

Naturally Speaking: Indiana s forests provide quality opportunities

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As I have written our Indiana State Forests can provide some really quality outdoor recreation opportunities. While the main goal of the State Forests is timber production and management, recreation still has its place. A classic example of this is the Morgan-Monroe State Forest located in the two counties of the same name. At 25,528 acres this is Hoosier land's largest State Forest and one of the most impressive. It extends from just southeast of Martinsville to the Lake Lemon area east of Bloomington, with another section of the forest west of highway 67 between Martinsville and the town of Paragon.

This is rugged terrain with many deep ravines sequestered between high wooded hills. It makes for a very scenic landscape that this region of Indiana is noted for. It's only a part of the region that extends east throughout Yellowwood State Forest that is 23,446 acres in size and a combined total of 48,974 acres of high quality woodland habitat for all kinds of wildlife.

Nearby is the 15,776 acre Brown County state Park, the 13,202 acre Lake Monroe Area, thousands of acres in the Hoosier National Forest and several Nature Conservancy and Sycamore Land Trust's Nature Preserves and one can see there is a lot of space for you to roam around in and enjoy. Morgan-Monroe noted for its twenty eight miles of hiking trails that run from easy to very rugged.

There are also three lakes open for fishing. They are nine acre Bryant Creek Lake, the four acre Cherry Lake, and Prather Lake also four acres in size. It also has four campground areas that offer some very nice spots to camp surrounded by large old trees that seem to say please camp close to me. There are Mason Ridge, Oak Ridge, Scout Youth Ridge and an overflow campground that provide a chance to camp out in nature and let the rest of the world worry about all its problems.

A brand new office has recently been opened where you can obtain maps of the forest and interesting information on what the forest does contain that can help you enjoy your visit. The Scout Ridge Dedicated State Nature Preserve is a fifteen acre site near the Scout Ridge Youth Camp. It has a half mile trail and lots of trail stations to inform you on the various features that make a short hike very interesting. There are six other trails in addition to the Scout Ridge Trail. Two are classed as easy, three moderate, and two are rugged. You need to be in shape if you want to hike the entire length of these trails. The easy ones are the mile Tree Identification Trail and the rather short Pathfinder Orienteering Trail Course. The moderate trails are the Scout Ridge Nature Trail, the 2.9 mile Mason Ridge Trail and the 3.1 mile Rock Shelter Trail that goes to a rather large rock shelter rock formation.

Now for the rugged trails... There are two that are both ten miles or so in length. They are the Three Lakes Trail and the Low Gap Back Country Trail. The latter is in a segment of the

forest very remote and where you can primitive camp. The Back country area is sizeable section of the forest that had been set aside as an area that was to remain free from most human disturbance, but it was decided to have some trees selectively cut. This caused an uproar that pitted the DNR. Division of Forestry against a large number of conservationists who were adamantly opposed to any cutting of trees in a back country area. It came down to Governor Holcomb having the final say and he agreed to allow some cutting in the back country area.

This has created a lot of hard feelings which still continues today. This is sad for Morgan-Monroe it's a great area and a place we can enjoy without resentment coming between two diverse philosophies that really need to act as one to ensure our great Hoosier natural heritage will be preserved.

Source: https://www.washtimesherald.com/community/naturally-speaking-indiana-s-forests-provide-quality-opportunities/article_8aa54bd8-3706-11ea-bd08-f31ec2720689.html