



# Hoosier National Forest Highlights



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## LAND EXCHANGES ON THE HOOSIER NATIONAL FOREST



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Land exchange is a tool national forests have to manage their land base that is not well known or understood by the public. Kelly Weigel, Realty Specialist, explains, "Land exchanges don't require the large funding outlays that purchasing land requires, so even in tight budget times, it's a tool we might still be able to consider." However, she states, it is a long process and private entities are required to pay a percentage of the costs involved in analyzing the land exchange proposal.

In the last decade, the Hoosier has acquired 1,166 acres through land exchanges while conveying 963 acres to private ownership. Weigel explained that the 203 acre gain only begins to tell the story of the benefit of these transactions.

These exchanges enabled the forest to consolidate existing ownership. With consolidation, the Hoosier reduced boundary maintenance costs by eliminating the isolated tracts and increasing the size of existing blocks of national forest. Many of the isolated tracts were not accessible to the public and were difficult to manage prior to the exchanges.

These acres were part of six cases, but within those six cases there were actually ten private tracts acquired by the Forest Service and twelve small isolated national forest tracts conveyed to private holdings. Each of those ten tracts further consolidated existing Forest ownership.

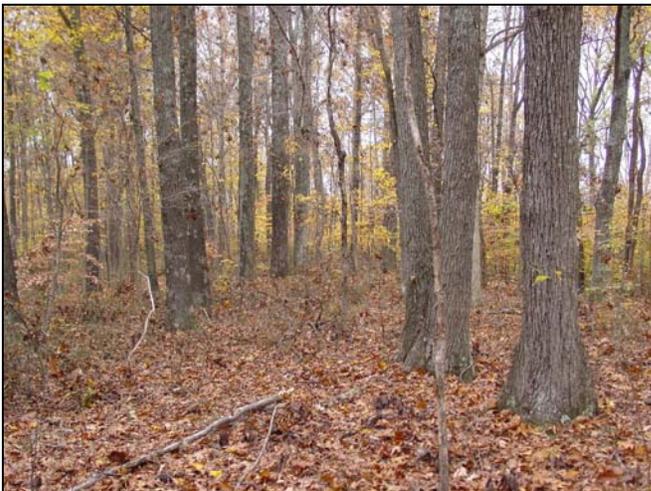
In some cases the tracts received in the exchanges provided access to existing national forest land, either by bringing the ownership out to an existing road, or by adding a tract that included an access road into the area. Larger parcels of land improve benefits to forest users such as hunters.

Wildlife species benefit from larger blocks of forest land and reduced fragmentation. The reduced fragmentation also eliminates some issues with predators such as cowbirds. Many times the Forest has not been able to effectively manage the small isolated tracts so once we complete the exchange, we can make habitat improvements on the new tracts which benefits plant and animal species. Some of the new exchanges have become incredible wildlife havens with plantings of warm season grasses, prescribed burning, and construction of wetlands.

Watersheds and stream frontage are a prime consideration for the Hoosier in order to protect water quality. Any time we can consolidate land along a stream or protect a watershed, the importance of that tract increases. Opportunities to acquire tracts with threatened and endangered species, significant cultural resources, special habitats or features and unique resources may increase our interest in pursuing a land exchange.

All land acquisition is based on funding availability and willing sellers. Although there is no shortage of willing sellers, land exchange is another means to acquire important tracts when funding for direct purchases is limited. The Forest has defined priorities and criteria to consider before accepting new cases.

For more information on the land acquisition or land exchange programs on the Hoosier contact Kelly Weigel at 812-276-4775 or [kweigel@fs.fed.us](mailto:kweigel@fs.fed.us).



Typical forest cover on a federal tract offered in an exchange – this tract was exchanged in 2008.



A private tract acquired by the Hoosier in a land exchange in 2006.



This picture shows the same field as shown above, but no longer in fescue, the area is now warm season grasses, native forbs and wildflowers.