



United States Department of Agriculture

#### Forest Service

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# Hoosier NF Highlights

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## One Step at a Time – *The Making of the Hoosier National Forest*



By Ron Scott, Lands and Minerals Program Manager

Land acquisition efforts for the Hoosier National Forest (Hoosier) initially began during the latter years of the Great Depression. By the mid-1930's, much of the land that now makes up the present day Hoosier had been cleared of timber, over-used as pasture, or farmed until its productivity was seriously impaired. Erosion was a significant problem and many acres of land needed rehabilitation. In 1935, the Indiana General Assembly approved the Enabling Act, agreeing to Federal purchase of lands suitable for National Forest purposes. Four separate purchase units were created, including parts of Brown, Jackson, Monroe, Lawrence, Martin, Dubois, Orange, Crawford and Perry Counties. Acquisition of suitable lands on a willing-seller basis began shortly thereafter, with 102,920 acres being acquired by the Forest Service between 1937 and 1950. In 1951, the Secretary of Agriculture formally established the area located within these four purchase units as the Hoosier National Forest.

The ensuing 66 years have seen the size of the Hoosier roughly double and currently, thirty-one percent (203,725 acres) of the land found within the Hoosier's administrative boundary is owned by the United States and managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Of course, much of the land within the overall boundary of the Hoosier is developed or otherwise unsuitable for National Forest purposes, such as timber production, fish and wildlife habitat, or outdoor recreation. And it is both unnecessary and impractical for the Forest Service to acquire and manage all of the land within the current administrative boundary. However, many outstanding opportunities still remain to acquire select lands that provide high-quality habitat

for a wide range of species, enhanced water quality protection, improved public access, and expanded outdoor recreational opportunities.

The primary funding source for Forest Service land purchases is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). These funds are derived from federal offshore oil and gas lease royalties and appropriated annually by Congress. These LWCF funds are then allocated to various national forests across the country on a competitive basis, so available funding is limited, and not provided to the Hoosier every year.

In Indiana, where more than 95 percent of the state is privately-owned, there is an increasing demand for public lands for outdoor recreation purposes. The Hoosier is one of the smallest national forests in the country with a highly fragmented ownership. These fragmented lands can sometimes create access challenges, confusion or even conflict for the public users of the National Forest. Accordingly, a major priority of the Hoosier's current land acquisition effort is focused on consolidating land ownership in order to provide larger, more contiguous blocks of National Forest land. This, in turn will provide enhanced recreational experiences for hunters, hikers and other recreationists. Indeed, with that objective in mind, the Hoosier has successfully secured roughly \$10.7 million in LWCF funding since 2000, resulting in the addition of 6,441 acres of new public land for all to enjoy. Come visit the Hoosier to see for yourself and take advantage of the many recreational opportunities that it offers!

For more information on the Hoosier National Forest lands program contact Ron Scott at 812-275-5987 or at [ronscott@fs.fed.us](mailto:ronscott@fs.fed.us).



*Selective land acquisition efforts around Monroe Lake not only help protect water quality, but also provides a diversity of outdoor recreational opportunities for the public to enjoy.*



This picture is of a portion of a 171-acre tract of land along Oil Creek in Perry County added to the Hoosier National Forest in 2015.