

Testimony in Support of House Bill 5294 (The Old Growth Forest Protection Act)

Dear Committee members.

I ask you, with urgency and resolve, to please support House Bill 5294 to protect Rhode Island's remaining Old Growth Forest, currently at an estimated 1% of what it once was.

All forests are not the same. Old Growth Forests are rare ecosystems. These undisturbed natural forests support an immense variety of native plant and animal species, store more carbon than other forests, are more resistant to wildfire, prevent flooding, and have a rich underground mycorrhizal network, which protects the forest. Old Growth Trees are more resilient to weather disturbances and insect infestations, and they keep out invasive plant species. They also soak up more water and keep the soil compacted, protecting water quality and preventing erosion. Even dead trees play a crucial role in the health and wellness of this environment by providing homes to native animals and nutrients to the soil.

Many with logging interests will emphasize the need to cut forests due to wildfire, however, experts state that thinning trees and brush for wildfire resiliency are not only ineffective for reducing or prevent fires, but they also actually make them bigger, hotter and more destructive. Scientists can also tell you that reducing native forests into fuel for biomass energy facilities will emit even more carbon than burning coal, while removing tree canopy that keeps the earth cooler. One of the best things we can do here in the Northeast is keep carbon in our forests.

Additionally, forest degradation makes our communities more vulnerable to flooding – something that has increased by a whopping 380% in some areas of Rhode Island since 2000.

We must also consider the vital importance of soil (one of the most diverse biological habitats on earth), which is highly disturbed by logging.

Please - let's adequately protected natural heritage areas and map our Old Growth forests.

Thank you,
Leigh Medeiros