May 10, 2018 Testimony of Scott Millar
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Submitted to the House Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources
In support of H-8141

The Rhode Island Forest Conservation Act must be adopted for RI to comply with the 2014 Resilient RI Act. The Resilient RI Act requires the attainment of greenhouse gas reduction levels that can only be reached by no further loss of RI forest, according to the 2016 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan. The RI Forest Conservation Act would require the State to lead by example and not fund or provide any economic or other incentives to encourage any development or conversion of forest land to non-forest uses on forested tracts 250 acres or greater. However, there is a critical need to prevent all forest loss therefore I strongly support the proposed amendment that would require the RI Department of Environmental Management and Statewide Planning Program to establish and coordinate a broad based advisory group to thoroughly assess all options to prevent the further loss of forestland to achieve the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets established by the Resilient RI Act. Since it’s urgent to prevent subsequent forest loss this group should report on their findings no later than December 31, 2018.

The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan determined that electricity consumption as of 2015 contributed only 20% of RI’s GHG emissions. So when RI is able to generate all of its electricity from renewable energy there will still be a need to reduce 80% of our annual GHG emissions to comply with the Resilient RI Act. Neither solar or wind facilities can absorb or store carbon so these mandatory annual GHG reductions must come from another source. The forest has been recently documented by the Nature Conservancy as the most economical means to absorb and store carbon. RI forests can absorb and store 30% of RI’s annual GHG emissions as estimated by DEM. Therefore the RI forest is currently mitigating 10% more of the annual GHG emissions than what can be expected when RI gets all of its electricity from renewable energy. (See below for how this was determined and sources.)

The subsequent clearing of forests for renewable energy development is actually making it more difficult and expensive to comply with the GHG reduction targets in the Resilient RI Act. For every acre of forestland lost, RI is losing the opportunity to absorb the annual emissions from two cars. RI must stop providing economic and other incentives to encourage the loss of loss of forestland immediately. It is imperative the RI Forest Conservation Act be adopted without delay.

Sources:
1. Nature Conservancy 2016, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences
2. The Resilient RI Act’s GHG reduction target for 2020 is 11.23 million metric tons of carbon.
3. RI forestland = 367,000 acres DEM
4. One acre forest can absorb 30,000 pounds of carbon annually (DEM)
5. RI forests absorb 3,376,400 of carbon annually (DEM)
6. 3,376,400 tons carbon annually divided by 11.23 metric tons GHG reduction target 2020= .298 or 30%
7. One car emits 4.6 tons carbon/year assuming 11,00 miles driven per year (EPA)
8. One acre forest absorbs 2 times the annual car emission GHG or 9.2 tons (American Forests)