

To the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife:

It deeply saddens me to see the Vermont legislature seriously considering watering down its signature environmental protection law, Act 250. At a time when ecosystems everywhere are threatened by climate change and other assaults from economic “development”, we need stronger environmental safeguards, not weaker ones. To “streamline” Act 250 – all to benefit developers -- sends the signal that Vermonters care less about the environment than we did a generation ago, and far less than we need to at this time of crisis.

It’s particularly troubling that the proposed revisions to Act 250 are inadequate to protect Vermont’s high-elevation zones, which provide wildlife habitat and migration corridors, sequester carbon, purify water, and mitigate downstream flooding. Now more than ever, these zones need to be strictly protected.

I’m also shocked to see that “streamlining” means eliminating the District Commissions. The people most affected by Act 250 decisions should have a clear and unfettered opportunity to participate in the process; centralizing it in Montpelier merely gives paid lobbyists even more power over ordinary citizens than they already have.

I have completely lost faith in VNRC for acquiescing to this gutting of our flagship environmental law. I urge the Committee to reject the proposal.

Sincerely,

Steven Gorelick
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