



NEW ENGLAND BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

April 5, 2022

To Chairman Craven and the members of the House Judiciary Committee

Re: BHA Support for RI - 2022 – H8055 - An Act Related to Waters and Navigation

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. Our members consider protecting and expanding access to public lands and waters a top priority, recognizing that access is one of the most important factors to our participation in, and the perpetuation of, our outdoor traditions.

With this in mind, we urge the Judiciary Committee to **support H8055**, which would establish a clear, identifiable boundary where the “privileges of the shore” outlined in Article 1, Sections 16 & 17 of Rhode Island’s Constitution are protected. These privileges include, but are not limited to “...fishing from the shore, the gathering of seaweed, leaving the shore to swim and passage along the shore” and should be protected up to 10 feet landward of the so-called “recognizable high tide line”. We do not see the changes proposed in H8055 as an expansion of access, but rather a restoration of rights that Rhode Islanders have enjoyed since colonial times, and inhabitants of present-day Rhode Island enjoyed prior to the 1663 Royal Charter.

We recognize that the changes to RI General Law proposed in H8055 reflect the recommendations of the Special Legislative Study Commission created by last year’s passage of 2021-H5469A. The Commission was populated by Representatives, stakeholders and experts from all sides who were appointed by the Speaker of the House, and after approximately 8 months of hearing from legal scholars, coastal geologists, historians, recreational users, and the general public on issues related to lateral shoreline access they published a Final Report, which we understand has been forwarded to the Judiciary Committee. BHA’s representatives followed the Commission’s work closely and participated actively during opportunities for public comment.

We believe that H8055 captures the consensus recommendations of the Shoreline Access Commission and converts them into an actionable statutory proposal that the General Assembly should pass into law. Doing so would effectively secure the rights and privileges related to the shore that are set forth in Article 1, Sections 16 & 17 of Rhode Island’s Constitution in a way that fairly balances and protects the interests of both the public and of landowners. **As a result, we urge the Committee, and ultimately the General Assembly, to pass H8055**

Thank you for your consideration.

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