

Massive Logging and Burning Project Proposed for Hoosier National Forest in the Lake Monroe Watershed. Your Phone Calls Can Stop This Project.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is moving forward with a plan to log 4,375 acres, repeatedly burn 13,500 acres, build 16.4 miles of logging roads, and apply herbicides on 1,970 acres all concentrated on ridges, slopes, and valleys in the Hoosier National Forest that drain into Monroe Reservoir. We urgently need your help in contacting the officials listed below to stop this ill-advised project and compel the USFS to consider alternatives.

Take Action Today

Contact each of the following officials and ASK THEM TO REJECT the current logging and burning plan in Houston South. You can make specific points if you wish. The USFS has:

- Ignored scientific information and concerns of the local community, including the City of Bloomington and Monroe County who depend on Lake Monroe as the sole source of drinking water.
- Failed to consider the Lake Monroe watershed and municipal water supply in planning for the project.
- Minimized or ignored the project's impact on recreation and local business owners. Point out impact on the horse-riding community.
- Failed to include 13,000 acres of burning into their carbon emissions estimates.
- Failed to consider cumulative effects of this project alongside other sources of contamination of Lake Monroe's water quality.
- Refused to consider alternative areas for the project, even though there are more than 60,000 acres available for this type of project that lie outside watersheds supplying municipal drinking water.

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Our Concerns

This proposed "Houston South Vegetation Management and Restoration Project" risks increasing sediment runoff into the South Fork of Salt Creek which is already polluting Monroe Reservoir, the sole drinking water supply for 120,000 people in Monroe and surrounding counties, with too much sediment

and nutrient input. It will impact recreation and local economies dependent upon the Lake. It will cause repeated closures and reroutes of the Knobstone Trail as well as popular horseback riding trails. The project will kill or harm at least eight species of federally or state listed bats and other birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles that are state endangered or listed as “species of special concern” in Indiana.

Impacts from the Proposed Management Project

Threatens Water Quality

Because Houston South is located in the Lake Monroe watershed, implementing the proposed management plan threatens the drinking water supply for 140,000 people. Lake Monroe already suffers from excess nutrients, sediment, and algae. The Indiana Department of Management has issued Recreational Advisories due to algae build up for the past seven years. The Lake is already listed as impaired due to algae by the EPA.

Drinking water authorities spend millions of dollars to treat algae and sediment laden lake water to safely provide drinking water to the public. When water clarity spikes, these costs are increased by hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Houston South project area contains many steep slopes with highly erodible soils, and the silt load from burning and logging will exacerbate these problems. The Clean Water Act prohibits new pollutant loads when an impairment is present.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) says that Best Management Practices (BMP’s) will prevent water pollution, but monitoring of other logging sites shows this is often not true. A literature review indicates that in general the effectiveness of BMPs for sediment range from 53 to 94% efficient during harvest and up to 1 year after harvesting. Fishing on Lake Monroe has already suffered from decreased water clarity, drawing fishermen away from the lake to more desirable sites.

Endangers Wildlife

In its present unlogged and unburned condition, the Houston South project area supports eight species of bats that are federally endangered or threatened, under consideration for this listing or state endangered or “species of special concern” (rare or range limited in Indiana). These are:

- Gray bat and Indiana bat (federally endangered)
- Northern long-eared bat (federally threatened)
- Little brown bat and Tricolored bat (state endangered; federal listing under review)
- Evening bat (state endangered)
- Eastern red bat and Hoary bat (state species of special concern)

Indiana state counts indicate that White-Nose Syndrome, a disease that attacks cave-hibernating bats, has killed hundreds of thousands of Indiana bats and 90% or more of Northern long-eared, Little brown, and Tri-colored bats since it arrived in Indiana in 2009. By burning and logging during the summer, the project will cut down, burn up, and engulf in smoke maternity roosting trees for these bats, killing the mothers and their pups.

Other animals that will likely be burned up or adversely affected by the logging and road construction include the state endangered Timber Rattlesnake and Cerulean Warbler and Species of Special Concern that live or nest on or near the forest floor such as Eastern Box Turtle, Smoky and Pygmy Shrew, Rough Green Snake, Worm Eating Warbler, Black and White Warbler, and Hooded Warbler.



An Eastern box turtle shows signs of damage and injury from fire. Photo courtesy of Joanna Gibson, Environmental Scientist.

Compromises Forest Health and Increase Invasive Species

The USFS claims that this timber harvest is required to regenerate early successional oak and hickory forests. However, the age class distribution table for the HNF indicates that about 10% of the HNF is in the 0-25 year age class while less than 5% is in the >100 year old classes.³ Findings from the 2018 Purdue Climate Change study indicate that climate conditions will be more favorable for oak in the coming decades, suggesting that oak saplings will thrive without the intervention of logging, burning, and pesticide applications. The proposed road building and logging operations will accelerate the spread of non-native invasive plant species such as stilt grass. Contaminating thousands of acres with stilt grass cannot be good for forest health and a reasonable tradeoff.

Jeopardizes Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation is one of the fastest growing components of Indiana's tourism industry generating some \$15.7 billion in annual consumer spending and creating 143,000 jobs in Indiana according to the Outdoor Industry Association. This project will consume a significant part of the most popular horseback riding area in the HNF and force repeated closures of other horseback riding trails. The project will force closures or reroutes of the Knobstone Trail, the state's longest and most famous backpacking trail, as well as the Fork Ridge and other hiking trails. Volunteers helped construct and maintain the Knobstone and many of the horse trails, but the volunteer pool is likely to dry up if trails are destroyed by logging or repeatedly closed due to burning. Several miles of the project are directly adjacent to the southern border of the Charles Deam Wilderness. This logging project will diminish the outdoor recreational experiences within the largest concentration of national and state forest public lands and the only federal wilderness area in the lower midwest (Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois) where wild land for such experiences is extremely limited.

Exacerbates Climate Change

While admitting their logging activities will contribute to carbon emissions, USFS has not considered how burning 13,000 acres will contribute to greenhouse gas problem. Since their latest 2006 Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), global climate change predictions have become much more dire. The Houston South proposal does not even reference the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report published in 2018 that emphasizes the importance of reducing carbon emissions and increasing carbon sequestration in the next 12 years. USFS claims they will be contributing only small amounts of carbon through their project activities. The USFS has failed to consider the cumulative impacts of their actions. Nor have considered alternatives that contribute less or have a positive impact on carbon sequestration.

Alternatives

The USFS is required to consider alternatives to the proposed action at Houston South. The USFS has not demonstrated that they considered the impacts on municipal water supplies in selecting the Houston South location. Some 63,000 acres of the HNF have the same management prescription (“Management Area 2.8” under the HNF Management Plan) as Houston South, but lie within watersheds that are not used for municipal drinking water. In spite of numerous objections, other than taking “no action,” the USFS has not considered any alternatives to this drastic plan.