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Comments:

LET NATURE BE: Humans cannot manufacture old growth forest. The best way to restore old growth forest within the HNF and many other eastern national forests is for the Forest Service to simply leave mature forests alone and study them to gain a better understanding of how mature eastern hardwood forest returns to the old growth condition and how old growth forest will respond to climate change.

STOP BURNING CENTRAL HARDWOOD FORESTS: Tell the USDA that it must restrain the Forest Service from its plans to conduct prescribed burns throughout the HNF and other eastern national forests until it has established a scientific, factual record that fire was a significant natural disturbance agent in the central hardwoods and should not allow prescribed burning otherwise. The map below of areas prone to fire disturbance in the U.S. demonstrates that Indiana is in the heart of the region least prone to fire.

(New York Times, May 17, 2022, Source: First Street Foundation

STOP LOGGING MATURE HARDWOOD FORESTS: Tell the USDA that other than for the removal of nonnative invasive vegetation, vegetative management, i.e., cutting or thinning native trees and understory, is exactly what will prevent hardwood forest from returning to the old growth condition in the HNF and other eastern national forests.

Much of the forest within the HNF is a century or more old and only a few decades at most from returning to the old growth condition. Tell the USDA not to let the Forest Service retard the restoration of old growth forests by cutting mature forests under the ruse of "forest health" or making old growth forest "more resilient", particularly in national forests like the HNF where there is abundant mature forest but very little undisputed old growth forest.

MONITOR MATURE AND OLD GROWTH FOREST: The Notice is correct in concluding that "geographically-informed adaptive implementation strategies" should be used to manage mature and old growth forests across US national forests. Given there is so little old growth eastern hardwood forest, the Forest Service should stop assuming it knows all there is to know about such forest. Tell the Forest Service that rather than spending most of its budget on logging and burning programs, you agree with the contention in the Notice that, "Consistent and effective monitoring of current and future old-growth forest conditions over time would better inform adaptive management." This monitoring should document that the agency's management is allowing significantly more old growth forest to return to the HNF and other eastern national forests.