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**Testimony in opposition to HB 1691, “AN ACT relative to limitations and qualifications for land placed in current use.”**

Chair Pauer and members of the House Municipal and County Government Committee,

I am submitting this testimony for Weyerhaeuser in opposition to HB 1691. Weyerhaeuser owns almost 24,000 acres of timberland in and around the town of Errol in Coos County and has a Timberlands office in Lancaster. Our timberlands are sustainably managed to meet the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Forest Management standards and a Forest Legacy conservation easement. Our forest management contributes to New Hampshire’s forest products industry and supports healthy wildlife habitat, clean water, and the capture and storage of carbon, while protecting special places and providing abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation.

HB 1691 proposes fundamental changes to the current use program that contradict the intent of the program by removing fair taxation for working lands and open space, creating an arbitrary cap on enrollment, implementing forest management requirements that are contrary to good forestry, and reducing New Hampshire’s competitive position in the regional forest products sector compared to other states.

**RSA 79-A:1 states “It is hereby declared to be in the public interest to encourage the preservation of open space, thus providing a healthful and attractive outdoor environment for work and recreation of the state's citizens, maintaining the character of the state's landscape, and conserving the land, water, forest, agricultural and wildlife resources. It is further declared to be in the public interest to prevent the loss of open space due to property taxation at values incompatible with open space usage. Open space land imposes few if any costs on local government and is therefore an economic benefit to its citizens...”**

Current use taxation is fair taxation that recognizes the important contributions of working forests, farms and open spaces to a healthful environment, conservation, and the character of the state. Healthy forests provide communities with clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. Valuable timber takes decades to grow and predictable, equitable taxation essential to landowners ability to maintain working forests. HB 1691 would increase taxes on forest land forcing growing timber to compete with the fair market value for development adding significant cost to growing timber, and damaging the forest economy.

The contribution of forest land to the state’s economy was quantified in the 2022 Working Lands Study done on behalf of the NH Timberland Owners Association by Plymouth State University and Innovative Natural Resource Solutions. **This report found every acre of private New Hampshire timberland contributes \$1,282 annually in recreation value and \$384 annually in timber value to state and local economies.** This significant contribution comes with little if any costs to local government.

Finally, the prohibition on clearcutting proposed in HB 1691 would remove an essential silvicultural tool from foresters and landowners timber management toolbox. Clearcutting is the recommended harvest method for numerous forest types and conditions including regeneration of white pine and high value hardwoods in certain situations and responding to forest health concerns. The forest management requirements contained in HB 1691 make it not only a tax Act but also a forest practices Act. One needs look no further than Maine, New York, and Massachusetts to see the unintended negative consequences to good forest management and the costly administrative burden that come with forest practices acts.

For all the above reasons, we respectfully urge this Committee to kill HB 1691.

Sincerely,

*Chris Fife*