

Vermont Wildlands Act Op-ed/Letter to the Editor Toolkit

What: Writing op-eds and letters to the editor to show our support for the The Vermont Climate Resilience and State Wildlands Act, which would protect 268,000 acres, or about $\frac{2}{3}$ of state-managed land.

When: Now! The wildlands act heard introductory testimony in Spring 2025 and will be back up for consideration at the statehouse in January 2026. Anything we can do now helps raise the profile of the legislation as we move forward toward the legislative season.

Where: News outlets across Vermont. You'll need to check the submission guidelines for each paper to find word limit (typically 250 words for an LTE) and whether you need to reply to a specific story they have written. The following is a list to get you started:

- [7Days](#)
- VTDigger (accepts commentaries and letters)
- [Addison Independent](#)
- Montpelier Times Argus
- Rutland Herald
- [Brattleboro Reformer](#)
- Valley News
- White River Valley Herald
- All of the local outlets in the [Community News Service](#)

Who: You! Anyone who lives in Vermont and/or has a connection to the natural areas of our state.

How: Check out our talking points and facts below and draft a letter (often 250 words or less) or an op-ed (often 600-800 words). Don't feel obliged to include every bit of information below - it is more important to share your story and why this bill is important to you. Also [feel free to pull from this general op-ed draft here](#). If you have specific connections to state lands nearby that you want to share, great. If your livelihood or other work ties into this bill (e.g. if have been affected by flooding, or if you have been pushing for other kinds of climate action for years and recognize this bill as a great, low cost way to draw down carbon and adapt to climate extremes), then share that. Feel free to reach out to Chris (cgish@standingtrees.org) for questions, drafting and editing help, and to Cheryl Joy for questions and background information about the bill (cheryljoyl@yahoo.com).

Wildlands Bill Facts

H. 276, The Vermont Climate Resilience and State Wildlands Act (State Wildlands Act) is a watershed law that directs the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to recover natural, old-growth forests on a portion of state-managed public lands.

- The State Wildlands Act is a low-cost strategy to increase flood protection for Vermont communities, improve water quality, protect biodiversity, remove planet-warming carbon, and support our recreation economy, all while minimizing impacts to the flow of wood products.
- Although 76% of Vermont is forested, less than 1% of Vermont's forests are old-growth.
- The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department recommends that at least 10% of Vermont forests should be managed to grow old to support Vermont's "ecologically functional landscape." This goal is now statutorily mandated under the 2023 Vermont Climate Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (Act 59).
- The State Wildlands Act protects 268,000-acres of State Parks, State Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas, increasing the amount of land managed to recover old forests from 4% to 7% of Vermont.
- 80% of Vermont is privately owned, and the vast majority of these lands are legally available for timber harvest.
- Only 2% of Vermont's annual wood harvest comes from state lands, and Vermont currently produces 47% more wood products than we consume — even with highly wasteful and unnecessary uses of wood like Vermont's biomass plants, which burn over half a million tons of wood every year, we more than meet our timber needs without any contributions from state lands
 - For context, state lands produce about 8x less timber than the amount burned by the McNeil plant in Burlington, a single modestly sized power plant that community has been fighting to shut down for decades
 - [Vermont brings in only about \\$350,000 / year from timber harvests on state lands](#). That is a really small amount of money that doesn't compare to the climate, water quality and flood protection benefits of letting our public forests grow old (Standing Trees will have a complete economic analysis of the Wildlands bill soon)
- Our state lands are overwhelmingly located in critically important headwaters, where timber harvesting stands to dramatically increase flood risks (Just look at a map to see this) In fact, [a report commissioned by the ANR](#) after Tropical storm Irene to examine how to manage state lands to reduce flood risk found that over 90% of state lands were in critically important headwaters
- The Wildlands Act has no impact on existing public access roads, trails, campgrounds, cabins, ski areas, hunting, fishing, gathering, foraging, and other established uses.
- The Act will have no impact on housing or the local tax base, since Vermont's public lands are already off limits to purchase and development
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Why are old forests important? According to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resource's Vermont Conservation Design, "Historically, the vast majority of Vermont's landscape was old forest, and it is the original habitat condition for many species. The state's native flora and fauna

that have been here prior to European settlement are adapted to this landscape of old, structurally complex forest punctuated by natural disturbance gaps and occasional natural openings such as wetlands or rock outcrops. The complex physical structure of old forests creates diverse habitats, many of which are absent or much less abundant in younger forests." Old forests are more resilient to climate extremes, better protect downstream communities from floods, improve water quality by removing sediment and phosphorus from runoff, and sequester and store vast amounts of planet-warming carbon. Scientists estimate that Vermont's forests could store two times more carbon by 2100 if allowed to grow old.

Where did the idea for this legislation come from? Vermont Conservation Design stipulates that at least 10% of Vermont should be managed to recover the old-growth forests that were once common across Vermont. Act 59 of 2023, the Vermont Climate Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act, codified these goals into law. A [2024 report by the Act 59 "State Lands Work Group."](#) composed primarily of VT ANR staff, recommends that the legislature should "Establish [a] New Statutory Designation: Ecological Reserve." The Vermont Climate Resilience and State Wildlands Act creates a new statutory designation for Ecological Reserves on state lands.

In the Act, wildland "means a land management designation within the category of Ecological Reserves, of any size and current condition, permanently protected from conversion, and explicitly intended and managed to allow natural processes to prevail." This definition stems from a report that was published with the help of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources in 2023, titled "[Wildlands in New England.](#)"

The closest example of state wildlands is in New York, where approximately 10% of the state's land area is protected as wildlands, primarily on state lands in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves. Today, these publicly-owned lands are among the healthiest forest ecosystems in the eastern US and attract visitors from around the world.