



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick Prime Co-sponsor of New York Deforestation-Free Procurement Act

ELIJAH REICHLIN-MELNICK March 26, 2021

| COMMITTEE: **PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTS**



Albany – Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick (D-Rockland/Westchester), Chair of the Senate Committee on Procurements and Contracts, is a prime co-sponsor of the New York Deforestation-Free Procurement Act (S.5921), a bill introduced by Senator Liz Krueger, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and Assembly Member Kenneth P. Zebrowski, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Governmental Operations. The bill would ensure New York State government procurement practices do not drive deforestation in tropical and boreal forests.

Senators Cooney, Kaplan, and May are also prime co-sponsors of the bill.

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Healthy forests are critical to a stable environment, yet unsustainable deforestation in tropical and boreal forests around the world is greatly accelerating the already rapid pace of human-caused climate change and pushing countless species towards extinction," said Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick. "Our state government has the power and duty to make sure that the companies we contract with and the products we procure are not contributing to unsustainable deforestation and climate change. I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this legislation to make New York a leader in environmentally responsible procurement."

By tightening an existing ban on the use of tropical hardwoods for government projects, and creating a new statute requiring state contractors who deal in forest-risk commodities to certify that their products don't drive deforestation, the Deforestation-Free Procurement Act will help to ensure that New York State government procurement does not drive tropical or boreal deforestation, while giving a boost to growing supply-chain transparency efforts in the affected industries. The bill is modeled on similar legislation that has recently been reintroduced in California.

"The days are long past when New Yorkers can pretend that what goes on in another part of the world has no impact on us," said Senator Krueger. "Whether its climate change or COVID-19, tropical and boreal deforestation - driven by our consumer choices - is creating ecological and social crises on a global scale that we cannot ignore. When you're in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging. That's why New York State needs to ensure that the products we buy are not contributing to the loss of Earth's most vital ecosystems."

"New York State has a moral responsibility to our planet and future generations to become better stewards of the environment," said Assembly Member Zebrowski. "This legislation will ensure that we are not engaging in practices that drive the deforestation of the earth's most

precious forests. We have and will continue to feel the devastating impacts; this bill looks to protect what we haven't already lost."

Tropical forests harbor close to 50 percent of all species on Earth. Those species are now going extinct at a rate that is at least 100 to 1,000 times higher than historical levels, due to human activity. An estimated 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation and forest degradation. Taking into account carbon sequestration potential, stopping the loss of tropical forests, mangroves, and wetlands could provide over 20 percent of necessary climate mitigation by 2030.

Boreal forests represent about 30 percent of the global forest area, help regulate the climate through the exchange of energy and water, and are a large reservoir of biogenic carbon, storing twice as much per acre as tropical forests. Canada's boreal forest alone stores nearly twice as much carbon in its vegetation and soil as the entire world's combined oil reserves.

Globally, an estimated 18,000,000 acres of forest, an area more than half the size of New York State, are lost every year to deforestation according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with over one-half of Earth's tropical forests already gone. At the current pace, the entirety of Earth's tropical rainforests will be degraded or destroyed within the next 100 years.

Loss of biodiversity resulting from forest degradation and deforestation, as well as human encroachment on formerly undisturbed ecosystems, also increases the risks of zoonotic disease pandemics such as COVID-19.

The primary factor leading to tropical deforestation is degradation and road-building associated with logging for timber, while the largest direct cause of tropical deforestation is industrial-scale production of agricultural commodities. Industrial logging to make single-

use tissue products, newsprint, and lumber is a large driver of boreal forest degradation and deforestation. Together, these products are increasingly known as “forest-risk commodities.”

The New York Deforestation-Free Procurement Act will update and close loopholes in existing statutes that limit the purchase of tropical hardwoods by the state and local governments, and create a new statute requiring contractors that sell forest-risk commodities to state agencies or authorities to certify that they are not contributing to tropical or boreal intact forest degradation or deforestation directly or through their supply chains.

Julie Tighe, President of the New York League of Conservation Voters, said, "Trees and forests are one of the first lines of defense in the fight against climate change. They sink carbon and help regulate temperatures. Protecting these vital natural resources has been an NYLCV top priority for decades. This legislation would ensure that the State does not contribute to deforestation, which will improve our ecosystem and act on climate. Thank you Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Zebrowski for their leadership."

Jeff Conant, Senior International Forests Program Manager at Friends of the Earth U.S., said: “Forests are essential to stabilizing our climate; they are home to numberless species and irreplaceable cultures; and they are the Earth’s immune system, preventing the emergence of pandemic diseases. We’re thrilled to see New York State join the movement to tackle the root causes of forest destruction with the introduction of this crucial piece of legislation.”

Jennifer Skene, Natural Climate Solutions Policy Manager with the Natural Resource Defense Council’s Canada Project, said: “Our purchasing decisions here in the U.S. have climate, biodiversity, and human rights reverberations in forests around the world. New York’s bill is an essential step away from destructive forest products supply chains and toward the kinds of transformative solutions we need to protect our two lungs of the earth, the tropical and

boreal forests.”

John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President for Public Affairs at the Wildlife Conservation Society, said: "The Wildlife Conservation Society applauds Senator Krueger's leadership to reduce New York's contribution to the deforestation of valuable tropical and boreal forests globally. Ecologically intact forests are the foundation for nature-based solutions, which can provide nearly one-third of the climate action needed by 2030. Without them, there is no viable pathway to decarbonizing by 2050."

Corey Klemmer, Director of Engagement at Domini Impact Investments, said: “Forests can be our most important ally in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, yet we are currently trapped in a system that undermines and destroys forest health and value. Our investments and markets, like so much else, rely on healthy forests. Through S.5921, New York State has an important opportunity to help shift the market and its own impacts towards a more sustainable system.”

Frank Sherman, Chair of the Board, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and Executive Director at Seventh Generation Interfaith, said: "According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2018 report, halting deforestation and restoring landscapes and forests is one of the best, most cost-effective options available to keep temperatures under 1.5°. In order to contribute to this reduction, it is important that all actors -- investors, companies and governments act swiftly. New York State should take all steps necessary to eliminate deforestation from its procurement and in this way increase its contribution to Paris-compliant climate strategies."

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2021-S5921

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