

**Date:** March 31, 2026

**To:** Chair Bennett and Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

**From:** Cindy Larson Moura

**Subject:** SUPPORT for H 7914 – Natural Forest Protection Act

Dear Chairman Bennett and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Cindy Larson Moura, and I am a resident of Barrington (District 67). I am writing today to express my strong **support** for **House Bill 7914**, the Natural Forest Protection Act.

Rhode Island's state-owned forests are a valuable natural treasure of our state's biological heritage. However, our current legal framework fails to protect these public lands beyond basic wetland regulations, leaving them vulnerable to management practices that prioritize industrial interests over ecological health. H 7914 is a critical step toward modernizing our forest management to ensure these ecosystems remain resilient for future generations.

I urge the Committee to support this bill for the following reasons:

- **Challenging a Status Quo that Favors Industrial Logging:** The current status quo in our state management areas often favors the logging industry through even-age logging and extractive operations that can lead to the spread of invasive plants and the destruction of native habitats. These management practices threaten the biodiversity of shared ecosystems that are essential to many of Rhode Island's other key industries, including **agriculture, horticulture and floriculture, fishing, and hospitality**. Healthy, intact forests act as vital infrastructure for these sectors by maintaining soil health, regulating water cycles, and supporting the natural beauty that drives our tourism economy.
- **Prioritizing Biodiversity to Catch Up with Our Neighbors:** Rhode Island has fallen behind most other Northeast states in prioritizing biodiversity as essential to the future wellbeing of the state and its residents. While neighboring states have established protected wildlands, Rhode Island remains the only state in New England with zero acres of state-owned forest protected in its natural state. H 7914 is one of several crucial bills this session aimed at rectifying this gap and aligning our conservation standards with regional best practices.
- **Reestablishing the Natural Heritage Program:** This legislation mandates the reestablishment of the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program, which was discontinued in 2007. Bringing back this program is vital for identifying and monitoring rare species and ecosystems, providing the science-based oversight necessary to protect our natural heritage areas from further degradation.

- **Wildland and Old Growth Protection:** By banning extractive and even-age logging on state-owned land, this bill protects rare old-growth forests that serve as essential carbon sinks and resilient habitats. It ensures that management activities—such as the removal of invasive species or hazard trees—are subject to public oversight and rigorous environmental review.

It is a matter of significant public benefit that our natural forests be protected as wildlands rather than industrial timberlands. Rhode Island is among the most densely populated states, resulting in fragmented forests that require careful management to support biodiversity and ecological resilience amid climate change and development.

Please pass H 7914 out of Committee to the House Floor with a recommendation for passage. This is one of several steps we need to take to safeguard Rhode Island's environment and economy. Thank you for your time and for your service.

Respectfully,

*Cindy Larson Moura*

Cindy Larson Moura, Barrington