From:	H Hemmalin <hhemmalin@gmail.com>
Sent:	Wednesday, April 3, 2024 12:08 PM
To:	House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject:	The Old Growth Forest Protection Act, Bill H7293

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to you to ask that you pass the Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2024 H 7293, which would create the first state laws to protect forests and biodiversity in Rhode Island. This Act includes protections for Old Growth Forests on public land, brings back the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program, and creates a Natural Areas Preserve system in Rhode Island.

Old Growth Forests are exceptionally rare in Rhode Island, with only 1% of the state's forests being over 100 years old. Yet, we know that Old Growth Forests (1) have a higher degree of native biodiversity, with very little to any invasives, (2) are more resistant to wildfires, (3) improve water and soil quality, and (4) store more carbon than any other forest type.

From 1978-2007, the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program was responsible for identifying, monitoring, and protecting native biodiversity as well as rare and endangered species. However, that program was defunded in 2007, and all state forests are currently open to logging, which essentially means that none of what would be the state's Natural Heritage Areas are protected in the way they should be.

The Natural Heritage Program would be required by this legislation to conduct environmental review and approve all public state logging operations. This would ensure that no Old Growth Forests, rare forest ecosystems, or Natural Heritage Areas are disturbed, and prevent clearcutting of public forests.

In sum, the Old Growth Forest Protection Act is a forward-thinking roadmap that puts native forest biodiversity protections at the forefront of forest management in Rhode Island going forward. I urge you to pass H 7293, so we can finally have the comprehensive legal protections for our forests that we need.

Thank You,

Holly A. Hemmalin, PhD
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