Dear Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Zebrowski,

I am writing to thank you for your leadership on protecting global forests, including the boreal, through the New York Deforestation-Free Procurement Act. As a Canadian Member of Parliament, former Leader of the Green Party of Canada, and one committed to shaping a sustainable and healthy future for Canadians and people around the world, I am profoundly grateful for New York’s efforts to ensure its purchases will no longer come at the expense of the forests critical to our climate and beloved wildlife and are aligned with internationally recognized Indigenous rights.

This bill, with its global focus, is a long-overdue recognition of the importance of protecting boreal forests like those we treasure here in Canada, and of ensuring that countries everywhere—no matter whether they’re in the Global North or the Global South—are doing their part to protect these vital ecosystems.

The Canadian boreal forest is an ecosystem we all have a stake in protecting. It is a forest of superlatives, as the most intact, most carbon-dense forest in the world, making its protection essential to avoiding the worst impacts of climate change. The boreal is also the home of treasured species, including billions of migratory birds seen and loved all over the Western hemisphere. Hundreds of Indigenous communities have lived in the boreal since time immemorial. Canadians across the country depend on the boreal for drinking water and other vital ecological services.

The New York Deforestation-Free Procurement Act is an essential means of ensuring that the products your state purchases are in alignment with the long-term sustainability of this forest and the rights of the Indigenous peoples who live there. The protection of intact forests and guarantees of the Indigenous right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) are baseline standards that need to apply to all forest sourcing, no matter whether it is in the tropics or the boreal.

As a result, I am deeply disappointed in the opposition to this bill you have received from the Government of Canada and several provinces, including my home province of British Columbia. That opposition does not reflect the leadership this government purports to embody on natural climate solutions, nor does it reflect the sentiments of many political leaders in Canada or of many Canadians.

Their talking points also do not reflect reality.
Canada has not lived up to its responsibility as the steward of globally critical forests. Each year, the logging industry clearcuts more than a million acres of boreal forest, much of this in irreplaceable intact areas. This industrial logging contributes significantly to Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions and is driving the loss of species like boreal caribou. Federal and provincial governments have failed to ensure protections for intact forests, species, and Indigenous rights, and to implement measures that would align the logging sector with sustainable practices. There are no policies in place to prevent clearcutting in intact forest or to guarantee FPIC.

Even as the federal government reassures New York that Canada is a world leader in forestry sustainability, it is considering stepping in to address unfettered boreal caribou declines in Quebec that have resulted from decades of deferring to short-term industry interests policies and denial of well-established science. Several First Nations in the province are taking legal action against the government to protect their homelands and ways of life. Meanwhile, Ontario has exempted the logging industry from its Endangered Species Act and rolled back public and Indigenous consultation processes.

The opposition is particularly disappointing given that this bill establishes standards that are essential for Canada’s logging industry to remain viable in an increasingly forest-conscious marketplace. Canada can be a supplier to New York and the rest of the world of sustainable, ethical forest products. Unfortunately, its current short-sighted approach is increasingly misaligned with global expectations for sustainability. It is also out of alignment with the desire of the vast majority of Canadians, 88 percent of whom are in favor of Canada leading on global forest protection through safeguarding its remaining intact forests.

This bill is a powerful, achievable articulation of the kinds of common-sense, scientifically essential measures governments and markets need to take to achieve our collective international climate goals. It is a bill that is good for Canadians and good for the world, and I applaud you for your leadership for forests, Indigenous rights, climate, species, and global equity.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth May, O.C.,
Member of Parliament, Saanich-Gulf Islands
Parliamentary Leader of the Green Caucus in the House of Commons