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RESULTS FROM INDIANA FOREST & WILDLIFE STUDY POINT TO VALUE & RARITY OF OLDER FORESTS

(Bloomington, IN)—To what extent do we value old-growth forests in Indiana, and what is the future of older forest tracts in Indiana state forests under current forest management regimes?

These questions will be explored October 25 in two presentations by scientists at a national conference hosted by the Natural Areas Association, taking place at IU Bloomington this year.

In their presentation at the conference, Drs. Leslie Bishop and Paul Rothrock (both biologists) will describe the conditions in the forest studied as indicative of a high quality secondary mature forest worthy of preserving, based on its composition, age, and structure. In her presentation, Dr. Rae Schnapp, IFA conservation director, summarizes highlights of the 3,316 species found in a comprehensive wildlife inventory in the same forest.

The data presented at the Natural Areas conference are the result of IFA's four-year Ecoblitz, the first comprehensive baseline inventory of an older, relatively undisturbed Indiana public forest: a 900-acre tract in the Back Country Area of Morgan-Monroe & Yellowwood State Forests.

Analyzing the age of the largest trees, Dr. Bishop, a retired professor of biology from Earlham College, found that 81% of the trees cored were over 100 years old. What does that mean? "Along with the other forest characteristics, these data illustrate a successional progression toward secondary old growth forest. Given the rarity of old growth forests in Indiana, this is a clear argument for protecting these older forests from further timber harvests."

Dr. Schnapp's presentation indicates the species richness of this mature forest, including 21 endangered, threatened and rare species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Dr. Schnapp said: "Understanding what's in our state forests should be a prerequisite for forest management decisions."

"If there ever was an area primed to become a High Conservation Value forest, this data show that this Back Country Area is it," said Jeff Stant, executive director of the Indiana Forest Alliance. "IFA has discussed the research on this forest with Governor Holcomb and will be nominating this forest as High Conservation Value based based on this research."

The Indiana DNR defines High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) as "state forest areas which, due to their unique high conservation values, receive added consideration of management activities in order to maintain or enhance these conservation values."

Launched in 2014, IFA's Ecoblitz was made possible by individual contributions and grants from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Efroymsen Family Fund, the Amos Butler Audubon Society. It involved the work of scientists from 13 colleges and universities.

For information about the Natural Areas Conference, visit:

<https://www.naturalareas.org/conference.php>

For more information about the Indiana Forest Alliance's forest studies, visit:

<https://indianaforestalliance.org/ecoblitz-wildlife-forest/>

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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.