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Monroe County is home to approximately 48,758 acres of Morgan Monroe and Yellowwood State Forests, which have been managed by the State for eighty and sixty-nine years, respectively. Slightly less than half of the 48,758 acres lies within the Lake Monroe watershed, which is locally protected with a watershed protection overlay zoning district - restricting development on steep slopes. Because Lake Monroe is the primary source of drinking water for Monroe County residents, land-disturbing activities in these areas has a direct impact on both our water quality and ecology in the watershed.

The Monroe County Commissioners would also like to make sure that a thorough and reviewed environmental impact assessment is conducted before logging public lands, and also increased enforcement of 'best management practice' for ongoing logging operations.

Morgan Monroe and Yellowwood Forests are characterized by steep slopes, numerous tributaries, and a shallow depth to bedrock. Prior to European settlement, these areas were forested with dominate climax species of oak, hickory, gum, and maple. Historic fire intervals were low, and disturbance was primarily limited to blow-down and the occasional fire. After European settlement, these areas were clear-cut, and remnants of the original canopy were only found in extremely remote areas or very steep slopes. This clear cutting took place in a very short ecological time frame (1850 – 1920) and as a consequence of this unregulated practice; erosion of the thin soils over shallow bedrock was severe. When logging of these areas declined, the disturbed areas were left to re-seed and natural forest succession began. However, due to the loss of soil and seedbed, what re-established in these areas was not the original canopy mixture.

Ecologically, these forests are young and it stands to reason to selectively thin these areas to allow for more desirable species growth. However, this interpretation cannot extend to the most remote areas of these forests; the backcountry areas. Logging activity in these areas is now economically feasible due to advances in forestry equipment which make it possible to log on the most extreme of slopes. Trees in these areas are high quality hardwoods that can potentially yield several hundred board feet per tree. Just one or two of these trees can fill a logging flatbed truck. Environmentally, logging these areas destabilizes slopes, compacts soil, and removes fauna and flora dependent on this habitat to survive. Loggers operating within State Forests are required to follow Indiana Best Management Practices, however, even the most careful logger cannot prevent degradation of a site while logging, as there will always be soil compaction, loss of soil and habitat.

We must conduct a true cost benefit analysis of logging our state forests. The Monroe County Commissioners believe logging state forests creates a net loss for state and local governments. We are subsidizing the cutting of trees in our state forests. The cost of creating logging roads and log yards, staff to mark and catalog trees, and set up sales outstrips logging proceeds.

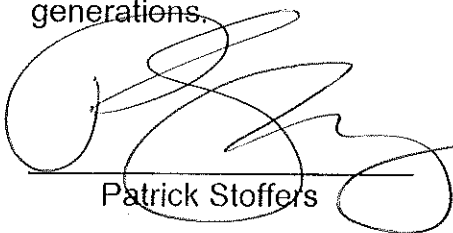
Three timber sales have already taken place along the most popular hiking trail in Morgan-Monroe State Forest. These aren't just small trash trees and undergrowth; these are the biggest, most healthy trees in our forest that the state is selling for pennies on the dollar. Last year, due to increased logging, Monroe County received \$59,000 from the state from timber sales. This amounts to less than \$70 per tree, even before expenses. Private individuals own most of Monroe County's timberland. By subsidizing the cutting of trees on public land, we are undercutting private sales.

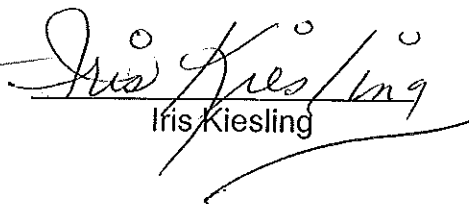
Also, visitors to local parks generate a large part of our local tourism dollars. Tourism is Monroe County's third largest employer and generates over \$250 million dollars annually for local businesses. According to Convention and Visitor's Bureau estimates, State and National parks are our second largest tourist draw. Annually, 2 million tourists come to Monroe County forests for hiking and recreation. The tremendous visible damage caused by logging our state forests jeopardizes that income.

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The future certainty of carbon emission caps will allow us to leverage our intact forest and trees as carbon sinks with a high dollar trade value which must not be overlooked in one of the most polluted states in the country.

We, the Board of Commissioners of Monroe County, Indiana, believe that, when all factors are reviewed and compared, it makes sense for the State of Indiana to restrict commercial logging of our public lands, and greatly expand the areas that will be permanently protected for future generations.

  
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