

RECREATION

Indiana's state forests and forest recreation areas provide a variety of recreational opportunities. The emphasis is on recreational activities that can be integrated in a natural setting, usually wooded. Often, these activities will be primitive, dispersed, and require limited development. Activities include hunting, hiking, primitive camping, backpacking, and edibles gathering. Other activities require more modern facilities, but these will be held to the least developed level possible. Recreation activities provide an opportunity for the public to learn about integrated forest resource management and the forest ecosystem on state forests.

It is the policy of the Division of Forestry to manage state forests to optimize multiple-use objectives. Because of the philosophy of offering limited developed recreational opportunities, recreation management often involves the maintenance of existing facilities and providing a forum for information dispersal. Additional recreation opportunities may be developed as user needs and demands are analyzed, and funding support is available. Recreation expansion has an impact on forest resources that must be considered in such decisions.

It is a primary goal to maintain all recreation facilities in a safe manner, and to meet maintenance and operation standards.

Intensive recreation opportunities require more developed facilities. These will be based on a wooded setting, and will be designed to have minimal impact on the setting. Forest Recreation Areas provide the most developed recreation opportunities on Division of Forestry properties.

While intensive recreation facilities consume a large proportion of property efforts, the dispersed recreational experiences are one of the key aspects of state forest recreation management. This dispersed recreation is most often accomplished simply with the creation of public access to the various holdings of state forest land. Access roads and dispersed parking units are the primary facilities needed by dispersed users.

Dispersed User Parking Areas

State forests and forest recreation areas encourage dispersed recreational use of the properties. In order to promote such use and to enhance user experience, the properties will install and maintain parking units for dispersed users. Areas of state forest holdings will be evaluated for dispersed recreation demand and existing parking availability. Parking will be matched to expected use. Many parking units will be associated with physical features that serve as draws. Others may provide regular access into large holdings. A typical parking unit will be associated with a gated fire/access road that receives recreational use for hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, and edibles gathering. High demand situations may exist at lake sites. Where practical, parking units will be sited to avoid possible conflicts with neighboring private residences and private property in general.

The size and construction of the parking units should be appropriate for the site. These will be located along public roads. If the public road is a state (not state forest) or county road, permission must be obtained from the Department of Transportation or the county prior to installation. A minimum sized unit should easily accommodate two vehicles. These units will have a gravel surface at a minimum. Posts or log frames may be used to mark the unit edges. A sign must identify the parking unit. The simplest sign would be a Carsonite post with a "State Forest" decal affixed. All parking unit construction must conform to appropriate clearances and permits.

Property Non-Public Roads

Property fire/access roads are important recreational opportunities for dispersed users. They provide easy lanes of travel and a good orientation tool so users do not get lost. Fire/access roads will always be clearly identified where they meet a public road. A Carsonite post with an appropriate decal, such as the simple "State Forest" decal, would be a simple way to mark these roads. If the fire/access road is likely to attract significant public use, a dispersed parking unit should be situated close to the fire/access road to accommodate users. Parking area design should discourage vehicle blockage of the fire/access road. Signs may be needed also. Further information on these roads is contained in the section on **Forest Access**.

Aesthetic and Visual Enhancement Areas

Sightseeing and aesthetic scenery are a primary use and benefit of the state forests and forest recreation areas. The goal of an aesthetic management program is not concealment of a forest management activity, but rather moderation of its impact. In resource management, all values cannot be maximized simultaneously. The goal of any successful management activity design is to accomplish the forest management objective while at the same time minimizing any unacceptable reduction in other resource values.

It will be the policy of the state forests to identify a visual enhancement area (VEA) within 200 feet of public roads and high use recreational facilities. One of the primary management criteria for the VEA will be to maintain or enhance the aesthetic values of a forested landscape.

Management Activities Within the VEA will Adhere to the Following Guidelines

- ◆ All management activities prescribed by the property personnel within the VEA will be designed and executed to minimize the negative visual impacts of such activities. Aesthetics is a higher priority in these areas than full utilization of the timber resource.

- ◆ No regeneration openings will be created in the VEA without prior approval from the Section Property Specialist.
- ◆ Harvesting within the VEA will primarily consist of the removal of dead or hazard trees and the selective removal of individual stems that are at high risk of death or significant loss of value during the next cutting cycle.
- ◆ Construction of roads, yards and skidtrails should be outside the VEA where possible. If necessary within the VEA, their locations will be designated or directed by the property forester and special measures will be taken to mitigate the appearance.
- ◆ Any slash, tree tops, splintered trees, and log butts that occur as a result of activity within the VEA will be cleaned up or lopped to a height not to exceed three feet off the ground. This guideline may be waived in specific instances with the prior approval of the Section Staff.
- ◆ Scenic vistas may be created with prior approval of the Property Specialist.
- ◆ Educational and interpretive use of timber harvests is encouraged. If a waiver of VEA guidelines is needed to provide educational opportunities contact the Property Specialist or Property Program Director.

It is important to remember that defining a VEA of 200 feet does not imply the aesthetics of an area are not visible or impacted beyond that distance. Consideration must be given to the particular set of aesthetic circumstances operable in the entire area. Visual penetration, which is the length of a viewer's unobstructed line of sight, influences the aesthetic impact from an activity both within and beyond a VEA. The following factors affect visual penetration.

TOPOGRAPHY

- Length of slope
- Steepness of slope
- Upslope or downslope view
- Drainages, perpendicular or parallel to road

LAND FEATURES

- Visual Barriers
 - road banks, pine stands, existing vegetation, water, clearings, utility lines

TIMBER

- Number of stems
- Density of stems

- Size of crowns
- General appearance (park-like or thicket)
- Timber Type - species characteristics

SEASON

- Leaf-on or leaf-off during harvest
- Visual impact after leaf fall

Hunting, Fishing, Trapping, and Wildlife Viewing

Recreational activities involving wildlife are major attractions to the state forests and forest recreation areas. While trapping has a commercial aspect to it, it is likely that most participants do it for the recreational aspects as much or more than the financial gains. The state forests and forest recreation areas will allow hunting, fishing and trapping to occur where appropriate, and under the statutes and regulations developed for these activities.

State forests and forest recreation areas may, at their discretion, sell the appropriate licenses for the above activities. Any properties wishing to sell licenses should coordinate with the Property Program Director. All properties that sell licenses are encouraged to work with local sporting good businesses to move the sale of licenses from the properties to the private businesses.

All properties will work to identify and develop areas, where appropriate, that persons with disabilities can participate in the above activities. Any of the above activities that are offered at a property should have a similar opportunity that can be used by persons with disabilities. Contact the Program Director for assistance.

Backcountry Areas

Traditionally camping on state forests and forest recreation areas has only been allowed in designated, developed campgrounds. There was no opportunity for those wishing a more primitive backpack experience. Backcountry areas were created primarily to help fill this recreational void. Backcountry areas have trail systems where users can readily isolate themselves from regular human contact in an undeveloped setting. There are no facilities provided to support this camping experience except parking facilities and trail systems. There is no fee to camp in backcountry areas.

In order to help backcountry area users experience a wilderness-type outing, forest management of backcountry areas will differ from other areas of the state forest. No wildlife

openings will be created in backcountry areas. Existing openings will be allowed to revert to forest, or may be planted to hasten reforestation. Horse trails will not be located in backcountry areas. Existing horse trails will be relocated out of backcountry areas. Timber management in backcountry areas can continue, but with modifications. A goal is to maintain a relatively contiguous canopy. Therefore group selection openings will not be created. The only exception to this is for catastrophic situations, such as storm salvage. A goal will be to develop a more homogenous forest structure than is created through standard management. Therefore, selection of trees to be removed will be more conservative than standard.

Knobstone Trail

The Knobstone Trail is another recreational opportunity for backpack enthusiasts. Similar to the backcountry areas, there is no fee to use the trail. The Division of Outdoor Recreation through a cooperative agreement with the Division of Forestry maintains the trail. Currently the trail begins near Deam Lake State Recreation Area in western Clark County, passes through Clark State Forest and Elk Creek Fish and Wildlife Area, and ends on Jackson-Washington State Forest in northern Washington County.

While the properties have no direct responsibility for the trail, they are encouraged to provide assistance when possible and resources allow. Maintenance of the parking units at trail access points is a way to assist, especially in light of the fact that many forest users in addition to backpackers use the parking units. Another way to assist is to help clear portions of the trail of downed trees when clearing fire/access roads in the area. Properties can provide invaluable assistance in locating trail routes.

Timber management of the tracts through which the trail runs will not be any different than if the trail was not there, with the exceptions being that the trail corridor will be treated similar to a Visual Enhancement Area and modifications to avoid direct impacts to the trail. The goal is to provide a less-managed woods experience to the trail user. In harvest operations, skidtrails, logyards and haul roads should be placed to avoid the trail when practical. There may be exceptions when the trail uses the existing road, or topography is such that the operation utilizes the same place as the trail. In these cases, the properties will work with the Trails Crew to identify and locate alternate trail routes. Timber stand improvement projects should be done so that trees that may be killed and fall across the trail are instead dropped by the TSI operation (unless they are too large or unsafe to do so) and cleared from the trail during the operation.

Wildlife openings may be created and maintained in the trail corridor with prior Section Staff member approval. Group selection openings can be located along the trail corridor with prior Section Staff member approval.

The properties with Knobstone Trail mileage will send an annual report prior to each spring to the Division of Outdoor Recreation Streams and Trails Specialist to explain planned activities for the coming year that may have an impact on the Knobstone Trail corridor. The properties will provide mitigation alternatives for activities that directly impact the trail. The properties will ensure that the trail is clear of debris after harvest operations. If unplanned impacts occur to the trail, whether caused by management activities or other sources, the properties will notify the Division of Outdoor Recreation. It is the responsibility of the properties to repair any damage to the Knobstone Trail caused directly by property activities.

Access for Persons with Disabilities

The properties provide excellent outdoor recreation opportunities to the general public. The relatively undeveloped nature of many outdoor activities found on the properties make participation by persons with disabilities difficult or impossible without accommodation. Persons with a mobility impairment are among those likely to be able to participate in many activities if accommodations are made.

The properties will attempt to make reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities so they can participate in the available outdoor recreational activities. The Property Program Director should be contacted for specifics on how to accommodate persons with disabilities in property recreation.

Section Bullet Summary

- Recreation emphasis will be for multiple-use outdoor activities in a wooded setting with minimal development.
- Dispersed User Parking Areas will be developed to support and enhance user access to blocks of property ownership and features that receive regular visitation.
- Fire/access roads will be identified for dispersed users.
- Visual Enhancement Areas increase the aesthetic values and benefits for sightseeing users.
- State forests and forest recreation areas will provide wildlife-based, dispersed recreation opportunities.
- Backcountry areas provide a primitive, backpack recreation experience. Management will be modified to enhance the setting.
- The Knobstone Trail provides a long distance hiking opportunity for backpack enthusiasts. Modified management enhances the trail corridor.
- When possible, persons with disabilities will be provided opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation activities.