



PO Box 633
Saunderstown, RI 02874
401-212-0832

January 26, 2022

Chairman Bennett and Members
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 7066 – Old Growth Forest Preservation Act

Dear Chairman Bennett and members of the House Environment and Natural Resource Committee:

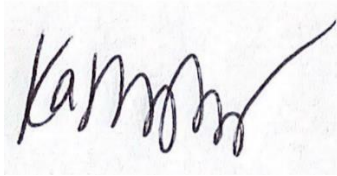
My name is Kate Sayles, and I am the Executive Director of the RI Land Trust Council. The Council is the coalition of the state's 45+ land trusts- community-based organizations that protect and steward Rhode Island's open spaces, farms, forestland, historic sites and natural areas. The RI Land Trust Council provides land trusts with support and the resources they need to not only conserve RI's important lands, but to ensure that the lands they protect are maintained, stewarded and secured forever. The Land Trust Council supports how individual land trusts choose to steward and manage their lands, and land trusts around the state own and manage hundreds of acres forestland either on their own or in partnership with conservation organizations and/or the State.

While I am writing today on behalf of the Land Trust Council, I also think it's important to note that I volunteer as co-coordinator of the RI Woodland Partnership, a collaboration among foresters, landowners, conservationists, and professionals who share a common goal of advancing the stewardship and long-term protection of RI's woodlands to benefit the local economy, ecological values, community enjoyment and health. In addition, I co-authored the 2019 study, *The Value of RI's Forests*, a project of the RI Forest Conservation Advisory Commission and the RI Tree Council.

The Land Trust Council agrees that Rhode Island's forests are important for all of their values, and that our forests are being increasingly fragmented and threatened by development. We agree that funding sources should be directed to conserving the state's important forests, recognized for all of the benefits they provide identified in the Forest Conservation Act, which passed in July 2021 (and was co-sponsored by many members of this Committee). We also recognize that there is not consensus on the definitions or prohibitions outlined in this bill, and **we respectfully ask that H7066 be held for further study by the Forest Conservation Commission, established with the passing of the Forest Conservation Act last year.**

According to the Forest Conservation Act, the Forest Conservation Commission shall be tasked with developing the criteria necessary for, “defining the most important forest land,” as well as “making a reasonably accurate inventory of all land in the state that meets the definition of forest land.” In recent updates, the public members of the Commission have been identified by the Department of Environmental Management and the group will soon be called into order to assume their duties. The charge of the Commission is clear in the law, and the Commission is the group best suited to study this H7066, and ensure that there is consensus across the board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Sayles", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Kate Sayles, Director