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From: Jen H <jenhindc@yahoo.com>
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To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Oppose H 7243

Categories: Red category

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To Members of the House Finance Committee:

I am writing to urge you to oppose House Bill H 7243, which would direct the General Assembly to fund ten new full-time equivalent positions within DEM's Division of Forestry for FY 2027. While the bill is framed as supporting forest stewardship, I am deeply concerned that these positions will in practice expand commercial timber harvesting on Rhode Island's state-owned land — continuing a pattern that has already resulted in the clearcutting of old-growth and Natural Heritage Areas. In 2020 alone, DEM clearcut 195 acres in the Arcadia Management Area, much of it within habitat identified as containing rare and endangered species. Adding ten more forestry staff without any corresponding legal protections for our most ecologically sensitive lands will accelerate, not mitigate, that damage.

Rhode Island is already the only state in New England with no forests on state-owned land protected from logging, and the only northeastern state with effectively no Wildlands on public land. Rather than doubling down on this shameful distinction, the General Assembly should be investing in the restoration of the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program — which DEM defunded in 2007 — to once again identify, monitor, and protect the rare and endangered species and ecosystems that depend on our state forests.

If the legislature wishes to fund new DEM positions, those positions should be housed in a restored Natural Heritage Program, placed under the Division of Statewide Planning rather than under DEM's forestry operations, and charged with protecting biodiversity rather than managing timber inventory. That is a use of public funds Rhode Islanders could be proud of.

I urge you to reject H 7243 and instead redirect this investment toward genuine conservation. Our old-growth forests, Natural Heritage Areas, and the species that depend on them cannot wait.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Haga
Portsmouth, RI

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