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From: Gretchen Sotomayor <ramblerg5303@pm.me>
Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2026 9:56 AM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Subject: Support for H7914

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Dear Committee members,

I am asking you to support the Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914, a bold step in protecting our public forests and rich biodiversity in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island is currently *the only state* in New England with no protected "wildlands" on public land, defined as forests protected in their natural state from logging.

H 7914 would protect Old Growth Forests and rare habitats on public state land through the creation of the Natural Area Preserves, as listed in the bill.

Old Growth Forests and old mature forests are exceptionally rare in Rhode Island, with *only 1%* of the state's forests being more than 100 years old. Yet, these Old Growth Forests are not only highly effective in trapping climate-warming greenhouse gases, they support a higher degree of native biodiversity.

The benefits of protecting these diverse, forested lands are many: they are more resistant to wildfires, they improve water and soil quality, and subsequently, a healthy forest environment reduces the population of infectious ticks

This bill would also reinstate the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program, which would be tasked with identifying, monitoring, and protecting native biodiversity, including our rare and endangered species in Rhode Island.

We need our forested lands to support the larger ecosystem of clean air, water, and soil nutrients that we all depend on. Please pass the Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914 to protect these invaluable resources for the children, and grandchildren following in our footsteps.

Gretchen Sotomayor

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