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TOPICAL

Despite legislative setback, advocates hopeful for logging limits

- By Christopher Stephens CNHI News Indiana / Feb 17, 2018

INDIANAPOLIS – Despite a failed bipartisan push to limit logging, environmental advocates are hopeful for the future of legislation to protect Hoosier wild forests.

Two bills to protect some of the state's old-growth forests were defeated in the Legislature early this year.

Senate Bill 275, authored by Republican Sens. Eric Bassler, Jon Ford and Eric Koch, would have protected 30 percent of each of Indiana's state forests. The bill failed to get a hearing in the Committee on Natural Resource.

A separate amendment to House Bill 1292, authored by Rep. Matt Pierce, D-Bloomington, would have set aside 10 percent of the state's forest for old growth. The amendment failed this month in a 50-35 vote on the House floor.

Jeff Stant, executive director of the Indiana Forest Alliance, said he was encouraged that 22 Democrats and 13 Republicans voted in favor, demonstrating the possibility of bipartisan cooperation to protect areas of the state's forests.

"If you listen to the discussion on the floor about this amendment, there was a high level of energy and support for the idea of setting aside some state forests to develop into old-growth forest," Stant said.

Three Republicans — Rep. Tony Cook, R-Cicero; Rep. Donna Schaibley, R-Zionsville; and Rep. Bruce Borders, R-Sullivan — joined Rep. Carey Hamilton, D-Indianapolis, and sponsor Pierce in speaking in favor of the amendment. Rep. Sean Eberhart, R-Shelbyville, spoke against it.

Comments in favor of the amendment touted the historical and quality-of-life benefits old-growth forests can bring.

"We have so few lands where you can experience what Indiana was like 100 years ago," Pierce said. "Our children ought to have that experience."

Much of this year's push to protect old-growth Hoosier forests springs from an increase in logging within the state.

The Department of Natural Resources reports in a fact sheet on logging that annual harvests have increased from 0.3 percent of viable timber trees to 1.2 percent, or 12 trees of every 1,000.

More than 1,700 trees from 299 acres, including back-country areas, of the Yellowwood State Forest near Bloomington were sold at a Nov. 9 timber auction. More than 200 protesters attended the auction and unsuccessfully tried to stop the sale to Hamilton Logging Co. of Martinsville, which registered a top bid of \$108,785.

Despite setbacks in this legislative session, Stant said the Indiana Forest Alliance will continue to work with legislators to pass protections for Hoosier forests.

“This vote reveals that the negative public response to DNR’s aggressive logging is a policy issue that is not ‘red’ or ‘blue,’” Stant said. “The way our public forests are treated is an issue that matters to Hoosiers in both parties.”

Roundup

Here’s a look at some General Assembly bills that would affect the environment in Indiana. Bills that have passed from the third reading in the Senate to the House have until March 5 to be voted into law. Bills that have moved on from the House to the Senate have until March 6.

BILLS ADVANCING

Senate Bill 286

Would direct the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) to assess the potential for development of low-carbon and green industries in Indiana and the job creation, economic growth and wealth generation that could result for Indiana communities.

Action: Passed on third reading in the Senate 49-0. Forwarded to House Committee on Environmental Affairs.

Senate Bill 361

Would establish a water infrastructure task force -- consisting of two members of the Senate, two members of the House and five governor's appointees -- to study drinking water and wastewater management systems and develop a long-term plan for addressing drinking water and wastewater needs in Indiana.

Action: Passed third reading in the Senate: 49-0. Referred to House Committee on Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications.

Note: House Bill 1267 is similar and passed a third reading in the House 93-0. Referred to Senate Committee on Utilities.

Senate Bill 362

Would require that a public utility, conservancy district or regional water or sewage district that is organized as a legal entity after June 30, 2018, be subject to the jurisdiction of the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission for 10 years.

Action: Passed third reading in the Senate: 49-0. Referred to House Committee on Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications.

House Bill 1227

Would specify that waterhemp, marehail, Palmer amaranth and poison hemlock are noxious weeds and directed the weed control board to take steps to control noxious weeds affecting agricultural production in Indiana.

Action: Passed third reading in the House 96-0. Referred to Senate Committee on Natural Resources.

BILLS THAT DID NOT PASS

Senate Bill 318

Would have required electricity suppliers to supply a percentage of total electricity supply from renewable energy resources.

Action: Failed to get a hearing in the the Senate Committee on Utilities.

House Bill 1338

Would have established minimum setback requirements for the siting of wind power devices after June 30, 2018.

Action: Failed to get a hearing in the House Committee on Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications.

House Bill 1369

Would have amended the law on confined feeding operations and provided that a person who owns a CFO own the livestock in the CFO, as well.

Action: Failed to get a hearing in the House Committee on Environmental Affairs.