SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

INDIANA SOCIETY

1/26/17

Senator Susan Glick
Chair, Senate Natural Resources Committee
200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204

RE: SB420

Dear Senator Glick,

The Indiana Society of American Foresters is writing to express its opposition to legislation, SB420, which has been assigned to your committee. This bill mandates that ten percent (10%), or at least 500 acres, in each of Indiana's State Forests be designated as "old forest areas" and specifies certain activities that are prohibited or allowed within these designated areas. It also establishes responsibilities for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and divisions that manage these "old forest areas".

State Forests are just one part of the larger DNR land ownership and natural resource conservation matrix. Each has a unique mission yet is unified in the overall mission to conserve Indiana's forests and natural areas for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of current and future generations. The DNR already has several landholding divisions, some which are identical, or nearly identical, to what is being proposed by this bill. All of the stated purposes in Section 3 of SB420 are those for which the State Forests are currently managed, though not all in one area.

DNR conservation strategies include ownership and stewardship of natural resource lands, "Green Certification" of its State Forest management programs, the landowner Classified Forest & Wildlands program, and the identification and dedication of Nature Preserves (the most widely distributed system of protected lands in the state). Like lands conserved by partner agencies and NGOs, a significant part of DNR holdings is left for natural processes where only limited management may occur. In total, DNR owns or has interest in more than 315,000 acres of forestland, with nearly one-third of it left to natural processes where only limited management may occur.

State Forests make up almost 158,300 of that total, of which 9,000 acres are designated as Backcountry Areas in four State Forests. While active forest management has always been a

component of the Backcountry Area plan, it is allowed only in a more select and less frequent application than other areas of State Forests.

Within the State Forests, there are 20 dedicated Nature Preserves protecting 2664 acres. These have been determined to be significant natural areas that have been permanently set aside for their unique natural features. These nature preserves ensure that older age trees will always exist in the State Forests.

In 1901, the Indiana legislature made its intentions clear on how State Forests are to be managed. Indiana Code 14-23-4-1 reads: *"It is the public policy of Indiana to protect and conserve the timber, water resources, wildlife, and topsoil in the forests owned and operated by the division of forestry for the equal enjoyment and guaranteed use of future generates. However, by the employment of good husbandry, timber that has a substantial commercial value may be removed in a manner that benefits the growth of saplings and other trees by thinnings, improvement cuttings, and harvest processes and at the same time provides a source of revenue to the state and counties and provides local markets with a further source of building material."*

"Good husbandry" is what still guides timber management practices on State Forest lands, while other forested lands in the DNR inventory are managed differently. DNR State Parks are free of commercial logging activities and generally left to passive recreation. So are DNR Fish & Wildlife Areas. In addition to the 20 dedicated Nature Preserves within the State Forests, there are an additional 242 state-designated Nature Preserves, totaling 46,000 combined acres, throughout the state where commercial logging is prohibited.

SB420 would prohibit active forest management on about 15,000 acres of State Forest land that has a long history of resource management, protection, and conservation. As professional foresters, we contend that adopting such a measure would negatively impact both the economic and wildlife habitat values of this land. For example:

- It would block trained professional foresters from continuing activities designed to ensure broad ecological considerations and long-term sustainability of these forest resources.

- Aside from the responsibilities given DNR in IC 14-23-4-1, there are clear conservation benefits of professional timber management, a nationally accepted reality. The nearly 15,000 acres that SB420 would set aside have a current timber volume over 82 million board feet and a sustainable timber growth estimated at over 2 million-board feet/year. The estimated value to the State of just the annual growth is $.8 million, though DNR only harvests around 60% of annual growth. With the selection harvest practices that DNR foresters employ, this would be about $.5 million annual revenue to the state. The economic benefit brought by DNR's management practices profits all Hoosiers: from the taxpayer, to the timber cutter, to the lumber truck driver, to the sawyer, and to the owners of the businesses employing these individuals.

- It would cause substantial loss of habitat suitable for native wildlife species, including many that are listed as either state or federally endangered. Ongoing research shows that managed timber harvesting is the most effective and economical tool for maintaining or restoring suitable habitat for many species of conservation concern while maximizing overall habitat and species diversity, productivity, and community resiliency.

A significant example of this last point is the federally endangered Indiana bat. The DNR Division of Forestry has worked closely with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to develop a 20-year Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the Indiana bat and other bat species that become federally listed due to the disease white-nose-syndrome.

Indiana State University and Ball State University researchers studied what effect DNR's timber management program would have on Indiana bat habitat relative to a number of other scenarios, including a "No Timber Harvesting" alternative. Their work will be published in a series of peer-reviewed scientific journals early this year. They found:

- "No Timber Harvesting" resulted in the lowest amount of suitable Indiana bat habitat on State Forests
- The Division of Forestry's current management program provided the highest amount of suitable habitat

As a result, active forest management, and timber harvesting in particular, is expected to play an important role in the State Forest HCP in order to maintain or improve Indiana bat habitat conditions in compliance with USFWS directives.

The real intent of this legislation, to prohibit active forest management on additional portions of DNR lands, likely would eliminate more remaining habitat in Indiana for other wildlife species of conservation concern.

- Ruffed grouse, once a popular game bird in Indiana, rely on early successional forest patches within larger blocks of contiguous forest. Due to the cessation of timber harvesting in much of their range, ruffed grouse have experienced one of the most dramatic declines of any bird species in Indiana (Breeding Bird Atlas Explorer 2014, Backs & Castrale 2010).
- Cerulean warblers, a state-endangered species, have been studied extensively at Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood State Forests, where research indicates DNR forest management techniques "are compatible with cerulean warbler breeding habitat needs" (Register & Islam, 2008).
- Researchers with the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment (HEE), a long-term, landscape-scale study at Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood, are finding after nearly a decade of study that species using mature forests prior to timber harvesting remain post-harvest while recording substantial increases in native species using recently harvested sites, including many species of conservation concern taking advantage of unique habitat created by timber harvesting. And as reported in a recent HEE extension publication, "forests with higher levels of habitat diversity are likely to have higher levels of animal, plant and insect biodiversity". (Meier, 2015).

The consensus among researchers after 30-plus years of extensive study is that timber harvesting does not cause "fragmentation effects" on forest bird communities. In their seminal review of the scientific literature, five well-respected authors on the subject concluded: "*We are aware of no evidence in eastern forests that fragmentation of mature forest by young forest creates the type of negative fragmentation effects that fragmentation by agricultural or developed land uses do*" (Thompson et al, 2002).

Further discounting claims of habitat "fragmentation" by some is the fact the overwhelming majority of State Forest harvests use single-tree selection, which creates only small gaps in the forest canopy. These relatively low-impact harvests mimic the periodic, small-scale natural disturbance events that historically shaped every Midwestern forest and the ecological communities within them.

Prohibiting timber harvests in those areas would severely limit the productivity and quality of forage and game alike, which would result in far fewer and less rewarding public-land hunting opportunities for State Forest visitors.

The DNR is currently stewarding hundreds of thousands of acres that are restricted in the same manner that SB420 proposes. Acreage continues to be added to the public domain through the Indiana Bicentennial Heritage Trust Fund, much of which will not be held by the Division of Forestry and thus not subject to the type of forest management this legislation would prohibit.

For reasons set out above, based on our professional training and experiences, the Indiana Society of American Foresters urges you and your colleagues to oppose SB420.

Sincerely,

William F. Minter
Policy Chair, Indiana Society of American Foresters

Literature Cited

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The mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance the science, education, technology and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish standards of professional excellence; and to use the knowledge, skills and conservation ethic of the profession to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society.