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Protecting Wilderness in the Midwest - Grant

Grant Name	Protecting Wilderness in the Midwest - Grant	Today's Date	12/15/2023
Staff Size	8	Organization Name	Indiana Forest Alliance Incorporated
Total Membership	1,500	Annual Operating Budget	\$985,751.00
BIPOC-led	No	Operating Budget Year	
C-Suite Staff		Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Notes			

Project Information

Project/Campaign Name	Protecting Wilderness in the Midwest	Project Address	
Project Location (State or Territory)	IN	Amount Requested from Alliance	\$50,000.00

Proposal Questions

1. Purpose/History Of Organization	<p>Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA) is Indiana’s only state-wide organization dedicated to the conservation of Indiana’s native forest ecosystem. Founded in 1998, our mission is to preserve and restore Indiana’s native forests for the enjoyment of all. Indiana is located in the heart of what was once the largest temperate hardwood forest on the earth. Prior to European settlement, Indiana was almost entirely old growth hardwood forests. IFA envisions a reforested Indiana where everyone can enjoy a natural sanctuary in the complex modern world.</p>	7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Widespread public support for the expansion of the Deam Wilderness and the creation of the Benjamin Harrison National Recreation Area and stakeholders who are committed to making this vision a reality. 2. 15,317 acres added to the Charles. C. Deam Wilderness in Indiana. 3. A 29,382 acre National Recreation Area surrounding the expanded Charles C. Deam Wilderness. 4. A federal law enacted that ensures clean water in Monroe Reservoir for generations to come. 5. A federal law enacted that enables the establishment of long distance hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, and mountain biking trails through a wild expanse of nature that are unsurpassed in the three states of Indiana, Ohio and Illinois.
2. Final Success	<p>S2990, the Benjamin Harrison National Recreation Area and Wilderness Establishment Act will be passed and signed by the President, adding approximately 15,317 acres to the Charles Deam Wilderness (more than doubling the size of Indiana’s only wilderness) and establishing the 29,382 acre Benjamin Harrison National</p>	8. Evaluate Your Progress	<p>We will document the dates for producing material and advertisements on social media and radio outlining the case for passing S. 2990 and evaluate reactions of public officials to this material and advertisements. We will document: neighbors to the lands addressed in S. 2992 who voice their support to the key decision makers; local</p>

Recreation Area surrounding the expanded wilderness area.

governments, businesses and other institutions who voice their support to these decision makers; and the number of organizations supporting the passage of S. 2990 and the outreach activities of those organizations.

We will document: whether Congresswoman Houchin introduces a House version of S. 2990; whether the contents of the House Bill will accomplish the project's goals as explained in answer #4; whether Senator Young cosponsors S. 2990; whether the Senate and House versions of S.2990 are reported out of Committees; whether they are passed by the Senate and House; and whether any differences are reconciled to allow final enactment by the Congress.

3. Location Details

By expanding the Deam Wilderness to the east, S2990 will protect some of the oldest and deepest hardwood forest within the Hoosier National Forest (HNF). Conservationists have been trying to save this wild and rugged forest east of Monroe Reservoir for fifty years since the area was proposed as one of the first Eastern Wilderness Areas in 1973, by former HNF Supervisor, A. Claude Ferguson.

Portions of the forest in the Browning Hill Special Area are identified by the Forest Service as old growth forest. Chestnut oaks, American beeches, black gums and other trees exceed 300 years of age in some stands and much of the rest of the forest to be added to the existing Deam Wilderness is within thirty years of returning to the old growth condition. The expanded Wilderness area includes the 928-foot Browning Hill, pristine native hardwood forests covering long ridges, steep hillsides, tranquil hollows and many miles of sparkling clear streams. Names like Nebo Ridge, Panther Creek, Will Hay Branch, Fleetwood Branch, Bad Hollow, and Mose Ray Branch reflect the wildlife, history and people who've lived in the area.

The proposed wilderness area has immensely rich biodiversity and harbors reproducing populations of federal and state endangered species such as the Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, tricolored bat, timber rattlesnake and Cerulean warbler.

Allowing the 28,270 acres of mature hardwood forest within an expanded Deam Wilderness to return to the old growth condition will decisively oblige President Biden's Executive Order 14072 for federal agencies to combat climate change by using the nation's federal forests as carbon sinks. Protecting the mature forest in the

9. TCA Funding Plan

Funding will be used to conduct outreach and analysis to garner widespread support for S.2990. In addition to an economic analysis in support of expanding the Wilderness Area and NRA, we will organize public involvement and speak at public hearings and meetings. We will engage the public through a targeted radio, print, and social media campaign. Funds from other sources will be used to produce and deliver educational materials and media to stakeholders and the public to garner support for the bill. TCA will fund staff time and media to conduct the campaign to coalesce overwhelming support for S. 2990.

expanded Deam is key to the climate fight because half of the world's forest carbon is stored in the largest 1 percent of trees. Furthermore, this mixed, mesophytic hardwood forest does not burn easily making its protection an ideal long-term solution to the climate crisis.

The forest in S.2990 to be set aside as wilderness lies between the existing Deam Wilderness and the 16,000 acres of Brown County State Park. By connecting these two areas and establishing the adjacent Benjamin Harrison National Recreation Area, S.2992 will protect an expanse of wild nature that exceeds 73,500 acres or 115 square miles, the largest expanse of wild nature set aside for carbon sequestration, restoration of old growth forest, preservation of biodiversity and wilderness in Indiana, Ohio or Illinois.

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

The goals are to permanently set aside a wild expanse of deep hardwood forest for the enjoyment of nature in the nation's industrial heartland and protect the sole source of drinking water for more than 120,000 residents in Bloomington and surrounding communities of south-central Indiana. To meet these goals, our objective is to pass S. 2990, more than doubling the size of the Charles C. Deam Wilderness and creating a National Recreation Area surrounding it, in the process expanding the total protected acreage from 12,953 acres in the current Deam Wilderness to 57,652 acres in the expanded Deam Wilderness and Benjamin Harrison National Recreation Area.

The expanded area will require every national forest acre within the HNF within the South and Middle Fork Watersheds of Salt Creek that drain to Monroe Reservoir to be managed to avoid erosion, protect scenery and habitat and promote primitive recreation. Thus once S. 2990 is passed, our followup objective will be to work with the Forest Service to manage the expanded wilderness and NRA to protect Monroe Reservoir, maintain existing trails and campsites, close worn out trails and eroded campsites and develop new trails and campsites.

For now, there is much to do to help this legislation across the finish line, including:

- 1. Economic Analysis: Establishing the recreation area and expanded wilderness will bring tourists and boost the local economy. As the Deam Wilderness is the only wilderness area currently exceeding 10,000 acres in the entire lower Midwest, National Visitor

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

IFA has ongoing initiatives to address environmental equity in our Forests For Indy (FFI) program. We mapped urban forests throughout Indianapolis and revealed that the most vulnerable communities have the least tree canopy. Through the FFI program, we work with decision-making bodies in Indianapolis to recommend and advocate for forest preservation and land acquisition, so communities have the benefits that forests provide, especially in the age of climate change.

For the last year, we have partnered with EWAY Foundation, an African American run nonprofit that educates communities about trees. We partnered in teaching about forests in summer camps and are currently working to organize focus groups in underserved neighborhoods in Indianapolis to understand their relationships with local urban forests and empower residents to participate in local decision-making that affects development and local forests.

Use Monitoring Data indicates it has one of the highest usages of any wilderness in the Eastern Region 9 (national forests in the Northeast, West Virginia and Great Lakes States). A thorough analysis of the benefits from this current use and the projected increase from expanding the Deam and establishing the NRA will build support for the legislation particularly among businesses and local governments in the area and help guide economic decision-making once the S2990 passes.

2. Public Education: Outreach to citizens about the bill and how it helps Indiana's environment and economy is essential to build grassroots support for the bill and public involvement. In addition to the economic value of wilderness, IFA has undertaken biological inventories in the forests within the wilderness addition and NRA, measured water quality in the area and worked on forest carbon sequestration projects that will enable us to establish the scientific case for this wilderness bill. This grant will help us prepare the case for this wilderness from economic, scientific and human-interest perspectives and sell it to the public and diverse communities.

3. Stakeholder Coalition-building: We will approach City, Town and County Councils and Commissions, local Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Bureaus in Monroe, Brown, Jackson and Lawrence Counties, Saddle Clubs, Trail Associations, Hiking Groups, Mountain Bikers, Canoeists, Overlanders, Conservation Organizations, Schools, Churches and others. In addition to local residents who IFA worked with for two years to agree upon the content of S.2990 before it was introduced, IFA has invested considerable time in discussions with Sierra Club, Citizens Climate Lobby and Hoosier Environmental Council. We plan to approach Audubon and Garden Club Chapters, the League of Women Voters, Urban League and two unions (IBEW and UAW), all with large memberships across Indiana to support S. 2990. A concerted statewide campaign with these organizations through the spring of 2024 will convince key decision makers to support the passage of S. 2990. From these groups we will build and maintain broad and diverse support from key stakeholders essential to passing the legislation and managing the area afterwards. S. 2990 will establish a Federal Advisory Committee with representatives of local governments, local residents, state and federal land managers, conservation and recreation groups, and forest experts. The Committee must develop a plan with the Forest Service to manage the NRA to

promote recreation, conserve the scenic and ecological values of the NRA and protect Monroe Reservoir. From interests supporting S. 2990, we will identify and advocate for a diverse set of stakeholders to serve on this committee.

By focusing efforts on the three strategies above simultaneously, we will build public support for S2990, develop stakeholders and convince legislators to pass the bill with bipartisan support. This will also set the stage for an engaged Advisory Committee to implement the plan in the legislation. We estimate the timeline for this work to be 3 years, with the first two years building the case for wilderness and the groundswell of support to pass S. 2990, and the third year engaging with the Advisory Committee in decision-making about recreation and management practices.

5. Key Decision Makers

Congresswoman Erin Houchin: Given the expanded wilderness and NRA lie within Indiana's 9th Congressional District, we need to persuade 9th District Congresswoman Erin Houchin to introduce S. 2990 in the House of Representatives. Senator Braun has a good working relationship with Houchin as both served together in the Indiana Statehouse. We are also employing a contract lobbyist who has a working relationship with Congresswoman Houchin, and our executive director has lobbied her on legislation in the Statehouse and is currently organizing local residents who live in the 9th District near the proposed expanded wilderness to speak with Houchin's Legislative Director, at his request in January 2024. The economic case, support of local governments and businesses in her district, and Senator Braun's influence will be crucial to convincing Congresswoman Houchin to introduce the legislation.

Senator Todd Young: Convincing Indiana's other US Senator, Republican Todd Young, to cosponsor S. 2990 in the Senate will demonstrate strong support from throughout the state for the bill helping ensure its markup by the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee earlier rather than later in 2024. Young's Legislative Assistant for Public Lands has also told IFA that securing Houchin's introduction of the bill in the House, will be key to convincing Senator Young to cosponsor S. 2290.

USDA Undersecretary Homer Wilkes: Senator Braun has developed a close working relationship with USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Dr. Homer Wilkes who oversees programs of the Forest Service. Dr. Wilkes has attended two

11. Confidential Items

There is nothing in our proposal that needs to be kept confidential.

public meetings at Braun's invitation to discuss the management of the HNF with citizens who live in the HNF. Convincing Dr. Wilkes of the overwhelming public support in Indiana for S. 2990 will help him persuade the Forest Service to be supportive or at least neutral on S. 2990, important for the bill's passage through Committees.

6. Elevate Voices

We are currently working to establish a partnership with Native American tribes, such as the Lenape and Shawnee, who have historically been connected with the area. We are in the early stages of this and realize the great importance of elevating their voices. Initial conversations have been very positive and shown support for further protection of this wilderness.

The proposed Wilderness Addition and NRA are near a very special historic town called Freetown. This area is home to many artifacts and history of free African Americans (never enslaved) in America. IFA has been leading hikes to an historic African American settlement, known as Paddy's Garden in a nearby County in the HNF to see artifacts and to discuss the history of this settlement.. We are partnering with Sierra Club, Indiana Historical Society and Indiana University on this effort. S. 2990 has historical significance for African Americans because of its proximity to Freetown. With TCA's support, we will amplify African American and Native American voices while highlighting the historical significance of this area which is often overlooked or unknown.

Protecting wild nature that is accessible to populations in inner cities is tremendously important for equity in the region. Passing S.2990 will establish the largest protected wild forest area in the lower Midwest and one of the only such protected forest areas of significant size. This is extremely significant for marginalized and underrepresented groups because it is located within a one hour drive of Indianapolis and 1.5 to 2 hours of other major cities such as Louisville and Cincinnati. Unlike many other American urban areas, minority residents in these cities and communities with lower incomes simply have no other wild expanse of this size to enjoy within a half day's drive and lack the incomes to afford trips to more distant locations.

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