

INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES



**Indiana Legislative Services Agency
200 W. Washington Street, Suite 301
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204**

Wednesday October 8, 2025

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2025

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INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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FINAL REPORT

Agriculture and Natural Resources, Interim Study Committee on

I. STATUTORY DIRECTIVE

The Interim Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources (Committee) is authorized under IC 2-5-1.3-4. The Committee shall study and make findings and recommendations concerning the topics assigned by the Legislative Council and submit a final report to the Legislative Council in an electronic format under IC 5-14-6 before November 1, 2025.

II. INTRODUCTION AND REASONS FOR STUDY

The Legislative Council charged the Committee with studying the economic value of Indiana public land used for recreation. The study included the following topics:

- (i) The direct and indirect economic impacts of public recreational lands on local and regional economies.
- (ii) Tourism, employment, and small business development associated with recreational use of public lands.
- (iii) The value of ecosystem services and health benefits provided through recreational access to public lands.
- (iv) Best practices from other states in valuing public land used for outdoor recreation.

III. SUMMARY OF WORK PROGRAM

The Committee met two times during the 2025 legislative interim, on September 11, 2025, and on October 2, 2025. The meetings of the committee took place in the Senate chamber in the state house in Indianapolis, Indiana.

At the September 11, 2025, meeting, the committee heard presentations from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Indiana State Museum on public land use, state park operations, and historic site holdings, and testimony from a diverse group of stakeholders emphasizing the economic, environmental, and social value of outdoor recreation.

Minutes of the meeting can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

https://iga.in.gov/pdf-documents/124/2025/universal/committees/interim/agriculture-and-natural-resources-interim-study-committee/46a5f99a-8175-48e5-a208-4dcb930ff184/46a5f99a-8175-48e5-a208-4dcb930ff184_minutes.pdf

At the October 2, 2025, meeting, the committee met to review and finalize recommendations and to consider the draft final report. The committee discussed the proposed recommendations contained in the draft final report, amended the proposed recommendations to include recommendations for the support of historic sites and to increase funds available for public land acquisition, and unanimously approved the recommendations and final report.

Minutes of the meeting can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

https://iga.in.gov/pdf-documents/124/2025/universal/committees/interim/agriculture-and-natural-resources-interim-study-committee/46a5f99a-8175-48e5-a208-4dcb930ff184/46a5f99a-8175-48e5-a208-4dcb930ff184_minutes.pdf

IV. COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee made the following recommendations:

- Reintroduce HB 1245-2025 which allows counties with state parks or state recreation areas to impose a surcharge of up to \$1 per car on entrance fees to be used to assist the county in providing emergency services.
- Reintroduce SB 515-2025 which: (1) moves control of Indiana's historic sites from the State Museum and Historic Sites Corporation to a new Division of Historic Sites under the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR); (2) creates oversight and funding structures; (3) protects historic properties; and (4) strengthens preservation efforts.
- Encourage financial and community support of historic sites from friend groups of the historic sites.
- Encourage organizations composed of experts representing all types of public recreation areas to work together to develop ideas for potential legislation to support economic opportunities on public lands used for recreation.
- Increase the biennial construction and maintenance budget for state parks, as well as other DNR divisions and the State Museum and Historic Sites, to levels similar to the inflation-adjusted 2007 spending levels.
- Establish a dedicated source of conservation funding to maintain and enhance facilities at state-owned public lands for recreation.
- Increase financial support for the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Fund to better maintain and repair public lands.
- Research and implement a system to collect visitor fees at state fish and wildlife areas.
- Establish a comprehensive plan to mitigate natural disaster impacts on public lands and facilitate effective recovery and restoration efforts.
- Protect and preserve state forests and old growth forests.
- Encourage the DNR to work with the Indiana Department of Health to identify the impact of public land on community and individual health.
- Require the DNR Division of Forestry to present its strategic plan to the general assembly in an electronic format under IC 5-14-6.
- Increase funding for the purchase of new public land.

WITNESS LIST

Andrew Forrester, Visit Madison

Brian Noah, President of Main Street Brookville

Brian Stone, Chairman for the Indiana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Brenda Myers, Indiana Tourism Association

Chris Smith, Deputy Director DNR

Daniel Boritt, Executive Director of Indiana Wildlife Federation

Rep. David Hall, Indiana State Representative for District 62

Eric Todd, Chief Operating Officer at the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites

Gene Hopkins, Indiana Sportsman's Roundtable

Holly Wehr, Community Development Director of Versailles, Indiana

Jack Seifert, State Forester

John Kinney, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

John Payne, Fallen Outdoors, Midwest Regional Director

June Julien, Executive Director of Steuben County Tourism Bureau

Kent Kasselman, Executive Director of Fort Wayne Trails

Khapri Hazel, Executive Director, Greenways Foundation

Kristal Painter, COO of Discover Southern Indiana

Marc McAleavy, Indiana Public Health Association & Health by Design

Marce Lee Johnson, CEO, Owen County Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development Corporation

Michael Klitzing, Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation

Ray Moistner, Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Association

Rick Shipe, Steuben County Commissioner

Scott Kraege, Ivy Ventures

Steve Hubacher, Indiana Ducks Unlimited

Tim Maloney, Indiana Conservation Alliance (ICA)

Tom Hohman, Indiana Parks Alliance

Will Haines, Legislative Director for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR)