

# Owen-Putnam timber sale draws bids, protest

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Bidding took place on the morning of Wednesday, June 20, for two lots of timber located in Owen-Putnam State Forest in a public sale.

According to a public notice published in May, these tracts included 285,922 board feet of timber, broken down into 1,327 sawtimber trees, 457 poles, and 1 cull tree, all located in compartment 5, tract 6 of the state forest.

Sealed bids for the first tract were opened at 9 a.m., with Tri-State Timber winning at \$66,651, beating out Sugar Ridge's \$55,500, R. Booe & Son's \$39,714, and Kinser Timber's \$43,333. Bids for the second lot were opened at 9:15 a.m., with Jim Graber Logging making the winning bid \$24,675, beating out R. Booe & Son at \$12,575 and Kinser Timber at \$17,177.

Members of the Owen- Putnam Friends of the Forest group were on hand to protest the sale, owing to their displeasure with the ways in which logging in the state forest has been handled in recent years. Representatives from the group, including Jeff Marks, Kurt Kemp, and Mahalie Kemp spoke of how the amount of cutting in the state forest has increased in recent years and voiced their concern that the process of logging on these tracts are not safe for the surrounding forest.

On this latter point, they elaborated that they would prefer trees be extracted vertically and that more care be taken to preserve trees that are not being harvested and to clean up where paths are created for harvesting equipment. Concern was also raised regarding the protection of designated heritage sites near to the harvesting areas.

Member Leah Creel also added that to their knowledge, little or nothing is done to replant in the harvested areas.

Overall, the protesters wanted it known they are not entirely against logging, but wish for less of it to be done more carefully, and with more involvement of the public in the process.

Dan Ernst, Assistant State Forester with the Department of Natural Resources was down from Indianapolis and attempted to answer some of the concerns raised by the protesters.

Ernst admitted that the amount of logging is in fact from where it was a decade ago, but said that this was due to more of the state forest having reached maturity.

He also estimated that around 700,000 board feet is cleared from Owen- Putnam each year, which he said is less than the over 1,000,000 board feet that the forest regains through natural regeneration each year.

As for designated heritage sites, such as homesteads, Ernst said that each harvesting site includes a staff archeologist to help the crews avoid damaging these important historical locations.

Ernst emphasized that the state uses science to guide which areas are designated for clearing with sustainability in mind.

Once the sales were underway, the dynamic between the protestors and the state forest employees was remarkably respectful, with some workers taking photos to mark the occasion of their "first protestors." Once each bidding period was complete, the gathered Friends of the Forest turned their backs to the sale area as the sale was finalized.