

The DNR Division of Forestry has managed State Forest lands for more than 100 years, during which time once abused and abandoned land has been restored to nearly 160,000 acres of lush and healthy forests seen in Indiana today.

Indiana law dictates that DNR Forestry “protect and conserve timber, water resources, wildlife and topsoil in forests owned and operated by the division of forestry” and use “good husbandry” to remove timber that has substantial commercial value “in a manner that benefits the growth of saplings.”

There are those who object to this public policy and repeatedly demand DNR Forestry stop doing its job.

In contrast, a Purdue University [public opinion survey](#) of Indiana residents found that 95 percent of Hoosiers approve of removing trees to protect woodlands from disease and fire.

DNR Forestry – staffed by professional foresters and other scientists with a combined 500-plus years of field experience – is evaluated annually by the Forest Stewardship Council® and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative®. For 10 consecutive years, these two independent audits have certified DNR Forestry meets nationally and internationally recognized standards for sustainable forestry management.

In other words, they do it the right way.

Still, opponents are addressing a proposed timber harvest in the Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood State Forest’s backcountry area with claims that aren’t supported by facts.

They suggest the proposed harvest violates a DNR “promise” of no logging when the 2,900-acre backcountry area was established even though the DNR’s 1981 news release announcing the designation clearly states timber management would continue but only under limited guidelines of single-tree selection (a tree here, a tree there).

They imply the 299-acre site will be stripped bare when in fact single-tree selection guidelines ensure the vast majority of trees, including big trees, will be untouched and less stressed from current overcrowding.

They call the area “pristine” or “old-growth” forest. It is not. Prior to state acquisition in the 1950s, much of the area was cutover woodland, worn out agricultural lands and fruit orchards. It is because of DNR’s active reforestation and management (including several documented timber harvests) that the area became worthy of “backcountry” designation.

They say hundreds of thousands of board feet of timber and as many as 40 trees per acre will be removed, even though no trees have been marked for sale and a typical single-tree selection harvest averages 5-6 trees per acre.

They claim the proposed harvest is in the “heart of the area.” The true heart of the backcountry area is Low Gap Nature Preserve, a 320-acre parcel permanently off limits to timber harvesting.

They claim endangered wildlife are at risk. Contrast that with studies by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Indiana DNR, and independent researchers who say rare and endangered species like the timber rattlesnake, hooded warbler, worm-eating warbler, and Indiana bat would benefit from conditions (small openings and sunny canopy gaps) created by periodic thinning of the area's current closed canopy.

They call this is a rushed decision, even though timber management in the backcountry area has been on the table from the outset and shared publicly numerous times. Additionally, the area includes ash trees impacted by emerald ash borers, a destructive insect. Since timber harvests in State Forests can be done only from Oct. 1 through March 30 to protect bat species, the EAB-affected ash trees will be too decayed to salvage a year from now.

They demand DNR Forestry designate areas off limits to harvest but ignore that it's already the standard at DNR State Parks and Nature Preserves, which have different management missions.

Finally, they say the DNR has increased logging 400 percent in State Forests. That's somewhat true, but it needs perspective – annual harvest has gone from 0.3 percent of the merchantable trees to 1.2 percent. That's actually a 300 percent increase, but it equates to taking less than two trees for every 100 in the state forest, leaving 98 others to grow and mature.

-- *The Indiana Department of Natural Resources.*

NOTE: The hyperlink in the 4th graf is www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/files/fo-IN-Perceptions_ForsMgt_09.pdf