Mr. Chairman, members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Nathan Cornell, and I am the President of the Old Growth Tree Society, an environmental non-profit in Rhode Island. I am opposed to H5784, titled "Forestry and Forest Product Operations." H5784 has inaccuracies regarding its "environmental" claims. On lines 8, 9, and 10 under Legislative Findings, it says, "The general assembly finds and declares: (1) That maintaining forests is vital to maintain both biodiversity, and ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration in the state…" This statement completely contradicts the bill as the purpose of H5784 is to expand the timber industry in Rhode Island by providing incentives to log more of our state forests through removing the sales tax on forest product operations. Logged forests have less biodiversity than unlogged natural forests. Logging also is not carbon neutral.

Every year, 76% of the carbon in trees cut for timber is released into the atmosphere as pollution with most of it emitted quickly in processing, waste, and short-lived products. In a study done by Dr. Stephen Hamburg, it was found that there was almost no net carbon accumulation after clearcutting. Only a small proportion of the carbon stored in trees is stored in wood products when logged. The rest of the carbon is released into the atmosphere as pollution contributing to Climate Change. By creating incentives in state law to log more of Rhode Island's forests, it goes against the objectives of the 2021 Act on Climate aimed at creating net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
[Losses of mineral soil carbon largely offset biomass accumulation 15 years after whole-tree harvest in a northern hardwood forest | SpringerLink](#)
[Frontiers | Forest-clearing to create early-successional habitats: Questionable benefits, significant costs (frontiersin.org)](#)

Logging also leads to invasives spreading in our forests, increased chance of wildfires, and a negative impact on water quality.

If this bill is passed, it will likely lead to increased logging in Rhode Island's forests including our state-owned forests which threatens Old Growth Forests and rare forest ecosystems as there are currently no laws to protect those areas. Old Growth Forests need to be left alone in their natural state, protected from logging, for them to retain their old growth characteristics. The protection of these areas and the creation of the Natural Areas Preserve system in accordance with the Natural Areas Protection Act of 1993, which still has not been followed by DEM, should come first, so these unique ecosystems are not logged as a consequence of this bill.

The current crisis in Rhode Island with the overpopulation of deer which are eating the buds from the cut (coppiced) stumps of logged trees, killing the stumps, and preventing our forests from regenerating should also be addressed before this bill is passed. Currently, because of the deer issue, it is raising the question of whether logging in Rhode Island is still sustainable. If logging continues and the forests do not grow back, Rhode Island will lose much of its native forests.

There are no environmental benefits contained in this bill. This legislation is purely economically driven which is evident in many parts of this bill including lines 12 and 13 under Legislative Findings. "(3) That providing for the economic viability of the forest products industry is an interest of the state…"

I believe it is also important that I address some of the comments made by the Rhode Island Forest Conservation Commission. In their letter of support, they state, "One issue that is clear RI needs forestry professionals to implement good forest management." What the RI Forest Conservation Commission means by "forestry professionals" is professional loggers. When the RI Forest Conservation Commission says, "good forest management," they mean logging. Even claims such as those made by DEM that they are just, "thinning" out the forest, is still logging. You cannot get wood resources to make forest products without logging trees. "Thinning" just sounds less brutal than cutting or logging. However, trees are still being felled in "thinning" operations, and it is still ecologically damaging to the forest.

As logging is damaging to our natural forests and therefore harmful to the environment, then a true environmental professional wouldn't be logging our forests or supporting a bill to expand the timber industry in Rhode Island by claiming it is good for the environment. Furthermore, by supporting this bill despite the ecological harm it will do to our state forests, puts into question the credibility of the Rhode Island Forest Conservation Commission and the members who serve on it. It should also be noted that there are members of the RI Forest Conservation Commission who are either currently or formerly involved in the timber industry, and not one member of the RI Forest Conservation Commission is a Forest Ecologist or even has a doctorate in Environmental Science.

In conclusion, I oppose this legislation for the environmental harm it can cause to the natural forests in Rhode Island, without any safeguards to protect old growth forests and rare forest ecosystems, while also not addressing the current deer problem.

While I am not personally opposed to all logging and understand the economic need for forest products, it does not make sense to expand the timber industry in the state before Old Growth Forests and rare forest ecosystems can be protected, and without knowing for certain whether logging is sustainable in Rhode Island due to the overpopulation of deer. Also, I find it disturbing that the Rhode Island Forest Conservation Commission, which is supposed to represent the environmental community of Rhode Island, is trying to help the timber industry instead of protecting Rhode Island's natural ecology.

Please let me know if you have any questions. My email is ncornell.ogts@gmail.com

Thank you,

Nathan Cornell

President of the Old Growth Tree Society