WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE BOARD

Prepared for

VERMONT
WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE
www.vermontworkinglands.com

Working Lands Enterprise Board
Vermont Agency of
Agriculture, Food & Markets
116 State Street
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Focus Group Summary

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Contents

Introduction

Four focus groups were held in November and December of 2014, to bring together a variety of perspectives throughout the forestry and wood products industry. These focus groups were held in four regions of the state, including the Northeast Kingdom, Northwest Vermont, Central Vermont and Southern Vermont.[1] Participants were engaged in conversations about positive developments in the forestry and wood products industry, challenges to strengthening the industry, and opportunities for the future of the industry in Vermont.

Members of the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) Forestry Subcommittee were responsible for inviting and welcoming participants to each focus group. A cross-section of different types of participants was invited in each region, but the composition of the actual groups varied. The table below shows the number of participants in each sub-sector by region.

Subsector	NEK	Central	Northwest	Southern	*Total*
Landowner	1	1	2	2	**6**
Forestry Services - Forester	5	1	1	1	**8**
Forestry Services - Logging, Chipping, Etc.	8	3	1	0	**12**
Sawmill	2	0	1	1	**4**
Secondary Wood Products	2	1	4	4	**11**
Wood Energy	0	1	1	1	**3**

As the table above shows, in the Northeast Kingdom and Central Vermont, the majority of participants were consulting foresters and loggers. In Northwest and Southern Vermont, the participants were more representative of the variety of forestry and wood products subsectors. Dates, locations and participants in each focus group can be found in Appendix A. The Focus Group Agenda is in Appendix B. In the Northeast Kingdom especially, it became clear that the forestry and wood products industry is often a family business. There were three families in attendance at this meeting in East Burke; some attendees in other regions also spoke of being part of a family business.

This document summarizes the results of the four workshops. The document reflects the beliefs and perceptions of a diverse group of focus group participants from all over the state. Some comments included in this document may seem contradictory to each other or

[1] Regions were delineated as follows:
Northeast Kingdom – Essex, Orleans and Caledonia Counties
Northwest Vermont – Franklin, Grand Isle, Chittenden and Addison Counties
Central Vermont – Lamoille, Washington, and Orange Counties
Southern Vermont – Rutland, Windsor, Bennington and Windham Counties

the experience of the reader due to unique experiences. The focus groups, and this summary, allow for a better understanding of the realities faced by a diverse range of participants in Vermont's forestry and wood products industry.

Process

Each focus group began with an introduction by one or more members of the WLEB Forestry Subcommittee or Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets staff; an effort was made to have introductions come from a public sector representative and also a private sector representative, in order to demonstrate the public-private partnership of the working lands initiative. After this, the focus groups were turned over to the facilitators. There were two facilitators from Yellow Wood Associates at each focus group, to allow for both facilitation and recording of the focus group. The facilitators introduced the process that Yellow Wood has been working through and where the focus groups fit into it, as well as next steps after the focus groups that could be of interest to participants.

The basic questions used in the focus group included:

- From your perspective, what are some of the most positive developments in the forestry and wood products industry in Vermont?
- From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges to strengthening the forestry and wood products industry in Vermont?
- What would it look like in 5 years from now if Vermont's forest products industry was thriving?

Finally participants were asked to weigh in on five business opportunities. These included:

1. Enhancing the economic value of Vermont's woodlands.
2. Improving the marketing of construction and construction materials.
3. Addressing demand in wood energy markets.
4. Expanding markets for furniture, furniture parts and solid wood products.
5. Raising public awareness of the economic contributions of the forestry and wood products industry.

The opportunities were presented briefly by facilitators, and then participants were given worksheets that allowed them to review the opportunities in writing, rank their level of interest and share thoughts about each of these opportunities. The worksheet used to collect responses is in Appendix C.

Positive Developments

Participants were able to identify positive developments in the forestry and wood products industry over the past 5-20 years. The table below summarizes the most common positive developments identified and the regions where they were mentioned. More detailed information about the major positive developments is provided below.

	NEK	Central	Northwest	Southern
Positive Developments				
Changing attitudes	x	x	x	x
Environmental protection	x	x	x	
Current Use program	x	x	x	x
Safety and new technologies	x	x	x	x
Employment	x	x	x	x
Certification		x	x	x
Greater visibility and better information through Northern Woodlands Magazine and other magazines.		x	x	x
Transportation	x	x	x	
Landowner education		x		x
Logger education/business training		x		
Marketing and internet use			x	x
Secondary products made from local trees		x		
Wood product markets	x	x	x	
Collaborative mindset	x	x		
Wood energy	x		x	x
Maple industry as a model	x			
Function of consulting forester			x	x
Appreciation of character wood			x	x
Competition for low-grade wood			x	
Wood as part of LEED			x	
Demand for VT/sustainable wood			x	x
FSC as a group/landowner - low cost				x

Changing Attitudes by the State and the Public

Members of the WLEB forestry subcommittee introduced the focus groups by discussing the history of this initiative and its focus now on providing a boost to the forestry industry in the context of engaging the forestry sector as part of the Working Lands Initiative as a whole.

There was a feeling on the part of all the regional focus groups that the legislature has recognized the value of the forestry industry alongside agriculture as part of the working landscape, as evidenced in part by these focus groups and also by forestry's inclusion in the Working Lands Enterprise Board. Participants felt that this has translated into an increase in public awareness of the working forest and its importance.

Others, specifically loggers and those operating mills, said that they had previously been chastised for how they make their living; that has changed over the past 5-10 years, as the general public now appreciate wood products more. Having organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the Appalachian Mountain Club becoming forest landowners that are actively practicing forestry has also made the public more receptive to working forestland.

Current Use

Vermont's Use Value Appraisal or Current Use program, while not perfect, is encouraging more forestland owners to work their land. There is a feeling that there is an increase in land enrolled in Current Use, which incentivizes better forest management by educating landowners and encouraging them to have a relationship with a forester. Consulting foresters are used more often in the woods. The tax incentive was felt to be appropriate taxation, not a tax break. Vermont's program was cited as being the best program among the adjacent states in terms of the silvicultural results on the ground.

Safety Improvements and New Technologies

There are more equipment choices due to better and improved technology, and an increase in the use of mechanized equipment in the woods. This is also leading to more efficient and safer harvesting practices. Mechanized equipment is used by 17% of companies, but it is helping to produce 60% of the wood that is harvested in Vermont. Forest management practices have also improved, partly as a result of Current Use (mentioned above). There are fewer accidents in the woods and workers' compensation rates for mechanized loggers are beginning to go down.

Transportation

The state opening up the interstates to logging trucks was seen as a huge positive. This was mentioned several times. This makes transportation much easier and safer.

Environmental Protection

From three of the focus groups (Northeast Kingdom, Central and Northwest) there was a discussion about the tremendous improvement in water quality protection in logging. It was once common for people not to know what a water bar was. There are now more and more innovative products being used in the woods in an effort to practice more sustainable forestry.

Wood Energy

The biofuels energy program through the school systems was mentioned as a positive development in three regions (not including the Central region); this program has opened up new markets for sawmill byproducts and whole chips. The growth in the use of forest fuels and wood fuels in general was cited as a positive, partly because it has opened up markets for low grade wood. Large scale biomass for energy was cited in the Southern focus group as a positive development for forest management opportunities.

Demand for VT/Sustainable Wood

Demand for Vermont wood and sustainable wood was mentioned as a positive development in the Northwest and Southern regions. In the retail lumber side of things, for example, more and more people are thinking about buying local for raised beds, instead of pressure treated wood. This demand is also being seen in the market for wood furniture. In addition, institutions are starting to demand locally sourced wood in construction and renovation projects. Wood has also been included as a sustainable material in the LEED credit system.

Land Certification

Certification may have raised the bar on conservation and sensible stewardship. There is an increase in landowners who have their forests certified. According to one participant, this (an increase in certified land) is a resource that is underutilized. And there is a greater resource of certified wood growing in the forest. Certifications mentioned included FSC, SFI and Tree Farm.

Wood Product Markets

Loggers and foresters reported having more low-grade wood products markets available to them, which is improving prices for loggers, and for landowners. This may be as a result of more and better markets for low-grade wood products. One example given was firewood, which is being sold for $100 per cord on the landing, as compared to four years ago, when a cord was being sold for significantly less. Markets are strong and there are plenty of places to sell wood. The competition between firewood and wood chips was felt to be beneficial. The energy market, which often uses the same low-grade wood as firewood and pellets, was also believed to be helping to support higher prices.

There has been more demand for secondary products made from local wood. This was mentioned specifically in the Central region. More and more people are seeking character wood, or wood with imperfections; the story helps to promote this kind of wood.

The popularity of sugar maple was mentioned as a positive development in the furniture and wood products sector. When maple became the species of choice, Vermont was lucky enough to be the maple state. Everyone wants rustic now. People are enjoying holes in the wood, stains, etc. There is greater appreciation of character wood.

Participants perceive that Vermont has become the place to go for high quality wood products. It's become a destination as other areas have gone out and people want the smaller company connection. One participant mentioned that, even though he doesn't sell wholesale, wholesale companies are trying to get him to sell to them. The cachet of the Vermont brand has increased.

Made in the USA is a stronger brand, but Made in Vermont does have added cachet in certain markets.

The fact that it is now possible to receive credits for using wood in your LEED certified building through a sustainable materials credit is considered a positive development. Extra points can be earned for wood procured within a certain distance. There has been demand as a result of that change to the LEED guidelines.

Much of what was said confirmed our findings from other parts of this project, whether from interviews or the survey.

Northern Woodlands Magazine and Vermont Coverts

Some people cited Northern Woodlands magazine as a great resource in the media sector. Vermont Coverts was also mentioned as a great organization. These organizations and publications are helping to create broader public awareness of what the forestry and wood products industry is all about.

Logger Education and Business Training

The increase and improvement in logger education was cited as a positive. There have been strides in these programs that have increased awareness and business acumen for those people working in the woods. Learning about forest management and concepts has led to a higher standard of harvesting wood in Vermont. Along the same lines, there was a recognition that more landowners are educated in the forestry business, through the work of county foresters and others.

Marketing and Internet Use

The use of the internet was mentioned as a sales tool for people making secondary wood products, allowing them to bring these products to market without having a store. The internet was also mentioned as a way to connect those in the forestry industry more easily. People are able to make a living as a result. Marketing through Vermont interstate rest areas was mentioned also; brochure racks at the rest areas and welcome centers have wood manufacturers displaying their rack cards alongside tourist brochures.

Challenges

Participants were asked to identify the biggest challenges to strengthening the forestry and wood products industry in Vermont as well as the challenges they face in their personal businesses. There were many challenges mentioned. Challenges mentioned are summarized in the table below by region.

	NEK	Central	Northwest	Southern
Challenges				
Weather/Seasonality	x	x	x	
Lack of connectivity	x	x	x	
Cost/price squeeze		x		x
Cost of logging and other equipment	x		x	
Loss of large manufacturers of secondary products or small scale wood products manufacturers		x		x
Regulatory uncertainty	x	x		x
Transportation	x	x	x	x
Loss of mills	x	x	x	x
Marketing		x		x
Workers compensation insurance	x	x	x	x
Education	x		x	x
Production decrease		x		
Access to wood	x	x		x
Labor issues	x	x	x	x
Global warming / Species loss			x	
Certification / Local wood			x	x
Better baseline data	x			
Lack of kiln drying capacity		x		x
Aging industry	x	x	x	x
Loss of species			x	
Competition for low-grade wood/threaten mature trees			x	
Lack of ability to know where wood comes from			x	x
Need for and cost of consistent three phase electricity				x
Carbon markets as unrealized opportunity for state lands				x

Lack of Connectivity
The forestry and wood products industry is experienced as a fragmented industry. People in this industry are very independent and self-sufficient and often lack knowledge about each other. As a result, participants perceive there is not as much connectivity or collaboration as there could be.[2]

Cost/Price Squeeze
Global pressure on price was a challenge that was mentioned, specifically by those in secondary production, which is "mostly out of our hands," but is an issue because of the high costs of production in Vermont. High energy costs relative to Canada was also mentioned as a challenge.

Cost of Equipment and Lack of Infrastructure
The shorter winter harvest season is a concern. This is tied to the number of loggers operating and the equipment that they own and whether that equipment is adapted to more marginal times of the year. Fewer people are entering logging and that is partly because of the cost of the equipment for them to enter the market. Cut to length is one example; those in this market are excited about this opportunity, but the cost of equipment to enter this market isn't reasonable for a younger person to be able to step into.

Infrastructure is an issue, such as the cost and availability of three phase power and "clean" electricity of consistent quality (e.g. no brown outs).

Taxes related to health care were mentioned as a barrier to hiring. Quick changes in different directions (whether single payer, taxes, minimum wage, etc.) around policy creates business uncertainty that is a significant challenge.[3]

Small Scale of Wood Products Manufacturers
There has been a loss of major manufacturers of secondary products. Right now, these manufacturers are small in relation to the industry overall. There were once larger manufacturers in Vermont. However, this production has left. "What we are left with are niche markets, which we need to grow."

It is challenging to maintain an inventory of grades and species to satisfy the needs of secondary manufacturers. Participants felt that Vermont is lacking kiln drying facilities. As a result, it is hard for secondary product manufacturers to source the wood they need from locally grown and harvested trees.

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[2] To wit, several people at the focus groups were meeting for the first time and some were identifying potential partners, customers, or suppliers.
[3] The final focus group was held just before Governor Shumlin announced his decision to scrap single payer health care for Vermont. Participants were very concerned about the rumored increase in taxes that would have accompanied single payer.

Regulatory Uncertainty

Uncertainty in the regulatory and property tax environment is another big challenge. Property taxes drive decisions about managing land. An ever-increasing tax burden forces people to make decisions about their land; often forcing them to sell it. This is not productive for future forests. From a regulatory standpoint, Use Value Appraisal has created a different landscape than existed when it started. Generally speaking, this has been positive for the industry. However, the tendency of the legislature to revisit the terms of Current Use on an almost annual basis creates a great deal of uncertainty and is beginning to undermine the value of the program since people do not have confidence that it will continue as it has in the past. There is a perception that it is undesirable to eliminate Current Use, but people in the industry are interested in having it be more stable.

There is also a perception that there is a propensity to have more regulation in Vermont relative to nearby states, which is not good for the forestry industry. This creates additional cost and less production and puts more economic pressure on the industry in a negative way. Most of these comments were in relationship to Act 250. Participants perceive that there is much more regulation in establishing a manufacturing site in Vermont compared to adjoining states. For example, if you wanted to start a sawmill in a place that was not already a sawmill, there would be an uncertain process. The state does not have a fast track process for companies that will produce jobs in the state, related to the forestry industry. Local zoning and NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) is a problem when something on a large scale is proposed for a small community.

Transportation

Trucking and transportation were mentioned as a challenge unless you have your own vehicles and your own drivers. The ups and downs in demand make trucking logs a challenging business. There is a perception that loggers are buying trucks but looking at it as a break-even endeavor. It gives them the opportunity to move material and allows for convenience. Trucking and transportation challenges were also mentioned by those producing and selling secondary products.

Loss of Mills

The loss of sawmills and pulpmills is a challenge, as is the fact that these mills have been replaced by logyards or concentration yards. When the sawmills go, the jobs go. The logyards can be managed by 1-2 people, where far more people were required to run a sawmill. This also leads to a downward pressure on price since concentration yards pay a lower price than mills, usually due to lower trucking costs. Log yards provide a market for smaller operations that may only be moving small loads versus tractor-trailer loads of logs.

From a logger's perspective, this means there are fewer places to sell logs than before the recession hit. There are fewer mills and those mills remaining have significantly cut production. Good quality logs are no problem to sell and profit from; it is the lower grade logs that are harder to sell. The loss of Rutland Plywood was mentioned specifically several times. This represented the loss of birch market for some loggers. While people acknowledged that it's not helpful to have mills right on top of each other, it's also true that the cost of transportation to more distant mills can be high.

Workers Compensation Insurance

Workers compensation insurance has been mentioned as a challenge; people in the forestry industry are finding it difficult to pay the rates that are being charged. This means that many businesses are employing subcontractors instead of employees. For those loggers with chainsaws, workers compensation is prohibitive at 48%, which means there are fewer of these loggers. However, workers compensation insurance does decrease as you mechanize; one participant quoted it as $0.14 on the dollar if you're mechanized and $0.40 if you're not. So, this becomes less of a challenge as you mechanize your operation. However, it also seems to be a problem for sawmills. It was also mentioned that if you do have a claim, the workers compensation rates can be punishing. One participant had success in working closely with his insurance company to lower workers' compensation rates.

Access to Wood

This is a barrier having to do with landowners. According to participants, if more landowners enrolled in Current Use, there would be more access to wood for the industry.

Labor Issues

It seems there is also a limited supply of logging contractors. According to a participant, that's one of the reasons that more wood is not being cut. This seems to be an issue due to higher paying jobs elsewhere and the costs and risks associated with running machinery.

Skilled labor is a challenge. Participants felt that technical schools were doing less and less and most programs were no longer relevant to the industry. Many do not have woodworking programs or cabinet-making programs, as mentioned by secondary products producers.

Getting youth engaged in the industry is another challenge that may eventually lead to an opportunity. It is a challenge to identify and encourage people willing and able to work in the woods. The next generation is doing other things. They're looking for more attractive jobs that do not require 6 ½ day work weeks. The opportunity is getting more youth to be exposed to the industry. There is a need for tech centers to be more attuned to the businesses in their neighborhoods. There are great resources in communities, including underutilized resources such as people, businesses and infrastructure that could be used.

Education about the forestry and wood products industry encompasses general education, training programs, apprenticeships, college programs and job shadowing opportunities.

Global Warming / Species Loss
Global warming was mentioned as the elephant in the room. There is also a loss of important tree species (ash, butternut, hemlock), and the increasing issue of invasive species.

Certification / Local Wood
Certification seems to be a challenge. Participants felt like better practices are happening already, without certification. The cost to maintain certification has gone up. People want certified lumber, but are not willing to pay extra for it. Some participants reported that their recent experience with local institutions was that they are now more interested in local Vermont grown or sawn product. One person mentioned that he can get more for his furniture if he can say it is locally grown wood. This can be a challenge but also an opportunity.

Often furniture makers can tell the story of how a product was made, but can't substantiate where the wood comes from. There are disconnects in the supply chain for Vermont products. Some buyers want to know it comes from Vermont. Some producers want to be able to say that they're using Vermont material, but there is not a predictable supply. There is an opportunity for collaborative purchasing for sawyers and wood product businesses. There is also an opportunity to differentiate between sustainable and certified sustainable.

Better Baseline Data
One person cited the need for better baseline data about the status and condition of Vermont's forests. Without knowing what's possible, it is hard to plan for the future.

What would be different five years from now if Vermont's Forestry and Wood Products Industry was Thriving?

Participants in the focus groups were vocal about opportunities they saw for progress in the industry. Below is a summary of what participants identified as what would be different five years from now if the industry was thriving:

Businesses

- More people working in the industry and more jobs.
- Everyone is making money.
- A system that benefits the shops producing the finished products, the mills, and the landowners.
- Companies within the forest products industry are more cooperative.
- Greater collaboration and connectivity within the industry from tree to table.
- Improved bottom line.
- All sawmills would be running again.
- More tech improvements.

- Smaller kilns.
- More places to buy lumber.
- More pellet mills.
- More younger foresters.

Markets

- Better and more consistent markets for forest products, including in-state, and higher value.
- Strong marketing program for Vermont forestry and wood products.
- Consumers making decisions based on good outcomes vs. low cost.
- The Vermont story would be out there, leading to people clamoring for wood from VT.
- Stronger and more centralized brand of Vermont made wood products.

Land Base

- Less parcelization of land.
- Longer tenure of ownership in properties.
- Current Use program that isn't challenged by legislators and public. More people would say it is important.
- More game animals and better wildlife populations.
- Less fragmented forested cropland.
- Current Use is alive and well.
- Thriving forest products industry can more effectively deal with the small lot.

Public Awareness

- Higher connectedness and respect of the average Vermonter for the importance of the forestry and products grown in Vermont and the working forests. More respect for those working in the woods.
- More effective links between tourism and the forest industry and educational institutions.
- Ongoing marketing or public awareness.

Improved Infrastructure and Use of Infrastructure

- Greater use of rail for timber transport.
- More and different types of third party certification programs for forests and forest products.

Energy

- More wood energy production in Vermont.
- More sawmill residue for biomass.
- Thermal costs would be lower.

Training and Education

- Technical programs geared toward forestry and wood products manufacturing.

- Technical schools would be tied into local wood manufacturing.
- More apprenticeships.
- Youth education. Forest to school.
- Schools systems with curricula targeted at producing wood, with logging opportunity programs, wood manufacturing programs.
- Fewer woodshops being closed in schools and more opening back up.

Overall

- Vermont would be the envy of neighboring states because of our success in the forestry and wood products market.
- Wood industry would be the largest manufacturing sector in our state.
- Lower unemployment.
- More people going into the industry – younger generation.
- More collective policy pressure on the legislature.

Opportunities

In the course of the focus groups, as participants were identifying positive developments and challenges, some ideas arose that were thought of as potential opportunities for Vermont's forestry and wood products industry. Opportunities identified included:

1. Continuing education program for landowners as part of Current Use. Landowners were positive about the Current Use program and also about the education and technical assistance they've received. This type of program would be best presented as a privilege and an opportunity, rather than a requirement.
2. Education/training for the younger generation. This was an idea that came up frequently. It is about providing education and training for the next generation, from grade school through high school into technical school or college and into apprenticeship and/or job shadowing. Many participants even offered to be part of such a program, offering to allow for job shadowing of their operations.
3. Cooperative transportation solutions. This one was less developed, but there was discussion about creating cooperative solutions for transportation issues.

Potential Business Opportunities

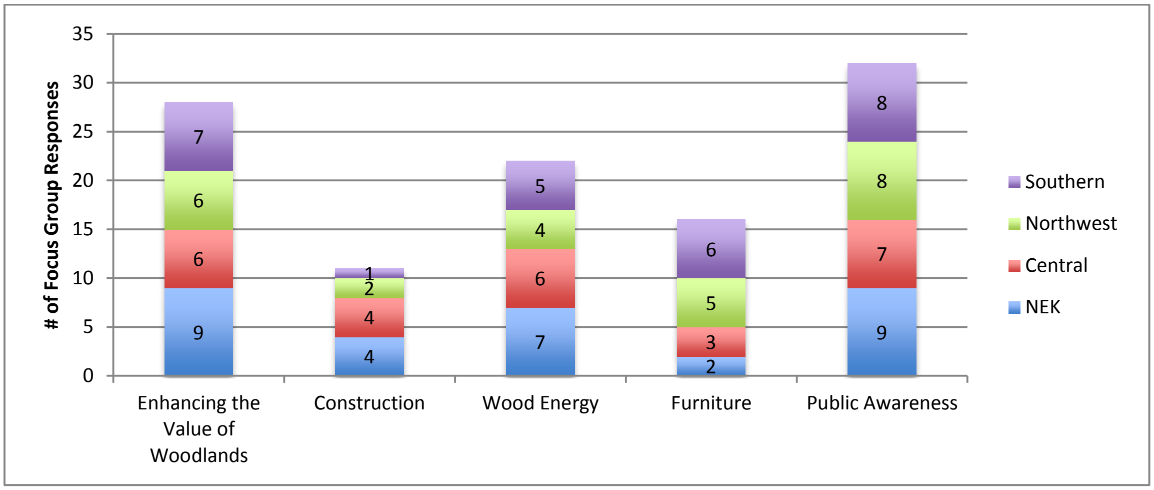
Participants were asked to weigh in on five broad categories of business opportunities. These included:

1. Enhancing the economic value of Vermont's woodlands.
2. Improving the marketing of construction and construction materials.
3. Addressing demand in wood energy markets.
4. Expanding markets for furniture, furniture parts and solid wood products.

5. Raising public awareness of the economic contributions of the forestry and wood products industry.

Once these were reviewed, participants were asked to complete a worksheet with these potential business opportunities and to identify which three were of greatest interest to them.

The chart below shows the number of participants from each of the regional focus groups who prioritized each of the five business opportunities.



The top three business opportunities identified in order of importance to those in the focus groups include:

1. Raising public awareness of the economic contributions of the forestry and wood products industry.
2. Enhancing the economic value of Vermont's woodlands.
3. Addressing demand in wood energy markets.

Opportunities Identified by Participants as Missing

Participants were also asked if any opportunities were missing. The following list includes those opportunities that were felt to be missing grouped by general topic:

Education and Training

- Improving education opportunities for young people interested in forestry; improving education and outreach for landowners.
- Wood Wise classrooms for school children.
- Educating young to get involved in industry.
- Primary and Secondary Ed improvements toward forestry and wood manufacture.
- Yes, the development of a new generation of skilled people to work in all areas of the wood products industry.

Increased Coordination

- Better coordination of firewood dealers; ability to process inventory to deal with shortages.
- Creating a supply chain of Vermont material.
- Improving the number and variety of sawlog markets, production s/f sawmill in Northern VT, secondary mills using lumber – i.e. Flooring.

Product Development

- Timber bridges – no one is doing it; Vermont Builder Packages – homes with Vermont lumber.
- Pulp, chemical use of wood.

Small Kilns and Processes

- Healthy forest = Healthy Economy; Take the industry "green," improve equipment; employ solar, compost, carbon credits.
- Small scale kiln operation that would cater to the small producer/individual.
- Small kilns and locations to get lumber that was harvested in Vermont.
- Cost accounting.

Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group Dates, Locations and Participants

November 20 Northeast Kingdom Burke Mountain Clubhouse, Burke

Participants	*Subsector*
Dale Covey	Plum Creek Timber, Landowner
Brian LaFoe	Logging, cut to length
Stan Parker	Logging, cut to length
Colleen Goodridge	White cedar mill
David McMath	Consulting forester
Frederick Cunningham	Logging, cut to length
Tasha Cunningham	Logging, cut to length
Monica Prusik	Procurement forester for Verso Paper
Matt McAllister	Logging
Peter Everts	Consulting forester
Wesley Everts	Consulting forester
Ross Morgan	Consulting forester
Rob College	Amoskeag Morse hardwoods, millwork,
Russell Riendeau	Logging, trucking, wood concentration yard
James, Andrew and Dylan Riendeau	Logging, trucking, wood concentration yard
Doug Clarner	Furniture maker

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Joe Nelson	Consulting Forester
Matt Langlais	Caledonia/Essex County Forester
Lauren Masseria	Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Jared Duval	Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

December 4 **Central Vermont** **VAST offices, Berlin**

Participants	*Subsector*
Peter Condaxis	Forest industry/biomass
Nils Shenholm	Tertiary production
Jim Parker	Wood energy equipment
Michael Tragner	Forestry
Putnam Blodgett	Forest landowner
Ken Mitchell	Whole tree chipping
Tammy Mitchell	Whole tree chipping
Graham Leitner	Forestry/logging

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Joe Nelson	Consulting Forester
Paul Frederick	Vermont Department of Forests Parks & Recreation
Kathleen Wanner	Vermont Woodlands Association
Ellen Kahler	Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
Lauren Masseria	Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Jared Duval	Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

December 11 **Northwest Vermont** **VYCC, Richmond**

Participants	*Subsector*
Chris Castano	(blank)
Fred Glanzburg	Logging service provider
Jo Levasseur	Guest
Paul Stanilonis	Landowner
Tom O'Keefe	Sawmill
John Monks	Lumber, furniture
Mike Rainville	Wood products
Bill Kropelin	Bio-energy
Louis DuPont	Woodworking company
Kevin Hastings	Manufacturing
Carl Powden	NGO/landowner

WLEB

Joe Nelson	Consulting Forester
Ellen Kahler	Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
Jolinda LaClair	Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Chelsea Lewis	Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Lauren Masseria	Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets

December 17 **Southern Vermont** **Manchester Library, Manchester**

Participants	***Subsector***
Roland Smith	Landowner
Chris Brooks	Forest products to fuel
Brent Karner	Furniture builder
Scott Duffy	Woodworks
Robbo Holleran	Consulting forester
Ken Gagnon	Sawmill
Jon Blatchford	Wood products
Bob Gasparetti	Furniture makers
Dave Potter	Tree farmer/VT House of Representatives

WLEB	
Kathleen Wanner	Vermont Woodlands Association
Lauren Masseria	Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets

Appendix B: Focus Group Agenda

4 pm Registration and networking

4:15 pm Welcome and introductions – WLEB public and private parters

4:30 pm Background/how did we get here? - Yellow Wood

4:40- 5:15 pm Discuss Current Perspectives on the Industry:
From your perspective, what are some of the most positive developments in the forestry and wood products industry in Vermont?

5:15- 5:50 pm From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges to strengthening the forestry and wood products industry in Vermont? Are they the same or different from those we mentioned at the beginning?

5:50 – 6:00 pm Break

6:00 -6:25 pm Discuss Opportunities for the Future of Forestry
What would it look like in 5 years from now if Vermont's forest products industry was thriving? Review a variety of market-based development opportunities to consider for the future of Vermont and complete a worksheet.

6:25 pm Thank you, evaluations and next steps

6:30 pm Adjourn and time for networking.

7:00 pm Close

Appendix C: Business Opportunities Worksheet

Vermont's Future:
Possible Business Opportunities

Name:

Sector(s):

Possible Business Opportunities

Please review these possible business opportunities and rate the top 3 opportunities of interest to you.

- ☐ Enhancing the economic value of Vermont's woodlands
  - Getting the wood out of the woods to the people that need it.
  - Maintaining the sustainability of the resource.
- ☐ Improving the marketing of construction and construction materials
  - Commercial and residential constructions materials (including millwork).
  - Maybe a New England alliance for construction related products.
  - High performance modular housing.
- ☐ Addressing demand in wood energy markets
  - Trend in reliance on wood heat (firewood, woodchips and wood pellets).
  - Opportunities for larger combined heat and power projects.
  - Sustainability of the resource.
- ☐ Expanding markets for furniture, furniture parts and solid wood products.
  - Opportunities in the hospitality sector, upholstered furniture, mixed materials, "smart" furniture with integrated technology
  - Non-furniture – demand for products such as oak barrels for craft distilleries
- ☐ Raising public awareness of the economic contributions of the forestry and wood products industry
  - Learn from success of local agriculture movement to identify opportunities to elevate awareness of this industry, its contributions, why it is important to support and how to support it.

Questions:

1. Why did you rank these the top three?

2. Are there any missing?

3. Where do you see yourself in one or more of these business opportunities?

4. What would your first step be?

5. Other thoughts?

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