

Dec. 16, 2021

Senator Rebecca L. Rausch and Representative Carolyn C. Dykema
Chairs, Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA)
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02113

As submitted by email to jaime.watson@masenate.gov and shannon.emmett@mahouse.gov

Dear Chair Rausch and Chair Dykema and Members of the ENRA Committee:

Climate Action Now, Western Massachusetts strongly recommends that the ENRA Committee report Representative Michael Finn's bill, H.912, An Act relative to forest protection, and Representative Lindsay Sabadosa's bill, H.1002, An Act relative to increased protection of wildlife management areas, out of committee with a favorable recommendation.

With every passing day we see the deadly and disruptive effects of climate change and hear increasingly dire predictions about impending climate catastrophe in the not-so-distant future.

We know that even if the world stopped all carbon emissions tomorrow, the problem of global warming would not be solved because of the CO₂ still in the atmosphere. Therefore, we must do everything possible to maximize carbon sequestration now.

And happily for us, our forests do just that, efficiently drawing down and storing carbon in trees and soil as they have done for millenia. Current biological and climate science says that 30% of the globe's forests must be preserved as intact ecosystems -- that is, allowed to grow naturally without human interventions -- to maximize carbon sequestration and preserve biodiversity.

In an article published in November 2021, "[World Scientists' Warnings into Action, Local to Global.](#)" fifteen international scientists say that "climate restoration" through "natural systems" is key if future generations are to have a liveable climate, writing that, "Nature has previously regulated greenhouse gases to maintain a habitable climate, and it is essential that we try to restore those conditions...To reach and exceed net-zero carbon, we would need to *immediately halt the destruction and degradation of critical carbon-accumulating ecosystems like forests, wetlands, and grasslands.*" (Italics added) Furthermore, they write that the "The two global bodies, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), jointly concluded that to succeed, *climate change and biodiversity loss must be addressed rapidly and together.*" (Italics added.)

H. 912, the Forest Protection Bill, follows the prescriptions of these scientists and intergovernmental bodies since it would protect Massachusetts' 412,000 acres of *publicly-owned* forests by designating them as forest reserves, thus prohibiting logging in these areas. (This does not mean that trees in emergency situations cannot be removed.) Preserving these public forests as *intact ecosystems*, would maximize carbon sequestration and biodiversity. At the same time, preserving our public forests in a pristine condition would benefit the people of our Commonwealth by helping to protect clean air and water, while enhancing scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and the solace that only undisturbed forests can provide. Additionally, indigenous people in the region have sites in our public forests that have been sacred for generations and must be protected. H. 912 would increase the percentage of the Commonwealth's truly protected forests from the current 1% of its land base to about 10%.

Similarly, H. 1002, Increased Protection for Wildlife Management Areas, in keeping with the goal of preserving 30% of the globe's forests in a natural condition, would designate as "Nature Reserves" by 2030 at least 30% of the Wildlife Management Areas under the control of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and make these preserves permanent. The argument that humans must manage wildlife areas for the benefit of certain species does not consider what the landscape was like in New England prior to European colonization. These species that get special treatment today were NOT dominant in old growth forests. Ecosystems will return to their natural state if humans allow them to mature undisturbed.

To be clear, these two bills apply only to our state-owned forests - the people's forests. The intention of these bills is not to prohibit all logging in the Commonwealth. Rather, since they designate specific areas (public lands) to be preserved as "forever wild," they would allow our older forests in these areas to reach and maximize their full ecological potential while still providing recreational opportunities to our residents. Passing these two bills will also help to preserve the natural wildlife corridor between Connecticut and Canada, promote regeneration of old growth forests, protect drinking water from the Quabbin and Wachusett watersheds, and sequester and store exponentially increasing amounts of carbon dioxide.

H. 912 and H. 1002 would be a modest but important step in helping Massachusetts live up to its commitment to meaningfully address climate change. Please vote to move them favorably out of committee.

Sincerely,
Darcy Sweeney, Lynne Man, and Carole Horowitz
on behalf of Climate Action Now, Western Massachusetts