To: The Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture,

Chairs: Sen.  Rebecca Rausch, and Rep.  Carolyn Dykema,

Dear Committee Chairs Rausch and Dykema and committee members:

We the undersigned citizens of the Commonwealth and residents and elected and appointed officials of Martha’s Vineyard share concern about the long-term health and management of the Manuel F. Correllus State Forest and wish to convey our strong support for proposed Massachusetts legislation (H-909), which would allow the existing headquarters structure in the state forest to be used as housing for the forest superintendent or other state forest employees.

In an economic climate in which reasonably priced, year-round rental housing is virtually non-existent on Martha’s Vineyard, utilizing the existing farmhouse structure for staff housing would greatly enhance the state’s ability to attract and retain the qualified and well-trained staff necessary to manage this important resource. We thank Rep. Dylan Fernandes (D-Barnstable, Dukes & Nantucket) for introducing and speaking for this legislation.

Home to state-designated sand plain priority habitat, Correllus is recognized by the Department of Conservation and Recreation as “one of the DCR’s most significant properties for rare species conservation.”  At 5,300 acres, the state forest is the single largest tract of undeveloped land on Martha’s Vineyard and the heart of the island. The Forest protects the Vineyard’s sole aquifer and is a linchpin of the island’s conservation network. Close management of this resource is necessary to protect it for its rare ecological value and to ensure proper fire mitigation and prevention, which, if poorly managed, could have devastating consequences for the island.

Given the challenges of daily commuting to and from the Vineyard, we applaud this creative, problem-solving approach to housing that helps ensure that the State Forest has the stable, competent, and professional staffing it needs and deserves. Furthermore, we implore the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to fully acknowledge the importance of the Manuel F. Correllus State Forest by providing the necessary funding and resources to manage and protect it.

Respectfully,

[Name and title or town residence]