

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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(Indianapolis—January 13, 2020) The U.S. Forest Service is moving forward with a plan to log 4,375 acres, repeatedly burn 13,500 acres, build 16.4 miles of logging roads, and apply herbicides on 1,970 acres all concentrated on ridges, slopes, and valleys in the Hoosier National Forest (HNF) that drain into Monroe Reservoir, according to the “Houston South Vegetation Management and Restoration Project overview.

This proposed project risks increasing sediment runoff into the South Fork of Salt Creek which is already polluting Monroe Reservoir, the sole drinking water supply for 140,000 people in Monroe and surrounding counties, with too much sediment and nutrient input. It will cause repeated closures and reroutes of the Knobstone Trail as well as popular horseback riding trails. The project will kill or harm at least seven species of federally or state listed bats and other birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles that are state endangered or listed as “species of special concern” in Indiana.

Impacts From Proposed Management Plan

Threaten Water Quality

Because Houston South is located in the Lake Monroe watershed, implementing the proposed management plan will compromise the drinking water supply for 120,000 people. Lake Monroe already suffers from excess nutrients, suspended sediment, and algae. Drinking water authorities spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to treat spikes in suspended solids (“turbidity”) to safely provide this water to the public. The project area contains many steep slopes with highly erodible soils, and the silt load from burning and logging will exacerbate these problems. Shallow bays are noticeably silting in and being clogged with invasive water plants. The Clean Water Act prohibits new pollutant loads when an impairment is present.

“We do not need the federal government adding to the pollution of our water supply by logging on these steep slopes and highly erodible soils.” said Sherry Mitchell-Bruker in a statement from Friends of Lake Monroe in Bloomington, Ind.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) says that Best Management Practices will prevent water pollution, but monitoring of other logging sites shows this is not true. In a Kentucky study, suspended sediments were 14 times higher during the first 17 months after cutting in a watershed where logging BMPs were used

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when compared to an uncut watershed ([See source 1](#)). A literature review indicates that in general, the effectiveness of BMPs for sediment ranges from 53 to 94% efficient during harvest and up to one year after harvesting ([See source 2](#)). Fishing on Lake Monroe will also likely suffer from increased sediment input.

Endanger Wildlife

In its present unlogged and unburned condition, the Houston South project area supports seven species of bats that are federally endangered or threatened, under consideration for this listing or state endangered or "species of special concern" (rare or range limited in Indiana, [see source 3](#)):

- Gray bat (*Myotis grisecens*)
Federally Endangered
- Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*)
Federally Endangered
- Northern long-eared (*Myotis septentrionalis*)
Federally Threatened, State Endangered
- Little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*)
State Endangered
- Tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*)
State Endangered, Federal Listing Under Review
- Evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*)
State Endangered
- Eastern red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*)
State Species of Special Concern

State counts indicate that White-Nose Syndrome, a disease that attacks cave-hibernating bats, has killed hundreds of thousands of Indiana bats and 90% or more of Northern long-eared, little brown, and tri-colored bats since it arrived in Indiana in 2009.

By burning and logging during the summer, the project will cut down, burn up, and engulf in smoke maternity roosting trees for these bats, killing the mothers and their "pups." Other animals that will likely be burned up or adversely affected by the logging and road construction include the state endangered timber rattlesnake and cerulean warbler and Species of Special Concern that live or nest on or near the forest floor such as Eastern box turtle, smoky, and pygmy shrew, rough green snake, worm eating warbler, black and white warbler, and hooded warbler.

Compromise Forest Health and Increase Invasive Species

The USFS claims that this timber harvest is required to regenerate early successional oak and hickory forests. However, the age class distribution table for the HNF indicates that about 10% of the HNF is in

the 0-25 year age class, while less than 5% is in the > 100-year-old classes. Findings from the 2018 Purdue Climate Change study indicate that climate conditions will be more favorable for oak in the coming decades, suggesting that oak saplings will thrive without the intervention of logging, burning, and pesticide applications.

Jeopardize Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation is one of the fastest-growing components of Indiana's tourism industry, generating some \$15.7 billion in annual consumer spending and creating 143,000 jobs in Indiana, according to the Outdoor Industry Association. This project will consume a significant part of the most popular horseback riding area in the HNF and force repeated closures of other horseback riding trails. The project will force closures or reroutes of the Knobstone Trail, the state's longest and most famous backpacking trail, as well as the Fork Ridge and other hiking trails.

Volunteers helped construct and maintain many of these trails, but the volunteer pool is likely to dry up if trails are destroyed or repeatedly closed due to logging and burning. Several miles of the project are directly adjacent to the southern border of the Charles Deam Wilderness. This logging project will diminish the recreational experiences within the largest concentration of national and state forest public lands and the only federal wilderness area in the lower midwest (Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois) where wild land for such experiences is extremely limited.

Exacerbate Climate Change

The USFS is required to consider the cumulative impacts of their actions, including the release of greenhouse gases. While admitting the project will contribute to carbon emissions, the Forest Service has not considered done this. Since the latest 2006 Forest Plan, global climate change projections have become much more dire. The Houston South proposal does not even reference the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report published in 2018 that emphasizes the importance of reducing carbon emissions and increasing carbon sequestration ([see IPCC reports](#)). USFS claims the project will contribute only small amounts of carbon through logging and burning activities. Furthermore, the agency has not considered alternatives that contribute less or have a positive impact on carbon sequestration.

Examine Alternatives

The USFS is required to consider alternatives to the proposed action at Houston South. The USFS has not demonstrated that they considered the impacts on municipal water supplies. Some 63,000 acres of the HNF have the same management prescription ("Management Area 2.8) under the HNF Management Plan as Houston South but lie within watersheds that are not used for drinking water. Many groups have asked

the USFS to consider harvesting and burning in those areas instead. However, other than taking "no action," the USFS has not considered any alternatives to this drastic plan.

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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.

Sources

Project Overview: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55119&exp=overview>

Source 1: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1752-1688.1998.tb00948.x>

Source 2: https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/jrnl/2010/nrs_2010_edwards-p_001.pdf

Source 3: https://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/files/fw-Endangered_Species_List.pdf

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Reports: <https://www.ipcc.ch/reports/>

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