

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 26, 2016

Legislature Misses Massive Opportunity for Indiana, in its 200th Year, to Permanently Safeguard its Forests

(INDIANAPOLIS, IN)- The Indiana Forest Alliance, joined by other statewide environmental groups, says the Indiana General Assembly has failed to act on a bill that would have preserved and protected 10 percent of Indiana's state forests from logging and other destructive practices.

Senate Bill 365, which was assigned to the Senate Natural Resources Committee, was not granted a hearing Monday, the last day that committee is scheduled to meet to discuss bills originating in that chamber of the legislature. A companion bill, HB 1155, was also refused a hearing by the House Natural Resources Committee.

“Thanks to hundreds of letters, emails, and communications from Hoosiers to their state legislators, these bills are coauthored by seven republicans and one democrat and have broad bipartisan support in the statehouse. In fact two of the authors, Senators Brent Steele and Jim Tomes are on the Senate Natural Resources Committee. Yet adamant opposition from the timber industry and Governor Mike Pence's Indiana Department of Natural Resources has convinced the Chairs of the Natural Resources Committees to deny any legislation that would protect any of the state forests a hearing for the third year in a row,” said Jeff Stant, executive director of IFA.

Current plans call for commercial logging of 95% of the state forests within 20 years, at levels more than 400% higher than logging prior to 2005. SB 365 and HB 1155 require the Indiana Division of Forestry to set aside from logging 10 percent of Indiana's state forests, keeping them intact for wildlife and hikers, campers, hunters and anyone who wants old growth forests to return to our public forestland for future generations of Hoosiers to enjoy.

“The state forests comprise only 3 percent of Indiana's woodlands, yet contain much of the best interior forest habitat needed by wildlife species that are rare and declining in Indiana. This reasonable proposal recognizes the many environmental values of conserving old growth forest – for wildlife habitat, water quality protection, carbon sequestration, among other benefits – and should be supported, instead of resisted, by the Indiana DNR,” states Tim Maloney, senior policy director for Hoosier Environmental Council.

“As it recognizes Indiana's bicentennial, it is time for the Pence Administration to realize that our state forests are the public's forests. Rather than just providing wood to the timber industry, which has vast supplies of wood available from private woodlands in Indiana, the state forests should provide public benefits, like hiking, backpacking, primitive camping and other wilderness recreation that no private lands nor any other state lands provide. Governor Pence's DNR should stop blocking this legislation,” explained Bowden Quinn, conservation director for Hoosier Chapter, Sierra Club.

“Rather than pay for the Division of Forestry's budget out of the state's general fund, the Pence Administration is insisting this Division should obtain its funds by selling the public's forests to private interests. So the DOF is logging 8,000 acres of our state forests every year, a growing amount of it by

clearcutting, and selling the trees to private timber companies at 40% below their market value. They don't want to leave any significant areas in the state forests off limits to this carnage; a short-term gain that sacrifices the long-term interests of Hoosiers. They can continue to block meaningful legislation, like SB 365 and HB 1155, but the issue will not go away," said Stant.

For more information on old forests and wild areas within Indiana's State Forests, visit <http://indianaforestalliance.org>

#####

About the Indiana Forest Alliance: The Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA) is a non-profit statewide network of groups and individuals dedicated to the long-term health and well-being of Indiana's native forests. We are volunteers and full-time staff working to provide accurate information to the people of Indiana and to involve them in efforts to protect and restore Indiana's forests. We work to improve forest policies in the state through advocacy using education, grassroots organizing, research, and litigation. Want to learn more? Visit us at indianaforestalliance.org, on Facebook at [facebook.com/indianaforestalliance](https://www.facebook.com/indianaforestalliance) or on Twitter at @INforests