



**COMMENTS ON H 5294, THE OLD GROWTH FOREST PROTECTION ACT OF 2025
BEFORE THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
OF THE RHODE ISLAND LEGISLATURE**

**By Michael Kellett, Executive Director, RESTORE: The North Woods
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I am submitting these comments on behalf of RESTORE: The North Woods, a New England nonprofit organization with members in Rhode Island and across the region.

Our organization strongly supports H 5294, the Old Growth Forest Protection Act of 2025. The bill would enact the first state law to permanently protect forests and biodiversity on public land in Rhode Island. This would include prohibiting clearcutting of forests on state-owned land, protections for old growth forests on these public lands, and the re-establishment of 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, compared with younger forests, these old growth forests have a greater native biodiversity, little if any presence of invasive species, superior resistance to wildfire, enhanced water and soil quality, and higher levels of carbon sequestration and storage. The Old Growth Forest Protection Act would ensure the permanent conservation of existing old growth forests and allow them to continue to reach their full ecological potential in the future.

From 1978 to 2007, the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program was responsible for identifying, monitoring, and protecting native biodiversity and rare and endangered species. Unfortunately, the program was defunded in 2007. Since then, no state agency has been doing the important work of advocating for and protecting native biodiversity in Rhode Island. Moreover, none of the state's Natural Heritage Areas are truly protected, as all state forests are currently open to logging and other intensive management. The Old Growth Forest Protection Act would reverse the short-sighted and ill-conceived elimination of this important program.

The Old Growth Forest Protection Act would help to mitigate climate change, reduce the loss of native biodiversity, and preserve intact forests for the enjoyment of this and future generations. This bill would have no negative environmental or economic impacts while offering important benefits to the health and well-being of the people of Rhode Island and beyond.

Please support the passage of H 5294, to provide long-needed statutory protections for public forests and the re-establishment of the vital Natural Heritage Program. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important bill.

Submitted to: HouseEnvironmentandNaturalResources@rilegislature.gov