

Dear Mr. Wassam,

My husband and I own 165 acres of Chapter 61-A forested property along the Mt. Pisgah range in Westampton, MA. Purchased 15 years ago from a life-long logger, we initially saw this property as an investment in its commercial timber. However, two things have shifted our view of the resources contained in our property.

One is that the land abuts on three sides forest permanently conserved by the Hilltown Land Trust, and the City of Holyoke as part of its watershed. It makes up a resilient and connected ecological corridor that captures and stores water, provides habitat to at-risk species, and tempers weather events.

The other is that, in the past 15 years, our scientific understanding of the gravity and imminence of climate change has come into much clearer focus, but research about the role that forests play in mitigating climate change and holding carbon is a relatively new field. Therefore, we hesitate to view the timber on our property as a commercial product that matures in 30-40 years. Should we regard it as public health & safety investments whose full maturity should be viewed over 300-400 years?

Recently, numerous logging companies have approached us (without our prompting) offering to harvest our forest. If the DOER changes the RPS to incentivize biomass production, it would drive foresters to more aggressive tactics, just as current SMART regulations have driven large solar companies to aggressively pursue and clear cut western MA forests for commercial solar farms.