

Action Alert: Comment period open until 12/16/22 for Buffalo Springs Draft Environmental assessment

Hello Friends of Hoosier National Forest,

This week the Forest Service issued their Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) for the Buffalo Springs project, in the analysis folder, [linked here](#). The public has 30 days to submit “substantive” comments for which the Forest Service has to at least acknowledge and provide a response too. This comment period however, has proven to just be a legal obligation for the Forest Service based on the comments submitted earlier this year during a similar comment period, [linked here](#) (please open the comments, read the heartfelt personal impacts detailed by residents and the dismissive response by the Forest Service). They have no intention of acknowledging that the overwhelming majority of the Public is challenging the need and purpose of the Project. Their efforts are clearly no more than check box in the NEPA process (National Environmental Policy Act) because they haven’t changed one aspect of the project since the original scoping letter was sent out 16 months ago.

Below is a summary of a few of the highest impact complaints where the Forest Service is acting illegally in their self-serving mission of cutting 100+ year old trees to fund their salaries under the guise of the flowery word, “restoration”.

Primary complaints

- Chris Thornton, the district ranger for the Hoosier National Forest, has said publicly multiple times and even wrote it in the DEA that the Forest Service intends to issue a FONSI (Finding of No Significant Impact) when the comment period closes, the exact reason for the comment period is to gain insight from the public if an environmental impact statement (EIS) is warranted (it is) or if alternatives should be considered. Since their mind is made up that nothing we comment will change their direction, we need to exploit their selfishness and violation of federal NEPA law.
- The NLRMP (National Land and Resource Management Plan) is nearly 17 years old. By federal law the plan must be re-written every 15 years. The ONLY exception to that 15-year mark is if the NFS (National Forest Service) is working diligently on the update and there is not a change in environmental conditions or public attitude towards the management plan. All three criteria for that exception are in severe violation. There has been no work on a new plan, the environment has changed drastically in the last 16+ years with climate change, newly endangered species, and blights like Emerald Ash Borer. This will be part of our lawsuit against the Forest Service.
- No alternatives for the area of Buffalo Springs were considered.
- The elected County Commissioners of Orange County and several others that contain parts of Hoosier National Forest have written and signed letters opposing the project asking for a new Forest Plan based on current environmental science, recreational value, and public wishes. The letter is [linked here](#). The fact the letters, signed by the county attorneys were entirely dismissed and ignored is a failure of public service by the National Forest Service.
- The Buffalo Springs project is located on the divide of two very crucial watersheds in Southern Indiana. A watershed is the area surrounding a stream or lake where any surface water ultimately drains to the stream or lake, or in this case, the underground karst system of the Lost

River. Some of the Buffalo Springs project is proposed near the banks of Patoka Lake and its many tributaries, a source of drinking water for 60,000+ people. Linked here is more information and a picture of what the clearcuts will do to the land: [Bulldozers, Skidder Trails, Heavy Equipment, 25 years of burning and erosion will pour right into the lake](#). Springs Valley Lake, or commonly known as Tucker Lake, will have over half of its shoreline burned. The Lost River is one of a kind, scientists are still exploring and learning more about this vast underground cave and river system. The herbicides sprayed, burning conducted and pending erosion from the bulldozer trails will drain directly into this wonder of the world. [Linked here](#) is a map overlaying the Buffalo Springs project area with the Patoka Lake Watershed and the Lost River Watershed.

- A federal judge recently struck down a very similar proposal from the Forest Service near Lake Monroe in Bloomington for failure to consider the impacts to the Lake Monroe Reservoir. This BS project is much closer to Patoka than Monroe in that “Houston South Restoration” project that is still tied up in federal court.
- Our groups have written multiple Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Forest Service for the backup data used to prepare the Buffalo Springs Plan. The FOIA process provides citizens with an audit mechanism to ensure our government is working without bias and under facts, not opinion. These requests have been submitted for 6+ weeks and were requested to be processed before the DEA was sent out – the Forest Service has stonewalled the requests and ignored our legal right to expedited processes and a fee waiver. They want the comment period to close before the publicly funded information is shared with us because the facts and data do not exist to support the largest logging and burning plan in the history of the Hoosier National Forest.
- Orange County is in desperate need of industry to create jobs and tax revenue. We have proposed many alternatives that leverage the unique beauty of the Hoosier National Forest for recreational benefit. This recreation would drive increased local tourism, spending, and traffic to the woods. All of these come with substantial economic value. The BS plan will do exactly the opposite. It will drive people away from Orange County and a massive opportunity to piggyback on what French Lick and West Baden Springs have done by creating a destination city to visit a unique treasure. The Buffalo Springs and historic Buffalo Trace has the same opportunity. Instead, bulldozers, chainsaws, and fire torches will trample the historic Buffalo Trace and records of our earliest ancestors in the area. Logging is proposed in a large area immediately west of Initial Point, or Pivot Point as some know it. A quick history lesson of this area is [linked here](#), the trees around this historical place will be timbered and sold, much of which is expected to be purchased by China and shipped by boat to Asia.
- This project is in direct violation of an [Executive Order](#) signed by the President of the United States on Earth Day this year. This Executive Order is based on protecting old growth forests. An old growth forest has trees that are 150 years old and where major disturbances by humans hasn’t happened in 80 years. Thousands of acres in the BS project are in tree stands that are 120 years old, just 30 years from reaching old growth. If they are cut now, they’ll not reach old growth again in our lifetime or our children’s lifetimes, this needs highlighted to all level of government.
- The Buffalo Springs plan is singularly focused on the fragmented areas specific to the Hoosier National Forest. In most cases, there is private land sandwiched right between sections of the

HNF, but the NFS refuses to acknowledge that the landscape view of the area meets their wishes for adequate young “early successional habitat”. The animals that live here don’t know property lines, a landscape view should be taken as written in a federal Planning Rule of 2012 for forest plans, instead, the plan uses science from 1982 with a focused view of just the Public Land ignoring the landscape.

- Our cries to the Forest Service and elected officials have been to focus the efforts of the National Forest and their employees to work with private landowners on improving forest health. The Forest Service also can purchase land for sale in the “purchase boundary” of the HNF which surrounds Orange County. This project will cost millions to generate thousands. This is atrocious use of taxpayer dollars. Use that money to purchase more forest, restore it as they see fit and leave the current public land alone, to return to the condition where it was before our ancestors arrived 240 years ago. Save the history of the [Buffalo Trace](#), don’t log and burn over it, losing it forever.
- The scoping document and DEA both reference the need for early successional habitat and cite that inside the “project area” there are only 8 acres of land in the 0-9 year old age class. We have identified at minimum, 216 acres of powerline and natural gas easements running directly through the middle of the “project area”. These easements are bush hogged every few years and maintained in a permanent early successional habitat for those species who wish to find young grasses and trees. There are 44,776.43 feet of electric transmission lines on Federal land in the BS area plus a major natural gas line. [See a GIS map here](#) on how we calculated this. Please ask the NFS why the easements were not counted in the Landscape view as required by the 2012 planning rule.

Actions to take

- Share this information with your friends, family, neighbors, social media, and any news outlet contacts you have
- Submit comments to the Hoosier National Forest before December 16, 2022.
- Visit www.savehoosiernationalforest.com and compose a letter to the individuals listed on the main website. These are Forest Service employees and your elected officials. Handwritten letters to our US Senators have a dramatic impact. Emails are just fine too. Please include “SAVE BUFFALO SPRINGS” in your title and concentrate on how this project will impact your daily routine, livelihood, recreation opportunities, future generations etc. Comments that show a direct impact to the way of life to the locals are given greater consideration when we are in court.
- Visit the Indiana Forest Alliance and their [Buffalo Springs website](#). Please consider donating to the [IFA or joining their cause](#). Without their support through actions and financially (we have already sourced a top NEPA attorney for our lawsuit) we wouldn’t stand a fighting change against the big government machine who is determined to fund their operations through cutting the public’s trees.
- Write your comments to the National Forest Service directly about this Buffalo Springs (BS) plan for their official scoping period. Again, the more personal and informative on the direct impacts

to your way of life are most valuable. Referencing as much of the above will also enforce our position

- Any comments submitted during this 30 day period can be used in further objections in the regulatory process. If your comment is not submitted in this period, you will not every have an opportunity to contribute to future discussion on this project. Send them all in one email or letter or send multiple letters.
- Here is how to submit comments as reported by the NFS:

Submit written comments to the Responsible Official who is Christopher Thornton, District Ranger, by one of the following methods: mail:811 Constitution Avenue, Bedford, IN 47421, facsimile: 812-279-3423, or email: comments-eastern-hoosier@usda.gov with Subject: Buffalo Springs Restoration Project. Acceptable formats for electronic comments are text (.txt), Word (.doc or .docx), portable document format (.pdf), or rich text format (.rtf). Office hours for those who wish to hand deliver their comments, are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday (except Federal holidays). Call in advance to ensure office will be open: 812-275-5987.

- Write letters to the editor, write WTHR news in Indianapolis. They recently published a very informative, non-biased, article ([linked here](#)) where both “our” side and the Forest Service were interviewed and given a chance to explain the merits of their position. Read it for yourself then decide on where your opinion falls. There is a [wonderful video](#) that accompanies the article. The more this news station hears from its viewers (it’s the largest news outlet in Indiana) the more likely they are to publish additional articles that will be seen by our elected officials causing them to wonder if they’ll lost voters if they don’t act.
- Visit the [Lost River Market and Deli](#) for a yard sign and consider donating for it. With those donations we can purchase more signs and conduct more public outreach.

This is undoubtedly a ton of information and overwhelming so just take one action at a time to Save Hoosier National Forest and to Protect Buffalo Springs.

We will have more information to share but wanted to get this out as soon as possible so individuals can do their own research, come up with their own opinions on how the public forest should be managed and then act accordingly.

Very Sincerely,

Friends for Saving Hoosier National Forest fighting to protect Buffalo Springs