

RESOLUTION

Sierra Club recognizes the escalating poor management and exploitation of the Illinois State Parks and conservation areas by the Illinois Department of Conservation. A recent example is the Department's proposal to harvest trees in state parks and conservation areas around the state, and specifically its request for bids to harvest trees in the Pere Marquette State Park. In order to help reform administration of state lands, preserve state parks and conservation areas in the most natural condition possible, and to preserve those lands for non-consumptive uses, the Executive Committee ratifies a lawsuit against the Illinois Department of Conservation and its Director seeking a declaration that harvesting trees in state parks and conservation areas is illegal and permanently enjoining the awarding of contracts for harvesting of trees on those lands.

BACKGROUND

The Illinois Department of Conservation recently proposed a plan to harvest trees in state parks and conservation areas around the state. To begin implementation of the plan, the state invited bids for the selected harvest of trees on a 345 acre tract in Pere Marquette State Park in southwestern Illinois. 1,973 individual trees totaling 314,000 board feet would be cut, yielding approximately \$10,000 to the state. The area to be cut was the scene of a forest fire four years ago, but appears to be recovering well. The state has refused to recognize that fire is a natural part of the life cycle of a forest. A Sierra Club forest ecology expert states that the infrequency of fires in Illinois hardwood forests in recent years has actually hindered the natural development of the forests.

The state's justifications for the cut appear groundless. The alleged need to protect the forest from attack by insects or disease carries little weight since there has never been such an attack on Illinois hardwood forests. The alleged habitat improvement would be for big game animals and would probably eliminate habitat for many species. The state alleges a need to "rehabilitate" the forest. However, "rehabilitation" is basically a logging industry term and bears no relation to the purpose for which the state parks were established.

The cutting of trees is specifically authorized in state forests, but there is no equivalent authorization for cutting in the state parks. In fact state statutes mandate the Department of Conservation to provide for and encourage preservation of natural conditions to the greatest extent possible in the state parks. There is even a criminal statute expressly prohibiting the cutting or removing of trees in any park. The suit seeks a declaratory judgment declaring that the plans of the state to harvest trees located in state parks and conservation areas is illegal and void and that the invitation for bids or awarding of contracts is also void. A permanent injunction to the same effect is also sought.

CLIENT ENTITIES

Great Lakes Chapter and Piasa Palisades Group

ACTION TAKEN

Approved