Honorable Dawn Euer, Chair
Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903
RE: Support Forest Conservation Act S 470

March 17, 2021

Dear Chair Euer and Committee Members

What can provide Rhode Island with clean and safe air to breathe and water to drink, create jobs, fight climate change, moderate stifling hot temperatures, protect native wildlife, provide a multitude of recreational opportunities and add an invaluable sense of place to communities? The answer is Rhode Island’s Forests: Conserving them is essential to sustain our quality of life! That’s why we must act now to adopt the Forest Conservation Act to take steps to conserve what’s left of our forest before it’s too late.

Rhode Island’s forests have been referred to as the invisible green giant for too long. Meaning they provide immeasurable values but have been taken for granted as something that’s just a green backdrop until they are cleared for another use. However, the forest is an ecosystem where the sum of all its values is far greater than any single attribute no matter how impressive these attributes might be. This was the key finding in The Value of Rhode Island Forests, a report by the Rhode Island Tree Council and Department of Environmental Management published in 2020. Grow Smart Rhode Island helped to coordinate the forest advisory committee that provided input into The Value of Rhode Island Forests Report.

Rhode Island is approximately 56% forested, an impressive figure in the second most densely populated State in the U.S. But our forests are being fragmented as they are cut into smaller segments at an alarming rate. Between 2011 and 2018 RI lost approximately 2,000 acres of just the core or most valuable forest. The total loss of forest over this time frame is not available but estimated to be far greater than 2,000 acres. As the forest is fragmented some values are impaired and others can be lost completely.

Grow Smart Rhode Island respectfully urges the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee to adopt the Forest Conservation Act H 5760. We commend the sponsors of this important legislation, Senators Ciccione, Acosta, Bell, Calkin, Di Mario, Euer, Kallman, Lombardo and Valverde for recognizing the time to act is now. We also commend the leadership of DEM to take on this challenging but worthy goal.
We support the Forest Conservation Act for the following reasons:

1. We are extremely pleased that 2-27-1 (a) clearly recognizes that forest land has many important values, cites these values and establishes policy that these values be maintained for future generations to enjoy. This is the first time that Rhode Island's forest values have been recognized in State law. Other natural resources including but not limited to farms and wetlands have all been previously recognized.

2. We strongly support the establishment of a forest conservation commission to be staffed by DEM in 2-27-1 (c) and believe the 7 objectives cited will help land owners conserve forests in perpetuity, encourage better forest management, encourage forest conservation as a means to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change, create jobs in the forest products industry, and expand urban and community forestry programs.

3. The act uses incentives, not new regulations or restrictions to encourage positive outcomes.

4. Legislation to encourage forest conservation is long overdue.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment

Sincerely,

Scott Millar, Director Community Assistance and Conservation
Grow Smart Rhode Island