestland plan, and regional teams (North, Central, South) have conducted coordinated reviews to support calibration and consistent administration across the state.

FPR believes that, at this early stage in Reserve Forestland rollout, continued and expanded landowner and forester education are the most important strategies to realize the enrollment potential. This approach supports enrollment rates while preserving the mechanisms that ensure the subcategory balances working lands and old forest management goals. It also allows enrollment trends to be evaluated over a longer period before considering more significant changes.

## Strategies for Long Term Enrollment

In addition to evaluating enrollment trends of Reserve Forestland, Act 146 directs this report to consider how to:

1. Promote long-term Reserve Forestland enrollment.
2. Protect significant and sensitive Reserve Forestland acres when landowners seek to amend the enrollment subcategory.

Act 146 included these questions recognizing that when land changes enrollment categories, progress towards one management objective may be reduced or lost. During the legislative deliberations on H. 697 (becoming Act 146), there was concern about land enrolled as Reserve Forestland, Ecologically Significant Treatment Areas (ESTA), or other Significant and Sensitive conditions could subsequently being enrolled in another eligible subcategory focused on different objectives, such as sawtimber, potentially reducing or losing some of the ecological benefits promoted in Reserve Forestland or ESTA subcategories.

To address both long-term enrollment and protection of significant or sensitive conditions, the program can employ internal mechanisms to incentivize or require continued management aligned with Reserve Forestland or ESTAs, such as financial incentives or management restrictions. Alternatively, compatible external programs—such as conservation easements, carbon programs, and cost-share assistance—can reinforce and support desired management outcomes.

FPR seeks to encourage long-term management for old forest characteristics on lands that are eligible and well suited for such management, when aligned with landowner objectives. Similarly, lands with sensitive or unique ecological conditions should be managed responsibly for the values they provide. These outcomes can be achieved in multiple ways, including through responsible sawtimber management outside Reserve Forestland or ESTA enrollment.

FPR recognizes that no single acre can be managed to achieve all potential values; trade-offs are inherent to our management decisions. Within UVA, eligible lands can be managed in alignment with landowner objectives – consistent with certain standards. When land offers multiple good management and enrollment options that advance program purposes, - landowners can choose the enrollment path that works for them.

Currently, FPR emphasizes education and outreach to inform landowners about management options, highlight significant features of their land, and demonstrate how stewardship choices can advance their goals. The current design of UVA provides flexible options and safeguards that support program purposes in meaningful ways and can be responsive to the unique objectives of a landowner and conditions of their land.

To avoid increasing program complexity, costs, or of deterring risk-averse landowners from considering Reserve Forestland, FPR recommends maintaining a flexible, voluntary approach to enrollment in eligible subcategories of Managed Forestland, so long as this approach continues to retain forestland and advance program purposes. This flexibility creates some risk, such as:

- loss of old forest structure if Reserve Forestland shifts to Productive Forestland and is no longer managed for old forest characteristics, or
- loss of habitat if, for example, a landowner chooses to let an Ecologically Significant Treatment Area for Golden Winged-Warbler mature into older forest instead of maintaining a sparser shrub-forest habitat it requires.

However, FPR believes that the flexibility, accessibility, and low risk for landowners to consider and pursue Reserve Forestland and ESTA-related management options (or not) will do more to support, educate, and achieve the desired outcomes than mandatory enrollment or prescribed management requirements.

Externally supported programs and mechanisms like conservation easements, carbon offset programs, cost share programs, and others that support the long-term stewardship for specific objectives such as old forest management or protection of significant and sensitive conditions and are compatible with UVA enrollment; are critical to an effective and resilient private forest stewardship framework. To support this, FPR and private consulting foresters advise landowners about available cost share and landowner assistance programs, organizations that will accept or purchase easements, and other complementary opportunities. In this way, enrollment in UVA—whether as Reserve Forestland or another subcategory—serves as a stable step for landowners to climb a



broader stewardship ladder, one that can be reinforced and advanced over time through complementary programs and partners.

## **FPR Evaluation of Reserve Forestland Subcategory**

Taken together, the findings of this evaluation indicate that the Reserve Forestland subcategory is functioning as intended at this early stage of implementation. It appears to be a viable and administratively workable pathway within UVA to manage select parcels for old forest characteristics, while maintaining appropriate safeguards that limit impacts to Vermont's working forest base. Current enrollments are modest in scale, well distributed, and largely concentrated on parcels with ecological significance or inherent constraints to intensive timber management, resulting in a limited and acceptable Productive Forestland Tradeoff at multiple scales. At the same time, enrolled parcels have the potential to contribute meaningfully to the development of old forest characteristics in a pattern and scale that was not previously possible.

The data and professional judgment of FPR and county foresters suggest that the balance envisioned by Act 146—advancing old forest objectives without undermining the core working lands purpose of UVA—is largely being achieved. While utilization remains low relative to estimated statewide potential, these figures are consistent with the subcategory newness, plan update cycles, and the deliberate eligibility thresholds established in statute. Continued and expanded education, outreach, and experience among landowners and foresters are expected to incrementally increase appropriate Reserve Forestland enrollment over time.

FPR therefore concludes that the Reserve Forestland subcategory represents a compatible and complementary addition to UVA and its working lands purposes, warranting continued monitoring and learning before consideration of any substantial changes.