

Vermont loggers are drawing fire

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Abstract (Abstract): CONCORD, Vt. - Some environmental advocates are questioning logging practices in Vermont's remote northeast corner, especially clear-cutting through wide swaths of the forest.

The cutting in some areas seems to be occurring with little regard to the sustained health and productivity of the forest, according to Brendan Whittaker, a former Essex County forester who served as environmental secretary in the mid-1970s under the late Gov. Richard Snelling.

The timber industry holds different views. Industry leaders say clear-cutting is not a big problem in Vermont.

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Full text: The Associated Press

CONCORD, Vt. - Some environmental advocates are questioning logging practices in Vermont's remote northeast corner, especially clear-cutting through wide swaths of the forest.

From the air, Miles Mountain in Concord looks as if a giant with a blunt razor has scraped it bare, leaving only the faint stubble of stumps where once there was forest, the Sunday Rutland Herald and Sunday Times Argus reported.

There are other clear-cuts in Essex County. North and south of U.S. Route 2 east of St. Johnsbury, thousands of acres of woods have been cleared.

Because of increasing demand for pulpwood and timber, loggers and paper companies are felling vast tracts of woodland in the Northeast Kingdom, critics charge.

The cutting in some areas seems to be occurring with little regard to the sustained health and productivity of the forest, according to Brendan Whittaker, a former Essex County forester who served as environmental secretary in the mid-1970s under the late Gov. Richard Snelling.

"What we're seeing there can in no sense be called a forestry practice," he said. "It's not. It's a liquidation of the resource."

Whittaker now works as the north woods project director for the Vermont Natural Resources Council, but he said his comments on clear-cutting were his own opinions, not those of the environmental group.

Although 75 percent of the land in Vermont was converted to farm or pasture by the early 1800s, that work was done over time and by hand, not with huge skidders that tear up the ground and compress the soil, he said.

"What's happening in southern Essex County ... is the most severe disturbance of the land since the Pleistocene glacier. That was 10,000 years ago," he said.

Clearing the woods fragments or destroys wildlife and saps soil nutrients, said Steve Trombulak, an associate professor of biology and environmental studies at Middlebury College.

"There's no question Vermont at one time was 75 percent cut over. That's not the issue. The issue is the regeneration of the forest. Continuing at this scale sets the clock for ecological regeneration back another 100 years," he said.

The timber industry holds different views. Industry leaders say clear-cutting is not a big problem in Vermont.

Although very little precise data are available, Roberta Borland of the Vermont Forest Products Association said trees were being grown in the state at the same rate loggers were taking them.

"The Vermont Forest Products Association has not taken a position that there is more harvesting going on," she said. "The only thing I can tell you is we're not cutting more than we're growing."

Still, her organization does not endorse clear-cuts, particularly in heavily traveled areas where the public can see them. And clear-cuts are the exception, she said.

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