

**Indiana State Forests:
Is Less Land Worth the Hassle?**

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

When one thinks of outdoor recreation in Indiana, it is likely that state parks would come to mind pretty quickly. What many do not realize is that there are fourteen state forests that are utilized for recreation as well as timber crop production. These forests also possess historical qualities that should not be forgotten. This paper examines the historical significance as well as environmental importance of two Indiana state forests: Owen-Putnam State Forest and Selmier State Forest. It examines the significance of the forests to humans throughout the 1900s. It argues that state forests should not be replaced by state parks, as they serve many purposes to us, even today.

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Of all the Indiana state forests, Owen-Putnam and Selmier are two of the smallest. Because they lack the timber production of the larger forests, one might pose the question, "Is it worth having small-scale forests at all?" While it is true that the smaller forests are more limited in the timber sale than some of the larger forests, it should be noted that what these small forests lack in timber production, they make up for in historical significance. Selmier possesses intriguing background stories of how it was founded and donated to the state of Indiana. Owen-Putnam's land was once farmed, but it was considered sub-marginal, making the most practical use for the land the production of timber crops, even if those crops were not as significant as that of larger forests. One might assume that a state park or nature preserve would be a better substitution for a parcel of land this size.

Owen-Putnam State Forest

Soil and Rehabilitation

Owen-Putnam State Forest is a 6,500-acre forest located in Spencer, Indiana. Since Owen-Putnam State Forest is not one of the larger forests in Indiana, one might pose the question, "Why was the forest established in the first place?" The answer lies in the soil. It was also non-glaciated soil, meaning it was old, thin, and rocky in the first place, so farming the land was the most unwise option for this soil. Erosion and exploitation of the soil were two major factors that made the creation of the forest a possibility.¹ The extent to which the soil had been damaged was described in the July 1949 issue of *Outdoor Indiana*: "In most cases the hilly sections of the counties involved were so 'short' on fertility that they never should have been cultivated in the first place. Their proper use is in a continuous production of timber crops. The

¹ "Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have 'New Look,'" *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

laws of nature and economics will not even permit them to be wisely used for grazing purposes.”² Without realizing it, resident farmers had been attempting to cultivate crops on a land that simply would not yield the product they sought.

Before the forest was officially established, the farmers who owned this land and their families attempted to live in these areas with poor soil, further exploiting the fields and woodlands through over-farming and over-cutting of trees. Eventually, each family decided to move because of the poor quality of soil, but for each family who left, another soon replaced them, continuing the constant cycle of new farmers destroying the fields. This destructive cycle ultimately led to extremely low fertility in the soil.³

The inhabitants of the land seemed unaware of the damage they were doing to the trees as well. There was mismanagement of “varying degrees” in some sections of the wood lots.⁴ “The wooded areas have been cut over in too many cases with the idea of cutting everything that would make a cross-tie or a two-by-four. Not only were the mature trees taken out, but the smaller trees as well, thus exhausting what could have been today’s and tomorrow’s timber crop.”⁵ It was clear that the grounds needed to be nurtured and the timber crop renewed. This was done by replanting in large amounts, building topsoil by accumulating leaf litter, and stopping runoff. Contour farming and planting vegetation barriers were ways runoff was slowed and soil erosion was prevented. Thus, sanctioning this land as an official state forest was the best way to utilize the land, ensuring proper management of its natural bounty.

² “Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have ‘New Look,’” *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

³ “Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have ‘New Look,’” *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Throughout this transition, farmers made additional mistakes as they continually attempted to cultivate the land in unproductive ways. Farmers also allowed livestock to graze in the woods, and as previously mentioned, the land was not suitable for that kind of treatment, as it was infertile because of excessive farming. The animals grazing in the forest killed the young trees that were just beginning to blossom, while also damaging and slowing the growth of older trees.

Finally, before its inception, the Owen-Putnam State Forest faced turmoil: fire was an issue that was “damaging older timber and killing the young, immature growth which was coming up to replace the older trees.”⁶ As a result of this calamity – in addition to the degradation caused by human activity – the production ability of this area for timber was greatly reduced.

Eventually, studies were done “by the Division in cooperation with the respective County Agricultural Agents and others” that included the great disintegration the land had faced, as well as farming and forests in the proposed area due to improper land use and the erosion of soil.⁷ In June of 1947, Governor Ralph Gates and members of the Conservation Commission approved the purchase of Owen-Putnam State Forest, which was called Owen County State Forest at the time. The property was “established in a piecemeal fashion due to the later acquisition of land in several different chunks.”⁸ Owen-Putnam State Forest was finally established in 1948, unlike many other Indiana State Forests that were developed as part of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) activities of the 1930s.⁹

⁶ “Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have ‘New Look,’” *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

⁷ *Year Book of the State of Indiana for the year 1947*, (1947) 646.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “The Division of Forestry: 100 Years and Growing,” *Woodland Steward* 10 (3): (2001).

When each plot of land was purchased and added to the forest, rehabilitation was a must. For example, to accommodate for the destructive fires that consistently damaged the land, the state decided to create a fire tower to monitor and control possible fires. According to a 1949 *Outdoor Indiana* article, "Fire will be controlled by erection of a fire tower in the central portion of the acquisition area, permitting early detection of fire and prompt arrival of a fire-fighting crew at the scene of the fire."¹⁰ The establishment of this fire tower allowed the land to be affected as minimally as possible so that tree growth would not be hindered.

To further efforts to rehabilitate the land, regulations were passed to ensure that trees were not cut down before their prime: "Through a selective method of cutting, only mature trees will be harvested."¹¹ Building on the positive effect of the fire tower, this regulation helped the soil get back on the road to recovery and allowed for beautiful land once again. The selective cutting method allowed young trees to fully grow and mature before cutting them down, encouraging uninterrupted growth of the surrounding trees. Each issue that plagued the land before it became the Owen-Putnam State Forest resulted in the destruction of not only mature trees but young trees as well. Thus, practicing this selective cutting was the most practical way to ensure the continued growth of timber.

However, the new caretakers of this land knew that the fire tower and selective cutting alone was enough to unlock the potential of the Owen-Putnam State Forest. They also planted 27,000 seedlings in the forest, "including red, white, pitch and Scotch pines, black locust and yellow poplar. Experimental plantings of European larch, cork oak and cypress were also recently established."¹² This number allowed a successful regrowth of timber on the land, even as mature trees continued to be cut down and utilized. Encouraging new growth also helped

¹⁰ "Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have 'New Look,'" *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have 'New Look,'" *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

prevent soil erosion by keeping the soil in place and mitigating runoff. In addition, having continual tree coverage slowed the process of water evaporation in the soil by providing shade to the land and allowing it proper nourishment, which it had been deprived of for years.

A Divided Land

The July 1949 edition of *Outdoor Indiana* explained that the adult forest could possibly reach 50,000 acres of land used for growing valuable timber and recreation for Indiana residents.¹³ It also explained that eventually, the forest might cover “104 sections of land in north-central Owen County and three tiers of sections in southern Putnam county.”¹⁴ Although there are approximately 67,000 acres of land within the forest boundaries, “it is neither the intention nor desire of the Indiana Department of Conservation to own all the land within this tract.” The forest owners were primarily concerned with timber growth, and parts of the land were better suited for agriculture, so privately owned land and crops were still cultivated by farmers.

Owen-Putnam “is considered the ‘late bloomer’ of the forestry properties, having been pieced together from multiple properties over many years that had been previously privately owned. For this reason, visitors must be careful when visiting the forest because some of the land remains private property. This haphazard juxtaposition of state forest and private property could make recreation difficult for some and less enjoyable due to the need to avoid some privately owns areas in the forest. In addition, the layout of the forest (interspersed with private land) could also make efficient harvesting of timber more complicated.

¹³ “Infant Owen State Forest Soon to Have ‘New Look,’” *Outdoor Indiana* 16 (7): 14-15 (1949).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Parting the Waters

However, the Owen-Putnam State Forest is not all soil and trees. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was controversy when it came to flood control in the Spencer area. Several large bodies of water in the area added extra challenges to maintaining this forest land. "Large dams proposed near Shoals and Spencer drew so much local opposition that the plans were dropped. A smaller dam and reservoir at Cagle's Mill in Putnam County was approved to be operational in 1953. This was the first of the flood control reservoirs where the Department of Conservation managed the recreational aspects of the project."¹⁵

Dams are very good for flood control. The water being held back by the dam is a possible water supply, but it can also be used for other aspects of life. Recreational opportunities arise with the creation of a dam, as well as a source of hydropower.

Despite the possible benefits, dams also carry the cost of construction and maintenance, so it was understandable that the local residents of Shoals and Spencer opposed the proposal of large dams being built. If a large dam broke, it would be a hazard to both the people and the land affected by the break. The reservoir that was built in 1953 impinged on the Owen-Putnam State Forest territory, so the Division of Forestry turned over the majority of the area to the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs to be used as Cataract Lake of Lieber State Recreation Area.¹⁶ The separation of this portion of the original forest was a better fit for the land for many reasons. While hunting is permitted during season on the lake, State Recreation Areas also have a focus on family-centered recreational outlets such as swimming, waterskiing, boating, and many other sports. It is optimal for this portion of land to be used for these activities while Owen-Putnam State Forest land continues to be used for more peaceful activities. Thus, turning this portion of

¹⁵ John Favinger, "A Time of Progress: Major strides made in protecting the environment," *Outdoor Indiana* 49 (2): 35 (1984).

¹⁶ Ibid.

the land into a State Recreation Area was a logical division that avoided conflicts that would have continued to arise from the confusion of purpose and function.

Campgrounds

After World War II ended in 1945, parents wanted to build new, happier lives for their families. A lot of families also had enough disposable income that they were able to travel to recreational sites such as the Owen-Putnam State Forest. Many of these families had newly expanded families as well due to the baby boom, so there was a definite need for recreational places to take the children at low costs. A state forest would make a perfect vacation for a family looking for a peaceful time away from home. Owen-Putnam State Forest houses three campgrounds: Fish Creek Campground, Horse Campground, and Rattlesnake Campground. All three of these campgrounds were developed in order to increase recreational opportunities for families.

The first campground in the Owen-Putnam State Forest – Rattlesnake Campground – was developed in 1966. The second campground, Horse Campground, was developed in 1970.¹⁷ This second campground was a primitive campsite with lay use horseman's facilities and horseman's overnight camping facilities. Typical primitive campsites consisted of "a table, a place for a campfire, a conveniently located pit toilet facility, and in most cases a source of drinking water in the general area."¹⁸ This campground consisted of twelve campsites and also had a source of water for the horses.¹⁹ Campgrounds like this were ideal for those looking for a more peaceful getaway, as opposed to a bustling amusement park. There were both little traffic and minimal

¹⁷ "The Division of Forestry: 100 Years and Growing," *Woodland Steward* 10 (3): (2001).

¹⁸ John D. Humphreys, "Horseback Riding: In Our State Forests And State Parks," *Outdoor Indiana* 36 (4): 5-8 (1971).

¹⁹ John Bergman, "Horse Camping in Indiana," *Outdoor Indiana* 43 (8): 12 (1978).

expenses for the family. Many people enjoy horses as well and were able to afford them after the war, as they had more disposable income. This made Owen-Putnam State Forest an ideal destination for many families.

In 1986, the Owen-Putnam State Forest opened its third campground: Fish Creek Road Campground. It was “the first campground dedicated by the Department of Natural Resources on any of its public properties after almost six years.” It consisted of fourteen campsites spread out along a ridge. “Easily accessible for fishing and hiking, the campground has three ponds and a convenient trail which links them to the campsites.” It was also a primitive campground, so it lacked electricity but provided basic necessities and even access to “municipal water and sanitary stations.”²⁰ Fresh water was also available in the Fish Creek Campground and the main Forest Office.²¹

Introduction of Turkeys and Recreational Hunting

In the early 1900s, these animals were few and far between, so it seemed as though extinction was imminent for them. “As late as 1945, turkeys were declared endangered, and it appeared that they might be a vanishing species in the United States” due to combination of uncontrolled hunting and the destruction of timber.²² Luckily, timber began to cover farmland and conservation practices were put into play, so the turkeys would grace the Indiana land once again.

The introduction of turkeys to the Owen-Putnam State Forest was a very big accomplishment for the state of Indiana. In 1969-1970, biologists of the Fish and Wildlife

²⁰ Mike Hayes, “Ridgetops and Ravines: A get-away-from-it-all-campground,” *Outdoor Indiana* 51 (7): 12-14 (1986).

²¹ “Owen-Putnam State Forest,” *Indiana Department of Natural Resources*, Accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/4815.htm>.

²² “Fish and Wildlife: Turkey,” *Indiana Department of Natural Resources*, Accessed September 20, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/3360.htm>.

Division of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources re-established wild turkeys in the Owen-Putnam State Forest.²³ A total of ten turkeys were released, two of which were adult hens, two juvenile toms, and six juvenile hens.²⁴ They were released with no natural predators, so eventually, the turkey population would get out of control if hunting was not re-introduced with this species as well.

By the spring of 1970, the turkey population was thriving once again, and the first “modern-day wild turkey gobbler hunt was allowed. That year, 100 hunters bagged six gobblers.”²⁵ The exact days of open season were May 2 to May 5, and the 100 resident hunters were drawn from a pool of applicants.²⁶ This allowed hunting to be gradually increased, allowing the turkey population to grow before even more hunters could participate in the open season.

By 1985, turkey hunting was “very popular in...Owen-Putnam State Forest.”²⁷ Hunters had to be careful, however, because turkey hunting was not allowed in Putnam County in 1985. In 2015, however, turkey hunting is allowed in both counties.²⁸

In addition to wild turkeys, many other types of game were hunted in the Owen-Putnam State Forest both before and after this time. In 1983, upland hunting included quail and rabbit, and woodland hunting included deer, turkey, squirrel, and grouse. Furbearer hunting and trapping was permitted at night for raccoon hunting.²⁹

²³ John D. Humphreys, “Forest Walking, Hiking,” *Outdoor Indiana* 35 (8): 15 (1970).

²⁴ P. Decker Major, “Wild Turkeys in the Spring,” *Outdoor Indiana* 43 (2): 8-12 (1978).

²⁵ P. Decker Major, “Going for Gobblers,” *Outdoor Indiana* 48 (10): 4 (1983-1984).

²⁶ “New 1970 Hunting, Fishing Laws Outlined,” *The Owen Leader*, January 8, 1970.

²⁷ Jeff Finley, “A Lieber Believer: Cagles Mill Reservoir offers myriad of outdoor activities,” *Outdoor Indiana* 50 (6): 36-37 (1985).

²⁸ “Indiana’s Public Hunting Areas,” *The Indiana Natural Resources Foundation*, Accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/files/fw-hg_wherehunt.pdf.

²⁹ Wayne Machan, “Public Hunting Areas in Indiana,” *Outdoor Indiana* 48 (2): 33 (1983).

Not only is hunting a recreational opportunity for many, but it also controls the population of many species in the Owen-Putnam State Forest. It is a way for residents to enjoy the hunt while also helping the forest avoid the overpopulation of wild animals.

Trails

Horseback riding is a popular recreational opportunity for many in Indiana. The addition of trails to the Owen-Putnam State Forest allowed visitors to ride their horses on land other than their own. This was another way in which Hoosiers enjoyed their post-war lives.

There are three horseback riding trails in the Owen-Putnam State Forest: Pleasant Grove, Sandstone Bluff, and Bridle Loop. There are not horse rentals at this state forest, so one must have his or her own horse to ride the trails.³⁰ Both the Pleasant Grove and Sandstone Bluff trails were opened in the winter of 1988-1989 and the spring of 1989, and both trails had similar terrain, beginning at the horseman's campground and intersecting at a wildlife pond.³¹

The third horse trail, which ultimately became the Bridle Loop, was developed later, and visitors were allowed access to the trail "by traveling the county road east of the entrance to the horseman's campground for one-half mile."³² This ended up being a ten-mile trail.

Timber

In November of 1983, *Outdoor Indiana* published an article explaining the cutting of timber in the Indiana State Forests. The forests use the "multiple use concept to obtain the maximum benefits from timber production, recreation, wildlife production and watershed

³⁰ John D. Humphreys, "Horseback Riding: In Our State Forests And State Parks," *Outdoor Indiana* 36 (4): 5-8 (1971).

³¹ "Trailing this Issue," *Outdoor Indiana* 54 (9): 38 (1989).

³² Ibid.

protection.” The tops of the trees were normally left in the woods once the sawlogs had been removed, and the tops could be used as firewood. Standing trees had to be completely left alone, whether they were dead or alive.³³

In the twenty-first century, the Owen-Putnam State Forest continued to thrive in its timber production. In a 2010 article in *Spencer Evening World*, Bill Gallogly, the Owen-Putnam State Forest Property Manager, explained why the forest has continued to be successful. He stated that promoting a higher quality of trees through timber harvesting and reducing the competition of the less desirable species has allowed the forest to keep thriving.³⁴

It is clear that the best use for the Owen-Putnam land was – and always will be – the production of timber. Attempts to farm the land were unsuccessful, so if timber production halted, there would be thousands of acres of land just being wasted, causing it to eventually revert back to the tragic condition it was in before becoming a state forest. It is in the best interest of this land to keep it in the hands of professionals who will put it to good use; otherwise, we will be wasting the years of progress and development that created the Owen-Putnam State Forest.

In the past seven years alone, timber volume has increased in Owen-Putnam State Forest, according to continuous inventories conducted by the Department of Natural Resources. In the years of 2008 to 2012, it was summarized that the forest contained an estimated net volume (in cubic feet) of 15,620,037 trees.³⁵ In the summary of 2009-2013, this number increased to

³³ John Nicholson, “Homemade Heat,” *Outdoor Indiana* 48 (9): 16 (1983).

³⁴ “Secluded Owen-Putnam State Forest Is An Ideal Destination For Area Outdoor Enthusiasts,” *Spencer Evening World*, September 28, 2010.

³⁵ Department of Natural Resources—Division of Forestry, “Report of Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI),” Page 47, Accessed on November 11, 2015, http://www.state.in.us/dnr/forestry/files/fo-CFI_Report_2008-12.pdf.

16,017,024 trees.³⁶ In the latest inventory, which included years 2010-2014, the number of trees in the forest increased to 16,170,212 trees.³⁷ Today, “active timber harvests are ‘restricted areas’ and are closed to the public for safety reasons.”³⁸

In the 1940s, Dutch Elm Disease – a fungal disease that affects elm trees, sometimes killing them – plagued Indiana trees. Beginning on March 17, 2012, rules about bringing one’s own firewood to the state forest were also updated.³⁹ They stated that you can only bring firewood onto the site if it met certain qualifications. It could be brought to the site if it was kiln-dried scrap lumber, if it was from your home or another Indiana location and had all bark removed, or if it was purchased from a store, local vendor or property camp store and had a compliance stamp.⁴⁰

It is important to follow these strict regulations because there are many invasive species that can plague trees, including the hemlock woolly adelgid, the Asian gypsy moth, and the emerald ash borer. These species could be introduced to the healthy population of trees if proper care is not taken. For example, woolly adelgid, a pest that plagues spruce and hemlock trees, has been seen in Indiana.⁴¹ It is vital that extra precaution is taken when choosing what firewood to bring to the state forest. The gypsy moth is a major problem for hardwood trees. It eats the leaves of them and could easily be brought to the grounds on timber that has not been properly

³⁶ Department of Natural Resources—Division of Forestry, “Report of Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI),” Page 47, Accessed on November 11, 2015, http://www.state.in.us/dnr/forestry/files/fo-State_Forest_CFI_Report_2009_2013.pdf.

³⁷ Department of Natural Resources—Division of Forestry, “Report of Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI),” Page 47, Accessed on November 11, 2015, http://www.state.in.us/dnr/forestry/files/fo-State_Forest_CFI_Report_2010_2014.pdf.

³⁸ “In a Nutshell: Owen-Putnam State Forest,” *Indiana Department of Natural Resources – Division of Forestry*, Accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/files/fo-OPSF_news.pdf.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Forest Health Protection—Hemlock Woolly Adelgid,” *US Forest Service*, Accessed November 9, 2015, <http://na.fs.fed.us/fhp/hwa/>.

inspected and bark removed.⁴² The same could be said for the emerald ash borer, which is a beetle that infects ash trees and prevents the flow of nutrients in the tree.⁴³

These rules about the care and regulation of timber in the forest are in place so that the land can harvest healthy timber and maintain the forest's overall quality. It would be easy for unassuming visitors to bring unhealthy timber onto the site and compromise the well-being of the current trees in the forest, and this would be devastating, seeing the hard work of many people fail, because the forest has come such a long way since the 1940s. Therefore, rules must be strict when it comes to timber in state forests.

Service Building

As of 1986, Owen-Putnam had never had any public buildings on its property. There were plans, however, to build a service building at the campground entrance. The plan was for the building to contain maintenance facilities and an office for public visitors.⁴⁴ This service building ended up being "built and occupied" in 1987.⁴⁵ It is very helpful to have a place the visitors feel they can receive important information for their visit, and maintenance is a vital part of forest rehabilitation. Thus, this building was a necessary addition.

Owen-Putnam Today

There are some differences in the Owen-Putnam State Forest of today and the Owen-Putnam State Forest as it once was, but a surprising amount of the forest has remained the same.

⁴² "Asian Gypsy Moth," *Don't Move Firewood*, Accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/gallery-of-pests/asian-gypsy-moth.html-0>.

⁴³ "Emerald Ash Borer," *Don't Move Firewood*, Accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/gallery-of-pests/emerald-ash-borer.html>.

⁴⁴ Mike Hayes, "Ridgetops and Ravines: A get-away-from-it-all-campground," *Outdoor Indiana* 51 (7): 12-14 (1986).

⁴⁵ John Datena, "Division of Forestry," *Outdoor Indiana* 53 (1): 12 (1988).

It allows hunting, hiking, mountain biking on a six-mile trail, and fishing in its many ponds.⁴⁶ There are twenty-five primitive campsites and fifteen horsemen campsites as well.⁴⁷ Most importantly, the forest remains dedicated to the production of healthy timber crops. In honor of the original -vision for this forest to cover 50,000 acres of land, the Owen-Putnam State Forest should continue to be expanded in order to continue its legacy of providing both timber and recreational space for Indiana residents. Since the volume of trees in Owen-Putnam is continuously increasing, it should remain a state forest. It is evident that efforts are made to keep this forest flourishing, so to alter the primary use of Owen-Putnam State Forest would be counterproductive.

Selmier State Forest

Selmier State Forest is located in North Vernon, Indiana. It contains 355 acres⁴⁸ and was a gift to the state from Mrs. Selmier in honor of her late husband, Frank Selmier. There are three buildings on the property of Selmier. There is a Boy Scout cabin, the Zoar school, which was converted to a church, and a home site that sits off of Walnut Trail. "There are no public restrooms, camping, picnicking, swimming, horse trails or boat launching facilities available."⁴⁹

Frank Selmier loved the outdoors. In 1919, he bought land that would eventually become Selmier State Forest. "When Frank bought the Jennings County property, it had been abandoned for some time and contained only the ruins of a small 1849 settlement known as Zoar village...

⁴⁶ "Owen-Putnam State Forest," *State Parks*, Accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.stateparks.com/owenputnam.html>.

⁴⁷ "Owen-Putnam State Forest," *Indiana Department of Natural Resources*, Accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/4815.htm>.

⁴⁸ "Selmier State Forest," *State Parks*, Accessed April 23, 2015, http://www.stateparks.com/selmier_state_forest_in_indiana.html.

⁴⁹ "Selmier State Forest," *Indiana Department of Natural Resources*, Accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/4818.htm>.

Zoar village apparently was built by a German Baptist sect, which had dissolved or moved on.”⁵⁰

The houses that were once part of this village sat along the Muscatatuck River bluff.

These houses, as it turns out, were a result of quite a journey taken by a group of Baptists. In the summer of 1834, a group of people living near Vernon began to gather at John H. Wagner’s home. The nearest Baptist church was in Vernon, but it was six miles from these villagers. After meeting for a year, they decided it was time to become an organized church. They decided that in order to stand out from the other Baptist churches, they would name their church “Zoar.” William Vawter became the first pastor, and the journey began. In 1839, an official church was built, but eight years later, the group decided to move to a new location. In 1849, the settlement was created. The villagers moved on in 1866, abandoning the village that Frank Selmier would inhabit one day.⁵¹

After purchasing the land in 1919, Frank began to develop his new property. He built a bungalow where he could reside as well as “outbuildings that included a caretaker house and a small filling station for delivery trucks going to Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Louisville,” which were places in which he did business in the rental linen industry. Frank also installed a water system that included “a series of ponds that produced potable water for the house and swimming pool.”⁵²

He then developed Selmier even more in 1921. “He planted several acres on this property of pine, black locust, black walnut, sycamore and tuliptree from 1921 to 1934. Most of

⁵⁰ Jennings County Historical Society, *Jennings County, Indiana: 1816-1999* (Nashville, Paducah: Turner, 1999, 2005), 55.

⁵¹ “Jennings County, Indiana Church History,” *Genealogy Trails History Group*, Accessed September 25, 2015, <http://genealogytrails.com/ind/jennings/church.htm>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the property was placed in Indiana's Classified Forest Program between 1927 and 1931.”⁵³ This allowed his private forest to receive tax breaks,⁵⁴ which in turn allowed him to plant even more trees on the property because of the extra money he saved from the tax reductions.⁵⁵

The February 1934 issue of *Outdoor Indiana* explained this concept of using tax savings to buy more trees and reforest their land as a permanent timber crop, and it pointed out that Frank Selmier's land in Jennings County was “the most outstanding experiment of this practice.”⁵⁶ *Outdoor Indiana* also reported, “Mr. Selmier, one of the oldest tree planters and classified woodland owners, is developing a forest and game preserve several miles northeast of North Vernon. Mr. Selmier reports the mixed plantings of hardwoods and evergreens proved to be excellent winter cover for all types of birds and animal life.”⁵⁷

Frank's third wife, Stella Beatty, lived with him at Selmier until he died in 1941.⁵⁸ She donated the forest to the state of Indiana in 1944 on behalf of her husband. In *The Plain Dealer*, the Republican newspaper of North Vernon, it explained that according to Frank's will, the tract was supposed to go to the state after Mrs. Selmier's death, but Stella “put through a deal whereby the state came into possession of the property” after Mr. Selmier's death. It was then that the forest officially became known as Selmier State Forest. It was operated as an experimental forest, due to its small size. There was evergreen planting experiments, and the growth of the forest was studied.⁵⁹

⁵³ “Selmier State Forest,” *Indiana Department of Natural Resources*, Accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/4818.htm>.

⁵⁴ “Classified Forest Program,” *Indiana Department of Natural Resources*, Accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/4595.htm>.

⁵⁵ “Reforestation—A Timely Topic,” *Outdoor Indiana* 1(1): 12 (1934).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Jennings County Historical Society, *Jennings County, Indiana: 1816-1999* (Nashville, Paducah: Turner, 1999, 2005), 55.

⁵⁹ “Selmier Estate Now State Property,” *The Plain Dealer*, December 14, 1944.

Forrest T. Miller

In February of 1945, *The Plain Dealer* announced that the head forester moved from Brownstown, and the new headquarters was placed in Selmier State Forest. It explained that F.T. Miller, the district forester, lived in the residence on the estate and use it as the forestry office. It also gave the description of the work F.T. Miller did with forestry in Indiana: "The district forester has supervision over fire protection work in fourteen counties of South-Eastern Indiana. He also has charge of forest management in twenty-two counties. In the fire protection work he has charge of the organization of civilian fire wardens and civilian and high school fire fighting crews. In the farm management work he confers with land owners on tree planting problems and forest classification."⁶⁰

In the years of World War II, many aspects of life were majorly affected. Even timber levels became low during this time. In June of 1945, Forrest T. Miller urged farmers to market their timber and "come to the rescue." He explained that there was a "critical shortage of lumber at the present time for both military and civilian requirements... He advises that the present crisis in war timber production cannot be solved unless the timber owners and the timber industry use their combined efforts to produce more."⁶¹ He also stressed that good forestry was practiced at the same time that timber was being sold, as long as only large, mature timber was being cut.

He advised the farmers to use specific techniques in order to practice good forest management while also helping with the timber shortage. "...remove old mature timber that is showing dead limbs at the top; remove timber which has defects due to fire damage to the stump or wind breakage at the top; fell timber carefully so that young seedlings and saplings are not

⁶⁰ "Head Forester Now Located In This County," *The Plain Dealer*, February 8, 1945.

⁶¹ "Forester Tells of Timber Needs," *The Plain Dealer*, June 21, 1945.

damaged; cut climbing vines which are strangling good, young poplar, walnut, oak... protect all of the woods from fire.”⁶²

In 1946, Forrest T. Miller was in charge of a farm forestry program that launched that year. This program covered a ten-county area, which included Jennings County, and operated out of a farm forestry office that was being built in North Vernon. This program was implemented because Indiana needed to further develop, manage, and utilize its forest resources, which included “reforestation of thousands of acres of land no longer suitable for farming.”⁶³

The farm forestry program was carried out in phases, beginning with the expansion of nurseries to provide trees for the reforestation of thousands of acres. Next, efforts to protect the existing woodland from fires were increased because these fires could destroy thousands of acres. Farm lots were also protected from grazing damage. Then, an emphasis was placed on educating the community about forestry problems and solutions for individual landowners. Finally, the Classified Forest Program was promoted.⁶⁴

Miller focused on getting the landowners in the area interested in reforestation, management of grazing and farm utilization, and the other phases involved with the program. He offered technical advice to those farmers interested in further developing the program. Finally, Mr. Miller was in charge of fire towers, as well as the fire protection system of ten counties and Selmier State Forest.⁶⁵

Winter Storm

On Saturday, February 25, 1961, a terrible sleet and snow storm hit Indiana, and it affected several counties, including Jennings County. The pine trees at Selmier were damaged

⁶² “Forester Tells of Timber Needs,” *The Plain Dealer*, June 21, 1945.

⁶³ “Farm Forestry Program Launched,” *The Plain Dealer*, May 2, 1946.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ “Farm Forestry Program Launched,” *The Plain Dealer*, May 2, 1946.

due to wind and ice and “were left in a tangle of overthrown, leaning and broken-off trees.”⁶⁶ It was reported that “trails were blocked in several places in the forest by fallen trees.”⁶⁷ Storms such as this one are significant because if enough damage is caused, progress could be hindered, and the progress of reforestation and conservation slowed.

Woodland Demonstration Area Program

In 1975, Indiana developed a program that allowed people to take tours of certain forests to see what practices were in place there. They could also learn “how the woodlands of Indiana should be managed for a continuous production of wood products.”⁶⁸ This program was entitled *Woodland Demonstration Area Program*, and Selmier was one of the forests that contained a demonstration area.

This was a very clever idea for many reasons. It taught residents the basic rules of conservation so that they could help ensure that there would not be another timber shortage like the one that occurred during World War II. It also allowed people to put these practices to use on their own property. Education was an important step toward the preservation of forests.

Recent Years

While Selmier State Forest has continually kept timber production as its focus through the years, notable events did not always happen. In 2008, however, Selmier had an opportunity to greatly impact Indiana heritage. A tornado hit the historical Moscow Covered Bridge in Rush County. It was Selmier State Forest that came to the rescue in 2009, providing twenty-six massive white pine trees in order to rebuild the bridge. Rob McGriff, the District Forester, noted,

⁶⁶ “Ice Damage,” *Outdoor Indiana* 4 (12): 8 (1961).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ John F. Datena, “Indiana’s Woodland Demonstration Areas,” *Outdoor Indiana* 40 (7): 30 (1975).

“This is pretty neat... I can’t wait to see the new covered bridge. When it’s rebuilt, it will have a little bit of Jennings County in it ”⁶⁹ He also explained that some of the trees being used for the restoration were approximately 58 years old, so there was even a possibility that they were planted by Frank Selmier himself.⁷⁰ His hard work truly paid off because he made history by planting the trees, and he ultimately helped preserve an Indiana county’s heritage by creating the legacy that is Selmier State Forest.

In the twenty-first century, the foresters at Selmier continue to strive to ensure the healthy growth of its trees. As far as timber production, the continuous forest inventories in the past few years have shown that the net volume of trees in Selmier has ultimately increased. In the years 2008-2012, the net volume of trees (in cubic feet), was 823,781.⁷¹ In the years 2009-2013, this number remained the same.⁷² In the most recent inventory, including the years 2010-2014, the number increased to 914,421 trees.⁷³ Since this number increased, this land should continue to be utilized as a state forest. The foresters examine the current state of each section of land and prepare for the future, setting goals to ensure that Frank Selmier’s vision is not lost. There is an updated Stewardship Plan for 2014, and it places a high importance on a few different aspects of forestry. It notes that the forest strives to provide opportunities for the education and research of natural resources. It also has set a goal to “demonstrate natural resources stewardship options for

⁶⁹ Bryce Mayer, “From Selmier to covered bridge,” *Plain Dealer-Sun*, November 30, 2009.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Department of Natural Resources—Division of Forestry, “Report of Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI),” Page 47, Accessed on November 11, 2015, http://www.state.in.us/dnr/forestry/files/fo-CFI_Report_2008-12.pdf.

⁷² Department of Natural Resources—Division of Forestry, “Report of Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI),” Page 47, Accessed on November 11, 2015, http://www.state.in.us/dnr/forestry/files/fo-State_Forest_CFI_Report_2009_2013.pdf.

⁷³ Department of Natural Resources—Division of Forestry, “Report of Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI),” Page 47, Accessed on November 11, 2015, http://www.state.in.us/dnr/forestry/files/fo-State_Forest_CFI_Report_2010_2014.pdf.

the benefit of the resource, professionals, and private landowners of Indiana.”⁷⁴ Finally, as expected, it continues to push for improved timber production as well as wildlife habitats.⁷⁵ Goals such as these are the reason Selmier has been extremely successful and will continue to make history.

Selmier is unique because of its history, not recreation. If one enjoys the story behind a place, then Selmier would be wonderful to visit. Although it is smaller in size, it still has activities of interest for many people. Its close proximity to other campgrounds as well as the Muscatatuck River also makes it appealing. If one is not a hunter, hiker, or fish enthusiast, the historical aspect of this forest alone is enough to make one have a deep appreciation for it. While Selmier would make a decent park due to its history, it should remain as a state forest simply because activities such as rebuilding the covered bridge in Rush County would not be possible if the forest were to be changed to a nature preserve.

Owen-Putnam and Selmier

Both Owen-Putnam and Selmier are small state forests, so one might wonder if they are truly necessary. Should we have state forests this minor, or should we just convert them to state parks or nature preserves? From a conservation and historical point of view, it is crucial to maintain all state forests possible, even the slightest of them all.

Net timber volume in both forests has increased in recent years, making it clear that the focus of these forests has remained on timber production. Clearly the actions being taken in both forests have proven to yield successful results, so it makes sense that both remain as state forests. Both Owen-Putnam and Selmier state forests appear to be doing their part to promote

⁷⁴ Don Carlson and Rob McGriff, “Stewardship Plan,” *Purdue Agriculture Center*, November 2014.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

conservation and the effective stewardship of the land. It will be vital that in future years, both forests continue to increase their volume so that the trees can remain plentiful, even after timber harvests are conducted.

Nature preserves do promote the conservation of wildlife and flora, and they are even used to aid in research. State parks provide wonderful means of recreation for all ages. It is vital to realize that state forests, however, provide recreation, conservation, and timber production all at once. As mentioned in the Owen-Putnam State Forest segment, wild turkeys were re-established in the forest. It provided a means of re-population for the turkeys. The recreation capabilities are plentiful, with hunting, hiking, biking, fishing and horseback riding. The forest also strives to increase timber production, which in turn leads to a much healthier environment. Why would we ever want to convert an area of land used for so many important aspects of life? It would simply be a mistake. The staff who maintain these forests are skilled at forest management and know the best practices to maximize potential growth. If converted to state parks, timber would not be harvested, which would cause a loss of revenue from forest products.

Since the early 1900s, many dedicated individuals have worked hard to renew the quality of this land, and to change its purpose would have devastating consequences. Considering the trees provide shelter for animals, shade to prevent soil erosion, absorb carbon dioxide while releasing oxygen, and help to combat climate change, it is crucial that we continue to maintain state forests.

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