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From: Greg Gerritt <gerritt@mindspring.com>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 1:08 PM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Cc: Greg Gerritt
Subject: Testimony on H 5294

Members of the House Environment committee, As a person with a great deal of experience in the woods, including working to stop clearcutting in Maine in the 1990s and 15 years of managing a small woodlot, I tend to support H 5294 but feel there are a number of things in the bill that should be modified in order that the bill work effectively.

I am glad the bill no longer calls for the creation of a new state agency. That would have been an overly bureaucratic solution .

The definition of a clearcut is really not that good. I quote the proposed law and then make a few comments on it

“(iii) Within a period of thirty (30) years, cuts or removes more than the lesser of the growth of the basal area of all tree species (not including a tree of a non-native invasive tree species) in a stand; or twenty percent (20%) of the basal area of a stand; and
(iv) Includes the application of clearcutting, high grading, seed-tree cutting, shelterwood cutting, or any other logging method in a manner inconsistent with selection management.
(5) “Extractive logging” means the felling or removal of any trees from a forest for any purpose.”

In a typical northern hardwood forest like RI you can cut 20% of the basal area in year 25 years (bill has limits for a 30 year period) and have much more wood growing on it than when you started as they grow 2% a year, compounded. It is hard to understand what the bill is actually saying when it uses a statement more than the lesser of the growth or 20% of the basal area of a stand, but either way, one can cut considerably more than the limits listed while still ending up with more wood growing than you started with over a 30 years period.

The definition of extractive logging would include 12 year olds cutting a few dead poles to make a tree house.

If the bill really is applied to only the 1% of RI forests that have not been cut over in the last 100 years that would be mostly okay. But I strongly believe that the bill ignores the realities of rural economies and the uses of wood in the 21st century. As a former logger, carpenter and furniture maker I understand how important wood is to everything, and that we need to use more of it instead of less. This means we need to both let wood grow and manage it fairly intensively. The bill as written will make it nearly impossible to use the wood we grow in RI for commercial purposes. The result will be that we are exporting our deforestation to places with weaker environmental and forestry laws. We must take responsibility and increase the proportion of wood used in RI that comes from RI. And do it in a way that increases the amount of wood growing in the state. The bill as written will help us grow a bit more wood, but will also reduce the commercial use of wood grown in RI, with negative effects on the economies of rural areas.

A simpler bill would simply call for the end of cutting on all publicly owned lands that have not been cut in the last 100 years, to be established by ecological survey, with pretty straight forward rules about delineating the sites on maps and monitoring and refusing permits to log them. The banning of clearcutting should be clear as to what a clearcut is rather than using a much wider definition that includes seed tree cuts. There comes a time in hardwood management when you have magnificent trees that are also very useful for human societies and you can remove the old giants before they fall down and ruin 3 generations of trees, condemning them to earlier deaths, and noting carbon sequestration fits well with some selective cutting that the bill outlaws.

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