



Local group fights against VA plan to expand in Crown Hill forest



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INDIANAPOLIS (WTHR) - They've stood since before we were even a country, but now there's a plan to cut down the centuries-old trees at Crown Hill Cemetery.

Many trees in the virgin forest on the north side are more than 300 years old, according to Jeff Stant, president of the Indiana Forest Alliance.

"Back when the pilgrims were held by Indians from the Mayflower, this tree was in the forest growing," Stant said of a burr oak.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, which bought the land last year, plans to build a large monument on that spot, which will ultimately hold the ashes of 25,000 Hoosier veterans.

"You read the environmental assessment on this project and it implies we're going to save all the trees or most of them and put in a cemetery here. It will honor veterans with a natural cemetery," said Stant. "And then you look at the

design plans they showed us and it's all concrete everywhere."

He says why here? Why not an open space?

"This was the only space due to future planning efforts," explained Keith Norwalk, president of Crown Hill Cemetery. He says it was important for the VA to have their cemetery in Indiana's oldest national cemetery.

"What can be preserved is going to be preserved and the public will be able to enjoy them. Now, with all the scruff, you can't even get in there, barely. So, it's a good project and it's going to serve the community more fully."

The wooded area in question is the same spot where developers wanted to build condos 10 years ago, but were shot down following a public outcry.

Stant said they didn't have a chance to speak on this case because they didn't see the public notice. Now they're focusing their efforts on Indiana's congressional delegation.