

Dear Director Gray,

I'm writing to follow up on and underscore the message from Nathan Cornell of the Rhode Island Old Growth Tree Society regarding the urgent need to postpone prescribed burns on state-owned lands. As an Indigenous person, I feel compelled to share an additional perspective that speaks to the deeper relationship between land, fire, and stewardship.

For many Indigenous communities, fire is not simply a management tool. It is a sacred force. When used with reverence and traditional knowledge, cultural fire practices have sustained ecosystems for thousands of years. But what we are seeing today are state-directed burns conducted without sufficient ecological context, oversight, or inclusion of Indigenous science. That disconnect puts vulnerable habitats at risk and threatens public safety, as seen in the Joint Base Cape Cod fire.

Indigenous Peoples have long been caretakers of this land, guided by the principle that decisions must account for their impact on the next seven generations. That ethos requires humility, ecological wisdom, and collaboration and not expedient management decisions rooted in extraction or outdated forestry models.

I strongly support the call for environmental review led by Forest Ecologists and the RI Natural Heritage Program before any further prescribed burns or logging operations take place. This is not only about environmental protection...it's about restoring our collective responsibility to live in balance with the land.

Thank you for your attention and for considering this perspective grounded in care, caution, and cultural respect.

In solidarity,

Chéri Smith
Charlestown, RI