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Comments: This comment is to encourage the U.S. Forest Service to not move forward with a project that would clear-cut 1,600 acres in the Wayne National Forest.

The Sunny Oaks Project project will destroy older oak trees and is unlikely to regrow new oaks, and that it is a violation of the Wayne's 2006 Forest Plan.

Oak trees are considered an ecological powerhouse, producing acorns that many birds, bears, and other species rely on, and hosting hundreds of species of insects.

A report by the White Oak Initiative, a cooperative project of industry and forestry groups, finds that white oaks could decline significantly in the next 10 to 15 years, and largely disappear from American forests in the coming decades.

The report cites a variety of reasons for this, including climate change, invasive insects and diseases, making it more difficult for oak saplings to become fully-grown trees.

Oak regrowth after clear-cutting only works if the oak trees already have well-established roots, and there is concern because the Forest Service doesn't have the data to know that.

The Oak tree is really disappearing, and It responds very poorly to clear-cutting, to other forms of heavy industrial timbering. There is real evidence that the agency isn't following its own forest plan for the Wayne. The plan requires the agency to maintain 12 trees with loose bark per acre, like oaks and hickories, to provide habitat for endangered Indiana bats.

The Ohio Environmental Council also has brought up an issue that the Sunny Oaks Project would destroy what it calls the "wood wide web" in sections of the Wayne National Forest.

The wood wide web refers to the mycorrhizal fungal network that communicates with trees underground.

Johnson argued that the importance of these networks is now well-established science.

These mycorrhizal networks are especially sensitive to clear-cutting, so if the agency goes in and clear-cuts a white oak ecosystem, it's destroying not only the trees but the soil that these trees depend on.

The Sunny Oaks project would also greatly impact my enjoyment of the Wayne National Forest and destroy needed habitat for wildlife including the endangered Indiana bats. Therefore, again, I urged this plan to be abandoned.

Jill Hunkler

Executive Director,

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