

Landowners must be protected from frivolous lawsuits

MANY New Hampshire landowners, including myself, who own agriculture and forestland have been following the “tree stand lawsuit.”

In this lawsuit, filed in April in Hillsborough County Superior Court, a Manchester deer hunter is suing a farmer in Epsom. In short, the hunter claims the farmer gave him permission to use his deer stand if the hunter would shoot coyotes on his farm. The hunter fell out of the deer stand, got hurt and sued the farmer. The farmer’s story is much different. He says he never met or spoke to the hunter and never had a deer stand, and now he

will have to pay thousands of dollars just to defend himself and his family in a lawsuit that has been brought against him.

I encourage you to go to the New Hampshire Farm Bureau website (www.nhfarmbureau.org) and read in detail the article by Rob Johnson titled “Lawsuit Targets Landowner after Fall From Tree Stand.”

I, like many New Hampshire landowners, got an early start as a landowner. For me it was age 11 in 1956 when my two older brothers and I were encouraged by our father, the late Gov. Meldrim Thomson, to purchase a 125-acre woodlot in Orford. Today, my wife Sheila and I own the Thomson

Another View

Tom Thomson

Family Tree Farm, which totals 2,800 acres that we open and share with the state and the public.

In a recent New Hampshire Sunday News column, landowner John Harrigan said it best: “It is a privilege to use our private lands.” John, I and many other landowners over the years have witnessed the pain, cost and frustration of vandalism to our properties by a few bad apples. Some of us have had good reasons to close off our lands and access, and no one could blame us

for doing so. I have served on three state boards: Forest Licensing, Current Use and Assessing Standards, with more than 25 years of service representing the interest of landowners, and I understand their issues and concerns.

Recreation is a big industry in New Hampshire, both in dollars and jobs, and its success is due in large part to private landowners sharing the land base with our state and public. One example is snowmobiling. This single recreational sport in one year contributes, both directly and indirectly, \$1.2 billion to our state’s economy. Eighty-four percent of all snowmobile

trails are on private lands

Rep. Gene Chandler, Sen. Andy Sanborn and other state officials and landowner organizations are looking to review and refine our states laws to protect our landowners. This is good news, and I compliment them for doing so. I encourage the House, Senate and governor to come up with a bill that once and for all will protect landowners who are willing to open and share their lands. This needs to be done in the next full session, and during the discussion we must have the true stakeholders at the table: the private landowners.

Today, I reach out to all landowners who are nervous

and frustrated and ask for their patience to give our elected officials the opportunity to fix this problem. I also ask our elected officials to take this matter seriously and correct it in this upcoming legislative session.

Our generous landowners provide the land base that is the fuel that runs our state’s recreational economic engine. If we ignore or fail our landowners, we will witness a domino effect of posting and losing access to private lands, and we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

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Tom Thomson is co-owner of Thomson Family Tree Farm in Orford.