

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

Division of Forestry



Conserving Special Places on Indiana State Forests

Indiana's State Forests were by and large created from worn out lands and other lands that were too rugged to farm long term or at all. For that reason, State Forests retain some unique features that existed prior to European settlement. These features include cultural sites left by prior inhabitants, and species habitats and natural communities that survived human pressures and land conversions to other uses. The Division of Forestry is committed to conserving the truly special features found on State Forests. In some cases these features are conserved by simple protection. In other cases active management is needed to maintain or restore some features. The Division of Forestry uses a variety of methods and levels for conservation, depending on the feature.

Nature Preserves

Dedicated Nature Preserves represent the highest level of protection. These are communities or species occurrences that either represent the best examples in the State of Indiana, or are one of the few or only occurrences. In the case of the Allegheny wood rat, the Deam Nature Preserve on the limestone cliffs at Harrison-Crawford State Forest contains one of the few and the best occurrences of this species in Indiana. There is little management of the Preserve, as the habitat requires no manipulation for this species. A different example, also at Harrison-Crawford State Forest, is the Leavenworth Barrens Nature Preserve. The barrens communities that the preserve is named for was existing as small remnant patches, many along open roadsides. Much of its original extent had been overgrown with forest vegetation. This preserve requires a large amount of active management including removing competing trees, removing exotic species, and regular prescribed fire to promote re-establishment and expansion of the barrens vegetation. There are 21 dedicated Nature Preserves on Indiana's State Forests protecting more than 2,500 acres.

High Conservation Value Forests and Representative Sample Areas

The internationally recognized certification programs that the State Forests are enrolled in require the identification and conservation these special features. There are primarily two levels of protection. High Conservation Value Forests are the highest level of protection. They are to be managed to maintain the feature(s) for which it was designated. Because the ecological conditions under this designation are very similar to those for Nature Preserves, any Nature Preserves on State Forest properties are also automatically designated as High Conservation Value Forests.



Limestone cliff community – one example of a Representative Sample Area

The other designation from certification is called Representative Sample Area. These would be for areas that are considered a less critical conservation concern than the areas that would be in a Nature Preserve or a High Conservation Value Forest. There would be instances, however, where a High Conservation Value Forest may also serve as a Representative Sample Area. A Representative Sample Area designation can be readily changed if another, better representative area is identified.

During the state forest planning process, the Natural Heritage Database is reviewed for unique features that may occur on the state forest planning area. This database is a recognized repository for observational information about natural features such as species of concern and communities. The possible presence of features would be taken into consideration in the planning and execution of management activities.

Backcountry Areas

Backcountry areas represent another designation based upon approved uses primarily recreation in nature. These were the first designated State Forest areas to allow backpack-type camping in areas other than campgrounds. In order to provide an improved backpacking experience, Backcountry Areas have designated management guidelines designed to provide a more primitive experience. This includes limits on timber management intensity, wildlife management intensity, and the maintenance of access roads. There are three designated State Forest backcountry recreation areas encompassing 7,200 acres.

Cultural Resources

State Forest management also takes into account cultural features – those features created by humans many years ago. This includes structures, remnants of structures and sites of past activity that are considered significant. Any activities that might disturb grounds or structures of this nature receive a review prior to any action. Features considered significant receive buffers of no activity or modified activity in order to maintain the significance of the features.



Remnants of a foundation and twin chimneys from a historic structure.



Tombstone from one of the many pioneer cemeteries on state forests