

# “A Time For Change”

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Our public lands are being commercially logged at an ever-increasing rate. This includes the state forests of southern Indiana, even in the primary watersheds of such lakes as Bryant Creek Lake and Yellowwood Lake. I first discovered this one day while hiking in Yellowwood State Forest with my family; we were all shocked to witness firsthand the damage that commercial logging does to our public lands.

Since that day I have been surprised to learn how many residents of Indiana assume that our state forests are lands protected from commercial extraction. But far from this being true, the managers of our state forests speak of forest management in terms of crop farming. Forests are “warehouses” for timber, and the trees are “inventory.” I do not mean to cast aspersions on the managers of our state forests; they are generally good people who are simply following the mandate that has been established for them by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Forestry. Within this mandate, our state forests are viewed as tree farms and sources for commercial timber. Many of us, however, believe that it is time for this mandate to change: it is time to stop commercial logging in our state forests!

Public lands comprise only a small percentage of American forests. If managed properly private lands can supply all our needs; we do not need to encourage over-consumption by subsidizing the forest products industries with cheap public timber. Public lands could serve a much higher purpose. Although personally I find them quite beautiful and even a source of spiritual solace, healthy forests are not simply an aesthetic luxury, but are absolutely vital to all biological life on planet Earth. The forests of southern Indiana—a rare treasure of diverse plant and animal life—

have been greatly compromised by years of neglect. Indiana’s DNR deserves much credit for bringing relative health back to much of our forest land. Present conditions, however, call for us to let these compromised forests mature so that they can begin to return to a state resembling “old growth.”



Honorary IFA activist “Emma” inspects an enormous freshly cut stump on Morgan-Monroe State Forest in

Mature forests are home to most species on the planet. Scientists now agree that bio-diversity is necessary for the overall health all any species, and the increasingly rapid loss of bio-diversity now taking place is one of the greatest threats to life on Earth. The picture that is emerging from recent biological research is that life is like a tree with each of the different species representing a leaf. The crucial questions How many leaves can be stripped from the tree before the entire tree dies? With this in mind, many are arguing for our public lands to be turned into preserves for bio-diversity.

Commercial logging is extremely destructive to overall forest health. It not only removes trees before they have lived out their supportive life cycle, but the heavy vehicular traffic resulting from commercial logging also destroys the myriad of creatures that live among



the trees and in the soil beneath the trees. In addition to being reservoirs of bio-diversity, healthy forests are also the source of oxygen, clean water, and fertile soil. Healthy human life is simply not possible without healthy forests.

The preservation of forests should extend beyond public lands, but under the current political system, we have almost no say about what is done to private forests. Under today’s laws a human being who lives on average 75 years can legally cut down a tree that has been living for *Over 2000 years* if this tree stands on what is now designated “private property”. For me this invites serious questioning, but at least in theory we do have some say about how the forests on our public lands are regarded.

Numerous national polls indicate that approximately 70 percent of the American people want commercial logging on our public lands to cease, yet it continues. I recently asked one of the managers of our state forests: If the state conducted a fair poll that showed that the great majority of the people of Indiana wanted commercial logging to stop in our state forests, would it stop? He told me that it would not, for “We are not that kind of democracy.” I do not claim to know exactly what the forest manager meant by these words, but in many ways they reveal the heart of the problem.

The management of our public lands exposes a serious flaw in American democracy today. We are all increasingly aware that the will of the people is being represented less and less. Today representational government more and more means the representation of money and moneyed interests. It is time to change this also.