

Vermont Legislature Expands Opportunities to Enroll Land as Ecologically Significant Treatment Area

- By Ginger Anderson, Chief of Forest Management, Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation

Legislative Changes to Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program (also called UVA or Current Use) slipped in under many people's radar in 2014. One of the key changes gives the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation the ability to approve forest management plans with acres enrolled in Ecologically Significant Treatment Areas (ESTAs) that exceed previously established program limits.

Unlike Current Use in some states, Vermont's program is a "working lands" program, not an "open space" protection program. This means that agricultural or forest lands enrolled in the program for the tax benefit must be *working* in the landscape to qualify. For forests, this means active forest management. Roughly 46% of the eligible forest land in Vermont is enrolled in UVA. This represents about 1.8 million acres, making Use Value appraisal an important tool for forest management in the State.



While private forestry UVA landowners are encouraged to manage environmental values in addition to the production of forest crops, they have been restricted in the amount of productive forest land they can enroll as ESTA. For a small property, this can only be 5-10 acres. If that property is a part of a forest wetland or clay pan forest, it is likely that ESTA is not large enough to cover all of the land that should be managed for protection. Because ESTA classification requires extra assessment and a review by Fish & Wildlife, there have not been many acres enrolled in the category since it was designated in 2009. ESTA designation allows landowners to manage invasive species, or for some wildlife habitat improvement.

The challenge in the changes for staff of Forests, Parks and Recreation is to encourage owners of eligible ESTA lands to take advantage of the classification, as we know more lands could be enrolled in this category. If you are interested in finding out whether you have potential ESTA lands on your property (or if you would like more information on Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program), [contact your county forester](#) to learn more.