

Dear Committee Members,

I write in support of the Natural Forest Protection Act (H 7914), which would create Rhode Island's first state law to protect public forests and biodiversity.

Rhode Island is currently the only state in New England without designated Wildlands on public land, meaning forests that are protected in their natural, undisturbed state and free from logging. This bill would begin to change that by establishing Natural Area Preserves to protect old growth forests and rare habitats on state-owned land.

Old growth and mature forests are exceptionally rare in Rhode Island, with only about 1% of our forests over 100 years old. These forests are not easily replaced. They support greater native biodiversity, have few invasive species, are more resilient to wildfire, improve water and soil quality, host fewer ticks, and store more carbon than younger forests. They also offer something harder to quantify, places where nature has been allowed to simply continue, undisturbed.

H 7914 would protect these areas by prohibiting clearcutting and other destructive logging practices on state lands, and by requiring environmental review before logging takes place.

The bill would also restore the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program after nearly 20 years, allowing the state to once again identify, monitor, and protect native biodiversity, including rare and endangered species.

This is a meaningful step toward making native biodiversity a clear priority for Rhode Island.

As the saying goes, "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in." This bill reflects that kind of long-term thinking and stewardship.

I respectfully urge you to pass the Natural Forest Protection Act (H 7914), so that Rhode Islanders can continue to experience forests that are intact, resilient, and alive with native species.

Sincerely,

Kenda Swartz  
Bristol, Rhode Island