

Lou Mansolillo

From: Hope Leeson <hopedleeson@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 5, 2023 6:43 PM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: Fwd: Comments - Upcoming bills House Comm. on Env. & Nat. Res.

Hope Leeson
She / Her

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Hope Leeson <hopedleeson@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jun 5, 2023 at 3:58 PM
Subject: Comments - Upcoming bills House Comm. on Env. & Nat. Res.
To: <rep-bennett@rilegislature.gov>, <rep-fogarty@rilegislature.gov>, <rep-mcentee@rilegislature.gov>, <rep-spears@rilegislature.gov>
Cc: <lmansolillo@rilegislature.gov>

Dear Representatives Bennett, Fogarty, McEntee, and Spears,

As a botanist and resident of South Kingstown, I respectfully submit this email to you, as a means of commenting on House Bills **H-5784** and **H-6342**.

H-6342

The bill's proposal to create a legislative study commission on forest management is an important step towards implementing the goals of the RI Forest Conservation Act. However, the members of the committee should encompass a broader diversity of land management ethics and understanding of forest habitat. This can be accomplished by including a member of the Narragansett Indian Tribe, and a member of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, or Rhode Island Natural History Survey. These voices would introduce differing perspectives on forest ecology, habitat structure, and ways of working with forest habitat to reduce the potential for unintended large scale forest fires.

H-5784

In concept I appreciate the interest in putting forestry practices on a par with those of agriculture, as a means of promoting forest products to incentivize retention of forested lands by landowners, I am troubled by the absence of specific language in the bill.

2-28-5. Declaration of policies.

The general assembly finds and declares that it is the policy of the state to promote an environment in which forest operations and forest-based businesses are safeguarded against nuisance actions arising out of conflicts between forestry operations and urban and suburban land uses, in a manner consistent with the provisions of chapter 23 of title 2 ("right to farm act"), and to protect forest landowners with forest management plans from state administrative actions and regulations above and beyond the restrictions on farms and agricultural operations on the same subject.

While I understand that the Right to Farm Act is intended to protect agricultural landowners from objections being legally imposed by neighboring landowners, it seems important that the statement also include a provision for the continued protection of forest lands under the Freshwater Wetlands Act (R.I. General Laws 2-14-1et seq.) Since many of our older forest habitat is located within freshwater wetland systems, and represents important ecological habitat on many levels, it is

important that review of alteration or clearing of these lands be reviewed and permitted by the staff of the Freshwater Wetlands Section for the protection of these important habitats.

As well, older and core forest lands in upland habitat deserve language specific to their ecological role and value. The framework around this bill is economic, and the value and role of forests, particularly older forests, goes beyond the economics of individual landowners.

It should be clear that it is not the intent of the bill to promote clear cutting of forested lands, but that the intent is to incentivize protection; in keeping with the Rhode Island Forest Conservation Act.

Respectfully yours,

Hope Leeson
She / Her