

## Testimony in Opposition of S2356:

George Voutes, 17 Shore Road, Bristol, RI 02809

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2026

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Senate Finance Committee Members,

I am writing in opposition to S2356 to place the Big River Management Area under the administration of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

Placing Big River Management Area and our Public Forest Lands under DEM is not acceptable. Unfortunately, DEM's current forest management practices include destructive clearcut logging, which is destroying RI biodiversity, causing invasives to spread, polluting waterways, disturbing the soil, creating greater tick habitat, contributing to Climate Change from the carbon released from the logged trees, and creating more fire hazards. If you place the "Management" of Big River under DEM, you are directly facilitating the current and existing practice of clear-cutting RI Public Forest by DEM and thereby the accelerated destruction of RI Public Forests and its biodiversity.

Instead of having DEM administer the Big River Management Area, it should be designated as a Natural Area Preserve with the highest legal protections. That way, it can then always be enjoyed by the public in its current "natural state". There is currently a bill in the state legislature, the Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914, that would do just this, as the Big River Natural Area Preserve is listed as the 31st Natural Area Preserve designated in the bill.

I ask the Committee to support the protection of the Big River Management Area through the Natural Forest Protection Act H 7914, instead of giving it to DEM to administer as outlined in S2356.

In addition, page 10, number 1 of S2356 states: *(allows the DEM director to utilize the unspecified surplus funds for enhanced management of the department's forest, **this should be removed from the budget and the bill's language for discussion and debate.***

Thank you,

*George Voutes*