

February 12, 2025

Honorable Jeff Thompson  
Chair  
Indiana House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee  
Statehouse  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

**RE: Investing in Conservation in the Indiana budget**

Dear Chairman Thompson and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

“Innovation requires inspiration,” says the Indiana Economic Development Corporation.

Every year millions of Hoosiers find inspiration by visiting Indiana’s great outdoor places – our state parks, fish and wildlife areas, nature preserves, rivers and lakes, and trails. From 2021 to 2023, over 19 million people visited our state parks and state recreation areas each year.

Besides inspiration for Hoosier families, community leaders, and visitors from other states, Indiana’s forests, wetlands and prairies make our state a healthier, more productive place to live and work – improving our water and air quality, supporting the pollinators that our food crops depend on, providing habitat for the animals that control agricultural pests, and offering opportunities for physical activity that supports healthier lifestyles.

Along with the foregoing benefits is the contribution to Indiana’s economy from jobs created and consumer spending on outdoor recreation. The U.S. Department of Commerce calculates this economic value to Indiana from outdoor recreation at \$16 billion a year, supporting 105,000 direct jobs.

Indiana’s economic well-being is dependent on our quality of life. A 2016 study commissioned by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and the Wellness Council of Indiana reported, “Infrastructure related to traditional wellness activities (such as trails, playgrounds, parks, and open green space) matter more than ever in where people and subsequent businesses relocate.”

Despite these many benefits and the widespread popularity of our outdoor spaces and natural areas, Indiana is not keeping up with the demand. Applications for Next Level Trails grants exceeded available funding by \$227 million. Virtually every READI grant proposal contained featured trail, greenway, or park projects.

Since 2018, 21 states have acted to establish new conservation funding programs. (NCEL, CAP, 2024)

**Let’s continue the positive conservation appropriations in the last two budget bills and invest robustly in conservation. Please include the following appropriations in the budget bill, HB 1001:**

- \$15 million over two years for land conservation (President Harrison Conservation Trust)
- \$10 million a year increase for State Park operations
- \$3 million over two years for State Park trails maintenance and repairs
- \$200,000 a year increase for Division of Nature Preserves operating expenses
- \$4 million a year increase in Division of Fish and Wildlife operating expenses
- \$2.6 million a year for the Lake and River Enhancement program, ensuring that new fee revenues are fully appropriated
- \$10 million over two years for DNR deferred maintenance needs

We support other construction and conservation appropriations in Governor Braun's recommended budget, including:

- \$27.7 million for McCormick's Creek State Park campground repairs
- \$10 million to match Lilly Endowment contribution of \$50 million
- \$6 million a year general fund appropriation for Clean Water Indiana

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brian Vigue, Freshwater Policy Director  
Audubon Great Lakes

Kyle Rorah, Regional Director of Public Policy  
Ducks Unlimited, Great Lakes/Atlantic Region

Kim (Kimberly) Ehn, President  
Dunes-Calumet Audubon Society

Christine Glaser, Indiana Policy Coordinator  
Faith in Place

Dane Strahle, President  
Friends of Goose Pond

Judith Andrews, President  
Friends of Harmonie State Park

Sherry Mitchell-Bruker, President  
Friends of Lake Monroe

Marc McAleavey, MSW, Chief Executive Officer  
Health by Design

David Van Gilder, Senior Policy and Legal Director  
Hoosier Environmental Council

Jeff Wells  
Indiana Conservation Officers FOP Lodge

Desi Rybolt, Conservation Campaign Manager  
Indiana Conservation Voters

Evan Robbins, Director of Policy and Communications  
Indiana Forest Alliance

Liz Jackson  
Indiana Forestry & Woodland Owners Association

Mary Blackburn, IFCL Creation Care Advocate  
Indiana Friends Committee on Legislation

Tom Hohman, President  
Indiana Parks Alliance

Dan Boritt, Executive Director  
Indiana Wildlife Federation

Jim Sweeney  
Izaak Walton League, Indiana Division

Jim Basala, CEO  
Lake County Parks & Recreation Department

Linda Hanson, President  
League of Women Voters of Indiana

John Ketzenberger, Director of Government Relations  
The Nature Conservancy of Indiana

Bruce Britton, President  
Northwest Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA)

Michael J Ryan, President  
Northwest Indiana Steelheaders

Harshini Ratnayaka, Advocacy Program Manager  
Save the Dunes

Robyn Skuya-Boss, Chapter Director  
Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter