

Dear Committee members, my name is Nathan Cornell, and I am the President of the Old Growth Tree Society, an environmental non-profit devoted to protecting forests and biodiversity in Rhode Island. I am writing in opposition to H 5098, the Forest Parity Act.

This bill, which would make it more profitable to log forests in the state by removing the use and sales tax on forest product machinery and expanding logging to all zoning districts, is no more than a timber industry expansion bill.

While this legislation claims to be environmental, there is nothing environmental about it.

Logging, especially clearcutting, does not make a forest healthy. It destroys biodiversity, killing many of the animals that live there. It creates a fire hazard through the flammable wood slash left behind after the logging operation. The opened up forest canopy allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor making the forest floor dry, and allows more wind to blow through the forest due to the wider holes in the canopy from the cut trees, increasing the risk of fire in the logged areas. Logging also contributes to Climate Change through the carbon released from the logged trees.

The 2023 Exeter wildfire started in an area that was clearcut logged a few years prior. If this legislation is passed, it would increase the risk of fire for residents living near logged forests.

While the bill states it wouldn't apply to forestry operations conducted in a malicious or negligent manner, or that violates state or federal law, that is difficult to prove. A logger could claim they are clearcutting a forest to improve habitat while they are in fact destroying it.

They could claim the trees in the forest are all diseased or dead and then clearcut the forest, even though scientists disagree. According to leading experts in Forest Ecology, Dr. David Foster and Dr. David Orwig of Harvard, it is ecologically better to leave a forest with diseased or dead trees alone to naturally regenerate than to log it, which would cause more damage.

Loggers could claim they are clearcutting a forest for fire prevention, despite the fact logging itself makes a wildfire more likely than leaving the forest alone, even if it has dead trees, as Harvard Ecologists found the dead trees don't pose a major fire hazard in the long run.

Regarding state and federal law, forest clearcutting and most forms of destructive logging are currently legal and actively practiced by tree and logging companies contracted by the state.

This bill also would be in conflict with the 2021 Act on Climate through the carbon emissions that would be released which result in net carbon loss.

Very little carbon of the original tree is contained in wood products, and that carbon is eventually released, especially in short lived products like woodchips, mulch, and firewood that most of the logged trees on state-owned land are turned into.

Logged trees sent to biomass Power Plants, including trees from state land, release carbon immediately.

It also doesn't make sense to pass a bill which removes a source of revenue for the state when the state is dealing with a massive financial deficit.

It is greatly concerning that previous iterations of this forest destruction bill made it pass committee in the last two legislative sessions. I ask the Committee to not pass this anti-environmental bill this year.

Sincerely,

Nathan Cornell

President of the Old Growth Tree Society

Warwick, RI 02886