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Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

I am writing to urge you to support the **Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914**. Support for this bill would create the first state law to protect public forests and biodiversity in Rhode Island's history.

Rhode Island is currently the only state in New England without protected Wildlands on public land, meaning forests are unprotected in their natural state from logging.

As a resident of both North Smithfield and South Kingstown, I am deeply concerned about the amount of deforestation happening on Rhode Island's public lands from clearcutting and other destructive logging. Such practices remove most of the trees from a forest destroying the tree canopy.

Further, such destructive logging harms native biodiversity, causes invasive species to spread, increases the risk of wildfire, disturbs soil, pollutes waterways, causes erosion, establishes tick habitat, and adds to Climate Change resulting from the carbon lost when trees in a forest are logged.

The Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914 would protect Old Growth Forests and rare habitats on public state land through the creation of the Natural Area Preserves listed in the bill. Most of these Old Growth Forests are located in southern Rhode Island.

Old Growth Forests and old mature forests. While these forests are exceptionally rare in Rhode Island with only 1% of the state's forests being over 100 years old, they have a higher degree of native biodiversity. They contain very little to no invasive species, are more resistant to wildfires, improve water and soil quality, have less ticks, and store more carbon than any other forest.

This bill would not only protect Old Growth Forests but also protect our public state forests from deforestation and natural habitat destruction through provisions prohibiting clearcutting and other destructive logging practices on state-owned land, as well as requiring environmental review before public state logging operations.

In addition, the bill would restore the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program after 19 years to identify, monitor, and protect native biodiversity including rare and endangered species in Rhode Island, thus prioritizing native biodiversity in the state.

As a land trust board member with a vested interest in both northern and southern Rhode Island, I strongly urge you to pass the Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914. Such a measure would preserve and protect state public forests from clear cutting, protect and preserve over 46 Old Growth Forests and undisturbed core forests, have more review before state logging operation, and bring back the RI Natural Heritage Program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Lisa J. Harpin, Ed.D.

North Smithfield Land Trust Board Member