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Chairwoman Anne M. Gobi
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House, Room 473F, Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Marc R. Pacheco
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House, Room 312-B, Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Massachusetts Sierra Club Testimony Supporting
H236, An Act Authorizing the Establishment of Old Growth Forest Reserves**

Dear Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Pacheco, and Members of the Committee

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer our comments on H.236 and S.382, related to preserving Massachusetts' remaining old growth forests. We wish to express our strong support in favor of this legislation.

Old growth forests are parcels of land that have been left largely undisturbed since the area's colonial period and are a link to the grandeur of the natural world. In Massachusetts they contain trees that are hundreds of years old, some of which are 100 to 150 feet high. This bill, H.236/S.382, would require an inventory of forests on state lands, identify old growth forest reserves, and develop plans for the management and protection of the reserves.

The Sierra Club is the nation's largest and oldest grassroots organization with 1.4 million members and supporters, and 22,000 here in MA. We fight for clean air, clean water, the preservation of the Commonwealth's most precious natural spaces, and healthy, vibrant communities.

The Old Growth Forest Bill (H.236) would require the Secretary of Environmental Affairs to inventory forests on state lands, identify old growth forest thereon, and develop plans for the management and protection of the old growth forests. Most notably, a system of old growth forest reserves would be established on lands identified as containing old growth forest and include buffer areas around old growth forest groves in order to properly protect the forests from damage by human (e.g. development) and natural (wind, storms, invasive insects) disturbances.

As one can imagine, logging and development has already destroyed most of the old growth forest that were once common place in the state. Even though these exemplary gems of nature are found on state lands, the old growth stands lack statutory protection necessary to withstand inconsistent state agency management policies. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation permitted the destruction of 12 acres for a snowboard park beside the rare and biologically rich old-growth forest at Wachusett Mountain State Reservation - contrary to the agency's resource management plan for the forest.¹

A total of approximately 2,742 acres of old growth forest has been identified on Massachusetts state lands.² Massachusetts' old growth occurs almost entirely within the Northeastern Highlands ecoregion.³ By comparison, the land area of the Commonwealth is 5,284,480 acres. These Old Growth Forests represent approximately 1/2% of the state's land area, which illustrates their extraordinary rarity and value. These 2,742 acres are heavily fragmented and isolated. It is also important to note that they are not all the same. The dominate tree species, as well as the types of ecosystems that each patch old growth forest supports vary making each patch unique.⁴

It is imperative that the state of Massachusetts do everything it can to preserve remaining old growth forest on public lands because:

- Species diversity is substantially higher in old growth forests than secondary forests^{5 6} and therefore needs to be protected if Massachusetts is serious about protecting biodiversity in the state.
- Current old growth forests act as a refugia for many organisms. These refugia are important sources of plants and animals for the colonization of present and future ecological restoration areas, which generally have lost most of their biodiversity.
- Old growth forests are important to preserve from a scientific prospective because they provide a window into the past. For example, using tree cores, ancient trees provide insight into past climate conditions, fire history and insect infestations.⁷
- Finally old growth forests have an intrinsic social worth, as some individuals believe that parts of the natural world should be left relatively undisturbed by people and take solace in knowing that this is the case. Old growth forests also provide the backdrop for some recreational activities.⁸

As this proposed legislation would be a crucial step in protecting old growth forests in Massachusetts, we respectfully request this Committee report H.236/S.382 favorably.

Respectfully,



James McCaffrey
Director
Massachusetts Sierra Club

¹ Sierra Club v. Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Management, SJC-08857, July 2003

² Mary Byrd Davis (23 January 2008). "Old Growth in the East: A Survey". Retrieved 2008-12-31.

³ United States Environmental Protection Agency (02 October 2007). "Ecoregions of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island". Retrieved 2008-12-31.

⁴ Anthony D' Amato, Orwid, David A. and Davis R. Forester, "New Estimates of Massachusetts Old-growth Forests Data useful for Regional Conservation and Forest Reserve Planning," *North Eastern Naturalist* (2006) 13(4): 495-506.

⁵ Anthony D'Amato, David A. Orwid, and Davis R. Forester, "Understory Vegetation in Old-Growth and Second-Growth *Tsuga Canadensis* Forests in Western Massachusetts," *Forest Ecology and Management* (2009) 257 (3): 1043-1052.

⁶ Sarah Cooper-Ellis, "Bryophytes in old-growth forests of western Massachusetts" *Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society* (1998) 125(2):11-132.

⁷ Old Growth Policy. Department of Environmental Management Division of Forests and Parks, Bureau of Forestry. www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/

⁸ Old Growth Policy. Department of Environmental Management Division of Forests and Parks, Bureau of Forestry. www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/