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County Tourism Officials See Negative Impacts from DNR's State Forest Logging Program

The outdoor recreation economy in Indiana generates \$15.7 billion in consumer spending each year (*source: Outdoor Industry Association*). And Brown County is often the first place that comes to mind when people think of outdoor fun in Indiana.

But Brown and Monroe County's eco-tourist assets are at risk due to frequent, ongoing logging in Indiana state forests, including a selective cut planned on 300 acres in the Yellowwood Backcountry Area, containing 150-year-old trees. As a result, tourism officials are sending strong signals to Governor Eric Holcomb.

"As one of Indiana's most forested areas, we value the natural beauty that surrounds us, as well as understand the importance it has upon our local economy," wrote Jane Ellis, executive director of the Brown County Convention & Visitors Bureau in a letter to Governor Holcomb October 12.

The letter continued: "Each year, millions of individuals visit Brown County, a large majority of whom come specifically to admire and explore our natural resources...However, the recent logging that has taken place in Yellowwood has hurt the State Forest's reputation. We have heard negative feedback from many visitors who have been to Yellowwood State Forest either on their own accord or based on our recommendation. Not only is this hindering interest and visitation to Yellowwood, but if it continues, it could possibly negatively impact Brown County's notoriety as a premiere outdoor destination, as well as revenue generated by tourism."

Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood State Forests, each about 37 square miles, are big draws for locals, Hoosiers and out-of-staters who like to backpack, hike, hunt, camp and forage mushrooms. Indiana's 13 state forests – all but one of them in the southern half of the state – are the only state properties where visitors are allowed to hike and camp off trail.

With many of the state's best hiking trails and its only backpacking trails running through them, state forests should be the go-to places for the most rustic experience of wild nature. But logging on state forests has increased 400% since 2002.

“The state has prioritized logging in state forests over recreational use, when they were created for mixed use,” says Jeff Stant, executive director of Indiana Forest Alliance. “State parks, while popular and heavily used, have extensive human infrastructure. In nature preserves and state parks, you’re not allowed to go off trail, and you can only do primitive camping in 2 of the 25 of the state parks. If state forests are all logged, there is no wilderness left to hike through or primitive camp in; what does that say about our priorities?”

The popularity of Indiana state parks proves that Hoosiers are starved for outdoor recreation. Hoosiers ranked hiking as one of their most favorite forms of outdoor recreation in four of the last five outdoor participation surveys in the DNR's [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#). Both the Knobstone Trail in Scott County and the Tecumseh Trail in Monroe/Brown/Morgan Counties should be Indiana's version of the Appalachian Trail.

Instead, the Tecumseh, for example, has been logged over in 14 locations in the last 7 years, resulting in trail closures and re-routes.

According to the latest US Census Data, more than two million people live within 20 miles of Indiana’s state forests and more than 14.5 million people live within 100 miles of them. “The 59% of Hoosiers who participate in outdoor recreation are an untapped market for state forests are concerned,” said Stant.

Mike McAfee, executive director of [Visit Bloomington](#), underscores the importance of natural resources to his county’s tourism dollars. “We target visitors that want to make the world a better place,” he said. “The more we keep our forests pristine and wild and take care of them, the more valuable and attractive they are. It is a special balance but the forest is only sustainable as an eco-tourism asset if it is intact.”

“Monroe County’s trees, hills, water and wildlife are priceless natural resources that we must preserve and we are against any activities, including logging, that curtail people’s enjoyment of the outdoors,” McAfee said. “We urge Governor Holcomb and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to seek every possible alternative before allowing further logging or developments in Indiana state forests or any locations where people enjoy wilderness experiences.”

An example: trail runner Matt Flaherty, who runs the Tecumseh Trail, documented his shock and dismay at completing the trail run, only to arrive at a clear cut, [in an article in the Limestone Post last summer](#).

“In a place as beautiful as southern Indiana, we believe that forests in their purest form are the renewable tourism resource we should invest in: by calling off the planned logging in the Yellowwood/Morgan-Monroe backcountry,” said Stant.

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About 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.