

FOREST PARTNERSHIP FY27 BUDGET LETTER

Dear Chair Watson and Members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee:

As advocates for the health of Vermont's forests, the Forest Partnership (organizations listed below) respectfully submits our endorsement for specific budget recommendations pertaining to the sustainable management and conservation of our forestlands.

We ask your committee to support the following measures:

- **Full Funding for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board:** The House and the Governor agreed to \$37.5M in full funding for VHCB. Its commitment to conservation helps sustain the multifunctional role of forests, from providing habitats to bolstering our outdoor economy.
- **Full Funding for Regional Planning Commissions:** The House and the Governor also agreed to fully fund the RPCs. They play a pivotal role in land use planning, which is critical for environmental conservation and sustainable development.
- **Serve, Learn & Earn:** The Governor and House supported base funding for SLE at \$500K in the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR), and the House additionally added \$300K of one-time funding. We request support for the additional \$300K, and we ask that it be moved to base funding. We support SLE because its engagement includes workforce development for the next generation of land stewards, which is vital to the longevity of education and outdoor-related trades and the maintenance of our forests and working landscape.
- **Working Lands:** We support the Working Lands base funding of \$1.5M, plus an additional \$3.5M in one-time funding.
- **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative:** We support the House's position of 500,000 to FPR for Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative grants.

Importance of Vermont's Forests:

Vermont's forests do so much for Vermonters. They produce local wood products, enrich our lives, and are multifaceted ecosystems that provide wildlife habitat and invaluable services:

- **Flood Resilience:** Forests act as natural sponges, mitigating the impact of heavy rainfall and reducing the severity of floods that can devastate communities.
- **Working Landscapes:** Beyond environmental benefits, forests are the backbone of our state's economy, providing jobs and contributing significantly to our rural economy.
- **Biodiversity and Climate Resilience:** Forests are a haven for a multitude of species, fostering a rich biodiversity that is crucial for ecological stability and resilience. They mitigate climate change by sequestering and storing immense amounts of carbon, and enhance landscape resilience through ecological complexity.

These recommendations reflect our collective commitment to Vermont's forests. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

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Audubon Vermont

The Nature Conservancy in Vermont

Trust for Public Land

Vermont Conservation Voters

Vermont Land Trust

Vermont Natural Resources Council