Lou Mansolillo

From:	je ha <jenhindc@yahoo.com>
Sent:	Thursday, April 4, 2024 1:51 PM
To:	House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject:	H7293

Hello,

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. Yet, these Old Growth Forests have a higher degree of native biodiversity, very little to any invasives, are more resistant to wildfires, improve water and soil quality, and store more carbon than any other 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. Also, 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 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 would provide a mechanism to protect rare forests, or any forests desired by the public, to be preserved in their natural state where no logging would be permitted.

Please pass H 7293, so we can finally have legal protections for our forests and have a Natural Heritage Program again.

Don't sell out Rhode Island's forested land! It's so not worth it!

Thank you for your time,

Jennifer Haga