



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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January 27, 2022

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

RE: H 7066 An Act Relating to Agriculture and Forestry – Old Growth Forest Preservation Act

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 7066, which would institute restrictions intended to protect old growth and certain other forests located on state or municipal property. DEM has some concerns with this legislation.

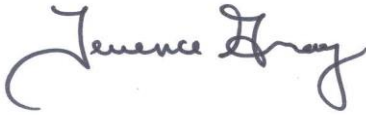
DEM recognizes the importance and benefits of a healthy forest ecosystem, including older and mature forests. However, we are concerned that this legislation would inhibit DEM's ability to effectively manage forests located on state property in a manner that benefits wildlife, recreational users, and the overall health of our forest ecosystem. The definition of "old growth forest" used in the legislation is not consistent with forestry best practices and we urge the Committee to work with stakeholders, including DEM, to find a definition consistent with those practices and with the definition used in other states.

In 2021, the General Assembly adopted legislation establishing a Forest Conservation Commission consisting of experts in a variety of areas related to forests. That body should be operational soon and DEM respectfully suggests that it be given the opportunity to study the issue of old growth forests and to make appropriate recommendations regarding their protection. Any stakeholders with an interest in the topic of old growth forests will be more than welcome to participate in the Commission's work and we look forward to further exploring this topic.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Jason McNamee, Deputy Director

for Natural Resources, at jason.mcnamee@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terrance Gray". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Terrance Gray, P.E.
Acting Director

CC: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources