

Date: February 27, 2025

To: [HouseEnvironmentandNaturalResources@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseEnvironmentandNaturalResources@rilegislature.gov)

Re: In support of Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2025 House Bill [5294](#):

House Bill No. 5294  
BY Shanley, Bennett, Phillips  
ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY -- OLD  
GROWTH FOREST PROTECTION ACT {LC1096/1} (Creates the Old Growth  
Forest Protection Act to provide protection for state-owned forestland in their  
natural state prohibiting extractive logging and clearcutting in any forest on state-  
owned land.)

I urge you to please pass the Old Growth Forest Protection Act 2025 H 5294, which would create the first state laws to protect forests and biodiversity on public land in Rhode Island.

This would prohibit clearcutting of forests on state-owned land, protect Old Growth Forests on public land, and bring back the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program.

Old Growth Forests are exceptionally rare in Rhode Island with only 1% of the state's forests being over 100 years old. Yet, these Old Growth Forests are incredibly important! They have a higher degree of native biodiversity, very little to any invasives, are more resistant to wildfires, improve water and soil quality, and store more carbon than any other forest.

Old Growth Forests full of big, old trees are highly effective at trapping climate-warming greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it away. Forests can only do this vital work if they remain intact; when old trees are cut down, they release their stores of carbon back into the atmosphere, trapping heat and ramping up climate. Conserving our oldest forests provides more net carbon storage than any other use of land in the United States.

Old Growth Forests also function as a water treatment network that catches rainfall, regulates storm runoff, and pulls pollution from the soil rather than allowing it to make it back to waterways.

Old Growth Forests are also extremely important habitats for threatened species, both animals and plants. From 1978-2007, the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program was responsible for identifying, monitoring, and protecting native biodiversity and rare and endangered species. However, since the program was defunded in 2007, no state agency has been doing the important work of advocating for and protecting native biodiversity. Also, none of the state's Natural Heritage Areas are currently protected because all state forests are open to logging.

Please pass H 5294, so we can finally have legal protections for our forests and have a Natural Heritage Program again.

Thank you.

Faye Dvorchak