

Dear Senators and Representatives:

I am writing as the former Coordinator of the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program (1978-2007) to share my concerns with Nathan Cornell and others regarding the clearcutting of forest slated for the Great Swamp Management Area. The Great Swamp is a significant natural ecosystem in southern New England, there are plants and animals inhabiting the Great Swamp found at no other place in the region. The loss of a 30+ acre tract of forest within the Great Swamp will have a significant impact on this ecosystem, but the extent of that impact has not been properly analyzed by DEM. In short, there has not been a cost/benefit analysis conducted for a significant land use change on public land.

As we are in the midst of climate and biodiversity crises, it is incumbent on the State of Rhode Island to have its forests managed for the greater good. That means leaving forests intact to support carbon sequestration and storage, water retention, soil building, and biodiversity. Providing habitat for a handful of game birds is not an acceptable trade-off for all of the ecosystem services provided by intact forests.

Before the Great Swamp logging project proceeds there should be an analysis conducted on the costs and benefits. A long-standing problem regarding the management of the state's Management Areas is the lack of a process for public review. There are no Management Plans for the public to see. This proposal for the Great Swamp is an example of what happens when there is no oversight of an agency's actions; this is a problem that needs to be addressed by the legislature. I'm not sure what the legislature is capable of regarding the Great Swamp project, but this project should be put on hold until the agency can provide proof that the benefits of the project outweigh the costs.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Richard Enser, Coordinator (1979-2007)

Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program