



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Crown Hill North Forest Advocates Gather for Rally

Advocates cautious but heartened by this week's temporary stop-work order issued by the Army Corps

(INDIANAPOLIS, IN) – Supporters of the effort to preserve Crown Hill North Forest will assemble Thursday, March 16 from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. outside of the contested site within Crown Hill Cemetery. Planned prior to Monday's actions by an unaffiliated group of citizens, the Rally was conceived to send a message of continued opposition to the Veterans Administration's plans to demolish an old-growth forest ecosystem in inner city Indianapolis.

"We are grateful to the VA for pausing to reconsider this project, but we will not relent until they announce their plan to dialogue with the community and relocate this project to one of the numerous alternative sites in Indianapolis that could accommodate it," said Jeff Stant, executive director of the Indiana Forest Alliance.

Since late August 2016, Indianapolis neighbors, preservationists, veterans, and schoolchildren have been speaking out against the project. Responding to months of outcry, Mayor Hogsett issued a statement on Wednesday, March 8, asking the VA to halt the project. Nevertheless, on Friday, construction crews began laying a gravel road into the forest from 42nd St. Then, Monday morning, a dozen activists occupied the site to block further construction. At 1 p.m., the Army Corps relayed that a stop-work order had been issued for the columbarium project.

"This is not only a victory for the trees, but for veterans, the local community, and a sustainable mindset around the world," says Carter Hays, the 15-year-old activist who scaled a 30-foot tree on Monday to demonstrate his conviction for saving the forest.

“We can’t be sure how long the stop-work order will last,” said Stant. “For now, we are grateful to the thousands of citizens who picked up the phone and spoke out to their elected officials. We’re also thankful for Mayor Hogsett for his supportive statement, and his vision for the site to become part of the city park system. And we’re appreciative to Sen. Joe Donnelly and Rep. André Carson for their direct communication with VA Secretary David Shulkin about this matter.”

The program at the Thursday rally is planned to include these speakers:

1. Zach Adamson, City-County Council Vice President
2. Jesse Kharbanda, Hoosier Environmental Council
3. Carter Hays, student (and participant in Monday’s act of civil disobedience)
4. Lori Perdue, veteran (and participant in Monday’s act of civil disobedience)
5. A representative from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust, which has offered to buy the property back and preserve it from development
6. Crown Hill neighborhood residents
7. Representatives from the Indiana Forest Alliance

The rally will occur inside Crown Hill Cemetery near the northwest corner of the property at the edge of the woods. The public and elected officials are also invited to speak at the event as time allows.

“Permanently protecting Crown Hill North Woods is in keeping with our city’s vision to be the ‘most sustainable in the Midwest.’ Safeguarding these Woods would also send a powerful signal that cities are determined to take up the mantle of environmental leadership at a time when there are aggressive efforts in Washington DC to undo years of national, often bi-partisan environmental progress,” remarked Jesse Kharbanda, executive director of the Hoosier Environmental Council, a partner in the campaign to save the forest.

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HIGH-RES PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD

1. Monday’s protest, March 13:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/139729494@N08/albums/72157679703676920>

2. September 25, 2016 rally:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/139729494@N08/albums/72157674415160905>

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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.