

Vermont Environmental Report

A Forest Resource Advisory Council Report

FRAC Axes More Harvesting Regulations

A report from the Vermont Forest Resource Advisory Council (FRAC), released in March, recommends that no new environmental protection regulations covering timber harvesting operations be enacted at the present time. The report states, "The general consensus...among the representatives of both the industry and the public who appeared before the committee was that the environmental damage occurring from present harvesting practices is not extensive or serious enough to warrant major government intervention in the form of new regulations."

FRAC's decision to recommend no further controls came after 10 months of review by a three member Resource Management Committee appointed by the Advisory Council. Members of the committee included Chairman Sam Lloyd, Representative from Weston, Leo Laferriere, General Manager of the Ward Lumber Company in Waterbury, and Darby Bradley, staff attorney for the Vermont Natural Resources Council. The committee drew up a list of alternatives for timber harvesting regulations ranging from "no further action" to requiring a permit system for virtually all harvesting operations. The list was sent to over 400 people for review and comment. The committee also met with representatives of forestland owners, environmental groups, and professional foresters. Two public hearings were held in February of this year — one in St. Johnsbury and the other in Rutland.

Sam Lloyd, Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee and a member of the FRAC committee, explained some of the reasoning behind the recommendations. He said, "With the bottle bill we saw litter along the roadside, with Act 250 we saw large-scale development moving into the state, with the phosphate ban we saw the state's water being polluted. You don't make laws unless you have a good reason. We saw no evidence at this time for further control."

Rather than stricter controls, the FRAC committee chose to emphasize better cooperation, more education and technical assistance, and self-policing by the industry. Additional recommendations pertaining to wood chip-harvesting operations

were also included.

In talking with people about the report, it became apparent that the recommendations were received with varying degrees of approval. Some felt the recommendations fit the current timber harvesting situation in Vermont, others felt the report did not go far enough, yet others saw it only as the bare minimum, a first step. Below is a summary of the major findings and recommendations of the FRAC report and comments from people who are involved and concerned with managing and protecting one of Vermont's most valuable natural resources... its forests.

