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An act relating to timber harvesting

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 10 V.S.A. § 2600 is added to read:

§ 2600. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Private and public forestlands:

(A) constitute unique and irreplaceable resources, benefits, and values of statewide importance;

(B) contribute to the protection and conservation of wildlife habitat, air, water, and soil resources of the State;

(C) mitigate the effects of climate change; and

(D) benefit the general health and welfare of the people of the State.

(2) The forest products industry, including maple sap collection:

(A) is a major contributor to and is valuable to the State's economy by providing jobs to its citizens;

(B) is essential to the manufacture of forest products that are used and enjoyed by the people of the State; and

(C) benefits the general welfare of the people of the State.

(3) Private and public forestlands are critical for and contribute significantly to the State's outdoor recreation and tourism economies.

(4) Forestry operations are adversely affected by the encroachment of urban, commercial, and residential land uses throughout the State that result in forest fragmentation and conversion and erode the health and sustainability of remaining forests.

(5) As a result of encroachment on forests, conflicts have arisen between traditional forestry land uses and urban, commercial, and residential land uses that threaten to convert forestland permanently to other uses, resulting in an adverse impact to the economy and natural environment of the State.

(6) The encouragement, development, improvement, and preservation of forestry operations will result in a general benefit to the health and welfare of the people of the State and the State's economy.

(7) The forest products industry, in order to survive, likely will need to change, adopt new technologies, and diversify into new products.

(8) Forestry operations, including logging, transportation, and processing of on-site-derived forest products, may be subject to lawsuits based on the theory of nuisance. Nuisance suits could encourage and result in the conversion of forestland and loss of the forest products industry.

(9) It is in the public interest of the people of the State to ensure that forestry operations that are conducted in accordance with the following are protected and encouraged and are not subject to public and private nuisance

actions arising out of conflicts between forestry operations and urban,
commercial, and residential uses:

(A) the Acceptable Management Practices for Protecting Water
Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont, as adopted by the Commissioner of
Forests, Parks and Recreation;

(B) accepted silvicultural practices as defined by the Commissioner
of Forests, Parks and Recreation; and

(C) the requirements of this subchapter.

Sec. 2. 10 V.S.A. § 2601 is amended to read:

§ 2601. POLICY AND PURPOSES

(a) The conservation of the forests, timberlands, woodlands, and soil and recreational resources of the ~~state~~ State are hereby declared to be in the public interest. It is the policy of the ~~state~~ State to encourage economic management of its forests and woodlands, sustain long-term forest health, integrity, and productivity, to maintain, conserve and improve its soil resources and to control forest pests to the end that forest benefits, including maple sugar production, are preserved for its people, floods and soil erosion are alleviated, hazards of forest fires are lessened, its natural beauty is preserved, its wildlife is protected, the development of its recreational interests is encouraged, the fertility and productivity of its soil are maintained, the impairment of its dams

and reservoirs is prevented, its tax base is protected, and the health, safety, and general welfare of its people are sustained and promoted.

(b) The ~~department~~ Department shall implement the policies of this chapter by assisting ~~forest land~~ forestland owners and lumber operators in the cutting and marketing of forest growth, encouraging cooperation between forest owners, lumber operators, and the ~~state~~ State of Vermont in the practice of conservation and management of ~~forest lands~~ forestlands, managing, promoting, and protecting the multiple use of publicly owned forest and park lands; planning, constructing, developing, operating, and maintaining the system of ~~state~~ State parks; determining the necessity of repairs and replacements to all ~~department-owned~~ Department-owned buildings and causing urgent repairs and replacements to be accomplished, with the approval of the ~~secretary of administration~~ Secretary of Administration, if within the limits of specific appropriations or if approved by the ~~emergency board~~ Emergency Board; and providing advice and assistance to municipalities, other political subdivisions, ~~state~~ State departments and nongovernmental organizations in the development of wholesome and adequate community or institutional recreation programs.

(c) The Commissioner shall implement the policy established under this section when constructing the provisions of this chapter related to the

management of forestlands and the construction of chapters 85 and 87 of this title.

Sec. 3. 10 V.S.A. § 2602 is amended to read:

§ 2602. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

(1) “Agency” means the ~~agency of natural resources~~ Agency of Natural Resources as created by 3 V.S.A. chapter 51 of Title 3,

(2) “Department” means the ~~department of forests, parks and recreation~~ Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation within the ~~agency of natural resources;~~ Agency of Natural Resources.

(3) “Commissioner” means the ~~commissioner of the department of forests, parks and recreation;~~ Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

(4) “Secretary” means the ~~secretary of the agency of natural resources~~ Secretary of Natural Resources.

(5) “Forest product” mean logs; pulpwood; veneer; bolt wood; wood chips; stud wood; poles; pilings; biomass; fuel wood; maple sap; or bark.

(6) “Forestry operation” means activities related to the management of forests, including a timber harvest; pruning; planting; reforestation; pest, disease, and invasive species control; wildlife habitat management; and fertilization. “Forestry operation” includes the primary processing of forest products of commercial value on a parcel where the timber harvest occurs.

(7) "Timber" means trees, saplings, seedlings, bushes, shrubs, and sprouts from which trees may grow, of every size, nature, kind, and description.

(8) "Timber harvest" means a forestry operation involving the harvest of timber.

Sec. 4. 10 V.S.A. § 2608 is amended to read:

§ 2608. ENFORCEMENT; PENALTIES; LIABILITY

~~(a) Enforcement of the provisions of this chapter or any regulations or proclamations promulgated~~ rules adopted hereunder shall be in accordance with the provisions of ~~3 V.S.A. § 2822(c)~~ chapter 201 or 211 of this title.

~~(b) A person who violates any provision of this chapter or regulations or proclamations promulgated hereunder, or neglects or refuses to assist a fire warden when called upon to do so as provided in section 2644 of this title, shall be imprisoned not more than 30 days or fined not more than \$ 50.00, or both. Such person shall be liable for all damages resulting from a violation to be recovered in a civil action under this statute by the person injured.~~

Sec. 5. 10 V.S.A. § 2613 is added to read:

§ 2613. HARVEST NOTIFICATION; PILOT PROGRAM

(a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

(1) The public will benefit from accountability of persons conducting timber harvests by providing a mechanism for the Department to distribute

information and guidance to achieve compliance with existing laws and programs related to harvesting, including Use Value Appraisal eligibility requirements, and those that protect landowners, the environment, and the economy.

(2) Enforcement of compliance with the Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont will be facilitated through notification and documentation of timber harvests.

(3) Owners of forestlands will benefit from proactive and timely delivery of guidance and resources that support successful forestry operations, including timber harvesting, provided by the Department, including the Vermont Voluntary Harvesting Guidelines.

(4) State knowledge of harvest locations will improve the understanding of factors affecting the forest economy, thereby informing opportunities to support it.

(b) Harvest notification; pilot. The Commissioner shall establish a harvest notification pilot program under which a landowner of property may notify the Commissioner prior to commencement of a timber harvest. The process established by the Commissioner shall allow for a harvest notification by electronic means, telephone, or paper submission.

(c) Requested information. The Commissioner shall designate the information to be submitted to the Department in a voluntary harvest

notification. The requested information shall contain, at a minimum, the following information:

(1) the landowner's name; mailing address; physical address of residence; e-mail address, if any; and telephone number;

(2) the name of the logger or contractor conducting the harvest and his or her mailing address; address of the principal place of business or residence; e-mail address, if any; and telephone number.

(3) the name of the landowner's agent or consulting forester, if any, and his or her mailing address; address of the principal place of business or residence; e-mail address, if any; and telephone number;

(4) the location of the timber harvest, including the town and the nearest public town highway used to access the timber harvest;

(5) the school property account number (SPAN) of the parcel where the timber harvest will occur;

(6) the date the timber harvest will commence and the estimated date the harvest will be completed;

(7) the estimate of the acreage of the timber harvest area; and

(8) whether the parcel where the timber harvest will occur is enrolled in the use value appraisal program.

(d) Harvest number; technical assistance. Upon receipt of a complete harvest notification, the Commissioner shall assign a unique harvest number to

the timber harvest and shall provide the landowner with technical guidance or information, including: a sample timber sale contract; voluntary harvesting guidelines; guidance on compliance with maintaining water quality protection during a timber harvest; and referral, where applicable, to appropriate natural resource professionals.

(e) Confidentiality. Information submitted by a landowner in a voluntary harvest notification under this section is confidential and exempt from public inspection under the Public Records Act.

Sec. 6. DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS, PARKS AND RECREATION;

HARVEST NOTIFICATION REPORT

On or before January 1, 2020, the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation shall submit to the House Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and on Agriculture and Forest Products and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy a report regarding implementation of the Harvest Notification Pilot Program established under 10 V.S.A. § 2613. The report shall:

(1) Summarize implementation of and participation in the Pilot Program, including the number of harvest notifications received.

(2) Summarize the technical assistance and information provided to landowners under the program.

(3) Summarize the effectiveness of the program in increasing compliance with the Acceptable Management Practice for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont.

(4) Summarize whether the Pilot Program increased the amount or quality of information collected by the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation regarding timber harvests in the State.

(5) Recommend whether harvest notification should continue as a voluntary or mandatory program. The recommendations may include proposed changes to the Program and draft legislation to implement the changes.

Sec. 7. SUNSET; HARVEST NOTIFICATION PILOT PROGRAM

10 V.S.A. § 2613 (Harvest Notification Pilot Program) shall be repealed on February 15, 2020.

Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2016.