



April 4, 2024

To: House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: H7293 – Old Growth Forest Protection Act

Position: **Support with Amendments**

Dear Chairperson Bennett and Honorable Members of the Committee,

While Clean Water Action feels that this legislation is overly ambitious in its current form, we support the overarching goals and intent of the legislation.

Despite the passage of the Natural Areas Protection Act over 30 years ago, Rhode Island has yet to designate even one acre of natural area or preserve, where forests are allowed to grow unaltered in their natural state. This makes Rhode Island the only state in New England with no public lands protected in their natural state. The General Assembly should take steps to ensure that at least some portion of RI's public lands will be preserved as undisturbed natural areas, which are important for biodiversity in the state.

We recognize that the proper management of state forests may require occasional selective cutting of hazard trees, but hope that the Department of Environmental Management will avoid the damaging process of "clearcutting" as much as possible.

While this legislation may be imperfect, we hope that the General Assembly recognizes the importance of protecting and preserving Rhode Island's natural areas and forests and that you will take actions to require the establishment of natural areas and to end clear cutting on state-owned lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jed Thorp", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jed Thorp
Rhode Island Director, Clean Water Action