



Audubon Society of Rhode Island

RE: Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 8152 – An Act Relating to Agriculture and Forestry - Forestry and Forest Parity Act

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Audubon Society of Rhode Island

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island – representing our 17,000 members – I respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 8152.

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island appreciates the intent behind H8152 and agrees that Rhode Island’s forests are critically important for biodiversity, climate resilience, carbon sequestration, clean water, wildlife habitat, and quality of life. We also recognize that working forests and responsible forest management can play a key role in keeping land undeveloped and economically viable.

However, Audubon must oppose H8152 as currently written because the bill provides sweeping exemptions and protections for “forest product operations” without sufficient environmental safeguards, local oversight, or sustainable forestry standards.

Importantly, the bill does not require compliance with forest stewardship plans, climate-smart forestry practices, habitat conservation standards, or DEM best management practices. There are no provisions protecting mature forests, wetlands, riparian buffers, bird nesting habitat, or sensitive wildlife areas. At a time when Rhode Island is increasingly focused on climate resilience and biodiversity protection, legislation affecting forests should strengthen — not weaken — ecological safeguards. Audubon is also concerned about the bill’s broad tax exemptions for forestry machinery, vehicles, and operations without requiring measurable public conservation benefits in return. Public subsidies should be tied to sustainable forest management, long-term conservation outcomes, and ecological protections.

While we support policies that help prevent forest fragmentation and conversion to development, H8152 goes too far in prioritizing commercial forest product operations over responsible environmental stewardship and local planning authority.

Until such protections are included, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island respectfully opposes H8152.

Regards,
Maxwell McFarland
Director of Advocacy

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