

Dear Committee Members,

I write to oppose H 8152, which would extend sweeping tax exemptions and legal protections to commercial forest product operations throughout Rhode Island. While the bill's preamble references biodiversity and ecosystem services, its actual provisions point in the opposite direction — subsidizing the very industries that put our forests most at risk.

H 8152 would exempt logging and timber harvesting equipment from sales tax, exempt forestry machinery from local property taxation, and designate commercial forest product operations as permitted uses in every zoning district in the state. Taken together, these incentives make it significantly more financially attractive to clearcut Rhode Island's forests — including for solar development — and remove local communities' ability to weigh in on such operations.

Rhode Island's forests are not simply a timber resource. They are living ecosystems that have developed over generations — habitats for native wildlife, watersheds, carbon sinks, and reservoirs of biodiversity that cannot be restored once lost. Old-growth stands and their understories represent irreplaceable ecological communities. Public subsidies that lower the cost of harvesting them will accelerate their loss.

The bill's wildlife habitat exception in the zoning section is far too narrow to serve as meaningful protection. And nothing in the bill requires forest management plans to protect old growth, maintain habitat corridors, or preserve intact native ecosystems.

Rhode Island's forests belong to all of us — and to the creatures who depend on them, and to future generations who deserve to inherit them intact. I urge the committee to reject H 8152 and instead pursue forest policy that centers ecological integrity alongside any economic consideration.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Haga with assist from Claude AI

Portsmouth, RI

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