

STATE PARKS AND SCIENCE

Senate Bill 270 and House Bill 4182, introduced by Governor Justice will allow logging in our state parks. This will cause damage to numerous bird, plant, and amphibian species, our growing tourism industry, and our state's image on the national scene. But a lesser known loser due to Governor Justice's bills is scientific research. Many state and federal agencies, private consulting firms, colleges, and universities depend upon mature forested environments in our state parks to act as research benchmarks to contrast with more disturbed landscapes. Research categories that depend upon such benchmarks are numerous and varied, such as forest health, nutrient-cycling, wildlife habitat needs, invasive species monitoring, air quality, and water quality.

As a good example of how state park forests contribute to research needs, consider the following. The WV Dept. of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) monitors the condition of stream health statewide. To do this, the agency must keep track of stream sites that have reference conditions, that is, the best of the best. These reference sites are located in mature-forested watersheds with few human disturbances. Twelve of the WVDEP's reference sites are located on nine state parks and four of those are long-term monitoring sites, which makes their protection even more necessary to our understanding of water quality changes over time throughout the Mountain State and the Appalachian Mountains region.

Other agencies, like the WV Dept. of Highways and the US Army Corps of Engineers, utilize the data from these reference sites and others that they monitor on state parks to help steer their environmental programs. Many environmental consultants who provide services to engineering, manufacturing, mineral extraction, and other firms depend upon the data from these reference sites and other reference sites that they have established on the parks. Universities and colleges, both in-state and out-of-state, also depend upon reference sites, streams and watersheds in WV state parks for their research. Consequently, state park reference sites located in mature-forested watersheds support many jobs across a wide spectrum of position types, from college-intern field-grunts to high-level state, federal, and private-sector program administrators. It is precisely the long-term protected condition of the forests on these state park streams that gives these research interests surety that the reference conditions will remain relatively stable and free of short-term changes.

State parks comprise only 0.6% of our state's forested land, but they are immensely important for scientific research. Most of the park system's forests, so necessary for important research projects, have been protected since the 1920s and 1930s. Logging them now will turn these benchmark forests into just another muddy, splintered mess that encourages invasive multi-flora rose, autumn olive, and tree-of-heaven; plants that farmers and other private landowners are desperately trying to eradicate from their own lands adjacent to the state parks. Should we convert these sources of clean water and air, rare birds and plants, and tourism dollars to sources of invasive species, muddy streams, and tourist-void zones? Let's work together to find another way to fund the much-needed infrastructure in our parks.

Contact Governor Justice and let him know how you feel about logging in our state parks:
Toll free = 888-438-2731 or local = 304-558-2000, and Governor's Mansion = 304-558-3588.

For more information, check out this website: <http://wvivers.org/sosparks/>

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