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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

**Hikers Question Logging Devastation on Two Popular Trails
*Concerns Rise about Negative Impact of Forest Management on Recreation***

(Scottsburg & Nashville IN) – The Knobstone Trail, Indiana’s longest, is a big draw for residents and out-of-staters alike. The 58-mile natural footpath takes about four full days to hike and is Indiana’s version of the Appalachian Trail--its stark bluffs and rock formations make it a showstopper.

But the Knobstone has become impassable in parts, and just plain ugly in others, due to aggressive logging by the Indiana Division of Forestry (IDOF).

“At least four sections of the Knobstone have been temporarily closed and torn up beyond recognition in the last year,” said Todd Stewart, a hiker and Scottsburg resident. “The joy of the path is now replaced with mud, stumps, and piles of wasted logging byproduct.”

Much of the Knobstone runs through Clark and Jackson State Forests, taxpayer-owned forests that are routinely logged as part of the IDOF’s forest management plan to create regeneration openings, or early successional habitat. The IDOF claims that this type of management is needed to create even-aged stands of trees. But to many hikers, logging near trails eliminates their entire reason for hiking: enjoying natural beauty and a great recreational experience.

For example: “The detours caused by the logging near Trail Mile 40 send hikers down country roads near properties with dangerous dogs. Or they force hikers to share trails with horseback riders, which turn trails into a muddy mess. Near Washington County, the whole trail is a road walk, not the natural footpath people seek in state forests,” said Stewart. “I don’t know why we treat our outdoor recreation opportunities with such little regard.”

While a tornado downed a lot of trees in 2014 and closed the trail for a time, the state’s timbering practices--which include clearcutting dozens of acres at a time--have dramatically altered the hiking experience.

Meanwhile, in Yellowwood State Forest near Nashville, timber harvests on the west side of Yellowwood Lake and on Carmel Ridge are destroying some of the most scenic parts of the 42-mile Tecumseh Trail, including the Scarce O’ Fat Trail, a favorite of groups such as Bloomington Hikers.

“I backpacked the Tecumseh last fall,” said Bloomington hiker Cathy Greene. “The one area they have designated to camp in has been clearcut and looks like a bomb went off,”

Hikers are incensed. “As a member of the Indianapolis Hiking Club and as an avid hiker I have spent a great deal of time on the two great trails in Indiana: the Tecumseh and the Knobstone,” said Charles Turner of Indianapolis. “It is heartbreaking to spend years hiking and camping in

these woods--which took a hundred years to reach this level of maturity--only to find large areas destroyed, and then walk through more stretches marked for logging.”

Turner continues: “The Division of Forestry budget was slashed at a time when the state has a \$2 billion reserve fund and a \$100 million annual surplus so the DOF decided to sell the trees that they are charged to preserve and protect in order to fund themselves. I have been told by DOF employees that trails interfere with logging. The idea that the DOF is managing our forest by cutting it down and selling it is mind boggling. It is beyond me why they have chosen to destroy these beautiful places.”

Timber contractors hired by the Division of Forestry say that management mimics natural disturbances. But this continuous, systematic intervention continues at a cost, both economic and aesthetic. “The Knobstone & Tecumseh are our most important hiking trails and provide access to our natural heritage in Indiana’s state forests,” said Dr. Rae Schnapp, conservation director at the Indiana Forest Alliance. “They should be managed to ensure a positive wilderness experience.”

Senator Eric Bassler (R-39), from the southwestern part of the state, has authored a bill (SB420) that requires the designation of undivided areas comprising at least 10% of each state forest as an “old forest area,” safe from logging. Four more Republican senators have signed on to it, and the bill will be heard in committee Feb. 13.

The Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA) is planning a mass gathering at the State House Monday, Feb. 20, in support of this bill and any legislation that promotes a balance between logging and recreation, as well as for the carbon sequestration that trees provide.

“We’re expecting several hundred people to attend and show our lawmakers that we believe trees have plenty of value left standing, and we cannot accept this profit-driven logging,” said Anne Laker, IFA communications director.

Details on the Feb. 20 event, which is free and open to the public, can be found at: www.indianaforestalliance.org.

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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.