

Testimony in Opposition to S2546: (RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY -- STATE FORESTS AND FORESTRY PROJECTS)

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Dear Chairman DiPalma and Senate Finance Committee Members,

While I support much of DEM's mission and responsibilities, I strongly oppose S2546, which would add 10 forestry loggers to DEM's payroll in support of more logging, including the increasing practice of clearcutting RI forests and large heritage trees on state-owned land. S2546 is not what RI needs now. Adding the cost, benefits, and expenses of 10 full time loggers to RI's budget during an affordable crisis impacting RI residents and businesses is ill-advised, ill-timed, and irresponsible. There are much more important areas in RI government for adding headcount including (housing, education, healthcare, public transportation and transitioning to low-cost renewable energy – through the Act on Climate). S2546 is woefully lacking in detailed justification on specifically what these 10 forestry loggers will do, and most importantly what they will NOT do.

Instead of adding 10 new forestry loggers, why not reorganize / repurpose existing DEM staff and other relevant state resources to address more pressing concerns threatening our RI public lands and forests. Namely,

1) Removing invasive species that are disfiguring, strangling and killing nearly all trees on public state-owned land in RI. Look around any property in RI and you will see the devastation being caused by invasives (especially vines). Ride down any bike path or visit any state park or management area and see for yourself this alarming situation. The state needs to act NOW and aggressively protect existing forests and trees from invasives. This is urgent and attainable.

[East Bay RI Bike Path:](#)



2) Increase research funding on making RI forests more resilient to climate change and other threats. Assign more biologists and science experts in forest health. Finding and deploying best practices that improve the health and bio-diversity of RI Forests (without cutting them down by default) is very much needed now. URI and UMASS Amherst can help with guidance in this area.

3) Strengthen staffing levels of EC4 to carry out their critical mission, including fulfilling existing obligations of the Act on Climate law and climate resilience acceleration.

4) Staff the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program to identify, monitor, and protect forest health and biodiversity across RI Public State-Owned Lands. RI must reduce destruction of remaining in-tact forests in order to reduce carbon emissions, and protect remaining wildlife and biodiversity still in existence. Keeping forests in their natural state as places for Rhode Islanders to visit and recharge is essential, and way more important than the increasing practice in RI of cutting down forests and selling timber. The RI Natural Heritage Program hasn't existed since 2007, and Rhode Island needs this program reinstated to protect the state's rare and endangered species whose habitats are vulnerable to logging and development. Logging happens very quickly, but the return of rare and endangered species takes a very long time (if ever) to recover.

I recently visited the RI Great Swamp Management Area. It is a magical place. Have you been there? There are still some very large and old growth trees left there. However, I noticed blue paint markings on many large and old trees. I found out these trees are going to be cut down. Why? The trees are in great condition and in no harm to trails, pathways, or structures. Now just imagine the addition of 10 additional loggers. We all know what will happen to these large and old trees. Let's stop the incessant cutting down (or what DEM calls Management) of our RI Forests on Public Lands. There are much better ways to address the health and needs of our current and future Forests.

Please do not advance S2546, which is just a deforestation bill supported by the National Timber, and US Logging Industry. Instead, support mitigating invasives killing our remaining trees and forests, bring in more forest scientists, and bring back the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program. RI is the most populated state in the country behind NJ. We don't want or need a timber industry in our heavily populated and increasingly industrialized state. RI is not Western United States or Canada, where timber comes from sustainably regulated areas. RI can't afford to lose our remaining forests on public lands. We don't want forest cut down and the bio-diversity destroyed and we want in-tack forests to stay in their natural state. RI Public Forests belong to us, (not National or Local Timber), and the public and the natural world have the most to lose by the human destruction of these forests and trees.

Lastly, help leave a legacy by preserving our remaining in-tact forests that you, your friends, children, grandchildren, and future generations can enjoy, and to marvel at. This is what real leadership looks like. This is what we expect from you. That is what RI needs now.

Thank you,

*George Voutes*