

Testimony against House Bill 5098 (Forest Parity Act)

Dear Chairperson Bennett and members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

I write to ask you, with urgency and resolve, not to support House Bill 5098 and the expansion of the timber industry in Rhode Island.

Those in support of the bill have co-opted the language of environmentalism to compel you. This is called 'greenwashing.' The loggers have taken a page out of the oil industry's playbook. They state the issues correctly – climate change, drought, wildfire risk, increased incidence of pests and disease, the need for biodiversity, and importance of carbon sequestration – but the proposed a solution of “more logging done consciously” is a ruse.

Timber is a for-profit industry. When money is the bottom line, we cannot trust people to be transparent about what they purport to “protect” and how/why they plan to do it.

Experts state that thinning trees and brush for wildfire resiliency are not only ineffective for reducing or prevent fires, but they also actually make them bigger, hotter and more destructive. Scientists can also tell you that reducing native forests into fuel for biomass energy facilities will emit even more carbon than burning coal, while removing tree canopy that keeps the earth cooler. One of the best things we can do here in the Northeast is keep carbon in our forests.

Additionally, forest degradation makes our communities more vulnerable to flooding – something that has increased by a whopping 380% in some areas of Rhode Island since 2000.

And, if we want to protect biodiversity, we must consider the vital importance of soil (one of the most diverse biological habitats on earth), which is highly disturbed by logging.

On top of all that, Rhode Island has not adequately protected natural heritage areas or mapped our Old Growth forests, it would be a mistake to let the timber industry expand into our precious forest habitats. We need state-wide mapping and reporting to better understand what's at stake. We need to do everything we can to preserve and protect the forests.

Many thanks for your consideration.

Leigh Medeiros