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From: Janice McAleer <jmcaleer1@verizon.net>
Sent: Thursday, April 4, 2024 10:55 AM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293.

Dear Members of the House Environmental Natural Resources Committee

I am writing in support of the Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293.

I am a resident of North Kingstown, Rhode Island 02852

The Old Growth Forest Protection Act basic purpose is to protect Rhode Island's forests and encourage a well-considered approach to our natural resources and encourage biodiversity. As I'm sure has been mentioned, Rhode Island is the only New England state that does not have this long-range planning in place. It would specifically address protection of Old Growth Forests on public land, revive the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program, and provide for a Natural Areas Preserve system.

In Rhode Island, data shows that only 1% of our Old Growth Forests remain, those over 100 years old. I'm a member of my town's local Conservation Commission and have participated in forestry events in addition to walking local preserves. One of the interesting features in these Old Growth Forests is the higher degree of native biodiversity. There are noticeably fewer invasives. Studies show that these intact areas have better soil quality, moisture retention and carbon sequestration.

Wildfires are a growing environmental concern. On this specific point, intact forests are more resistant. Having been on events in managed forest areas, I've been very concerned with all the debris left by tree clearing/logging. The unwanted branches (economically uninteresting) are left in piles. Yes, they may offer protection for small wildlife. But they also look like handy kindling, as if we're getting ready for a bonfire. It's a scary wasteland. Whether this is wise forestry management is a significant issue in my mind.

Rhode Island once had a Natural Heritage Program (1978-2007) charged with identifying, monitoring, and protecting native biodiversity and rare and endangered species. State budget cuts eliminated this program and the reduced DEM staff has been stretched too thin in their capacity to protect native biodiversity. Without their oversight, Rhode Island's Natural Heritage Areas and state forests are currently unprotected and can be logged without prudent evaluation.

Here's the important detail: the Natural Heritage Program would conduct environmental review and approve public logging operations to ensure no Old Growth Forests, rare forest ecosystems, or Natural Heritage Areas are disturbed, as well as preventing clear-cutting of public forests. This would help us identify and protect our Old Growth forests and open the public discussion as to preserving significant natural areas.

This is not an anti-forestry bill. It is a wise and forward-thinking one. We all need forestry products --- this email will probably be printed off on paper for easier reading. We just need to put mechanisms in place to formulate environmentally well-conceived approaches. The Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293 would help us move in that direction.

Thank you for supporting H 7293.

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