

I grew up in a hunting oriented family. My family owns a hunting camp in central Vermont in the foothills of Camel's Hump. We hunt private property, timber land and state forest. Over the years I have come to appreciate the generosity of others and the value of open public lands. I have come to believe that public and private partnerships are the most effective means to keeping lands productive and open to the public.

One of the first steps to preserving our forests is through good forestry practices and closely monitoring the effect we are creating on the environment. Logging is one of the most visible faces of large tract land management. Clear cut timber harvesting is often selected to simplify the logging project and maximize profits. The land my family hunts sits in the middle of approximately ten thousand acres of land that was clear cut and sold off some twenty years ago. I have seen firsthand that land harvested in this way is difficult to hunt on and stubbornly refuses to regenerate and sustain healthy populations of wildlife. Likewise the land has little economic or recreational value. Barren stump and brush filled landscapes are bad press for land owners and loggers alike.

People need to understand that logging isn't a bad thing for the environment. Logging can actually help wildlife and the overall health of a forest. When a tract of land is logged off properly it allows the undergrowth to grow up providing more hard mast and woody plants for animals to feed on. This same under growth provides places for the animals to hide and seek out shelter. Proper forest management improves the overall health of the forest. It creates a more diverse ecosystem and allows the forest to be more resilient to diseases. Using proper forestry and land management practices can greatly benefit both people and the environment.

Current land use laws have been very effective in keeping land open. Like so many other programs, land use should be modified to meet current needs. The state of Vermont needs to make it easier for land owners to put their land into land use and to create incentives for focusing the goals of land owners to meet the needs of people and wildlife. Currently land owners that have their land in land use get tax breaks, in exchange for making their land open to the public and saying they won't subdivide it. Land use programs need to provide land owners with value to keep their land open for recreation and wildlife. One opportunity would be to allow land owners to retain taxes they would normally pay for the sale of timber or maple syrup they produce. In return, land owners could return a certain percentage of the money they earned back into their land for projects to benefit wildlife and recreation. Projects like public accesses trails or stumping and planting clear cut meadows would be tops on my list.

Loggers and foresters need to work together to create effective cutting plans and lay out skid roads that cause the least amount of harm to the forest. Using lower impact machines is a good way to help achieve this. Another way to create less of an impact on the environment and preserve the woodlands is through selective cutting mixed with smaller tracts of clear cut. Selective cutting preserves woodlands that can provide bedding areas and corridors for animals and humans to move about the forest. Clear cutting controlled sections of timber can provide a reasonable income while providing valuable edge cover and grazing land both of which can sustain and improve existing populations of wildlife. Fortunately for us what's good for the forest is good for those who live, work and play there.