

Lou Mansolillo

From: Jennifer Sheppard <chocolatemog@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 27, 2025 8:38 AM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: In support of H5924 Old Growth Forest Act

Dear Committee members, I strongly support 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 include prohibiting clear cutting of forests on state-owned land, protections for Old Growth Forests on public land, and bringing 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 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.

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 protected as all state forests are currently open to logging.

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

Sincerely

Jennifer Sheppard
Tiverton RI