

Nicholas Sweet

Growing up in Vermont, I have always been able to appreciate the value of our state's namesake, the "Green Mountains". The "Vert Mont". I, like many of my fellow Vermonters, still gaze at our rich and verdant lands with the same awe that the French explorers did almost 500 years ago. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel around our great nation and abroad. Every time I met someone while away, if I mentioned that I was from Vermont the universal response was how wonderful and beautiful the state is. But Vermont is not just a pretty place to live or visit. It is a diverse and dynamic place with latent economic potential. It is my generation's duty to continue the stewardship that exists today and improve upon it. We can put up a "bigger tent", to use a recent political phrase of inclusiveness, and welcome more and diverse users to our forests.

My father worked at a sawmill here in Vermont for nearly a decade. He taught me many things about the wood products industry, managed forestlands, and sustainability. I learned about what a "working forest" is from the logger and sawyers perspective and how the same land can be managed responsibly to produce resources for generations. Sadly, he lost his job as a result of unsustainable forestry practices and unfair government subsidies overseas. A hard lesson that exemplifies the value of diversity in our working forests and how they can benefit all of us. I, like many Vermonters, enjoy hunting in our vast forests. Hunters, like loggers, harvest the forest but always think with reason and leave enough to allow it to prosper in perpetuity. It's simple, responsible, and it works. As I began to see the bigger picture, I looked at how others use our forests and their efforts to preserve our forests for their own purposes. Farmers, manufacturers, skiers, bird watchers, naturalists, artists, campers, hikers, tourists, leafers, part-time residents and vacation/second home owners in addition to the traditional users like loggers, sawyers and hunters. All of these diverse groups have the same thing in common. They are all drawn to our forests. They all want the forest land as pristine and useable as possible.

Where my generation can make a difference is to bring these diverse groups to the table. A table where each party has an equal place and an equal share in deciding the future of our forests. Even though the activities that draw people to our forests are diverse and sometimes even factious, it is imperative that we find a common ground. With thriving and well managed forest lands, not only do all interested parties get the value out of the land that they seek, but the state as a whole will benefit economically. With the advances in science, technology and social media, my generation can make the difference between a declining working forest and one that improves the quality of life for all that call Vermont our home.