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Bipartisan Support Grows in Vote on Pro-Forest Amendment

(Indianapolis)—An amendment that would have set aside 10% of state forests from logging introduced by Rep. Carey Hamilton (D-Indianapolis) to a natural resource bill, SB 363, failed to pass the State House of Representatives yesterday with a vote of 52 to 42, however not along party lines. Thirteen Republicans joined all but one of the Democrats present to support the amendment. The amendment gained the support of seven additional legislators over a similar amendment heard in 2018.

“The debates over this and last year's amendment are the first time that anyone can remember that state forest logging has been debated on the floor of either chamber,” said Jeff Stant, executive director of the Indiana Forest Alliance. Stant added, “The result reflects a growing public concern for protecting forests returning to the old growth condition on Indiana's public lands, despite state opposition to that protection.”

Comments in favor of the 10% set aside amendment included the economic and ecological benefits of intact forest. While Carey Hamilton (D-Indianapolis) acknowledged the need for a robust timber industry in Indiana, she also observed that today's outdoor recreation industry is a larger economic driver in Indiana.

“Outdoor recreation is generating more than \$15 billion in annual consumer spending and creating 143,000 jobs in Indiana, according to the Outdoor Industry Association,” said Hamilton, compared to \$10.5 billion annually and 70,000 jobs from logging private land cited in the 2018

Indiana Hardwood Assessment from Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the timber industry.

In a statement issued to legislators, the owners of Rusted Moon Outfitters, an outdoor recreation retailer, expressed their support of the 10% set aside. “Our business’ success or failure is heavily tied to the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities here at home in Indiana. Continued negative impact on the limited number of areas that offer wilderness experiences is detrimental to our business.”

Two Republicans, Bruce Border (Jasonville) and Donna Schaibley (Carmel) joined Democrats Hamilton, Patricia Boy (Michigan City) and Matt Pierce (Bloomington) speaking in favor of the amendment while Republicans, John Prescott (Union City), Sean Eberhart (Shelbyville), and Alan Morrison (Terre Haute) spoke against it.

Forest advocates will continue the campaign to protect Indiana’s publicly-owned, older-growth forests.

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The Indiana Forest Alliance 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.