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From: iris yang <irisyang6376@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 7:12 PM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: Testimony in Support of Protecting Old Growth Forests

Hello Representative Bennett,

I am in strong support of 2024 – H7293) A N A C T RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY -- OLD GROWTH FOREST PROTECTION ACT).

As a state, we need to protect old growth forests to ensure that these climax species continue to thrive for many years. These trees provide habitat for a number of species and create sustainable ecosystems that have a number of human benefits. One ecosystem service is water filtration, which is very important for our state's coastal ecosystems. We've heard of many beaches closing due to excess growth of bacteria, which happens in nutrient (nitrates, phosphates) rich environments. Keeping old growth forests would allow tree roots to take up some of these nutrients, preventing eutrophication and dead zones in our local beaches. Another ecosystem service provided by old growth forests is flood mitigation, which is important in the coming years as climate change causes more weather extremities. Rhode Island, being a small state with a large coastline, will be immediately impacted by these changes. Preserving our forests also prevents soil erosion, which helps coastal landscapes and infrastructure.

A more obvious benefit of forests is carbon sequestration. Old growth forests play a crucial role in capturing and retaining carbon. If these mature forests and forests in general are absent, there will be a more rapid accumulation of heat-trapping carbon, leading to accelerated warming in our state and country. This, in turn, could contribute to heightened air pollution and an increase in respiratory illnesses.

The reality is that all woodlands in Rhode Island, whether public or private, are being cut down rapidly. At a time when it is crucial to protect healthy trees and forests and encourage more planting, there is an ongoing and unchecked removal, primarily driven by opportunistic land developers, tree companies, landscapers, and uninformed or self-centered residential homeowners. This is a serious issue, and if it continues, it will lead to a significant reduction in tree canopy cover across Rhode Island, negatively impacting the ability of these areas to support life.

Please support this critically important Act and enact it into law as soon as possible. Both present and future generations will benefit from efforts to preserve our state's beautiful forests.

Regards,
Iris Yang
Barrington, RI