

# DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION: LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

*Vermont has a legal, institutional, and economic framework in place for forest conservation and sustainability*

## OVERVIEW

A legal, institutional, and economic framework needs to be in place to support conservation and sustainable management and to uphold the views and values society holds towards Vermont's forests. Policies and guidelines need an enabling institutional environment for their formulation and implementation. Legislation provides the regulatory and fiscal instruments needed to achieve policy objectives. Institutions also provide the human and technical capacities needed to implement activities and programs for sustainable, healthy forests. Just as crucial are adequate economic resources. Increased internal efficiencies can no longer compensate for the long-term trend of smaller budgets and less staffing. Division programs need a significant commitment of adequate funding.

For the 2017 Plan to be successful, it is vital to maintain and increase, where needed, the financial support for implementation. Continuing budget pressures have made it difficult for the Division to keep the staffing levels needed to meet demands. Budget pressures appear to be the new normal rather than temporary downturns. The Division must pursue new opportunities for funding and collaboration with partners wherever possible. We must continue to tell our story to the lawmakers who determine our funding.

Similarly, we must look for new opportunities to maintain landowner's financial viability of private forest lands, including sustaining Vermont's forest-based manufacturing sector, pursuing opportunities to market carbon credits, and new ways to monetize ecosystem services. No program has been more successful in keeping our working landscape than the UVA Program. As the popularity of the program grows, the increasing amount of forgone tax revenue may become an issue. An important strategy will be to tell the story of the positive benefits of the UVA program and maintain support for it.

State policies, laws, and regulations must promote sustainability of Vermont's forests and reflect the needs of all forest landowners while encouraging cooperation between all citizens of the state. Forestry statutes, rules, and policies should provide for the sustainable management and protection of forest resources and provide the greatest environmental yield. To ensure that our policies, laws, and regulations are followed, the Division will strive to

ensure that the public has a clear understanding and the technical assistance needed, as well as a stakeholder voice in their development. Voluntary compliance has always been, and will continue to be, our goal.

Healthy forests are at the heart of this plan and new initiatives including forest certification, forester licensing, Voluntary Harvesting Guidelines, non-native invasive plant programs, and state guidelines for management of riparian buffers, vernal pools, and other ecologically significant habitats are important steps in ensuring this outcome. Within the Division, we will improve our understanding of and monitor our actions in relationship to the principle of healthy forests.

To be successful, the Division must be managed and operate in a sustainable manner that is respectful of the environment, its employees, and the public. A well-trained staff and the tools and data infrastructure to support their work are crucial. To carry out its mission, the Division will continue to manage in close collaboration with its partner divisions within FPR, allied departments within ANR, other state agencies, and with its partner organizations throughout Vermont.

## ASSESSMENT

### ASSESSMENT: REGULATORY PROGRAMS, POLICIES, AND COMPLIANCE

The Division, working with other staff in ANR, is responsible for administering, regulating, and providing technical assistance in an increasing number of programs, laws, rules, and policies, including:

- **HEAVY CUT LAW:** Regulates timber harvest intensity on cuts greater than 40 acres in size.
- **ACCEPTABLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:** Regulates timber harvesting practices that protect water quality.
- **USE VALUE APPRAISAL:** Provides property tax reductions for keeping land undeveloped and managed for forestry uses.
- **ACT 250:** Vermont's land use law regulating development, particularly timber harvesting over 2500' in elevation.
- **SHORELAND PROTECTION ACT:** Regulates shore land development within 250 feet of a lake or pond, including tree removal.
- **QUARANTINE REGULATIONS:** The Division and the Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets regulate non-native forest pests and products that can spread them, and help support USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service quarantines.

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## HEAVY CUT LAW

In 1997, the Vermont Legislature passed what is known as Vermont’s “Heavy Cut” law, V.S.A.10 Chapter 83 § 2625, to regulate heavy cutting and clear-cutting of forest land in Vermont. The law requires landowners who intend to conduct a heavy cut of 40 acres or more on land owned or controlled by the landowner, as well as landowners heavy cutting more than 80 acres within a 2-mile radius, to file a “Notice of Intent to Cut” with FPR. The law defines heavy cutting as a harvest which leaves a residual stocking level of acceptable growing stock below the “C-line”, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture silvicultural stocking guides. Landowners are required to file and receive approval for all proposed heavy cutting activity even if an exemption applies; the law provides for the following exemptions:

- Carry out an agricultural conversion plan and that the conversion will be completed and the land will be in agricultural production within five years;
- Carry out a conversion subject to regulation by an Act 250 District Commission and the Vermont Natural Resources Board under 10 V.S.A. Chapter 151 Act 250 or by the Public Service Board under Title 30;
- Be consistent with an approved Use Value Appraisal (UVA) (“Current Use”) forest management plan;
- Have a chip-harvesting plan approved by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife under a permit issued under 30 V.S.A. §248; or
- Be consistent with any other plan approved under other FPR rules.

Since the law went into effect, FPR has been aiding landowners with compliance and has been documenting the level of heavy cutting activity. The level of heavy cutting statewide has remained consistent over the last decade. Since 2010, numbers of approved heavy cuts range from a low of 48 in 2012 to a high of 59 in 2014 (Chart 11). Acres that were heavy cut range from a low of 4,607 in 2014 to a high of 8,009 in 2010 (Chart 12). Many approved heavy cuts qualify as exemptions. From 2010 to 2016, 305 applications concerning 35,670 acres qualified as exemptions. During this same timeframe, there were 72 approved ‘Notices of Intent’ to cut within 6,654 acres. Most of the approved heavy cutting has occurred in the Northeast Kingdom counties; from 2010 to 2016, 58% of approved heavy cuts and 65% of the total acreage were in this region.

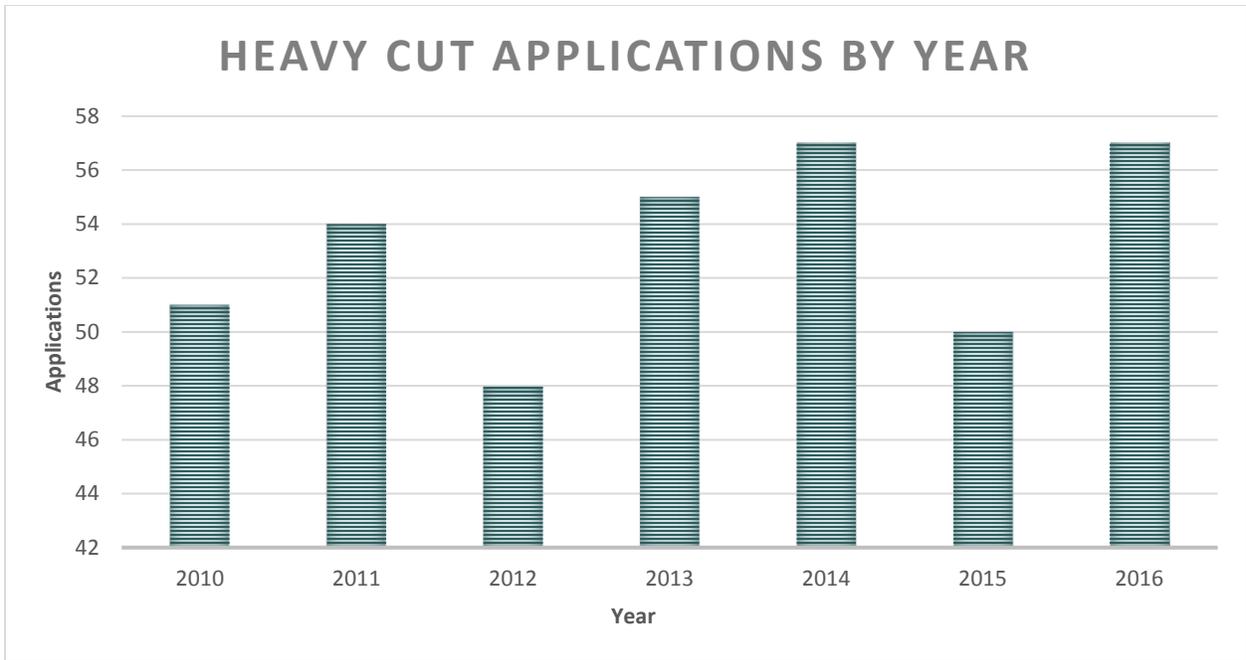


Chart 11: Heavy Cut Applications by Year. Source: FPR.

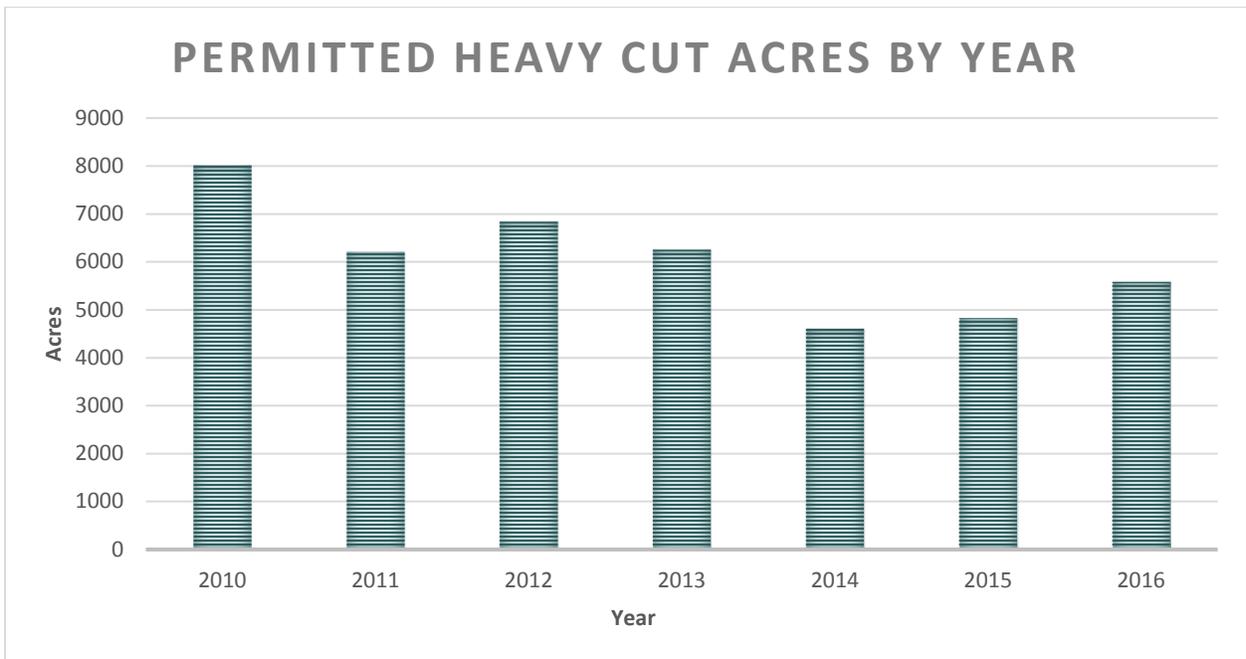


Chart 12: Permitted Heavy Cut Acres by Year. Source: FPR.

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## ACCEPTABLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR MAINTAINING WATER QUALITY ON LOGGING JOBS

The 1986 Vermont Legislature passed amendments to Vermont's water quality statutes, Title 10 VSA Chapter 47: Water Pollution Control, which stated that "it is the policy of the State to seek over the long-term to upgrade the quality of waters and to reduce existing risks to water quality." The revised state law requires permits for discharges of "any waste, substance, or material into the waters of the state." However, individual permits are not required for any discharges that inadvertently result from logging operations, if responsible management practices have been followed to protect water quality. AMPs for Maintaining Water Quality in Vermont were developed and adopted as rules for Vermont's water quality statutes and became effective August 15, 1987. The AMPs are intended and designed to prevent sediment, petroleum products, and woody debris (logging slash) from entering Vermont's waters. The AMPs were revised in 2016 with an improved set of practices as a requirement of Act 64, legislation to improve water quality. The division has started the process to update the AMP manual with the new rules, supporting information about how to implement the rules, and additional information such as timber sale planning and guidelines for harvesting near wetlands. The manual is expected to be completed by early summer 2017.

Since the adoption of AMPs, FPR has provided education, outreach, and technical assistance to logging contractors, landowners, and licensed foresters to reduce the number and severity of discharges resulting from logging operations. AMP activities are summarized in annual statewide summary reports.

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## USE VALUE APPRAISAL

Vermont's UVA Program - also known as "Current Use" - enables eligible lands to be appraised based on the property's value of production of wood or crops rather than its residential or commercial development value where owners practice long-term forestry or agriculture. For more information on this program please refer to Desired Future Condition 2.

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## ACT 250

Act 250, Vermont's land use law, was enacted in 1970 and is recognized nationally as a landmark land use regulation. Ten criteria were developed to minimize environmental impact from development. Headwaters, predominantly forested and considered as pristine, are defined and protected under this state statute. Because headwater streams have significant influence on downstream river processes, it is important to direct protection and conservation efforts to maintain and enhance forest cover in these watersheds. All logging over 2500' in elevation needs to go through Act 250 review.

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## SHORELAND PROTECTION ACT

Effective July 1, 2014, the Vermont Legislature passed the Shoreland Protection Act (Chapter 49A of Title 10, §1441 et seq.), which regulates shoreland development within 250 feet of a lake's mean water level for all lakes and ponds greater than 10 acres in size (550 lakes and ponds in Vermont meet this criterion). The intent of this legislation is to prevent degradation of water quality, preserve habitat and natural stability of shorelines, and maintain the economic benefits of lakes and ponds and their associated shorelands. The Act seeks to balance good shoreland management and shoreland development.

Silvicultural activities are allowed in a protected shoreland area if the activities comply with a forest management plan approved by the Commissioner of FPR and follow AMPs. Parcels that don't have an approved plan must conform to the Vegetation Protective Standards under the Shoreland Protection Act for tree removal within the protection zone. Under these standards, existing vegetation must be measured using a plot system to determine how many trees must be preserved. Because streams can deliver sediment to a lake, they, and other sources of runoff associated with silvicultural activities, need to be protected and managed to prevent erosion from reaching a lake or pond.

### ASSESSMENT: PLANNING

The Division has a long history of proactive planning. The 2010 Plan built on this tradition by incorporating many of our other Agency and internal planning efforts into a broader vision that identified landscape-scale resource opportunities and created a forest sustainability strategy that linked the over-arching vision to program specific approaches. Since 2010, many of these planning efforts have been updated and other new planning documents and processes have been developed. Our 2017 Plan update incorporates these more recent documents, including:

- 2015 VERMONT FOREST FRAGMENTATION REPORT TO THE VERMONT LEGISLATURE assessing the current and projected effects of fragmentation on Vermont's forest land and recommendations for how to best protect the integrity of Vermont's forest land. As requested by the Legislature, a follow-up report, RECOMMENDATIONS IN SUPPORT OF FOREST HEALTH AND INTEGRITY IN RESPONSE TO ACT 61 OF 2015, was produced in 2016 to identify policy considerations.
- CREATING AND MAINTAINING RESILIENT FORESTS IN VERMONT: ADAPTING FORESTS TO CLIMATE CHANGE was published in 2015 by FPR to provide land managers with a menu of forest adaptation strategies; many policy-level strategies have been included in recognition of the connections between statewide policy and forest management.

- 2015 REVISED VERMONT WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN is an update of Vermont's first Wildlife Action Plan, created in 2005. Congress requires that each state revises its Action Plan at least every ten years to remain eligible for State Wildlife Grants (SWG) funds.
- THE NORTHEASTERN AREA STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2013-2018 identifies the most important forest-related challenges and opportunities we face and sets priorities to guide us as we work with others toward our vision for forests in the 21st century.
- GREEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN guides the management of the GMNF for the current planning period (2006 to 2021). The Forest Plan is strategic in nature, with an emphasis on ecological, social, and economic sustainability over the long-term.
- FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM, ANALYSIS OF NEED (AON) documents the threat of loss of traditional forest values and benefits and, with the approval of the USDA Forest Service, delineates an area or areas (Forest Legacy Area) in the state in greatest need of assistance from the program. The process for doing this is referred to as the Assessment of Need (AON). It was approved in 2010.
- VERMONT CONSERVATION DESIGN: MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING AN ECOLOGICALLY FUNCTIONAL LANDSCAPE identifies coarse-filter conservation targets for landscape-scale features including forest blocks, riparian areas, wildlife and landscape connectivity, and physical landscape diversity. These features are necessary to effectively conserve many finer scale conservation elements in the face of climate change and habitat loss. The Vermont Conservation Design is an integral part of the 2015 revised State Wildlife Action Plan.
- AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES-ANR LANDS CONSERVATION PLAN guides future Agency land acquisition and other land conservation transactions.
- VERMONT STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP) 2014-2018 assesses the supply, demand, quality, priorities, and issues surrounding outdoor recreation in the state, and sets forth a plan of action for achieving a desired vision for outdoor recreation.
- STATE LANDS PLANNING Lands owned by FPR and VFW are managed under the guidance of long-range management plans. The development of these comprehensive plans is based on multi-resource inventory data including an assessment of natural communities, wildlife habitat, timber, recreation, and historic resources. Each planning effort includes public outreach. Long-range management plans may address just a single state forest or wildlife management area or may be several parcels combined into a management unit.
- WORKING LANDS SUMMIT gathered over 100 forest, forestry, and wood products professionals in 2015 to discuss opportunities for this important sector. The Vermont forest and wood products industry employs

over 10,000 Vermonters and generates over \$1.4 billion in economic output yearly, and is a critical component of Vermont's economy.

- INTERNAL DIVISION PLANS are important for moving Division programs forward. Division programs that have plans include Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Resource Protection, and Forest Resource Management. The development of some of these plans have engaged stakeholders and are strategic, while others are truly internal work plans.

## ASSESSMENT: FOREST DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

The strategies developed to implement this 2017 Plan are dependent on data to inform decisions and management. An enormous volume of government, NGO, and private sector data is available concerning forests, plants, animals, ecosystems, climate, geology, hydrology, and social and economic factors. The management, storage, and accessibility of this data is a significant issue. It is crucial that forest data infrastructure is developed, maintained, and supported, both in-house and with partners. Within ANR, the Information Technology Division (ITD) is key to our efforts.

Vermont has had a statewide GIS program for geographic information and related technology since the late 1980s. Known as the Vermont Geographic Information System (VGIS), it is managed by the Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI). VCGI administers a clearinghouse for Vermont GIS data and provides access to GIS services and expertise to state agencies as well as academic, public, and private entities in Vermont.

The Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative (FEMC) manages over three decades of Vermont's forest ecosystem data intended to benefit research, natural resource management, education, and public interest. In recent years, FEMC has grown to become a critical database management service and information coordinator for Vermont's long-term forest ecosystem and air quality studies. FEMC continues to upgrade and modernize its database service for both numerical and spatial data, real-time data access, data quality assurance and control, and ease of use for scientific, natural resource manager, education, and public interests.

Our largest partner for data infrastructure remains the federal government, particularly the USDA Forest Service. Our program and strategies in the areas of Climate Change, Forest Health, and Forest Inventory are heavily dependent on federal data infrastructure. Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) is and will continue to be the most important data source to support Vermont's monitoring of forest health and sustainability. Adequate funding at the federal level is paramount to maintaining this important dataset.

## ASSESSMENT: PARTNERSHIPS

The Division has a legislative mandate to lead Vermont's forest stewardship and management efforts but we cannot carry out our mission and vision and implement this plan without the support of our major partner organizations. Our long history of collaboration with other public agencies, internal partners in ANR, throughout state, and municipal government, educational institutions, federal and regional partners, and numerous nonprofit and user groups has positioned us well to collectively leverage our resources to carry out the 2017 Plan. In 2015, it became apparent that money and staff will continue to be under pressure from budgetary pressures into the coming years. The work of our partners in supporting and carrying out this plan is essential. Some of our key partners are discussed below; others have been identified throughout this plan.

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### USDA FOREST SERVICE

The USDA Forest Service, comprised of three separate and distinct units, has long been our key federal partner and their support for this plan at every level is the key to its success. Research and Development provides valuable resource assessments through Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA), and research in a broad range of fields to promote sustainable management. State and Private Forestry provides technical assistance to landowners and resource managers, primarily through partnerships with state forestry agencies, to help sustain the nation's forests and communities. Finally, the National Forest System manages almost 200 million acres of forests and grasslands. Within Vermont, the over 400,000-acre Green Mountain National Forest is managed out of offices in Rutland, Manchester, and Rochester.

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### GREEN MOUNTAIN AND FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST

FPR and GMNF are the two largest forest landowners in Vermont and have a long history of collaboration. As budgets are reduced for both organizations, the way forward will undoubtedly involve more creative partnerships to accomplish management and planning needs. Issues such as climate change, watershed health, recreation, ecosystem services, and resilient forests increasingly cut across forest boundaries. Highlights of this collaboration include:

- Forest health monitoring through the Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative and aerial surveys;
- Forest pest management, such as invasive species monitoring and control work on developed recreation sites, and on both the GMNF and in state parks;
- Timber sale marking assistance;
- Forest fire control and emergency response;
- Response to Tropical Storm Irene;
- Landscape-scale planning efforts; and
- Management of diverse forest habitats for wildlife.

FPR has worked with GMNF staff since the early stages of this planning process to solicit their input on this plan. Interaction has occurred both directly and through collaborative partnerships that both GMNF and FPR are involved in, including the Forest Roundtable and the Staying Connected Initiative.

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## NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE

In addition to the USDA Forest Service S&PF, one of the Division's important federal partnerships is with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS' role is to work with private forest landowners to help them understand the effects of different management decisions. Identified 'problems' on the land, or 'resource concerns', are identified and addressed with conservation practices implemented through a Conservation Plan.

NRCS works in collaboration with FPR and VFW through a cooperative agreement to provide technical assistance to landowners on forestry and wildlife habitat concerns. For those that do not have a forest plan, NRCS offers funding for a Forest Management Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) that meets UVA standards and addresses forest stewardship elements such as recreation, aesthetics, cultural resources, wildlife habitat, and rare species. In addition, NRCS funded plans provide a framework for identifying and implementing NRCS practices. NRCS has a list of private consulting Technical Service Provider foresters approved to develop these plans and carry out practices ranging from wildlife habitat improvement to invasive plant control to skid road stabilization and stream crossing protection. Currently, UVA Forest Management plans are sufficient for meeting the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) requirement that a participant have a forest management plan before a forest-based practice may be implemented.

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## VERMONT STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Vermont State Technical Committee (STC) meets on a regular basis to provide information, analysis, and recommendations on a wide variety of policy issues to NRCS through the State Conservationist. The State Forester is the Department representative on the STC. Our 2017 Plan was presented to The STC at one of their regular meetings and reviewed over a period of a few weeks by select individuals of the group.

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## FOREST ROUNDTABLE

The Forest Roundtable (Roundtable) provides a link to nonprofit and other partners organizations. Conceived and convened by the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) in 2006, the Roundtable is a venue for the exchange of information related to keeping Vermont's forests as forests, with attention focused on addressing parcelization and forest fragmentation. The Roundtable has grown in participation and interest, with over 180 people now tracking its progress. Participants have included consulting foresters, professional planners, government officials, landowners,

sportsmen, representatives from the forest products industry, conservation groups, biomass energy organizations, and public and private universities and colleges. VNRC's goal as convener of the Roundtable has been to create an open forum through which people with a broad range of perspectives could exchange information and, where possible, develop recommendations for policy changes. Roundtable meetings have addressed multiple topics, including trends in Vermont's real estate market and rising forest land values, property tax policy, land use and conservation planning, estate planning, landowner incentive programs such as the Current Use Program, and the long-term sustainability of the forest products industry.

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## **LANDOWNER ASSOCIATIONS**

The Division works closely with landowner associations, utilizing their collective and social connections to reach forest stewards and help us with plan implementation. Three of the most active landowner association partners are Vermont Family Forests, Coverts (focus on wildlife management), and the Vermont Woodlands Owners Association.

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## **UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT AND UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION**

We look to the University of Vermont (UVM) and, in particular, draw upon the natural resource expertise of the faculty and research staff in the Rubenstein School of the Environment & Natural Resources. UVM Extension's Natural Resources branch offers periodic workshops, short courses, and produces a variety of educational publications on forest management, maple, plant health, and urban and community forestry. The Division's Urban and Community Forestry Program has an extensive partnership and delivers the program jointly with four staff in residence. The University administers the Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative and provides quality data management services for the Division's ecosystem data.

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## **WOOD PRODUCTS ASSOCIATIONS**

The health and sustainability of Vermont's forests relies on a healthy economy and available markets. Wood products organizations provide vital support to those engaged in the working landscape. Advocacy, training and professional development, business planning, and safety are some of the topics supported by the wood products associations; these include Associated Industries of Vermont, Logger Education to Advance Professionalism, Vermont Forest Products Association, and the Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association.

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## **THE WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE**

An important partner in carrying out the 2017 Plan's strategies for working lands is the State of Vermont's Working Lands Enterprise Initiative. They created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) and the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB). The WLEB comprises private sector members throughout the supply chains of agriculture and forestry, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, FPR, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development,

Vermont Housing Conservation Board, Vermont Economic Development Authority, and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund.

## PRIORITY LANDSCAPES AND FOCUS AREAS

### FOCUS AREA: FORESTRY DIVISION FUNDING

The Division's annual budget is currently \$6.4 million. Funds come from: 60% general funds, 20% federal funds (excluding Forest Legacy Program acquisitions), 18% special funds, and 2% inter-departmental transfers. The percent of the Division's budget provided by federal funds has shifted over the past eight years from a high of 26.5% to a low of 20%; these shifts are a result of reductions in core federal program allocations and competitive sources.

Personnel costs make up roughly 80% of the Division's expenditures. The second largest expense is grants. Grants range from small, one-time expenses to more substantial on-going commitments primarily with UVM and UVM Extension. Decreasing revenues have led to the inability to rehire positions after retirements and a reduction of some grant amounts. We have attempted to increase revenues through some fee-for-service work to other public agencies and retention of income generated from the sale of forest products from state land. The Division works closely with many departments within state government as well as several federal agencies, all of whom are facing budgetary pressures of their own. Additional revenue enhancements are necessary, and will require an integrated approach that draws upon partner resources to support efforts within Vermont. To address this issue, we will continue to develop performance measures that accurately capture our outcomes and help us tell our story. We will leverage our work using partners wherever possible to maximize the impact and efficiency of our staff, knowing that increased staffing and funding will be tight in the near term fiscal environment.

### VERMONT FORESTRY DIVISION'S FY16 BUDGET SOURCE

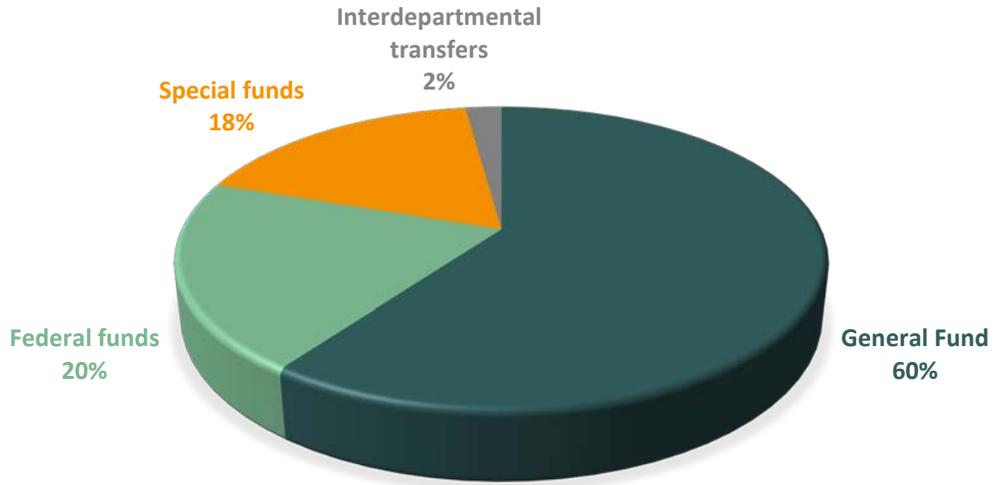


Chart 13: Vermont Forestry Divisions FY16 Budget Sources

### VERMONT FORESTRY DIVISION'S FY16 EXPENDITURES

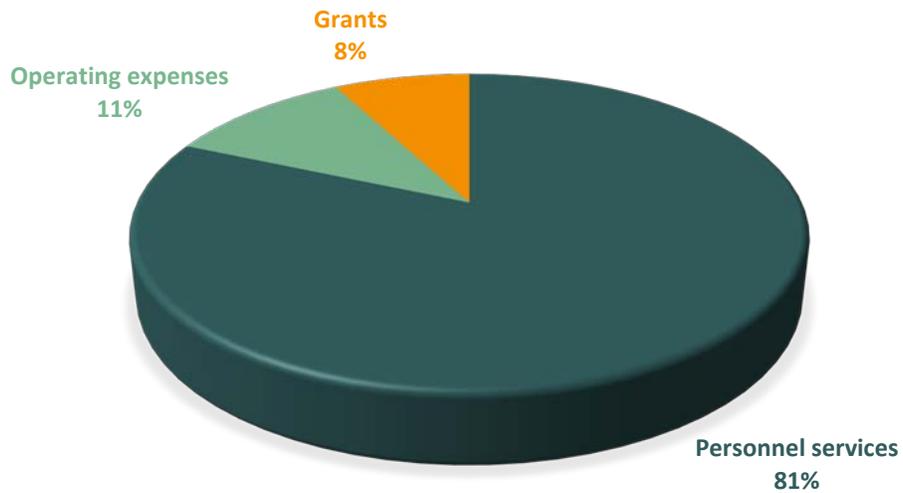


Chart 14: Vermont Forestry Division's FY16 Expenditures

## FOCUS AREA: SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIPS

The Division provides leadership and is the focal point for forestry issues in Vermont, but we cannot carry out our mission and vision without the support of our major partner organizations. The work of our external partners in supporting and carrying out the 2017 Plan is essential, as detailed earlier. Our long history of collaboration with our internal partners within ANR is one of the strengths of this plan and has been mentioned numerous times in our strategies and assessments. This internal collaboration will be a priority for this planning period.

We will continue our close cooperation with ANR, the VFW, and DEC (mentioned below), but also seek out new opportunities for collaboration with other parts of state government. Examples include the Agency of Transportation on initiatives such as green infrastructure planning and the Division of Marketing and Tourism for outreach efforts utilizing social media and other communication forums in which we lack capacity. We will also remain an integral part of the Vermont Forest Roundtable, which is a major connector to all our nonprofit and private partners in the Vermont forestry community.

## FOCUS AREA: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Division's greatest asset has always been its staff. A professional and dedicated workforce supported by upper management is critical in a climate of declining revenues. From a peak in the 1980's of 80 employees, in 2016 the Division had 57 full-time employees. In recent years, the Division has seen a significant number of retirements: 34 employees have retired in the last decade, and more are expected in the next few years. The loss of institutional memory due to retirements is a concern, as is the Division's ability to maintain its level of dedicated public service as staff levels are reduced. Maintaining a strong commitment to employees and teamwork is essential to meeting future challenges.

To address this issue, the division will institute several steps. We will investigate better efforts to onboard and mentor newer employees. We are developing an employee guide so that all our staff are better informed on policies, procedures, and programs. We are also working on better performance measures. To address staffing, we will continue to seek opportunities to collaborate and employ interns and other temporary employees.

## FOCUS AREA: POLICIES, RULES, AND LAWS

Providing information, technical assistance, and education to attain compliance with Vermont's forest policies, rules, and laws has always been a Division goal. As financial and staffing levels decrease, we must seek innovative methods to support enforcement of Vermont's laws and regulations to participate in the development of policies and rules to support the protection of forests into the future, and to sunset laws that are no longer helpful. We also need to

explore new methods of information outreach through social media. Finally, we will make sure our field staff is well informed on the latest laws and has adequate training in interpersonal and communication skills.

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

In the 2017 Plan, we have reexamined and revised the goals and strategies from our 2010 Plan. These are intentionally broad and flexible and we will tie specific projects and work plans during implementation. Although these goals focus on our DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION: VERMONT HAS A LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK IN PLACE FOR FOREST CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY, they may apply to other desired future conditions.

### GOAL 12: EXPAND FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT VERMONT'S FORESTS.

**Strategy 55:** Pursue new funding opportunities to support local, state, and regional efforts for forest conservation, forest health, and sustainability.

**Strategy 56:** Provide opportunities and incentives to encourage private contributions to support forest conservation and sustainability.

**Strategy 57:** Work with partners to support organizational viability and capacity.

**Strategy 58:** Keep the state legislature informed of the Forestry Division's current financial status, programming efforts, and opportunities and challenges.

**Strategy 59:** Maintain financial collaborations with partners, including the USDA Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

**Strategy 60:** Support the development of a carbon credit system that allows the aggregation of smaller parcels to enable them to remain economically viable and forested.

**Strategy 61:** Support efforts to monetize ecosystem services with an aim to reward and incentivize landowners for the contributions their forests provide.

**Strategy 62:** Support good stewardship through financial assistance for landowners and communities, including Natural Resource Conservation Service programs.

**GOAL 13: VERMONT'S FORESTRY POLICIES, RULES, AND LAWS ARE FOLLOWED.**

**Strategy 63:** Provide information, technical assistance, and education to support compliance with Vermont's forest policies, rules, and laws.

**Strategy 64:** Support enforcement of Vermont's laws and regulations and participate in the development and improvement of policies and rules that support forestry including Vermont's Acceptable Management Practices for Water Quality, Shoreland Protection Act, state and federal quarantines, and the reduction of Lake Champlain's TMDL.

**GOAL 14: INITIATE AND SUPPORT POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND INITIATIVES THAT ASSIST IN MAINTAINING A HEALTHY FOREST LANDSCAPE.**

**Strategy 65:** Support Vermont's Use Value Appraisal program to preserve the working landscape and the rural character of Vermont.

**Strategy 66:** Support financial incentives and programs that would help to protect and conserve forest land throughout Vermont and in the Lake Champlain watershed as the best land use for reducing phosphorous and other pollutants from entering waters of the state.

**Strategy 67:** Support new and emerging policies and initiatives, including forest certification, forester licensing, Voluntary Harvesting Guidelines, and state guidelines for management of riparian buffers, vernal pools, and other ecologically significant habitats.

**Strategy 68:** Support local, statewide, and regional planning efforts that encourage forest conservation and economic development and strengthen land tenure.

**Strategy 69:** Support policies and laws that reduce landowner liability, the trend of increased posted land, and encourage a land ethic that maintains the Vermont tradition of public access to private land.

**GOAL 15: MAINTAIN AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY WITHIN THE DIVISION OF FORESTS TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT, PROTECTION, CONSERVATION, AND USE OF VERMONT'S FORESTS.**

**Strategy 70:** Ensure that all programs are consistent with the Division's mission, indicators are appropriate to monitor progress, and results-based accounting is used to plan, strengthen, and prioritize programming.

**Strategy 71:** Maintain an appropriate level of infrastructure and staffing.

**Strategy 72:** Promote cross-program cooperation to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

**Strategy 73:** Maintain and develop data management systems and share data among partnerships to enhance internal and external communications and collaborations.

**Strategy 74:** Support professional development, continued learning, and succession planning for Division staff.

**Strategy 75:** Encourage an organizational culture within the Division that rewards excellence, encourages teamwork, and provides mentoring to achieve maximum job performance and satisfaction.

**Strategy 76:** Ensure Division policies and procedures are clear, sensible, and followed in a timely manner.

**Strategy 77:** Cultivate new strategic partnerships while enhancing existing collaborations to reach the desired future conditions outlined in this 2017 Plan.