



3-1-18 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Right to Forestry Bill – S.101 – sponsored by Sen. John Rodgers

This bill proposes to provide essential protection for forestry operations from nuisance lawsuits. Rural Vermont members Kate and Mark Bowen provided important testimony on this bill because they experienced an adverse decision by their municipal government in response to a complaint from a neighbor about their small-scale, seasonal firewood operation. This bill does not change existing law or regulations governing forestry operations but instead creates protection and provides support for forestry as a crucial part of Vermont's working lands economy.

This bill has passed the Senate and will be taken up by the House Ag Cmte after the Town Meeting Week break. If you are interested in sharing any experiences you've had with successes or complaints about your forestry operations, please [contact Graham](#).

[Click here](#) to read the bill as passed by the Senate:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/S-0101/S-0101%20As%20Passed%20by%20the%20Senate%20Unofficial.pdf>

Ag Enterprise Bill – H.663 - Sponsored by Rep. Harvey Smith

This bill proposes to direct that no municipal land use bylaw may have the effect of prohibiting an accessory on-farm business at the same location as a farm regulated under the rules for required agricultural practices adopted by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets. The bill also proposes to define and set forth requirements for what constitutes an accessory on-farm business. The bill does not affect existing exemptions for agriculture under 10 V.S.A. chapter 151 or 24 V.S.A. chapter 117.

This bill has passed the House and is now in the Senate Committee on Agriculture. It is expected the Committee will start considering the bill after the Town Meeting Week break March 5-9. The coalition of groups who collaborated on drafting this bill (of which Rural Vermont is a core participant) will be developing the advocacy strategy for the Senate. If you or someone you know is interested in providing testimony on this bill, please [contact Graham](#).

[Click here](#) to read H.663 as it was passed by the House:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/WorkGroups/House%20Agriculture/Bills/H.663/Drafts,%20Amendments%20and%20Summaries/H.663~Aaron%20Adler~Draft%20No.%20As%20Recommended%20Out,%202-6-2018~2-6-2018.pdf>

Hemp Pilot Program – S.276 & S.255 - Sponsored by Sen. John Rodgers

At the beginning of the legislative session there were two stand-alone bills, one in the Senate and one in the House, proposing to create a new federally compliant Hemp Pilot Program in the VT Agency of Agriculture that would be open to farmers to participate in state-sponsored research on the growing, processing and marketing of Hemp.

As a strategy to help ensure this new Hemp program will be passed this year, the Hemp provisions are now included in two larger Senate bills:

- S.276 a broad-based rural economic development bill that is a top priority for Senate Ag Committee Chair, Sen Bobby Starr, Essex-Orleans.
- S. 255 a so-called “Ag Housekeeping” bill that contains several provisions in addition to the Hemp Program. Those provisions include changes in how the Agency of Ag deals with complaints; the process by and timeline in which the RAPs will be revised; revisions to ANR’s wetlands program; directs the VAAFMM to convene a Nutrient Management Commission to make recommendations for revising farming practices in VT.

NOTE: These bills are likely to change as they make their way through the legislative process, [please contact Rural Vermont’s Policy Consultant, Andrea Stander](#), to get access to the most up-to-date versions of these bills.

ACTION YOU CAN TAKE: If you are a farmer who is already growing hemp or planning to, please [contact Graham](#) to learn more about offering testimony. **ALSO**, please talk to your senators and representatives during Town Meeting Week and urge them to support the new program that will help re-establish Hemp as a viable agricultural crop in VT.

Regenerative Ag Bill – H.903 – Sponsored by the House Committee on Ag & Forestry

This bill has been on a long strange trip that began over two years ago. The current bill, which was just passed out of the House Ag Cmte on 2/27/18 is considerably less ambitious but also may have more potential to encourage farmers to adopt more regenerative farming practices. What this new bill does is to put into law the Agency of Agriculture’s already existing “Vermont Environmental Stewardship Program” (VESP).

From Rural Vermont’s point of view, this bill is a small improvement because it does NOT propose to create yet another certification program for farmers to literally buy in to. What it may be able to do is to create a more direct path for farmers to access funding and technical assistance in meeting the more regenerative standards and practices prescribed in the VESP. This bill is scheduled for a

floor vote in the full House on Friday 3/2/18 and is expected to pass. Rural Vermont will seek to improve this bill when it gets taken up in the Senate in March.

[Click here](#) to read H.903 as introduced:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/H-0903/H-0903%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

Pollinator Protection Bill – H.9??? – Sponsored by the House Ag & Forestry Committee

This issue has been worked on for several years in the legislature. The House Ag & Forestry Cmte has taken extensive testimony on the threats facing domestic bees and wild pollinators. Following Committee discussion, they decided to replace H.688 with a Committee bill which is still in draft form and has no bill number as of 2-28-18. This bill proposes to require a person who sells treated article corn or soybean seed in the State to offer for sale untreated corn or soybean seed. The bill also requires the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets to assess the effect of neonicotinoid treated seeds on pollinator losses in the State. The bill also requires the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets to develop and implement an educational program to inform users of pesticides in the State of the effects of pesticides on pollinators.

The Committee is under time pressure to pass this bill out of the committee by Friday 3/2/18 to meet the crossover deadline. Hse Ag Cmte Chair, Carolyn Partridge has expressed a strong commitment to “do something” this year to advance pollinator protection. We heard that this will make the crossover deadline which means it must be voted out of the House Ag Cmte by the end of the legislative day on Friday 3/2/18.

[Click here](#) to read the draft of the bill that was available on 3/1/18 in the morning:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/WorkGroups/House%20Agriculture/Draft%20Requests%20-%20not%20yet%20bills/dr%20req%2018-0917~Pollinator%20Protection/Drafts,%20amendments%20and%20summaries/18-0917~Michael%20O'Grady~Draft%20No.%202.2,%202-28-2018~3-1-2018.pdf>

There is another bill, H.726, that is in the House Energy and Technology Cmte that would create a voluntary standard for pollinator friendly practices at solar array sites. We heard that this will make the crossover deadline, but the Cmte has not passed it as of 2/28/18.

[Click here](#) to read H.726 as introduced:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/H-0726/H-0726%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

Clean Water Funding Bill - S.260 - Sponsored by Sens. Bray, Lyons & Clarkson

Speaking of long strange trips! This bill, which proposed to create a long-term funding plan for addressing Vermont's water quality problems, spent almost 6 weeks being debated and amended on almost a daily basis in the Senate Natural Resources Cmte. Under the pressure of the crossover deadline, the bill was passed out of the Sen. Natural Resources Cmte and referred to the Sen. Cmte on Agriculture. The Senate Ag Cmte significantly amended (and shortened) the bill and it is now scheduled to be taken up by the full Senate on Thursday 3/1. If you'd like to see the version that passes the Senate, [email Rural Vermont's Policy Consultant Andrea Stander](#).

Changes to the Universal Recycling Law - S.285 sponsored by Sen. Rodgers and H.837 sponsored by Rep. Gannon

These are two bills that seek to amend Act 148, the Universal Recycling Law. We are monitoring them because they have the potential to impact farms/farmers who are involved in making compost and esp. those who are gathering food waste to use as part of their feeding program for chickens in an integrated compost operation.

S.285 – This bill will likely be passed by the Senate on Wed 2/28/18. If you'd like to see the version that passes the Senate, [email Rural Vermont's Policy Consultant Andrea Stander](#).

[Click here](#) to read H.837 as introduced:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/H-0837/H-0837%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

This bill will probably be taken up and possibly incorporated into S.285 when it comes over to the House in early March.

Send your questions, concerns, and stories to graham@ruralvermont.org or contact the Rural Vermont office at 802-223-7222.