



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Federal Judge Rules on Crown Hill North Woods Case *Denies Request to Halt Columbaria Project*

(INDIANAPOLIS, IN) – Jane Magnus-Stinson, Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, has denied the request from the Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA) and plaintiffs to halt the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs’ columbaria project at Crown Hill Cemetery’s North Woods.

“It’s a profoundly regrettable decision that makes a travesty of our environmental law,” said Jeff Stant, IFA executive director. “We are examining the ruling and next week will appeal the decision in U.S. Seventh Circuit District Court in Chicago. We do not believe the VA complied with the spirit or the letter of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

“It will be a tragedy in the truest sense to allow the only pre-settlement old-growth forest in Indianapolis to be destroyed to build a cemetery when ample sites exist that could accommodate this cemetery—none of which were examined by the VA—without any harm to the environment, and in a place that honors veterans appropriately,” Stant said.

The appeal to the U.S. District Court in Chicago will include requests to keep the project on hold while the appeal is being considered, and to receive a ruling as soon as possible.

If the Seventh Circuit Court fails to act, the destruction of the forest will commence. The construction of the cemetery will strip 14.75 acres of forest with old-growth trees that pre-date European settlement of Indiana.

The VA has not responded to the Laura Hare Charitable Trust’s offer made on November 22 to purchase the land for a nature preserve, enabling the VA to find an alternate and more suitable site. “These forests are irreplaceable, and as we continue to lose the last remnants, we are all impoverished,” said Lenore Tedesco, a spokesperson for the Hare Trust. “It’s unfortunate that the VA has chosen this destructive course when they have a viable partner to save this forest and also achieve their goals.”

Since Sept. 1, hundreds of citizens have appealed to Indiana’s congressional delegation and VA Secretary General Robert McDonald to reconsider the project.

Preserving & restoring Indiana’s native hardwood forest ecosystem for the enjoyment of all.

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The judge denied the Forest Alliance’s complaint, rejecting the argument that the VA did not conduct an adequate process, while admitting that the project would still cause “irreparable harm.”

The North Woods at Crown Hill is “a relict natural area, not a planting or ‘restoration’, but a true remnant of the once-vast hardwood forests of Indiana. ... This site carries inordinate biological and cultural value,” according to a 2006 Assessment by an ecologist with the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves.

There will be a public candlelight vigil for the forest Monday, January 16 at the Crown Hill North Woods from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m.

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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.

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