

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 29, 2019



Contact: Angela Herrmann, Indiana Forest Alliance
(317) 602-3692 / angela@indianaforestalliance.org

Indiana Scientists Seek High Conservation Value Forest Designation for Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood Back Country Area

(Indianapolis—May 29, 2019) Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA) scientists have submitted a proposal to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources that would protect the 2,380-acre Back Country Area of Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood State Forests from future logging. The proposal calls for the Back Country Area to be designated a “High Conservation Value Forest” (HCVF), and managed to allow old growth forest to return to the area. High Conservation Value Forest is a protective designation defined by the international Forest Stewardship Council, a sustainable forestry auditing agency.

IFA officials also presented the proposal to Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb.

“Governor Holcomb has assured us that he will read and consider this proposal. The public will also have a chance to comment on the proposal according to the IDNR’s guidelines,” said IFA Executive Director Jeff Stant. “We hope Governor Holcomb and Hoosiers across the state will get behind the HCVF designation for this forest. There’s nothing like it anywhere else in the state forests.”

Professor Emerita from Earlham College and lead author of the proposal, Leslie Bishop, Ph.D., said the forest characterization data show that the Back Country Area of Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood State Forest is developing characteristics of secondary old growth forests, areas that have regrown such that the effects of previous deforestation are minimally evident.

“Old growth forests are extremely under-represented in the state forests, with only 2% of these forests being 140 years or older,” said IFA Conservation Director, Rae Schnapp, Ph.D.

“The Division of Forestry has committed in its strategic plan to manage 10 percent of the state forests to reach older forest conditions, but so far has set aside only 2% of these forests from logging. This HCVF designation will help the Division meet its commitment,” said Schnapp.

Between 2014 and 2018, the IFA conducted an Ecoblitz, a series of taxonomic surveys, in a 900-acre section of the Back Country Area to document the species present in one of the largest and most undisturbed interior forests remaining within Indiana’s state forests. The surveys, led by scientists from 13 Indiana colleges and universities, revealed a rich diversity of flora and fauna, cataloging more than 3,100 species. Many insects are still being identified by

Indiana Forest Alliance; 2123 N. Meridian St.; Indianapolis, Indiana 46202

(317) 602-3692 | info@indianaforestalliance.org

Follow us on [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

Hanover College's insect laboratory due to the lack of taxonomy experts for many of the insects found in this forest.

"The surveys illustrate that the rich diversity in this older forest is coupled with a high natural quality as it returns to old growth conditions," said Bishop. She cited an analysis of the forest's plant community by Paul Rothrock, Ph.D., noted botanist who refined the Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) method used by the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves to measure the natural quality of plant communities.

"The FQA of the herbaceous community shows that this forest has very high remnant natural value, with portions that are clearly remarkable and likely are unmatched in other forest ecosystems in the state," according to Rothrock's analysis.

The surveys also found seven bat species living in the forest, six of which are listed as federally endangered or threatened, or species of special concern in Indiana.

"Two Indiana Bat maternity roosts were found leading biologists to conclude that this federally endangered animal has a maternity colony in this forest," said Bishop. "Our surveys also revealed pygmy and smoky shrews, rare mammals that live only in undisturbed mature forests in Indiana and more than 10 timber rattlesnakes and two dens of this state endangered animal. We found deep forest birds, such as the cerulean, worm-eating, and hooded warblers, that are endangered or rare in Indiana successfully nesting in this forest."

Bishop concluded that managing this area as a HCVF is the perfect response to the most recent report by the United Nations predicting the potential extinction of a million species in the coming decades due to habitat loss and climate change.

-30-

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.

Indiana Forest Alliance; 2123 N. Meridian St.; Indianapolis, Indiana 46202

(317) 602-3692 | info@indianaforestalliance.org

Follow us on [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)