

The following statement, made on March 8, 2017, can be attributed to Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett, as he calls on the Veterans Administration to halt plans to clear woods and pursue an alternative that honors veterans while preserving our natural heritage:

*“Crown Hill North Woods is Indianapolis' largest old growth forest. It is a place of tremendous diversity and uniqueness. So treasured are these Woods that the Indianapolis Parks Foundation sought to buy them in 2005 and the Indiana State Government tried again in 2007. An outpouring of opposition from the community prevented these Woods from being developed in 2008. Distinguished voices in the community, have called, of late, for the Crown Hill North Woods to be forever preserved. At the same time, the mission of the Veterans Administration/National Cemetery Administration's Urban Initiative project is to provide burial options for veterans in urban areas. Indianapolis was chosen as one of only five cities nationwide to be the site of a columbarium. The VA chose Crown Hill Cemetery, for this proposed columbarium.*

*The VA's specific location within Crown Hill Cemetery is one of Indianapolis' crown jewels -- the Crown Hill North Woods itself. There are plans by the VA to begin developing this site, which would irreversibly damage the integrity of the North Woods as an old growth forest ecosystem. There are, however, development-ready alternatives at Crown Hill itself and at other safe, secure, and dignified locations in Indianapolis.*

*It is true that I have been receiving an outpouring of calls and messages from people in Indianapolis who are alarmed about the danger facing the Crown Hill North Woods. They are clearly people representing a diversity of voices -- neighbors around the Woods, veterans, conservationists, and people who want to protect a natural heritage that could be forever lost. It is clear that these Woods provide a safe space for kids in the neighborhood, a land that sustains property values for nearby communities, and an area that absorbs air pollution, stormwater, & traffic noise.*

*I feel a deep sense of responsibility to be responsive to the public's alarm about the future of the Woods. As such, I am calling upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to halt their efforts to develop the site. My dream would be for these Woods to become part of the City's park system -- one that is an enduring monument to our fallen heroes and one that preserves sacred ground that has been undisturbed for hundreds of years.*

*Let us work together to achieve a lasting solution for our community that honors our veterans and preserves the irreplaceable Crown Hill North Woods as a crown jewel of our city's natural heritage. This seems fitting and worthy as we head into our 200th Anniversary as a City.”*