

Steven Sepe

From: Chéri Smith <cheri@tribalcleanenergy.org>
Sent: Thursday, March 20, 2025 12:09 PM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Cc: Nathan Cornell
Subject: Written Testimony : H 5607

House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Strong Opposition to H 5607 – Misclassification of Forestry as Farming

Dear Honorable Chair and Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

I am a resident of Charlestown, Rhode Island, and President & CEO of an Indigenous nonprofit. I am writing to express my strong opposition to H 5607, which would erroneously redefine forestry—including the logging of natural forests—as farming under Rhode Island law. This bill is a transparent attempt to expand the timber industry’s influence in our state at the expense of irreplaceable natural resources, including old-growth forests, critical wildlife habitats, and vital carbon sinks.

While the bill purports to support economic development, its true intent is to strip away environmental protections under the guise of agricultural policy. Equating forestry with farming is a deliberate misrepresentation designed to provide the timber industry with greater access to land-use benefits, tax breaks, and weakened regulatory oversight. Logging—especially of natural forests—is fundamentally different from farming, as it permanently alters ecosystems rather than allowing for sustainable regeneration as traditional agriculture does.

Why H 5607 is a Direct Threat to Rhode Island’s Forests and Environment:

1. Destruction of Old-Growth and Natural Forests

Rhode Island’s remaining natural forests are essential for biodiversity, climate resilience, and environmental stability. Unlike farmland, which is cultivated and replenished seasonally, forests take decades—or even centuries—to mature. Logging natural forests under the guise of farming would accelerate deforestation, eliminate habitat for endangered species, and irreversibly damage ecosystems.

2. Corporate Exploitation of Loopholes

This bill is not about supporting small landowners or sustainable forestry—it is a corporate-driven effort to exploit agricultural incentives for profit. By reclassifying forestry as farming, large timber companies could gain unfair access to farmland tax exemptions, weakened land-use restrictions, and relaxed environmental regulations.

3. Undermining Rhode Island’s Climate Goals

Forests are one of our most effective natural climate solutions, acting as carbon sinks that absorb greenhouse gases. Logging increases carbon emissions while reducing our ability to mitigate climate change. Rhode Island has committed to reducing its carbon footprint—allowing increased deforestation runs counter to these commitments.

4. Water and Soil Degradation

Unlike sustainable farming practices, logging depletes soil nutrients, increases erosion, and disrupts watersheds. Clear-cutting, even if rebranded as "forestry farming," leads to sediment runoff that pollutes rivers, streams, and drinking water sources.

5. Public Deception and Misuse of Agricultural Protections

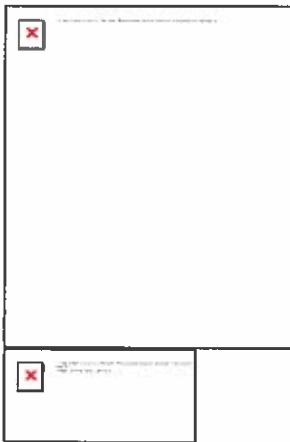
Expanding the definition of farming to include forestry distorts public perception of land stewardship. It creates a dangerous precedent that could lead to further deregulation of extractive industries under the false premise of agricultural activity. This is a deceptive and dangerous move that benefits industry at the expense of local communities, Indigenous land rights, and environmental sustainability.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject H 5607 in its entirety. Rhode Island’s forests are not farms, and they should not be sacrificed for corporate timber interests. Please stand with the people of Rhode Island in protecting our natural heritage, resisting this blatant industry-driven attack on environmental regulations, and ensuring that forests remain forests—not commodities for corporate exploitation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to vote NO on H 5607.

Sincerely,

Cheri A. Smith



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I live on the Narragansett Reservation on the woodland shores of so-called Rhode Island, and respectfully acknowledge that I occupy the traditional and unceded homelands, hunting, and fishing grounds of the Narragansett, Wampanoag, Pequot and Mohegan People.