

**In Opposition to H 8152: RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY -- FORESTRY AND FOREST PARITY ACT**

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To Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

**I strongly oppose the Timber Industry Expansion Bill, i.e. the "Forest Parity Act, H 8152.** This is a bad bill for RI residents, wildlife and the natural world. It's hard to process why this bill is even being considered. RI is second only to NJ in population density, and what few forests and trees we have left on RI public lands must be preserved (and admired) and not harvested for short-term profit. The epidemic of tree clearing on private lands in RI is already destroying forests at an alarming rate. Let's protect the last remaining public forests in RI from the same fate. RI doesn't want or need a Timber Industry. RI is not the Western United States or Canada, where sustainable timber logging comes from and where RI receives its wood products today. **H 8152 would make it permissible to cut down forests and trees in all RI zoning districts of all municipalities in RI.** Can you imagine if this bill was law? Every neighborhood forest and tree patch (large or small) could be cut down and destroyed! For what? Spoiler Alert → For a one-time, short-term commercial profit, but at the immense expense of permanent destruction of RI neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, parks, forests, and associated natural environmental ecosystems all across RI. This is not hyperbole, and this is exactly what WILL happen if H 8152 is passed.

H 8152 would make it more profitable to cut (including clear-cutting) ALL RI public land (which is absolutely not what we want or need in RI at this time in our historical evolution) and create a publicly subsidized Timber Industry in Rhode Island. This bill is deviously enabled by removing the use and sales tax on logging equipment and expanding logging to ALL RI zoning districts! If RI wants to publicly subsidize industries, it should look at health care, education, low-cost renewable energy, and the mass transportation sectors to further assist. These are the industries that Rhode Islanders need help with NOW, and that we expect our legislators to act upon aggressively today. Classifying RI forests as agriculture land is NOT acceptable and will only destroy vast tree canopy, kill bio-diversity quicker, and increase wildfires. More than enough open space (devoid of trees) has been created across RI from DEM clear-cutting of public lands, from the expansion / upgrades of electrical transmission power lines and towers, and from the enormous number of new solar fields where forests used to be.

H 8152 is clearly being pushed by the American Logger's Council and U.S. Timber Industry. Giving the logging and tree removal industries tax incentives and tax breaks on machines and equipment that will be used to clear-cut our precious remaining public lands and forests is the worst thing we can do and unacceptable to every RI resident. We need more tax revenue in RI to help fund our crumbling state infrastructure and mitigate the accelerating effects of climate change effecting our land, air and water. Investing more (and creating competitive tax subsidies) in high-tech, electro-tech, renewable energy, med-tech, and public higher education is a much better course of action for RI than using taxpayer money to fund a timber industry that will only destroy our state forever.

If H 8152 is passed, it WILL lead to increased destructive logging in Rhode Island's public spaces and forests. It WILL destroy biodiversity. It WILL create many more fire hazards (9 out of 10 wild fires are manmade and many start in clear-cut forest areas). It WILL increase invasive species in place of a healthy tree canopy and natural understory, and it WILL contribute to rapid climate change. This is not an overstatement. This is what happens when you allow the timber industry to destroy forests.

During a recent visit to the *Great Swamp Management Area in West Kingston RI*, I was awestruck by the few remaining beautiful large trees on the property. If you haven't visited this site, you really should (especially before considering this bill). What I also noticed was that many large and old growth trees were colored with blue paint, which I learned meant they would be cut down (they were in fact cut down). For the life of me, I don't understand why these trees are being cut down. They are large and old growth trees in great condition, not in danger of falling, and far away from structures, roads and pathways. Take one guess why these trees were cut down? Spoiler Alert → \$\$\$\$. And where did the money go from all this beautiful wood that was taken out of our public land in the Great Swamp Management Area? Would be a good question to ask someone responsible for managing public land in RI.

Let's not give the logging industry a free pass to cut down our last remaining forests. Once cutting starts, it will be virtually impossible to stop it.

Please do not advance H 8152. Current and future generations of Rhode Islanders and the natural world we all need to survive and thrive will thank you.

*George Voutes*