

December 13, 2023

ATTN:

STATE OF VERMONT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

RENEWABLE ENERGY STANDARD REFORM WORKING GROUP

My name is Ashley Adams. I live in Burlington and I am with Standing Trees and StopVTBiomass.

I am deeply disappointed that this body will complete its recommendations on long overdue updates to the Renewable Energy Standard while failing to reckon with Vermont's ongoing and misguided support of our two biomass plants, McNeil and Ryegate. This failure will inhibit our ability to achieve climate, biodiversity, and water quality goals, moving us backward on all three. It will also have material consequences for ratepayers who bear operational losses at McNeil which are only partially mitigated by the unbundled REC scam. All of this in the name of subsidizing the Vermont and, to an even greater extent, the New York forestry industry. Meanwhile, untold millions spent to keep these plants afloat could and should be put in service of supporting workers to transition out of it.

In considering biomass renewable, this body continues to ignore settled science. Burning trees emits more carbon pollution than any fossil fuel, and unlike fossil fuels, eliminates the very trees that we desperately need to absorb and store carbon, making it the worst way to generate electricity. Forests are in fact not renewable in any meaningful sense.

Unmanaged forest ecosystems provide vitally important free and irreplaceable services. Those of us with a deep love of Lake Champlain, have witnessed its decline for decades and are keenly aware of the role that forests play in filtering our water and protecting our precious lakes and rivers- a function greatly diminished when our forests are disturbed by logging. Forests absorb and store carbon, clean our air, filter our water, mitigate floods, and support a biodiversity of life upon which all of life on earth depends, humans included. Unmanaged forests that, allowed to grow old, perform all of these functions to a degree far exceeding young forests. Given that old forests in VT are rare to nonexistent, we should be allowing many more forests to grow old rather than throwing them away to generate a few MW of power when we have so many other options.

Focusing on renewability rather than low carbon is the subterfuge that allows Vermont to continue operating McNeil, the largest stationary source of carbon pollution in this state, as well as Ryegate, a shameful decision that undermines efforts to salvage a habitable planet. While Vermont ratepayers subsidize climate and ecological collapse, neighbors all around (NY, MA, NH, and CT) are phasing out biomass. Our focus should be on weatherization, ecosystem preservation, efficiency, and low carbon energy, not a greenwashed renewable goal that is disconnected from reality. Vermonters deserve better.

Respectfully Submitted,
Ashley Adams