

Press Release

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Ohio's newest state park visitor: loggers

Proposal would open up state parks, nature preserves, forests, wildlife areas, even state historic sites to wide-scale logging

Conservationists call backers' claim a smokescreen

(Columbus, OH)—A second front is opening in the battle over oil and gas drilling in Ohio's state parks and other state lands: logging.

An Ohio Senate hearing is scheduled for Wednesday on legislation to allow timber as well as oil and gas companies to nominate vast areas of any state-owned and controlled lands for extraction, including state parks, forests, nature preserves and even state historic and archeological sites.

The addition of timbering to this growing debate is seen as a stealth development, as recent hearings in the legislature have centered on natural gas supplies, not timber. But the bill's backers claim that logging along with drilling for oil and gas on state lands will help counteract recent sharp increases in oil and gas prices.

Conservationists call the proposal a smokescreen that will make no difference in fuel prices, but only enrich oil and timber interests at taxpayers' expense.

"This spring, lawmakers fought to keep free access to our state parks when they scrapped a proposed \$5 parking fee," said Portsmouth resident Cheryl Carpenter, founder of Voices for the Forest. "But now some of those same lawmakers want to turn our parks and forests over lock, stock and barrel to industry. We don't want the leftover crumbs that the timber industry will toss us after they've profited from our timber. We want our state parks and forests left alone."

Conservationists point to key facts that undermine the bill backers' claims:

- According to government statistics, 99% of Ohio households rely on natural gas or electricity for heating, not firewood.
- Based on current consumption rates, there is less than a 3 year supply of natural gas in Ohio, most of it under Lake Erie. Experts estimate it would take decades to fully tap the supply.
- State-owned and controlled lands make up only about 2% of Ohio's land mass. The overwhelming majority of Ohio's known oil and gas fields are covered by privately-owned land.
- The president of the Natural Gas Supply Association has acknowledged publicly that there are "no

quick fixes” for the nation’s rising heating bills this winter.

- A recent study commissioned by the state Consumers’ Counsel projected that Ohio consumers could save up to \$9 for every \$1 invested in a statewide energy efficiency program.

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Conservationists believe the timber industry wants wide-open access to more than just the 183,000 acres of timber in Ohio’s 20 state forests. They believe it also covets logging for exceptionally large trees in the scattered pockets of remaining old growth woods on state nature preserves and other state lands. These lands contain thousands of individual trees worth thousands of dollars for their veneer-quality wood, including at Goll Woods State Nature Preserve (Henry Co.), Johnson Woods S.N.P. (Wayne Co.), Lawrence Woods S.N.P. (Hardin Co.), Conkle’s Hollow S.N.P. and S.P. (Hocking Co.), Fowler Woods S.N.P. (Richland Co.) and Dysart Woods, owned by Ohio University (Belmont Co.).

Conservationists stressed that the proposed legislation, Senate Bill 193, is rigged to give industry the upper hand in dictating terms of any logging and drilling on state lands. Under the bill:

- Extractive companies could nominate *any* land “owned or controlled by state agencies” for timber harvesting or oil and gas extraction, including state parks, state nature preserves and wilderness areas, state forests, state wildlife areas and state historic and archeological sites.

- A proposed Oil, Gas, and Timber Leasing Board would have exclusive authority to enter into leases, usurping the power of state agencies to manage state lands.

- Public comment is not invited.

- No specific review is required of potential impacts to the environment, wildlife habitat, public recreation or scenic or historic features.

- Only industry could appeal the terms of a lease, not the state. The Forest Advisory Council, which has no legal expertise, and the Oil and Gas Commission would consider appeals.

- If it denied a logging or drilling permit, the state potentially could be liable for a takings claim.

- In direct conflict with existing law, state nature preserves, the Shawnee State Wilderness Area and state historic and archaeological sites could be open to logging and drilling.

“The tall tale that logging and drilling on state lands will help lower winter heating bills is growing to Paul Bunyan proportions,” said Jack Shaner, public affairs director for the Ohio Environmental Council. “This is about inviting extractive industries turn a quick buck at the expense of our treasured public lands, nothing more.”

The groups identified a list of state lands they believe may be targeted for logging or oil and gas drilling, based on known timber and potential oil and gas reserves. The list and related information is available at www.TheOEC.org.

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Voices of the Forest (<http://www.voicesfortheforest.org/>) is a grassroots organization determined to serve as the voice for Shawnee State Forest, located west of Portsmouth, Ohio.

The Ohio Environmental Council (<http://www.theoec.org/>) is a network of more than 100 state and local groups that advocates for clean air and water and natural resource protection.