

Vermont Woodlands Association

Public Policy Issue Brief: Level the Playing Field for Vermont's Forest Landowners, Foresters, and Harvesters

Background:

Vermont's Forests play a major social, economic, recreational, and environmental role in the state, perhaps even greater than ever now that the state faces the task of cleaning up Lake Champlain. The recent DEC publication, Vermont Lake Champlain Phosphorus Phase I Implementation Plan, states that, "Forests produce the cleanest water of any land use... Given that 86% of Vermont forests are privately owned and managed, successfully achieving our no net loss of forest cover relies on landowners reaping some financial benefits from their forestlands. Economic incentives for forest products, therefore, become an integral part of keeping healthy forestland." But forest landowners and their harvesting partners, the foresters, loggers and truckers, are facing serious economic hardships in the stewardship of their woodlands because of potential lake cleanup fees on their acreages, very high worker's comp costs to logging firms, truck weight restrictions on state roads and sales taxes on equipment. Vermont Woodlands Association (VWA) believes the forestry community deserves:



- Recognition of their importance to the Lake Champlain cleanup effort
- Help in reigning in the cost of Worker's Comp to the logging community
- Truck weight limits equal to our neighboring states
- State sales tax treatments equal to the agricultural community

Vermont Woodlands Association Policy:

VWA supports policies and programs that reduce the costs of Worker's Comp in Vermont, provide tax treatment to forest workers, loggers, and truckers equal to their agricultural counterparts, and raise the logging truck gross vehicle weights (4-7 axles) up to comparability with NY and NH. VWA opposes parcel fees or impervious cover fees on lands enrolled in the Vermont Use Value Appraisal program, or that are third-party certified, and sustainably managed. The contribution of these parcels to flood control and keeping Vermont's water clean far out-weighs any very minor sedimentation effects that may occur as the result of forest management.



Public Policy Goals:

VWA, working with its partners and networks, will advance the following policy initiative

- The passage of legislation to bring logging truck weights into equality with NY and NH.
- Changing 32 VSA Chapter 233 Sales and Use Tax: Section 9741. Sales Not Covered: to include forest harvest and trucking machinery and sales of oil, gas, and other fuels used directly and exclusively for forestry purposes.
- Reducing Worker's Comp costs to a level comparable with surrounding northern New England states and supporting legislative efforts in Vermont which would accomplish that.
- Insure that private forestland acreage managed under the UVA program or managed sustainably under any third party certification system is not unfairly targeted with fees associated with the Clean Water Act 64 of 2015.

Policy Approval:

VWA is a non-profit (501(c)(3)) association dedicated to the health and enhancement of the working forest in Vermont. Through education, outreach, and advocacy we are a Voice for Healthy Forests in the Green Mountain State. Level the Playing Field was approved by the VWA Board of Directors on March 17, 2017.



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