



To: House Committee on Environment
Re: House Bill 276 – Designation of Wildlands
Position: Oppose without Amendments
Date: March 5, 2026

Dear Chair Sheldon,

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, thank you for the opportunity to provide input on House Bill 276. I write to express our concerns with the legislation, which would negatively impact forest health and wildlife habitat by prohibiting science-based forest stewardship practices on state public lands. We encourage you to table the legislation or, at a minimum, amend the bill to (1) remove State Forests and the Wildlife Management Area from the list of designated “state wildlands” and (2) allow vegetation management on “state wildlands” to conserve biological diversity and maintain landscape resiliency.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen’s Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen’s Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation’s conservation legacy.

Legislation Threatens Biological Diversity and Forest Resiliency

We support the intent of House Bill 276 to conserve biological diversity and maintain landscape resiliency. At the same time, however, the legislation is misguided because it would have the opposite effect. The strict prohibition against vegetation management and other silvicultural practices would threaten biological diversity and limit the state’s ability to maintain the resiliency of its forests.

Invasive species, insects, disease, and forest disturbances often warrant adaptive management intervention to improve forest stand vigor and treat threats that jeopardize biological diversity. The Vermont Forest Action Plan, in fact, cites invasive pests (e.g., Dutch elm disease, hemlock woolly adelgid, elongate hemlock scale, emerald ash borer, etc.) and non-native invasive plants (e.g., autumn olive, multiflora rose, garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed) as threats to maintaining forest

Your Inside Connection to Outdoor Legislation

ecosystem health and ecological productivity.¹ The Vermont Forest Action Plan recommends slowing the spread and eradicating non-native invasive species that have an impact on forest ecosystems to retain native flora across the landscape, but House Bill 276 prohibits vegetation management that would prevent the state from treating nonnative invasive pests and plants.

Similarly, the report, *Creating and Maintaining Resilient Forests in Vermont: Adapting Forests to Climate Change*, specifically discusses several vegetation management practices that House Bill 276 prohibits, including timber harvesting, that can be used to create resilient forests. The report states, “Although forest management has long advocated for species and structural diversity, climate change further supports this strategy as critical to long-term forest health.”² In short, removing management flexibility by prohibiting sustainable forest management practices would undermine the intent of the legislation to support forest resiliency.

Legislation Overlooks Value of Young Forests

The “Findings” section of House Bill 276 references Vermont Conservation Design as a premise for prioritizing older growth forests, but the legislation overlooks the value of young forests, which are also listed as one of the “Highest Priority Features” in the Vermont Conservation Design. The Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function state, “Vermont Conservation Design identifies increasing the amount of both *young* and old forest in the state as highest priority for maintaining an ecologically functional landscape [emphasis added].”³ It further states, “A return to the pre-European abundance of young forest (approximately 3-5% of the forest) is needed to reverse a declining trend and reach a level that at one time supported all of Vermont’s native species that require young forest.”

We hope you will consider the importance of maintaining management flexibility to support species that depend on young forests and early successional habitats. Young forests support a wide range of species in Vermont, including American woodcock, ruffed grouse, black bear, bobcat, moose, white-tailed deer, and snowshoe hare. Neotropical migrant passerine birds, including the golden-winged warbler and willow flycatcher, other passerine birds including the chestnut-sided warbler, American goldfinch, and eastern bluebird, and even bird species that are commonly associated with mature forests, but in fact forage in young forests, utilize early successional habitats as well. Many of these species are identified in Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan as High Priority species for conservation.⁴ Young forests and other early seral habitats are critical for

¹ Vermont Forest Action Plan. 2017. Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. Division of Forests.

² *Creating and Maintaining Resilient Forests in Vermont: Adapting Forests to Climate Change*. 2015. Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. Division of Forests.

³ Vermont Conservation Design. 2015. Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Department of Fish and Wildlife.

⁴ Vermont Wildlife Action Plan. 2025. Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Your Inside Connection to Outdoor Legislation

CONGRESSIONAL
SPORTSMEN'S
FOUNDATION

supporting an extensive array of species during important stages of their life cycles, and House Bill 276 would negatively impact the species that benefit from the habitat created through active forest management. Stewarding forests through sustainable management practices is key to creating habitat diversity to support a greater diversity of wildlife across the landscape.

In closing, we would submit that the legislation could be more narrowly tailored to align with its legislative intent. Allowing vegetation management to further the goals to conserve biological diversity and maintain landscape resiliency, instead of a blanket prohibition against vegetation management regardless of the benefits, would provide flexibility to adapt to the threats that a changing climate poses to Vermont's forests. Actively managing forests supports wildlife conservation, creates forest age class diversity, and increases resiliency to insects, disease, and other forest health threats. Accordingly, we respectfully encourage you to reconsider House Bill 276 in its current form.

Please let us know if you have questions or would like additional input.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Fred Bird
Senior Manager, Northeastern States | Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Ave, SE | Washington, DC 20003
fbird@congressionalsportsmen.org | 603-583-7484

Your Inside Connection to Outdoor Legislation