



## **THE CLASSIFIED FOREST AND WILDLANDS PROGRAM**

A Classified Forest and Wildlands tract is an area of at least 10.0 contiguous acres of forest or non-forest wildlife habitat where the landowner has agreed (by application) to be a good steward of the land and its natural resources. In return, the State of Indiana agrees to see that the assessed value of the land is significantly reduced and taxed on that preferential assessment. The land is managed for timber production, wildlife habitat, and the protection of watersheds, while conserving other natural resources and values.

Eligible lands may be either native forests containing at least 40 square feet of basal area per acre or at least 1,000 timber-producing trees (any size) per acre. Tree plantations with at least 400 well-established timber-producing trees are also eligible to be classified. Wildlands can include natural or planted grasslands, wetlands, native woody vegetation, or areas of open water averaging less than 4 feet in depth or less than 2 acres in size.

Certain activities cannot take place on Classified Forest and Wildlands:

- Grazing by domestic livestock
- Building of houses, sheds, etc.
- Intentional burning unless prescribed under a written management plan
- Growing Christmas trees

Other activities are allowed and are encouraged when appropriate to meet the landowner's goals and objectives for the land. These activities, however, must not be conducted in a manner detrimental to the health and productivity of the property or its watershed. Allowed activities include:

- Wildlife management
- Maintenance of access roads and trails
- Timber harvesting
- Firewood cutting
- Horseback riding
- Hiking
- Hunting

### **PRIMARY BENEFITS TO THE CLASSIFIED LAND OWNER**

- Reduced property taxes
- Regular inspection by a professional forester
- Annual newsletter and forest and wildlife management literature
- Timber harvested recognized as *“Green Certified”*

## **HOW TO ENTER THE PROGRAM**

Contact your district forester to let him/her know you are interested in putting your land into Classification. An initial inspection of your property will be done to determine whether it meets the eligibility requirements. A written management plan, which may be prepared by the district forester or by a wildlife biologist or professional forester, is required prior to application. This plan puts into writing a description of the land, your goals for the land, and prescribes how to reach those goals over the next 5-10 years. This plan is flexible, and may change as your objectives change and/or the property develops over time. The prescription(s) will always take into account the health and productivity of the property as activities are done to reach your goals.

The actual Classified Forest and Wildlands application must be taken to a registered land surveyor, who will write an exact description of the area being classified. This can usually be done by providing an aerial photograph and a copy of your deed to the surveyor. An 'on-the-ground' survey is not required. The cost may vary according to the complexity of the survey and the surveyor. You will also need to sign the application. The county assessor must also sign the application, along with the State Forester. Once these signatures have been completed, the document must be recorded in the county courthouse where the land is located.

## **REINSPECTIONS**

At least once every seven years, the District Forester or a representative will be out to look over your classified property (at no cost). You are encouraged to go along on these reinspections to ask questions of the forester and to discuss your goals for the classified land. The forester will look at the area to see how it is progressing, to be sure there are no violations occurring, and to help you update your management plan. A written report will be provided to you after the reinspection. You are also required to fill out and return an annual report that is used by the District Forester to keep up-to-date records of your classified land.

## **POSTING YOUR LAND**

The District Forester will provide signs to you (at no cost) which you must post around your classified property. The signs clearly state that the area is private property and a Classified Forest and Wildlands property. By placing your woodlands in the program, you are not giving up your private property rights, or surrendering control of who accesses your property. The Classified Forest and Wildlands designation does not open your land to public hunting.

## **SELLING OR TRANSFERRING THE LAND**

Whenever the classified land is transferred to a new owner, the classified status remains intact. The same benefits and responsibilities are transferred to the new owner. If the new owner does not wish to participate in the program, they may withdraw the land from the program. You must notify the District Forester when the land changes hands. If the land is withdrawn from classification (voluntarily or involuntarily), the back taxes (up to 10 years), plus a 10% per year interest penalty, must be paid to the county. If not, it is considered a lien against the property and it is treated in the same manner that delinquent taxes on real property are treated. Properties that are entered in the Classified Forest and Wildlands program after June 30, 2006 are subject to an additional withdrawal penalty of \$100 per withdrawal and \$50 per acre withdrawn. Classified properties that are divided into 2 or more separate tracts must maintain at least 10.0 acres of eligible land in each tract to remain classified. In addition a revised application describing the new tract boundaries must be filed with the district forester.