



Division of Statewide Planning

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February 27, 2025

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

RE: House Bill No. [5294](#) - AN ACT RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY -- OLD GROWTH FOREST PROTECTION ACT

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Administration, Division of Statewide Planning (RIDSP) the opportunity to comment on 2025-H-5294. This bill would create a new program called “the natural heritage program” within the RIDSP and mandate that the State Planning Council (SPC) provide oversight of extractive logging operations and prescribed burn operations in all state or municipally owned forests over one acre.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation and the sponsor’s focus on protecting Rhode Island’s forests. Presently, RIDEM has the responsibility and expertise in forestry, and we are concerned that the bill would subject a sister agency’s actions to oversight by our SPC, which functions as a policy council not a permitting agency. The bill would create onerous and redundant data gathering, inventory and reporting issues, extensive and expensive public notice requirements, and additional meeting and hearing requirements for the SPC. In addition, the bill would create an appeal process for SPC decisions to Superior Court that would require additional funding for legal expertise, time and other expenses.

The RIDSP would require substantial resources beyond the one full time employee proposed to implement this legislation as envisioned.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and will make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Legislative Affairs, Department of Administration, Karen.Greco@doa.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Meredith E. Brady
Associate Director
Division of Statewide Planning

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
Kristen Silvia, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Legislation
Louis Mansolillo, House Committee Clerk
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House