



Hoosier National Forest Highlights



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100 Years of Restoring America's Forests



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While Congressional gridlock has been an on-going problem, 100 years ago legislators worked together to pass the Weeks Act. This ground-breaking law led to the creation and restoration of 52 national forests in 26 eastern states. Nearly 25 million acres, including some of the most abused and severely degraded land was restored after the passage of this Act.

The Weeks Act was the corner-stone for land acquisition in the east, protecting and restoring irreplaceable forested watersheds, and ensuring a future supply of clean water. Today one-fifth of the nation's clean drinking water comes from lands purchased under this law. Named for its sponsor, US Representative John Weeks from Massachusetts, the bill was signed into law by President William Taft on March 1, 1911.

The drive for the Act began in the White Mountains of New Hampshire where devastating fires had swept through cutover lands and erosion was stripping hillsides of soil. Stripped of trees, runoff caused severe flooding closing mills and putting people out of work. Tourists stopped coming to the White Mountains. The economic effect was crippling. As the public clamored for action, John E. Johnson, an Episcopal minister took up the cause. He effectively carried the message of the destruction and waste to the public where it was soon clear that federal action was needed.

The debate in Congress began in 1906 over federal dollars allocated to buy back land in the east. The country had long been in the mode of disposing of public lands, the suggestion to reverse that process and spend public funds to reacquire the land was not popular. Speaker of the House John Cannon

declared, "Not one cent for scenery." Other Congressmen balked, seeing public forest lands as an economic impediment.

Speaker of the House Cannon appointed Congressman John Weeks, a Boston banker, to investigate the issue. He said if Weeks could come up with a forest bill acceptable to businessmen, he would support it. Weeks crafted a bill in 1908 to purchase forest lands to improve the navigability of rivers. It was hard to argue the value of the Constitutional right of interstate commerce, though filibusters delayed the bill passage for two years.

Under the Weeks Act, national forests could now be created in the east. In Indiana and other eastern states thousands of acres were lost to foreclosure during the Great Depression. The land had become so worthless that it could be bought at minimal cost. The peak year for Week's Act purchases in the east was 1934 when the average price per acre was \$1.97.

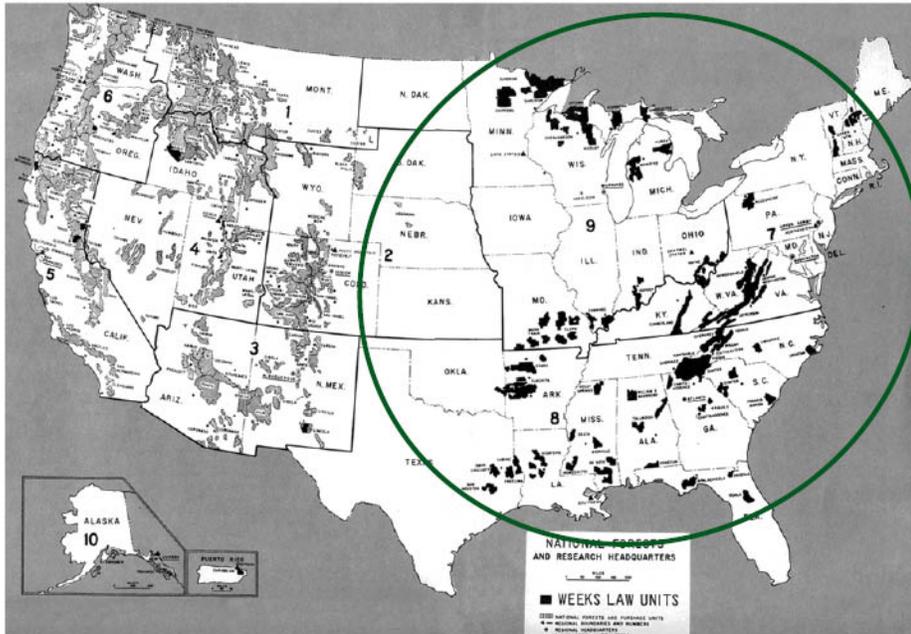
It was not until 1935 that the state of Indiana authorized the Forest Service to purchase land to create a national forest. Most of the land on the Hoosier has been purchased under Weeks Act authority.

Most of the country's investments under the Weeks Act were made in the 1930s during the deepest economic depression our country has endured. We continue to benefit from those investments, and commend the commitment and leadership of John Weeks and his fellow legislators for recognizing the value of conservation.

With the passage of the Weeks Act, the Forest Service inherited the complex responsibility of accepting cut, burned-over, and farmed-out lands. The agency took on a new role of restoring entire forested ecosystems across landscapes. Working closely with partners to control wildfires and erosion, the Forest Service has spent the last 100 years restoring the eastern national forests. Denuded hillsides are now again supporting healthy wildlife populations and providing a multitude of benefits. Timber is even being harvested on lands which were once unproductive.

People working together have been the key to past achievements and are the key to future successes in restoring these lands to create sustainable forests.

For more information on the Weeks Act or Forest history contact Teena Ligman at tligman@fs.fed.us or call 812-276-4757.



National Forests within the circle show those authorized and purchased by Weeks Act monies. Note there are also some western forests (shown in black) authorized by the Weeks Act.



Farmer plows eroding field in the early 1900s.



Stumps of cut and burned-over land before the Weeks Act allowed it to be restored.