



THE CLASSIFIED FOREST AND WILDLANDS PROGRAM

A Classified Forest and Wildlands tract is an area of at least 10.0 contiguous acres of forest or non-forest wildlife habitat where the landowner has agreed (by application) to be a good steward of the land and its natural resources. In return, the State of Indiana agrees to see that the assessed value of the land is significantly reduced and taxed on that preferential assessment. The land is managed for timber production, wildlife habitat, and the protection of watersheds, while conserving other natural resources and values.

Eligible lands may be either native forests containing at least 40 square feet of basal area per acre or at least 1,000 timber-producing trees (any size) per acre. Tree plantations with at least 400 well-established timber-producing trees are also eligible to be classified. Wildlands can include natural or planted grasslands, wetlands, native woody vegetation, or areas of open water averaging less than 4 feet in depth or less than 2 acres in size.

Certain activities cannot take place on Classified Forest and Wildlands:

- Grazing by domestic livestock
- Building of houses, sheds, etc.
- Intentional burning unless prescribed under a written management plan
- Growing Christmas trees

Other activities are allowed and are encouraged when appropriate to meet the landowner's goals and objectives for the land. These activities, however, must not be conducted in a manner detrimental to the health and productivity of the property or its watershed. Allowed activities include:

- Wildlife management
- Maintenance of access roads and trails
- Timber harvesting
- Firewood cutting
- Horseback riding
- Hiking
- Hunting

PRIMARY BENEFITS TO THE CLASSIFIED LAND OWNER

- Reduced property taxes
- Regular inspection by a professional forester
- Annual newsletter and forest and wildlife management literature
- Timber harvested recognized as *“Green Certified”*

CLASSIFIED FOREST AND WILDLANDS FAQ

How long does the land remain in classification?

Indefinitely, unless an owner legally withdraws the land, or the state forester removes the classification because of non-compliance. If land is withdrawn, the current owner incurs penalties.

Can I build a home or have a trailer?

Permanent buildings larger than 4 feet by 4 feet are not permitted within the classified forest boundary. A building can be on the same parcel if it is excluded from the classified forest boundary. Trailers can be used on the property temporarily for weekend getaways. Trailers may not stay within the classified boundary year-round.

How does sale or inheritance of land affect classified land?

Properties stay classified indefinitely. Classification stays with the land not the landowner. The property will remain classified through inheritance and sales. Owners are required to disclose what areas are classified and if there are any violations to any interested buyers. The new owner assumes the program's benefits and responsibilities. If a classified tract is divided, a revised application for each parcel must be filed with the district forester. If acreage split off is under 10 acres, the land is withdrawn from the program.

Do I have to do anything each year to keep up my classification?

Landowners are required to fill out and return their annual report. Landowners are expected to work on improving the health of their forest. This may include maintaining trails, killing invasive species, completing forest/timber stand improvement, disking wildlife habitat, planting native species, improving shelter for critters, and/or harvesting timber sustainably.

Does the landowner have to obtain permission from the Division of Forestry to cut or sell timber?

Any harvest on classified forest needs to improve the health of the forest. A timber harvest that decreases future timber value is prohibited. Although a good idea, the landowner does not need to contact their district forester before harvesting. Unless landowner is also enrolled in FSC Green Certification program. However, landowner must include timber harvest information on their next annual report form. The landowner must ensure that the harvest maintains forest productivity and required tree stocking. Professional consulting foresters provide forest management services including timber marking and timber sale administration.

What types of land can be classified?

Native forests, forest plantations, wetlands, areas of native grass and herbaceous plants, and areas of water less than 2 acres in size or less than 4 feet in average water depth. Your district forester or district wildlife biologist will help you determine eligible areas. Wildlife habitat requires management to qualify.

CLASSIFIED FOREST AND WILDLANDS FAQ

What are some types of land that may not be classified?

Agricultural land is not eligible for classification. Land that is primarily populated by exotic, invasive plant species, or is being actively cultivated for non-timber agricultural crops is not eligible. Christmas tree plantations or orchards are not eligible for classification.

Can I have cows, goats, or other livestock?

No. Land that is being grazed by domestic livestock or other confined animals is not eligible for classification. A fence will be needed to keep livestock out of classified area.

Where can I get management advice?

District foresters can provide land management advice. If you have specific wildlife management questions, contact a district wildlife biologist. DNR employees do not complete work on private property. Private consultant foresters are available for a fee for more detailed service or to implement management activities, such as timber sales and forest restoration projects. The district forester can provide the Indiana Forestry and Woodland Owners Association's (IFWOA) Directory of Professional Foresters.

Does program enrollment mean my property is now open for public access?

No. The landowner retains sole ownership. Anyone who does not receive permission for access is trespassing. Access must be granted to the Division of Forestry for regular inspections.

Can I have trails through my classified land?

Yes. Trails for hiking, horses and off-road vehicles are acceptable as long as the activity does not destroy the health and productivity of the area or cause significant erosion.

Will enrollment in the program protect my land from future development?

Only to a small degree. A landowner can withdraw from the program at any time if they are willing to pay the back taxes and associated withdrawal penalties. Look into conservation easements for development protection.

How do I enroll my property?

Contact your district forester. They will walk the property and create a stewardship plan that helps the landowner meet their objectives. Your district forester will also provide a map of eligible land and enrollment application. The landowner will then hire a surveyor to draw a plat and write a description for eligible land. The surveyor can complete their part from an office. A physical survey is not needed. Then the application is signed and recorded at the courthouse.

How much will it cost to withdraw land?

Up to 10 years of back taxes, plus 10% interest will be due. If the property is enrolled after 2006, additional penalties of \$100, plus \$50 per acre will be due for land withdrawn. The amount due is based on soil productivity. The county assessor or auditor calculates payment of back taxes.

HOW TO ENTER THE PROGRAM

Contact your district forester to let him/her know you are interested in putting your land into Classification. An initial inspection of your property will be done to determine whether it meets the eligibility requirements. A written management plan, which may be prepared by the district forester or by a wildlife biologist or professional forester, is required prior to application. This plan puts into writing a description of the land, your goals for the land, and prescribes how to reach those goals over the next 5-10 years. This plan is flexible, and may change as your objectives change and/or the property develops over time. The prescription(s) will always take into account the health and productivity of the property as activities are done to reach your goals.

The actual Classified Forest and Wildlands application must be taken to a registered land surveyor, who will write an exact description of the area being classified. This can usually be done by providing an aerial photograph and a copy of your deed to the surveyor. An 'on-the-ground' survey is not required. The cost may vary according to the complexity of the survey and the surveyor. You will also need to sign the application. The county assessor must also sign the application, along with the State Forester. Once these signatures have been completed, the document must be recorded in the county courthouse where the land is located.

REINSPECTIONS

At least once every seven years, the District Forester or a representative will be out to look over your classified property (at no cost). You are encouraged to go along on these reinspections to ask questions of the forester and to discuss your goals for the classified land. The forester will look at the area to see how it is progressing, to be sure there are no violations occurring, and to help you update your management plan. A written report will be provided to you after the reinspection. You are also required to fill out and return an annual report that is used by the District Forester to keep up-to-date records of your classified land.

POSTING YOUR LAND

The District Forester will provide signs to you (at no cost) which you must post around your classified property. The signs clearly state that the area is private property and a Classified Forest and Wildlands property. By placing your woodlands in the program, you are not giving up your private property rights, or surrendering control of who accesses your property. The Classified Forest and Wildlands designation does not open your land to public hunting.

SELLING OR TRANSFERRING THE LAND

Whenever the classified land is transferred to a new owner, the classified status remains intact. The same benefits and responsibilities are transferred to the new owner. If the new owner does not wish to participate in the program, they may withdraw the land from the program. **You must notify the District Forester when the land changes hands. If the land is withdrawn from classification (voluntarily or involuntarily), the back taxes (up to 10 years), plus a 10% per year interest penalty, must be paid to the county. If not, it is considered a lien against the property and it is treated in the same manner that delinquent taxes on real property are treated. Properties that are entered in the Classified Forest and Wildlands program after June 30, 2006 are subject to an additional withdrawal penalty of \$100 per withdrawal and \$50 per acre withdrawn.** Classified properties that are divided into 2 or more separate tracts must maintain at least 10.0 acres of eligible land in each tract to remain classified. In addition a revised application describing the new tract boundaries must be filed with the district forester.