

THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH ABOUT INDIANA FORESTS

Science and best management practices have been at the core of growing and sustaining Indiana's state forest properties for more than 100 years, and the results show.

In fact, two independent audit firms have certified for nine consecutive years that DNR Forestry meets national and international standards for sustainable management of our State Forests.

DNR Forestry employs best management practices and science-based techniques recognized and developed by many of the nation's top forest research centers and universities offering forestry management degrees. DNR Forestry staff includes 30 degreed foresters, a wildlife biologist, an archaeologist, and two others with natural resources degrees, all from universities with accredited forestry programs such as Purdue, Indiana State, Illinois, Missouri, Paul Smith College, Virginia Tech, and Wisconsin. They have a combined 544 years of professional experience in forestry and forestry-related work using proven methods that support healthy forests.

Despite the proven success of scientific management of our State Forests for over a century, a small group of activists is pushing for State Forest management to be conducted through legislation and special interests. In trying to convince some that their way is the correct way to go, they have distorted the truth about how our State Forests actually are managed. They suggest their idea will achieve the following points, which are accompanied by DNR Forestry responses to each claim:

1) *The Division of Forestry should ensure state forests retain age classes that encompass the entire natural lifespans of Indiana's native trees.*

DNR:

- Current timber management is helping to better balance age class. Comprehensive, science-based inventories show that well over 20 percent of State Forest tree stands are more than 100 years old. Another 20 percent is within 20 years of reaching or exceeding 100 years old. The current figure for young forest (20 years old) is 3 percent, with a state forest long term goal of 10 percent young forest.
- State-designated Nature Preserves ensure older age trees will always exist in State Forests.

2) *State Forests should provide habitat for forest dependent wildlife species.*

DNR:

- Managing for wildlife already is an identified priority for State Forests through the enabling legislation that created the Division of Forestry in 1901.
- A universal tenet of wildlife biologists and forest ecologists is that forests with a variety of stand ages and habitat types provide the greatest benefit to the widest range of species. DNR Forestry management directly provides for that diversity through active and passive management guided by science and wildlife resource biologists.
- A recent 10-year study at Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood state forests showed increased sightings of birds after timber harvest, regardless of whether the species was categorized as one that nests in mature forest or early-successional forest.

3) *State Forests should protect ecologically sensitive or unique areas.*

DNR:

- The DNR Nature Preserve program provides for the protection of Indiana's unique ecological areas.
- State Forests have been reviewed by Division of Nature Preserve forest ecologists to identify priority areas for long term protection as preserves.
- There are 270 state-designated nature preserves in Indiana totaling almost 49,000 acres.
- 20 of those nature preserves are in State Forests, totaling 2,600 acres.
- Other DNR divisions (Fish & Wildlife, Nature Preserves, State Parks) protect thousands and thousands more acres of forest lands containing ecologically sensitive and unique areas under their management, which typically do not include commercial harvest of trees.

4) *State Forests should protect water quality and supplies.*

DNR:

- Forests protect water quality through enhanced surface filtration and improved water storage during peak rain events. This is true of managed and unmanaged forests.
- Managed timber harvests do not result in deforestation. It is a temporary disturbance modeled after natural events (e.g., tornados, fires, etc.) that historically guided forests we have today.
- The use of widely accepted best management practices help protect soil and water resources.

5) *State Forests should provide public recreation opportunities.*

DNR:

- State Forests already offer extensive camping, fishing, gold panning, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, mountain biking, picnicking, swimming, wildlife viewing and more.
- State Forests continue to see significant increases in visitation and recreational participation.
- State Forests contain 300 miles of hiking trails, 270 miles of horse trails, 140 lakes, 900 campsites, 2,200 picnic tables, 3 swimming beaches, and 3 target-shooting ranges. They are home to Indiana's longest trail – the 57-mile-long Knobstone Trail – and three other backcountry trails.
- While continuing to offer primitive recreation experiences, the recent addition of mountain bike trails and rentable cabins appeal to new audiences.

6) *State Forests should conserve aesthetic values.*

DNR:

- Visual buffers in unique or sensitive areas already are part of DNR Forestry's best management practices, which were rated "strong" in a recent independent audit (FSC®).
- State Forest visitors find our properties beautiful and inspiring and are often surprised to learn our forests are not "virgin" or "old growth" but instead have a long history of timber management – and in many cases were once cleared, eroded and abandoned farmlands of earlier decades. A true testament to forest resiliency.

7) *State Forest should provide control areas to assess how forests are responding naturally to stresses and to compare forest productivity, regeneration and species richness between managed and unmanaged forest stands over time to ensure that logging is done in a sustainable manner.*

DNR:

- DNR's existing portfolio of 408,000 acres (State Fish & Wildlife, Forests, Nature Preserves, and Parks) provides extensive control areas where no active timber resource management occurs.

- Historic documents show that improvement harvests and thinnings have been standard practices since the Division of Forestry was created in 1901.
- DNR Forestry already is engaged in a comprehensive, long-term research project. It is the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment (HEE), a multi-disciplinary, collaborative research effort that engages several universities in looking at the impact of different forestry management practices on fauna and flora.
- HEE was launched in 2006 and already researchers are finding evidence that timber management has no significant impact on a variety of threatened and endangered wildlife, and in fact appears to enhance the presence of other woodland species.