

Dear House Finance Committee Members,

I strongly oppose H 5781, which would add 10 loggers to the DEM to support increased logging, including likely clearcutting, on state-owned land. H 5781 is a terrible idea and not what RI needs now or at any time in the future.

The money that would be used in H 5781 to destroy our state forests through funding of these loggers would be better spent on two very important and urgent areas...

1) Staffing to help remove invasive species that are disfiguring, strangling and killing nearly all trees on public state-owned land in RI. Look around any property in RI and you will see the devastation being caused by invasive (especially vines). Ride down any bike path or visit any state park and see for yourself this alarming situation. The state needs to act NOW and aggressively to protect existing forests and trees from invasives.

2) Staffing the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program to identify, monitor, and protect biodiversity for the state. RI must reduce destruction of remaining forests in order to reduce carbon emissions, protect remaining wildlife and biodiversity still in existence. Keep forests in their natural state as places for Rhode Islanders to visit and recharge is essential, and way more important than cutting down forests for profit. The RI Natural Heritage Program hasn't existed since 2007, and Rhode Island needs this program reinstated to protect the state's rare and endangered species whose habitats are vulnerable to logging and development. Logging happens quick, but destruction of rare and endangered species takes a long time (if ever) to recover.

I recently visited the RI Great Swamp forest. It is a magical place. There are still some very large and old growth trees left there. However, I noticed blue paint markings on many large and old trees. I found out these trees are going to be cut down. Why? The trees are in great condition and in no harm trails or pathways. Now just imagine the addition of 10 additional loggers. We all know what will happen to these large and old trees. Let's stop the madness before it gets going please.

Please do not pass H 5781, which is just a deforestation bill. Instead, support mitigating invasives killing our remaining trees and forests and bring back the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program.

Leave a lasting legacy by preserving our remaining in-tact forests that your friends, children, grandchildren, and future generations will thank you for. This is real leadership. This is what we need from you.

Thank you,
George Voutes

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