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From: Crystal Roberts <crystalcares@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 3, 2024 1:55 AM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: Support of Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293

Greetings!

I am writing to you to ask that you pass the Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293, which would create the first state laws to protect forests and biodiversity in Rhode Island. This would include protections for Old Growth Forests on public land, bringing back the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program, and the creation of the Natural Areas Preserve system.

Old Growth Forests are exceptionally rare in Rhode Island with only 1% of the state's forests being over 100 years old. Despite their rarity, these Old Growth Forests: have a higher degree of native biodiversity and very little to no invasives, are more resistant to wildfires, improve water and soil quality, and store more carbon than any other type of forest.

From 1978-2007, the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program was responsible for identifying, monitoring, and protecting native biodiversity and rare and endangered species. However, since the program was defunded in 2007, no state agency has been doing the important work of advocating for and protecting native biodiversity. Currently none of the state's Natural Heritage Areas are protected, as all state forests are currently open to logging.

The Natural Heritage Program would be required by this legislation to conduct environmental review and approve all public, state logging operations to ensure that no Old Growth Forests, rare forest ecosystems, or Natural Heritage Areas are disturbed, as well as preventing clearcutting of public forests.

The Natural Areas Preserve system is long-overdue in Rhode Island and would finally provide a mechanism to protect these rare forests, or any forests desired by the public, to be preserved in their natural state, where no logging would be permitted.

I see these as only positive moves for the future of Rhode Island and its forests, wildlife & entire ecosystems, (including humans), that all are interdependent. The health, resiliency and continued sustainability of forests and biodiversity in the state have far-reaching consequences that branch out to impact many areas of life for us all - including: air & water quality, soil quality & water retention, resiliency to flooding and wildfire, spread of disease, etc. By taking the larger picture into account now - making proactive decisions towards protecting and monitoring our state's forests and biodiversity - we can ensure that in the future, Rhode Island won't be left in a state of "damage control" due to poor decision-making about our environment and what's in the best interest of us all.

In conclusion, I encourage you to please pass Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293, so we can finally have legal protections for our forests and have a Natural Heritage Program again. We can do better for our future together. Your time & consideration to these important matters is greatly appreciated.

With Best Regards,

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