



April 4, 2024

The Honorable David A. Bennett
Chairman
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 7728 An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Comprehensive Fire Safety Act

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the Water Resources Board (WRB), housed within the Division of Statewide Planning, the opportunity to comment on H 7728. This bill would require any entity that owns five hundred acres or more of land to complete a forest plan with a fire mitigation component, to be approved by the local fire department and DEM. We appreciate the intent of this legislation and the sponsor's focus on protecting Rhode Island's forests. However, we have significant concerns about our ability to meet the well-intentioned requirements that this bill introduces without additional capacity and resources.

DEM owns and manages many properties in Rhode Island that exceed 500 acres, such as Arcadia Management Area, George Washington Management Area, and Great Swamp Management Area. In addition, the WRB owns the 8,400-acre Big River Management Area and partners with DEM to manage the property. The bill does not provide details on what must be included in the forest plans it mandates, but even high-level plans would require substantial resources. The bill also does not specify how frequently plans would have to be updated or if there would be requirements for their preparation (for example, must they be written by a certified forester?). We would be pleased to collaborate with the sponsor and committee members on the topic of preventing forest fires in Rhode Island.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and will make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Ryan Mulcahey, DEM Director of Legislative Affairs, at ryan.mulcahey@dem.ri.gov or Legislative Affairs Liaison, Department of Administration, at kyle.lynch@doa.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director
Department of Environmental Management

Meredith Brady
Associate Director
Department of Administration, Division of
Statewide Planning

cc: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
The Honorable Megan Cotter
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director