

September 21, 2017

Dear Hoosier:

Thank you for your interest in the proposed resource management plan for a portion of the Yellowwood State Forest's Back Country Area (BCA).

The DNR Division of Forestry has managed state forest lands for more than 100 years, during which time once abused and abandoned land has been restored to nearly 160,000 acres of diverse and healthy forests.

This includes the 2,900-acre Yellowwood State Forest Back Country Area. When the state acquired this land in the 1950s, it was a combination of cutover woodland, fruit orchards, farm fields and young growth. The husbandry practices of the Department of Natural Resources Forestry division restored this area, and in 1981, it received backcountry designation. At that time, the state announced timber management would continue under harvesting guidelines limited to the use of single-tree selection.

Single-tree selection, along with best management practices for erosion control, will be used for this harvest, just as it has been utilized for the previous 13 Morgan Monroe Back Country Area harvests, including 2011 and 2013. This means that 5 to 7 trees per acre may be removed. Single-tree selection guidelines ensure the vast majority of trees, including some big trees, will be untouched and less stressed from current overcrowding. The removal will focus on disease, insect, overcrowding and the overall health of individual trees and the entire forest. The long-term goal is to maintain a process that regenerates new seedlings by allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor.

The DNR, with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and independent researchers have conducted research and studies about the impacts of the harvest to wildlife. Rare and endangered species like the timber rattlesnake, hooded warbler, worm-eating warbler, black-and-white warbler, and Indiana bat would benefit from conditions created by periodic thinning that includes small openings and sunny canopy gaps of the area's current closed canopy.

A long-term research project in Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood forests – the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment (HEE) – has produced these findings:

- The number and species diversity of Neotropical breeding birds are significantly greater in harvested treatments relative to unharvested controls due to increased habitat diversification provided by the creation of young forest habitat.
- Birds that use mature forest for nesting frequently use regenerating forest openings to forage, including many species of conservation concern associated with mature forest interiors, including the cerulean warbler, worm-eating warbler, and hooded warbler. Other mature forest nesting species have also been found to frequent these recent clearcuts, including ovenbirds, wood thrushes, and scarlet tanagers.
- Single-tree selection did not affect the abundance of any Neotropical breeding bird analyzed by HEE researchers – including all species studied that nest in forest interiors.
- Researchers have concluded the cerulean warbler – a state endangered species - does not avoid recently harvested areas.
- No bat species using state forests has been found to avoid harvested areas, including the federally endangered Indiana bat and threatened northern long-eared bat.
- Researchers have found evidence that most bat species using state forests also benefit from timber harvesting in some way. For example, researchers found Indiana bat maternity roosts were preferentially located within canopy gaps and openings, and most of these roosts were within areas recently affected by harvesting.
- At Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood State Forests, researchers have intensively studied Indiana bat roosting and foraging within three separate maternity colonies. Each colony includes recently harvested areas where researchers have documented high levels of nocturnal (foraging) and daytime (roosting) use during the summer maternity season.
- Approximately half of known northern long-eared bat (federally threatened) maternity roosts on state forests occur within recently harvested areas.

Additional research from HEE may be found at these websites: https://heeforeststudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Hardwood-Ecosystem-Experiment_Threatened-and-Endangered-Species.pdf and the number of species recorded in a managed forest <https://heeforeststudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/HEE-Species-List-2006-2015.pdf>

DNR Forestry is staffed by professional foresters and other scientists with a combined 500-plus years of field experience. The division is evaluated annually by two forest certification organizations. The reports are at www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/7532.htm. For 10 consecutive years, these two independent audits have certified that DNR Forestry meets nationally and internationally recognized standards for sustainable, well managed forests.

The DNR Forestry staff is dedicated to maintaining the health of the state's forests. This harvest plan is directly in line with other timber management plans that have led to healthier backcountry areas.

Over time, the DNR's annual harvest has increased from 0.3 percent of the merchantable trees to 1.2 percent. That is a 300 percent increase and equates to taking less than two trees for every 100 in the state forest. This trend also means that the once abandoned and cutover lands assembled as the Indiana State Forest system have done well and have grown exponentially to now enable sustainable timber benefits for Hoosiers.

The management plans for the three tracts proposed for active forest management can be found at www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/3643.htm.

Sincerely,

John Seifert
State Forester