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**Testimony submitted to the
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
in support of H.999/S.563 *An Act Responding to the Threat of Invasive Species*
Submitted by Judy Lehrer Jacobs, Executive Director
Friends of the Blue Hills, December 7, 2021**

The Friends of the Blue Hills is a 1,500-member non-profit organization devoted to preserving and protecting the Blue Hills Reservation's natural beauty, diverse natural habitats and many recreational opportunities.

The Friends of the Blue Hills is testifying in support of *An Act Responding to the Threat of Invasive Species* (H.999/S.563), filed by Senator Patricia D. Jehlen and Representative David Rogers and urge the Committee to report the bill out favorably.

The health of the forests in the Blue Hills Reservation, like parkland throughout the state, is threatened by invasive species. A majority of the Blue Hills is considered priority habitat for endangered species. These species, already struggling to survive a changing climate and dangerously low populations, face the additional pressure of invasive species that outcompete natives and destroy their habitat.

We work closely with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to manage invasive species and protect endangered species habitat. We organize hundreds of volunteers each year who manually remove invasive species. For example, we organized over 50 volunteers to remove the invasive vine mile-a-minute from Fowl Meadow to protect an endangered plant, and have organized events with over one hundred people to remove garlic mustard from Ponkapoag Pond. Despite hundreds of bags of invasives that we've removed over the years, much more work is needed to keep invasives in check. And with climate changes, even more work will be required.

For several years we were unable to remove invasives in the Blue Hills because the DCR habitat management plan expired and there were not sufficient resources to develop a new plan and work through the complicated permitting process for managing invasives, especially with the additional permissions required for working in endangered species habitat. During that time the invasives that we were keeping in check at Ponkapoag Pond and Fowl Meadow grew back, building up the seedbed in the soil and harming the ecosystem. This bill would help make sure there are the sustained resources required to control invasives and protect our forests.

This bill would help protect the Blue Hills Reservation forests, and all our conservation land, by:

- Creating a centralized office dedicated to controlling both terrestrial and aquatic invasive species by combining existing resources like the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group and DCR's Aquatic Invasive Management Plan.
- Providing grant funding through a new Invasive Species Trust Fund to help Friends groups and others to undertake public outreach and invasive control and eradication.
- Creating the position of a new State Coordinator who would help small groups like ours navigate the many state agencies that oversee invasive plants and endangered species habitats and help us identify state and federal funding to implement control strategies.

The value of healthy forests is clear, both as a carbon sink and as an invaluable recreational resource for people during the pandemic. Providing the resources in this bill to help control invasives would help protect our forests.

We urge you to protect our conservation land by reporting out favorably H.999/S.563.