



An Act Relative to the Protection of Old Growth Forests

HD 3173 Sponsored by Representative Natalie Blais (Sunderland)

It's time for a new law on Old Growth Forests

Old-growth forests are extremely rare, and serve as “living laboratories” where students, scientists, and the public can learn more about forest development, tree genetics, and climate change. Although 3 million of Massachusetts’ 5 million acres are forested, only 1,500 acres of this land 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.

The value of these rapidly disappearing old-growth forests to people and wildlife is immeasurable; in forests that have not been disturbed for hundreds of years, canopy layers and fallen trees create rich and diverse habitats for many species of birds, insects and reptiles. These areas also act as carbon sinks - helping to sequester greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

Currently, old-growth forests in Massachusetts are not lawfully protected from timber cutting; instead, they are protected only by policy that could change at any time.

Solution

- **Protection** - prohibit new development, recreational facilities, and commercial timber cutting in old-growth forests.
- **Growth** - include an assessment and selection of forest areas that exhibit characteristics which could one day meet the definition of an old-growth forest.
- **Education** - establish a research and education program to monitor the status and promote understanding of old-growth forest reserves.