



AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OLD-GROWTH FOREST RESERVES (H. 236)
Lead Sponsor: Representative Stephen Kulik (D-Worthington)

Old-growth forests are extremely rare. Although 3 million of Massachusetts' 5 million acres are forested, less than one-tenth of 1% (or 3,500 acres) of this is original, old-growth forest. These ancient groves are scattered throughout the state in small patches, with most on the steep mountainsides of western Massachusetts managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. ***Currently, old-growth forests in Massachusetts are not protected from timber cutting by any law, only by administrative policy that could change at any time.***

The main defining factor for old-growth forests is that they have not been significantly impacted over the years by human activities such as timber cutting or farming, but rather have been shaped by natural disturbances such as wind and ice over very long periods of time. Most forests in Massachusetts are relatively new, between 60 – 100 years old.

These rich habitat areas contain a wide diversity of woodland wildflowers, mosses, ferns, and lichens. There is an abundance and variety of amphibians, birds, and mammals. Large numbers of standing snags, live trees with cavities, and fallen dead wood provide habitat for many species.

Old-growth serves as a biological library for studies of forest development, tree genetics, and climate change (through tree-ring analysis). These areas also act as carbon sinks – helping to sequester global warming gases, and as they are not impacted by development, they are healthier and better able to adapt to a changing climate. These rare undisturbed forests provide our only remaining opportunities for comparison with actively managed forests.

An Act Authorizing the Establishment of Old-Growth Forest Reserves would protect old-growth forests for the purpose of protecting exemplary forest habitats, maintaining biodiversity and establishing ecological benchmarks for assessing the health of forests statewide. A system of permanent old-growth forest reserves would be established on state lands. The bill:

- Directs the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs to designate reserves comprised of old-forest growth and protective buffers. Requires an inventory of the forests on state-owned land to be conducted to determine the extent and condition of old-growth forest stands and their surrounding landscapes. Includes an assessment and selection of future old-growth forest areas that exhibit characteristics which, if left undisturbed, would meet the definition of an old-growth forest.
- Requires protection and management of old-growth reserves. The Secretary can authorize the continuation of existing recreational uses and facilities within the old-growth forest reserve if they do not significantly contribute to erosion or other harmful impacts on the forest resources. Activities compatible with the establishment of an old-growth forest reserve would be prohibited, such as new development, new or expanded recreational facilities, and commercial timber cutting. Violations would result in fines of not more than \$25,000 and/or imprisonment for not more than two years.
- Establishes a research and education program to monitor the status and promote understanding of old-growth forest reserves.
- Requires that within one year of the *Act* going into effect, the Secretary must report to the General Court on the results of the inventory, the regulations developed, and the progress made in designating old-growth forest reserves and the preparation of management plans.

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