



Comments on Preserving the Integrity of the Owen-Putnam State Forest

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Re: Owen-Putnam Compartment 1 Tract 4, Compartment 4 Tracts 5 & 8, Compartment 8 Tract 13

I am writing on behalf of the Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter to encourage you to reconsider the plans to log and burn portions of the Owen-Putnam State Forest. Trees are one of the most underappreciated of our natural resources and heritage. When we talk about our nation's history, we tend to focus on the people and not the places. But the vast forested tracts of our state were important pieces of our path to modern society. They were the beginnings of our infrastructure, they built our homes, and they allowed us to put pen to the page.

Additionally, primary old-growth forests provide many benefits, yet their presence in Indiana is rare and they occur only in small, isolated patches. While much of Indiana's state forest area is maturing, these older successional stages are not well represented. Old growth trees in particular, such as many found in the Owen Putnam State Forest, absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide, lessening the impacts of climate change. They provide shelter and habitat for endangered species. They also prevent soil erosion and runoff, thereby protecting water quality for the many people who live within the surrounding watershed. The four tracts currently targeted contain slopes that can reach as steep as 60-70 degrees in places. Logging on slopes like these will very likely negatively impact water quality in Fall Creek, Jordan Creek, and Rattlesnake Creek and cause problems with erosion.

Tracts in Compartment 4 (Tracts 5 & 8) are ecologically high quality forest and have been nominated repeatedly as State Wild Areas in legislative initiatives. The Division of Forestry's own assessment of these tracts slated for "management" states that "this part of Owen-Putnam State Forest...represents presettlement conditions better than any other region in Indiana." Logging these tracts would permanently destroy this high quality forest.

Furthermore, many Hoosiers still place enormous personal value on our remaining forests - we use them for hiking, hunting, foraging, and even simply to inspire awe among our children and ourselves and provide a deeper connection to the world around us. These tracts are some of the best deep forest habitat in Owen-Putnam and are home to sites significant for historical reasons as well, including the grave of Abner Frazier, an Owen County legend. Also, within Compartment 4 Tract 12 is Rattlesnake Campground, enjoyed by hundreds of Hoosiers and beloved for its geology and botany.

Due to all of these reasons, we at the Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter urge you to reconsider the current plan and instead preserve these forested tracts as they are.