

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 20, 2017

Contact: Anne Laker

anne@indianaforestalliance.org

317-600-9136 (cell)

Forest Biologists Call Crown Hill Woods “nature preserve quality”

Crown Hill Neighborhood Association and Veterans appeal directly to Rep. André Carson

(INDIANAPOLIS, IN) – “All efforts should be made to conserve this example of Indiana's natural heritage.”

This is the conclusion of three biologists, specialists in characterizing Indiana forests, who assessed the Crown Hill North Woods last month. Their findings contradict Indiana State Forester John Seifert who stated that he does not think this forest qualifies as old growth forest in the October/November 2016 issue of *Indy Midtown Magazine*.

The biologists—Dr. Kemuel Badger, Dr. Don Ruch and John Taylor—found several trees greater than three feet in diameter that are conservatively estimated to be greater than 200 years old, stating, “200 years old is a minimum estimate and actual ages of stems this size could be much greater, but would need confirmation-core or cross-sectional analysis.” They found beechdrops, a plant that grows in high-quality mature forest and noted an inventory of Crown Hill Woods “found a very diverse herbaceous flora with several species typical of high quality minimally disturbed plant communities.” Their report states that Crown Hill North Woods exhibit characteristics that typically define “old growth forests.”

Drs. Badger and Ruch are professors of biology at Ball State University, and Taylor is land manager there. Dr. Ruch is a former member of the Indiana Natural Resources Commission and past President of the Indiana Academy of Science. Collectively, they have published over 25 scientific studies of Indiana forests.

The biologists’ report concluded that Crown Hill Woods “is a high quality remnant of a once extensive forest that covered most of central Indiana. Very few high quality forest stands of this type remain in Central Indiana. This diverse site ranks among the most biologically diverse sites of this type that we have studied. We agree with the [2006] assessment of the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves that this site is of nature preserve quality. All efforts should be made to conserve this example of Indiana’s natural heritage.”

The effort to urge federal VA officials to relocate the columbaria project—which would pave over a majority of the 14.75 acres—continues. One hundred people turned out for a vigil in the forest on Monday, Martin Luther King Day. On Wednesday, Crown Hill Neighborhood Association presented a letter, signed by 17 of its members, to Congressman André Carson, in whose district Crown Hill North Woods lies.

The letter stated, “This proposed veterans cemetery could and should still be built at a location within Crown Hill, without destroying this forest...The VA can accept the offer from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust...while our neighborhood would retain an irreplaceable asset.”

If the VA were to accept the Trust’s offer, the VA would be fully reimbursed for the land purchase amount, and all costs incurred to date. The North Woods at Crown Hill could then become a nature

preserve for the community, while the structure to inter veterans' ashes could be built at a variety of other locations and still fulfill the desire to memorialize veterans in urban areas.

A group of veterans is also preparing a visit to Carson's office to ask him to dialogue with the VA.

Meanwhile, the Indiana Forest Alliance and plaintiffs have appealed a federal judge's decision last week which denied their request to halt the project.

###

INTERVIEW SOURCES

1. Dr. Kem Badger, Ball State University: 765-285-8820 (office)
2. Carleen Carter, President, Crown Hill Neighborhood Association: 317-964-9286 (cell)

###

HIGH-RES PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD

Citizens hold vigil at Crown Hill Woods, January 16, 2017

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/139729494@N08/albums/72157679149259186>

###

ABOUT THE INDIANA FOREST ALLIANCE

IFA is a non-profit, statewide organization founded in 1996 and dedicated to preserving and restoring Indiana's native hardwood forest ecosystem for the enjoyment of all. Through expert research, influential advocacy, effective organizing, powerful storytelling, and when necessary, litigation, IFA ensures that the integrity of Indiana's forest ecosystem thrives as a natural resource to benefit native wildlife, soil, air and water quality; and as the emblem of our natural heritage. By leading a coalition of citizens, organizations and decision makers, IFA establishes, protects, and restores forests for future generations.