

WORKING LANDSCAPE: AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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Ware Farm: Tunbridge | © First Light Studios

A. Introduction

The TRO Region has had a strong history of our residents making their living through their land. Like much of Vermont, historically much of the work done in our Region once had its roots in the land, whether through farming, forestry, or mining. While the face of agriculture and forestry has changed significantly since the 1800s, these vocations remain an essential part of what makes our Region what it is. Businesses that utilize the land help to shape it and give it the character that it has today. Without farming we would not have open rolling fields. In order to maintain our working landscape and the occupations it supports, we must recognize its contributions to our Region and be prepared to address the challenges to its sustainability.

B. Agriculture

In 2014, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets conducted a survey for their report on agricultural enterprises. Respondents to the survey identified the preservation of open

space and access to locally grown and processed food as the primary reasons land should be kept in agriculture. Farms provide open space for wildlife habitat, scenic views, and a connection to the land that is hard to find in other places. In addition, agriculture is an important piece of our local economy, providing opportunities for entrepreneurship that extend well beyond the farm. As such, to continue to receive the benefits farming has to offer, TRORC and our communities must continue to support agriculture.

Farming Trends

An analysis of the USDA Census of Agriculture data between 2002 and 2012 (2012 being the most recent period of data collected) shows that farming in Vermont is slowly shifting toward smaller farms. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of farms in Vermont increased by more than 11 percent. Growth in farms was at its highest among smaller farms, specifically in the 10 to 49 acre range.

The overall trend in farm growth in Vermont and the Region is in farms that are considered “small scale”—those that that sell under \$2,500 in agricultural products per year. While the number of small-scale farms continues to grow, these farms only produce 2.3 percent of Vermont’s agricultural income. Generally, these small-scale farms tend to be more diversified and not dependent on a single source of production like dairy.

Agriculture is an important piece of our local economy, providing opportunities for entrepreneurship that extend well beyond the farm.

While smaller farms grew in number, larger farms (between 180 and 1,000 acres) continued their decline between 2002 and 2012. Yet at the top end, there has been growth in Vermont’s largest farms (2,000 acres or more) as remaining operating farms, mainly dairy farms, purchase the land and stock of neighboring farms when those stop operating. The Region’s largest farms are primarily dairy farms.

Farm Economy

Vermont is within easy reach of millions of people in cities like Boston and New York City. Additionally, Vermonters are increasingly seeking locally sourced, sustainably produced farm and forest products. Fluctuating fuel prices have led to an increased interest in food and energy security. Vermont is a national leader in innovative education programs based on local food, agriculture, and healthy eating. It is also widely recognized for its strong network of land trusts and other nonprofits that are models for conserving farm and forest lands. As such, there is a growing mix of emerging entrepreneurs and long-time land-based businesses that are constantly evolving to stay competitive. Farms are producing biofuels, artisan cheese, specialty wood products, produce, breads, and other value-added items—all of which rely on the farm economy.

According to the Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan (2013), between companies responsible for farm inputs such as feed and labor, farms themselves, food processors, and wholesale food distributors, Vermont’s agricultural economy has almost 9,000 businesses employing nearly 30,000 people.¹ In 2012, USDA data indicated the estimated direct agricultural revenue in Vermont to be \$776 million per year.

Vermont has continued its efforts to encourage the continued diversification of on-farm businesses and more broadly to support rural economic development in both farm and forestry economic sectors. In 2012, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 142, which created the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, a State-supported grant program aimed at investing in Vermont’s farm, food, and forest economies.

Challenges

Loss of Farmland

From 1997 to 2007, Vermont lost (on average) nearly 8,200 acres of farmland each year, including 1,100 acres of prime cropland and pastureland, while the amount of developed land has increased nearly 4,700 acres annually.² This trend has slowed since 2013, but the loss of farmland remains a concern, particularly in more populated areas, where the pressure to utilize land for commercial or residential purposes is greater.

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For many farms (particularly dairy farms), a significant percentage of the lands actively managed do not actually belong to the farm, and instead are leased from a wide range of property owners for the purposes of haying or growing corn for feed, although some grazing takes place as well. The need to generate feed locally is a strong one, as local feed production is more cost-effective than purchasing feed. Purchased

grain costs are also often unstable due to external market fluctuations (such as fuel costs).

These leasing arrangements are beneficial to owners and farmers, but are not necessarily sustainable. When landowners sell their property to someone who intends to build a home on it, that farmable land is taken out of production. During a survey of farmers in Tunbridge, for example, one farmer indicated that if he were to lose 20 acres of land, it would seriously impact his ability to produce his feed locally.³ Keeping farmland in farming is a critical concern, since when good agricultural land is developed, it is permanently lost to farming.

Aging Farmers

The average age of Vermont farmers is 56, and over a quarter are 65 and older.⁴ This means that many farmers are reaching retirement age. While farm operations are often family owned, there is no guarantee that a family member will take over the farm.

Luckily, there are a growing number of young people interested in becoming farmers or starting a food enterprise business. The challenge is that farms are expensive to purchase and operate for new farmers. Most farms also require one or more family members to hold a full-time job to supplement farm income and maintain access to health insurance. The average wage for farm workers is just over \$11 per hour.

Land and Taxation

Rising tax rates due to increased property values and education costs find owners of farmland faced with a tax bill on land that often exceeds its economic value for agriculture purposes. These high property tax bills coupled with the low prices paid for commodity agricultural products like milk, a demand for development land in general, and their own lack of retirement savings have all pushed landowners to place their land on the market.

Unless the cost of owning farmland is reduced, meaning a reduction in property taxes, it

becomes difficult to rationalize conventional farming and forestry pursuits. The general problem of taxation is exacerbated because towns and school districts are primarily dependent on property taxes to raise local revenues. Furthermore, any reduction in the amount of taxes received from active open land needs to be made up by non-farm, non-forest, or non-enrolled taxpayers, many of whom are unable to pay more.

Climate Shift

Farming is a livelihood that depends on the weather. Rain at the right time, frost that does not come too late or too early, temperatures warm enough but not too hot. All of the parts of weather have variability, but the general conditions that we expect over the course of the year are the climate. With the climate expected to shift toward one that more resembles that of areas farther south, there will be challenges and opportunities. One of the larger issues for milk production will be hotter days in the summer. Irrigation will likely be needed in July. Warmer winters will extend some cold season crops but will hurt maple syrup production as well. Greater rainstorms will make fields too wet to work at times and erode precious topsoil.⁵

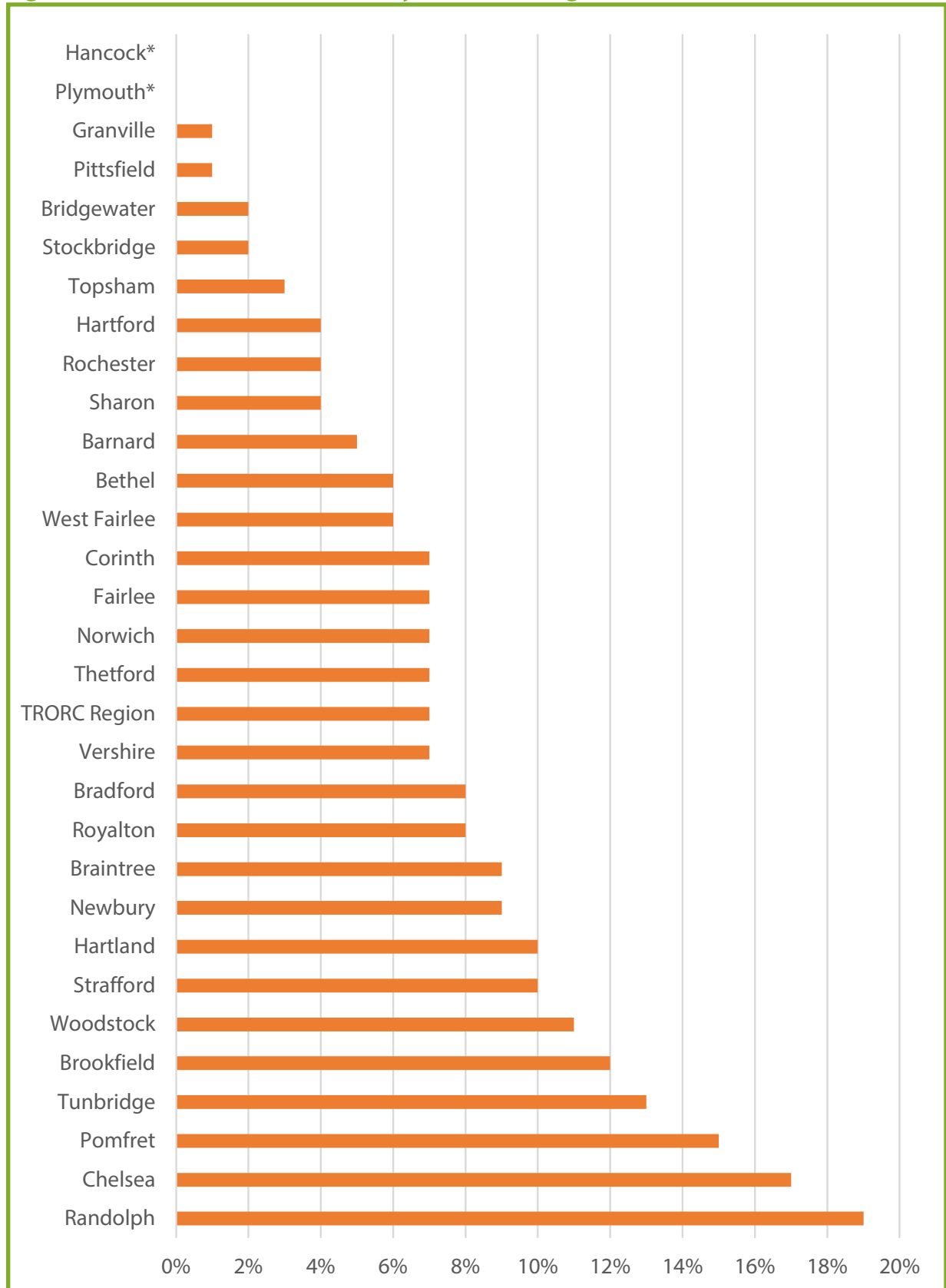
Solutions

Current Use and Tax Stabilization

The most common method used to reduce the tax burden on farming and forestry operations is through the Vermont Current Use Program. The main incentive for Current Use to landowners is that it allows participating landowners to pay much lower taxes on their forest or farm lands based on their use value, rather than for their

Vermont has lost (on average) nearly 8,000 acres of farmland each year, including 1,100 acres of prime crop and pastureland; while the amount of developed land has increased nearly 4,700 acres annually.

Figure 5-1: Current Use Enrollment by Town, TRO Region



Source: Vermont Department of Taxes, 2016

Hancock and Plymouth are reflected on this graph as having 0% while in reality they do have a small amount enrolled.

development potential. The State makes up the difference in tax payments through appropriated funds every year, thus allowing towns to still benefit from full taxation. Since Current Use is funded by the State, all taxpayers essentially fund this program.

The primary objectives of the program have been to preserve Vermont's agricultural and forest lands, keep them in production, and achieve greater equity in property taxation based on use. Forty-six percent of the Region's total land is enrolled in some form of Current Use, and most of these lands are forested. Out of the total lands enrolled in Current Use, only 15 percent are agricultural lands. This is due to the program's strict definition of agricultural use. However, land that is enrolled as agricultural receives a significantly greater tax benefit than forest land. Both figures underrepresent land actually in agriculture and forestry, since not all owners take advantage of the program and some small farm operations are under the 25-acre threshold for the program.

Farmland Preservation

Preserving farmland is often achieved by utilizing a mix of programs that provide incentives for landowners to keep their land in farming and regulations that limit the impacts of development on the land. The most common nonregulatory method of farmland preservation is the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. While preservation efforts may begin at the local level, they often include organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust or the Upper Valley Land Trust, both of which work to actively conserve working lands in the TRO Region. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, which is the primary funder of land conservation projects in the State, may also play a critical role in local farmland preservation efforts.

Municipal regulatory methods use zoning and/or subdivision rules to regulate the location, density, and design of development within selected areas to protect farmland. Regulatory methods include:

- **Overlay/Special Districts** – Overlay districts can be based on maps of open areas or agricultural soils. Within the overlay, additional standards apply to the underlying district and can be used to exclude development on farmland or to impose resource protection standards. Special districts are very similar, but there is no underlying district, and the district usually is based on general areas where agricultural lands are present and not the specific outlines of such lands.
- **Large Lot Zoning** – A crude but somewhat effective tool, zoning for certain districts can require a very large minimum lot size that is good for resource-based uses, such as farming or forestry, and helps to discourage residential development. However, it can also simply result in a pattern of very scattered, low-density development.
- **Density Provisions** – A more complex but effective solution than large minimum lot sizes is allowing a small minimum lot size paired with very low density provision. For example, instead of a district, where new lots would have to be at least 10 acres, with a 10-acre density, farmers or timberland owners could sell just a one-acre house lot and keep the remaining 9 acres as undeveloped and in production. This way, they can earn some income while preserving most of their land.
- **Conservation (Open Space) Subdivision Design** – Conservation or open space subdivision design is a subdivision design process wherein subdivisions are intentionally designed to protect rural character and open space, usually by concentrating development along the edge or in just one part of a large parcel. Towns can offer bonus incentives to do this so that developers would end up with more house lots than standard, but the overall effect would be less fragmentation of land. Both conservation subdivisions and meeting density provisions can be expanded by towns to apply not just within a parcel, but across

parcels. This could result in much more development on a single parcel/subdivision than would otherwise be allowed, but having much larger open lands retained in other areas.

Each of these methods has its own set of benefits and pitfalls and all of them should be thoroughly evaluated before they are implemented. However, there are many examples of successful regulatory land protection strategies in Vermont. The key to success is to ensure that the community supports the regulations.

Value-Added Products

Farm innovation and diversification is essential to sustaining our working landscape. Instabilities in traditional markets, such as dairy, mean that farmers need to embrace broader ways to utilize their farms and sell their products, such as direct-to-consumer sales, on-farm events, participation in farmers markets, agritourism, and the

production of value-added products.

Direct-to-consumer sales represents a step away from the traditional model established by the dairy industry. As farms try to take advantage of the growing market for locally produced foods, they are often challenged by the perception that food should be cheap. The artificially low cost of our industrial food system impacts demand for local products. To counter this, farmers must improve consumer education, helping them recognize the broader benefits (social, economic, environmental, etc.) of buying locally and regionally produced food. Marketing and market development are key components to educating and encouraging new customers.

Utilizing on-farm assets to develop agripreneurial enterprises beyond direct food production is a way to increase sustainability and encourage economic growth. For example, many farms are experimenting with on-farm events such as weddings, farm stays, concerts, or festivals, as well as joint retail or processing of area farms' products. Some farms have developed their own restaurants that take advantage of the types of food produced on the farm and other local farms to create seasonally developed menus that focus on fine dining.

Farming itself is exempt from local land use regulations per Vermont statute, but many of these new types of nontraditional commercial uses can be regulated, at least to a certain extent. Legislation passed in 2018 expanded protections to “accessory on-farm businesses” so that towns cannot prohibit them. As farmers develop these new markets, land use regulations will need to be revised to address them, balancing the impacts of these potential uses with the need to support these new innovations. It should be noted that farming operations that are not regulated by towns are still subject to state rules on water quality and in most cases will comply with zoning setbacks.

It is important to recognize that the “value-added” concept in agriculture goes beyond



Farm in Granville | © John Knox

the development of products or services. When approached in an ecologically sound manner, farming adds value to our ecosystem. Regenerative agriculture techniques such as permaculture and holistic management utilize a range of approaches, including maintaining a high percentage of organic matter in soils, minimum tillage, biodiversity, composting, mulching, crop rotation, cover crops, and green manures, to improve soil health and biodiversity. By utilizing ecologically sound farming techniques, farmers are adding value to the lands in our Region by improving their health. This has broad benefits from an ecological standpoint, but it also allows for more sustainable agricultural production.

C. Forestry

Vermont is one of the most heavily forested states in the nation, with 4.6 million acres, 75 percent of its lands, covered in trees. The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Region is emblematic of this and is situated within the larger northeastern forest corridor, which contains the Green Mountains (running down the spine of Vermont), the Adirondack Mountains (in eastern New York), and the White Mountains (in western New Hampshire). Accordingly, two famous hiking trails run through the TRO Region: the Long Trail (which stretches from the northern to the southern border of Vermont) and the Appalachian Trail (which cuts a path between Georgia and Maine).

Forestlands in the Region are widespread except in open bottomlands along rivers and in the agricultural centers from Randolph to Tunbridge. Forests are owned by the federal, state, or even local governments, but most forestland is owned by private individuals and companies. Some of the private properties have been conserved with the assistance of local land trusts (for example, the Vermont Land Trust or the Upper Valley Land Trust), while many others are enrolled in the State's Use Value Appraisal Program (UVA or "Current Use").

Healthy forests provide a significant number of benefits to our communities. Environmental services of forests include clean water supply, clean air, mitigation against climate change, wildlife habitat, and biological diversity. Economic benefits of forests include tourism, recreation, and raw supply for the wood products industry.

As can be seen from Figures 5-2 and 5-3, most of the parcels in the Region are 5 acres or fewer, with only 5 percent having 100 acres or more. However, this relatively small number of large (100+ acres) parcels contain more than half of the land in the Region. The data indicates that the number of parcels in the 50-200 acre range that are being subdivided into parcels of 2-25 acres is increasing.

Challenges

Forest Fragmentation

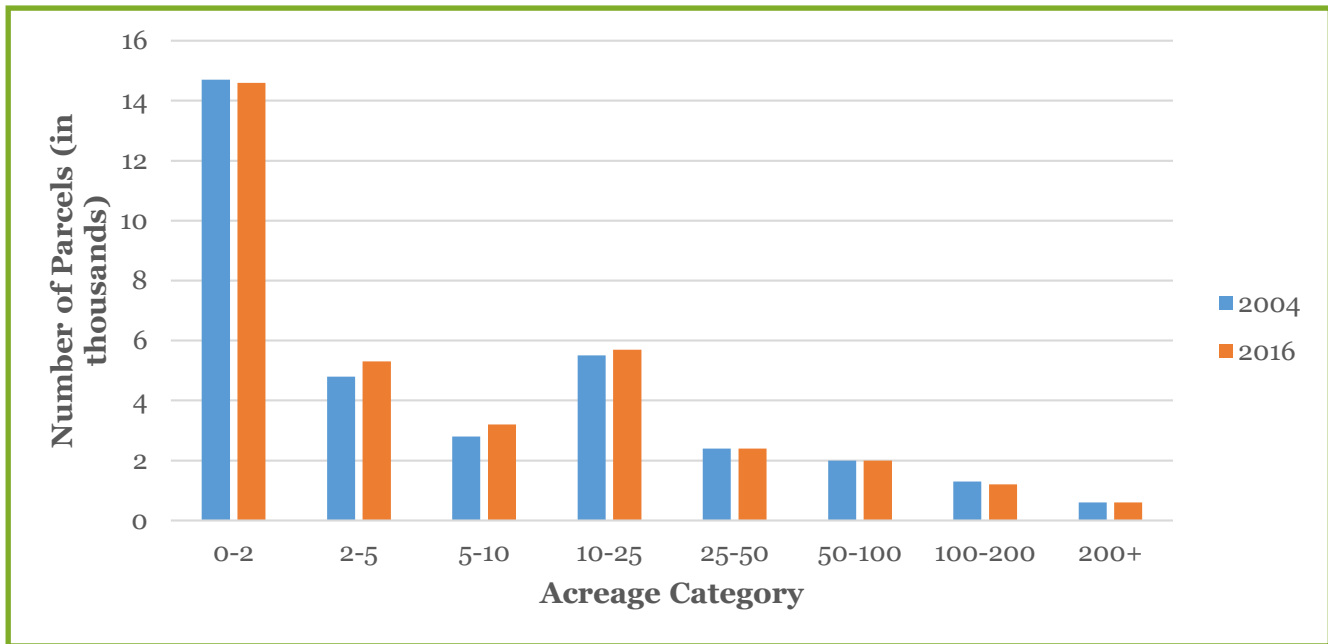
Vermont had long been gaining overall forest as fields reverted to woods, but that has now peaked. The 2013 U.S. Forest Service's national Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program report indicates that since 2007 there has been a continuing, though gradual, loss, totaling about 75,000 acres of forestland in Vermont as forests are converted to developed land. Of even greater concern is the fragmentation of lands that are still forested, causing many of these lands to lose ecological functions and also to be harder to manage for forestry.

The 2015 Vermont Forest Fragmentation Report identifies the following causes of loss of forest:

- Escalating land prices
- Increased property taxes
- Conveyance of land from aging landowners
- Exurbanization (the trend of moving out of urban areas into rural areas)

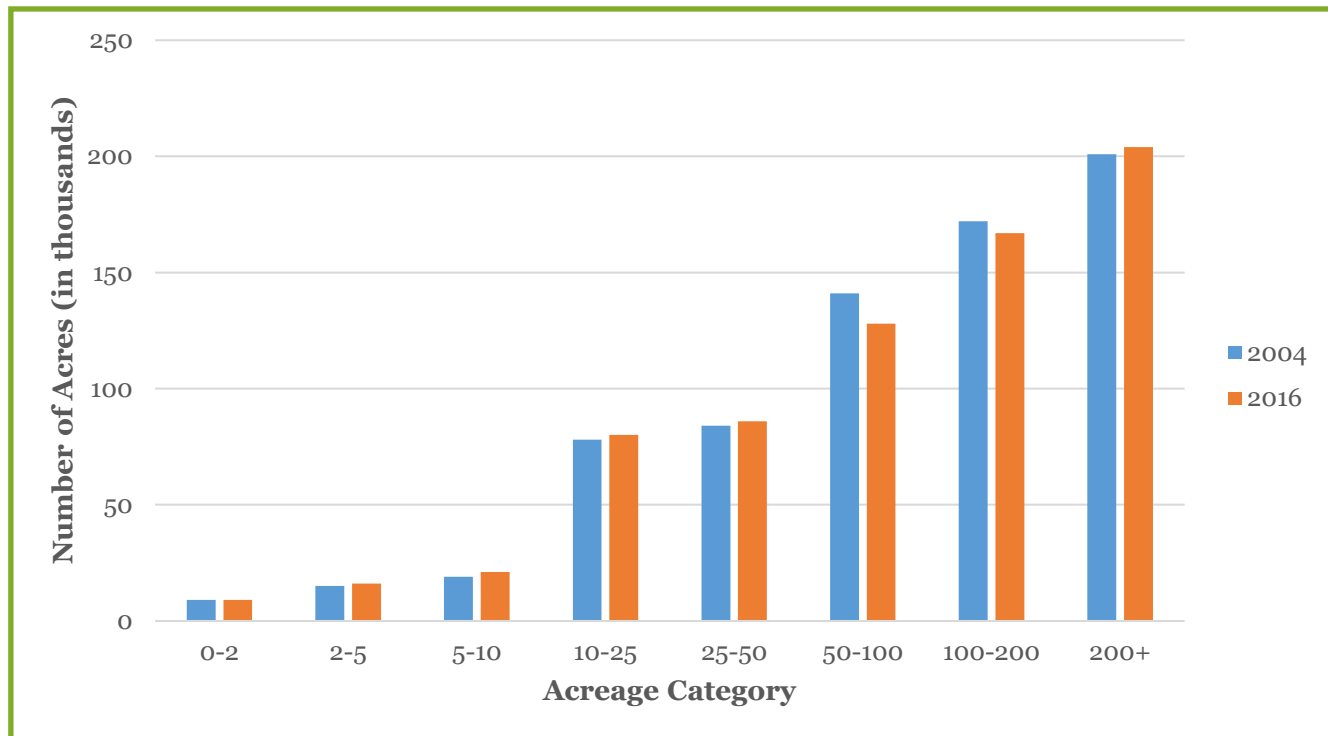
While development pressures have slowed in Vermont since 2010, the damage done to our forestlands has been significant, and statewide we are still losing 1,500 acres of forest a year.⁶ In

Figure 5-2: Number of Parcels by Size, TRO Region



Source: Vermont Natural Resources Council

Figure 5-3: Number of Acres by Parcel Size, TRO Region



Source: Vermont Natural Resources Council

several of our communities (including Randolph, Hartland, and Brookfield), there are essentially no longer large, contiguous, forested areas to serve as significant wildlife habitat or to act as connections to larger areas of habitat. (See the Forest-Based Resource Areas section of the Land Use chapter for more on this subject.)

Changing Forest Economy

Forest product manufacturing and recreation represents a significant economic driver in Vermont. In 2011, the wood manufacturing industry generated over \$1.4 billion in economic benefit for the State, and during the same year, forest recreation (e.g., skiing) generated \$1.9 billion. Since 2011, however, the forest industry has experienced several significant changes that threaten its viability. Due primarily to outside forces, paper mills in Maine, which were a significant buyer of low-grade pulp wood, have stopped operating. While there are opportunities for low-grade woods to be used in renewable energy generation, these have yet to materialize at a scale that offsets changes to the paper industry.

Changing Forest Health

As the pattern of climate change worldwide progresses, the habitat ranges of many North American species are moving north and to higher elevations. Forests are made up of complex webs of geology, climate, plants, fungi, and animals. Alterations in climate will affect not just animals, but also the trees that are the most visible aspect of forests. Tree species that make up our forests are expected to shift from the dominant hardwoods being maple, birch, and beech to oak and hickory. The habitat for the trees that we currently have is likely to shift 350-500 miles further north. Warmer climes will allow pests like the woolly adelgid (which can be killed off by cold) to become more prevalent and hurt hemlocks. Spruce will move up or out.⁷

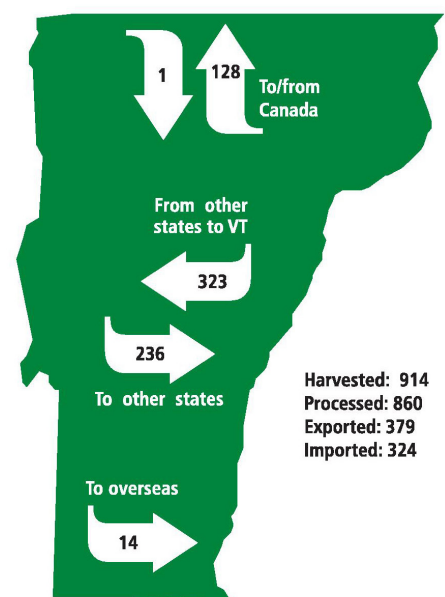
According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in recent decades plants and animals have moved to higher elevations at a median rate of 36 feet per decade, and to higher latitudes at

a median rate of 10.5 miles per decade. While animals can move faster than plants, some animals still can only move slowly and only if there is uninterrupted and suitable habitat. Grass and shrub species, including invasives, move faster than trees, which typically can only advance about 100-200 yards per year.⁸ This is significantly slower than the rate habitats are shifting northward. While this climate shift means an expansion of range for some species, for others it means movement into less hospitable habitat, increased competition, or range reduction, with some species having nowhere to go because they are already at the top of a mountain or at the northern (or southern) limit of land suitable for their habitat.

Another separate, but related at times, threat to forest health is the spread of invasive species, primarily forest pest insects and diseases. Just as we lost our native chestnut forests and many of our elms, we now face pests to ash (emerald ash borer) and hemlock (woolly adelgid, mentioned above) that could decimate these trees. Many other pests and diseases are on the rise that also threaten maple, beech, and even oak.

Significant changes in our forest ecosystem will affect our current forestry management techniques and our forest economy. Even with sound ecological forest management practices, adapting to new forest species and combating invasive species will be challenging.

Wood Flows to and from Vermont - in 1000 cords



Source: North East State Foresters Association



Sharon | © John Knox

Challenges to Maintaining and Enhancing Our Forestlands

In 2011, TRORC formed a Forest Stewardship Committee to explore threats to forest stewardship in this Region and develop strategies to maintain and enhance our forestlands in the future. The Committee comprised forest landowners, consulting foresters, loggers, and members of local forest health organizations, such as the Linking Lands Alliance and the White River Partnership. They identified the following as this Region’s top three threats to forestry:

1. The lack of personal and cultural connections to forests in general, actual forested lands in Vermont, and the many forest products we use and take for granted on a daily basis.
2. The lack of a “buy local” forest products movement, or lack of successful branding/marketing techniques for forest products.
3. The decreasing number of manufacturing

or wood processing sites in Vermont, which has resulted in Vermonters shipping more raw materials out of state to become finished products.

Solutions

Support Current Use

As with agriculture, one of the key State-based efforts to maintain forestlands across Vermont is the Current Use Program. Funding of the Current Use Program has been identified by the Northern Forest Lands Council as vital to ensuring that landowners do not overharvest their forests or opt for liquidation cutting of tracts. In their study that used cost data, stumpage prices, and taxation scenarios, the Council concluded that timber management is only profitable at very low annual taxes (\$2 per acre) and even at that level, only the better sites are profitable. In addition to the problem of high property taxes, forest landowners must grapple with the fact that property taxes are assessed on a yearly basis, and unlike most agricultural crops, timber harvests are not an annual event (indeed, they are usually set apart by decades). In addition to the tax benefits of the program, those lands in Current Use that are forested require a forestry management plan. The maintenance of these plans contributes to the overall health of our forests. Of the total lands in Current Use in the TRO Region (380,681 acres), the vast majority (321,765 acres) of them are enrolled as forestland.

Reduce Parcelization of Forests

A sustainable and economically viable forest products industry clearly depends on the availability of harvestable wood. Protecting forestlands from parcelization is a key component of maintaining forestry in our Region. This can be done through nonregulatory and regulatory means.

- Conservation Planning – As part of a local planning process, communities can identify the extent and location of forest resources, prioritize which areas are suitable for resource protection, and recommend

strategies for conserving these lands. This Plan takes a similar approach through the identification of Forest-Based Resource Areas in the Land Use chapter.

- Estate Planning – Municipalities can encourage landowners to engage in estate planning so that forestland can be maintained across generations, thus reducing the future threat of subdivision due to a death in the family, an unforeseen illness, or other events.
- Land Conservation – Municipalities can be involved in the land conservation process through the development of a conservation fund (generally managed by a conservation commission with oversight from the selectboard) that acts as a savings account that can be used to help conserve land.

Regulatory methods, such as those mentioned earlier in the chapter for agricultural lands, can similarly be applied to forest lands.

New Forest Product Markets

With changes to the forest industry throughout Vermont, it will be necessary to support programs and initiatives like the Forest Products Value Chain Investment Program (a collaboration

between the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, the Northern Forest Center, and the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board) that seek to enhance the economic competitiveness of the forest products industry in the Region by exploring ways to access new markets outside the State, developing new products that could be produced using Vermont wood, encouraging innovation, and facilitating collaboration among industry members.

Encourage Ecologically Sound Forestry Management Practices

Just as farms can be managed in a way that improves soil health, forests can also be managed both for fiber production and to improve habitat and maintain water quality. In order to effectively manage our forestlands in an ecologically sustainable manner, it will be necessary to properly educate landowners and the foresters who manage their lands as to what the best management practices are. Focusing on methods that support and improve biological diversity and forest vitality will help maintain good forest function.

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Working Landscape

Goals

1. Forestlands provide native species with adequate and varied habitat under a changing environment and threats from invasive species.
2. Agriculture and forestry continue to preserve, reinforce, and revitalize the best characteristics of the Region’s landscape and communities while also improving soil and forest health.
3. A dynamic diversity of businesses based on farming and forestry provide food and fiber for our citizens and jobs and prosperity in our rural communities.

Policies

1. To improve timber stands and provide some value to forest owners, new thermal/ renewable energy generation systems, from residential to village scale, that utilize sustainably harvested, low-grade woody biomass are encouraged.
2. Local and regional marketing and value-added industries to improve the economies of farm and forest operations are encouraged.
3. Forestry practices shall maintain or enhance the diversity of ecosystems existing in the Region.
4. Businesses that are sited and designed in accordance with this Plan and promote the local processing, sale, and distribution of native raw materials and products are encouraged. Planning and regulatory review at the state and local levels should not unduly restrict the development of such commercial operations, which complement farming and forestry.

Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Working Landscape**

Policies (continued)

5. To minimize point and non-point source pollution, loggers and foresters must use Accepted Management Practices (AMP) and are encouraged to implement Best Management Practices (BMP) in their operations; farmers must meet state standards for Required Agricultural Practices.
6. It is the policy of TRORC to minimize or mitigate the loss of agricultural and silvicultural lands to development. When on-site protections are not able to be reasonably done to protect future agricultural or silvicultural use, TRORC endorses off-site mitigation techniques to offset the loss of these resources when it provides an equal or greater public benefit than conservation of the development site itself.
7. Where agricultural and forested lands are identified, clustered or peripheral development is required to protect such resources and prevent fragmentation and sprawling settlement patterns.
8. Contiguous forest and significant agricultural areas form the separations between town centers, villages, and hamlets and shall remain largely in non-intensive uses unless no reasonable alternative exists to provide essential residential, commercial, and industrial activities for the Region's inhabitants.
9. TRORC strongly supports property tax reform efforts at the local and state levels that would reduce the costs of land ownership for farming and forestry, while protecting against the Current Use Program's use as a low-cost vehicle for speculative holding of property for future development.
10. The construction of utilities, roads, or other physical modifications should skirt tracts of productive agricultural and forest land rather than divide them.
11. The use of public or private funds for purchase of development rights, or fee purchase of agricultural and forest land for conservation purposes from willing landowners, is supported and should be promoted. Town officials and landowners are encouraged to work with private nonprofit conservation organizations to identify options, and when conserving farms or forests, owners and conservation organizations are encouraged to also consider if other regional or local goals such as housing, production of sand/gravel, and increased employment can also be satisfied on such lands.
12. Septage, sewage sludge, and any other product of municipal waste processing shall not be applied or injected upon agricultural and forest lands without consistent chemical component testing of both disposal material and receiving medium for potentially harmful substance concentrations.
13. Efforts to revegetate streambanks eroded from natural or human activities are supported.
14. TRORC recognizes that certain local land development or subdivisions may conflict with policies to minimize the loss of existing or potential agricultural or forest resources. Furthermore, TRORC acknowledges that in certain areas, agricultural or forestry uses may no longer be viable due to a variety of factors, including:
 - a. The existence of or planning for roads or sewers in the immediate area that dictate that involved land should be converted to more intensive uses; and
 - b. The presence of parcel sizes or site conditions that affirm that conservation efforts to minimize loss of the resource result in marginal public benefit.

Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Working Landscape**

Recommendations

1. TRORC, as part of its ongoing Technical Assistance Program, will provide planning advice and support to town planning commissions, conservation commissions, nonprofit conservation organizations, and other groups interested in sustaining agriculture and forestry.
2. The Natural Resource Conservation Service, Conservation Districts, University of Vermont Extension, and others should continue efforts to educate landowners as to the benefits of maintaining and improving streambank vegetation and shoreline buffer.
3. The State and others should strengthen programs that are designed to provide new farmers access to farms and farmland, as well as programs designed to assist retiring farmers with the transition to a new generation.
4. Streambank stabilization erosion control projects to protect farmlands from erosion should use vegetation and other natural materials when practical to protect wildlife habitat and water quality as well.
5. Invasive species that threaten forestry and agriculture should be closely monitored by state and federal governments, and education and prevention methods shared with landowners.
6. In order to keep land in production, the State should work to ensure that there are price supports, better marketing, or other mechanisms so that producers of food and fiber are able to be assured they will at least get paid their production costs.
7. Local land use planning should consider the following as ways to promote agriculture and forestry:
 - a. Agricultural zoning
 - b. Cluster development
 - c. Impact fees
 - d. Overlay districts
 - e. Performance standards
 - f. Purchase of development rights
 - g. Transfer of development rights
8. To promote a better understanding of farming and forestry practices, and natural resource management in general, the industry, conservation organizations, public schools, and the tourism and recreation industries should sponsor continuing educational opportunities to the public.
9. TRORC should organize a regional committee of stakeholders to focus on how TRORC can support the local agriculture and forest products industries.
10. Towns should set up a town fund for conservation purposes to purchase lands or easements outright that are important to the town, or to leverage other public funds or donations for conservation purposes.

Working Landscape: Agriculture and Forestry Endnotes

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