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## Letter: Let's preserve the old growth forest at Crown Hill

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*Indiana Forest Alliance*

Crown Hill Woods is old growth forest in inner city Indianapolis. A plan of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs plans to develop 14.75 acres in Crown Hill Cemetery's "North Woods" along West 42nd Street. The plan is part of the National Urban Initiatives program for the NCA to improve access to burial services for veterans.

This plan includes building "columbaria" to house urns for the remains of up to 28,000 veterans, a network of paved roads, an information building, power lines and drainage pipes – all within the 14.75 acres. When these structures are completed, they will eventually convert this tract of forest into manicured lawns, concrete and pavement.

Indianapolis will say goodbye to a treasure that no other urban community in North America has. In 2013, Crown Hill Cemetery showcased these woods in its coffee-table book, ***Crown Hill: History, Spirit, Sanctuary***.

“Just as the inscriptions on the grave markers are a reminder of, and tribute to, our forbearers, the woods are a legacy of the past, linking generations...These woods are special...At least forty-seven species of trees grow here ...Among the largest and oldest are burr oaks. Some in the woods measure more than fifteen feet around and are likely several hundred years old ... Trees at Crown Hill preserve the gene pool of early Indiana and so connect the past with the present ...”

Clearly, the Veterans Administration must provide reasonable access to burial options and services for veterans and their families. But many veterans and non-veterans of our community feel that this obligation can and should be met without eliminating this rare forest, containing trees that were growing here before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.

Before any decision is made that affects this old growth forest, alternatives must be examined and considered, publicly. And the public must be provided a sincere chance for input on this taxpayer financed project and the examination of alternatives.

Anyone who wants to stop this tragedy needs to contact our U.S. Senators, **Joe Donnelly** and **Dan Coats**, Congressman **André Carson** and/or Congresswoman **Susan Brooks**. Ask them to take action requesting that the National Cemetery Administration provide a public hearing on this project and a reasonable public comment period. These 14.75 acres of old growth hardwood forest are an irreplaceable treasure that should continue to exist right here in the middle of our city.

Zach Adamson  
City-County Councilor, District 17