



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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Committees:
Environment and Natural Resources
State Administration
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Elder Affairs

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Representative Daniel Cahill, Chair
Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
State House, Room 473F
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Rebecca Rausch, Chair
Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
State House, Room 215
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Cahill and Chair Rausch,

I write in strong support of my sponsored legislation H.4150, An Act relative to forest protection. This bill would designate 412,000 acres of forest and watershed lands controlled by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation as parks and reserves, protecting around 8% of the state's land base, as well as establish coordinated management guidelines for public forest lands in the state. In addition, the bill would create an independent council, made up of public officials, scientists, and members of the public, to use the latest science to advise the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs on the management of public forest lands in the state.

From the Berkshires to the Cape, our public forest lands are a vital natural resource for the Commonwealth. They buttress our biodiversity, wildlife habitat, water quality, carbon sequestration, climate resilience, recreation, tourism, and rural economies. As a long-time Scoutmaster, I have grown to deeply love the woods. In the Boy Scouts, we teach kids to appreciate the beauty and value of nature, and how to respect the environment as they use experiences in the wild to learn, have fun, and grow.

I want the Commonwealth to protect our public forests for use by future generations. However, these lands face many threats and challenges that this bill would help address. If passed, this legislation would prevent harmful uses of public lands, including land sales, construction of new gas pipelines, pesticide and herbicide spraying, or the promotion of woody biomass energy.

The bill would also safeguard our forests from destructive resource extraction and industrial development.

We all know that climate change poses an existential risk to humanity, and to the Commonwealth if left unchecked. According to the IPCC, we must act urgently and effectively to prevent disastrous climate change. This means cutting down our greenhouse gas emissions significantly in the next decade and removing the excess carbon dioxide that has accumulated in the air. Trees play a vital role in both these tasks. As Bill McKibben wrote in support of this legislation in an op-ed in Commonwealth Magazine, “we need to stop burning trees and let them grow. And the latest science makes clear that the longer and larger they grow, the more carbon they suck up.” This legislation is one of the cheapest and most efficient weapons in our arsenal to combat climate change.

Crucially, this bill would require the Secretary to develop and implement a Public Forest Lands Management Plan that would set goals, objectives, and strategies for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of public forest lands. The bill would ensure public participation and transparency in the development and implementation of the management plan, as well as accountability and evaluation of the outcomes.

Our State operates as a steward of public forest lands in the public interest. We must secure the long-term health, resilience, and sustainability of public forest lands and the ecosystem services they provide for future generations.

I humbly request that the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources report this bill favorably. Thank you for consideration of this written testimony and I look forward to the opportunity to discuss this matter with you further.

Sincerely,



Carmine L. Gentile
State Representative
13th Middlesex District