LAND ACQUISITION

The days of major land acquisition that occurred with the state forest properties from the 1930's through the early 1960's are unlikely to occur again in the near future. For the last few decades, there has been very limited land acquisition. Since the early 1960's, the state forest system has not received a regular supply of land acquisition funding. What little land acquisition did occur came about through donations, special funding from the legislature, or by selling outholdings. Within the past few years, however, the state legislature and governor have supported the Indiana Heritage Trust Program. Funded through Environmental License Plates and legislative appropriations, Heritage Trust has provided a small but regular source of funding for state forest land acquisition. This, combined with small, intermittent allotments to the Division Land Acquisition account allows the consolidation of state forest holdings.

A primary goal of state forest land acquisition is the consolidation of existing state forest holdings. This reduces conflicts with neighbors, improves management, and reduces property lines. Another major goal is to obtain viable access to all state forest holdings. This improves the management of the holdings, and increases the recreation opportunities for state forest users.

General Land Acquisition and Transfers

In general, all land acquisition and other land transactions are handled through the Division of Land Acquisition. The Property Specialist is the primary liaison with the Division of Land Acquisition with general land interest transfer situations.

Land acquisition is almost always done with willing sellers. Offers made to purchase are based on appraisals. An offer cannot be more than an appraisal unless it can be documented that some value has changed or was missed by appraisal. Offers can be less than the appraisal, but the seller must be informed of the appraisal amount. The Division of Forestry will generally purchase property at the appraised value.

Indiana Heritage Trust Land Acquisition

The Division of Forestry plans to use the Heritage Trust Program to acquire large pieces of property that benefit and/or simplify property management, improve the management of some property programs, reduce or simplify property lines and contain unique/special species, communities, or features in relation to the mission of the state forests. In general, these are parcels that would be the primary targets of any major land acquisition program. Emphasis will be given to those projects that best meet the objectives described above. Projects that pull in additional financial partners, particularly with respect to the IHT Discretionary Account will also be given some preference.

Prior to submitting a parcel for acquisition, a property is expected to have thoroughly inspected the parcel, and checked the use of the land and if there are any structures. To propose a parcel for Heritage Trust acquisition, the property must complete a Forestry Land Acquisition Request Form. This form and requested attachments should be complete. All sellers must be willing, and must be contacted by the property prior to submission. In addition, properties should be prepared with county commissioner names and their official address for the counties parcels are submitted for. This is sent to the Property Specialist at least two weeks prior to the IHT Project Quarterly Due Dates, which are February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1 of any year. The properties are encouraged to contact the Property Specialist prior to submitting the acquisition forms.

Properties are expected to be the primary contact with the selling landowner and/or his representative unless other arrangements are made with the Property Specialist. Properties should not have selling landowners/representatives contact the Division of Land Acquisition. Any questions regarding land acquisition should be relayed through the property to the Property Specialist.

Central Office staff will evaluate submitted parcels against each other and available funds to determine what is forwarded for the Heritage Trust process. Parcels may be combined to create projects for IHT. Properties will be notified that submitted parcels have been made a IHT project by receiving a copy of the IHT project form within two weeks after the Quarterly Due Dates. Those that receive no project form can assume no project was created for the parcels for that quarter. Also, properties will receive a copy of the letter to the county commissioners informing them of an IHT project in their county.

The property should be available to show submitted parcels to the Property Specialist. The submitted parcels may be visited twice - once for photos for the committee presentations, and once for Environmental Inventory to complete the Environmental Statement.

The IHT Project Committee meets approximately one month after the Due Dates. The IHT Trust Committee meets approximately six weeks after the Project Committee. The property can contact the Property Specialist for the status of a project through the committees.

The Division of Land Acquisition will order the title insurance and handle the appraisal process. The Property Specialist may assist with the presentation of offer paperwork.

Shortly after a parcel is purchased, Stewardship Account funds are available for minor management projects on the purchased parcels. Properties should work expeditiously to determine highest priority for use of these funds and to ensure they are spent. The funds must be used on projects that benefit the purchased parcel, but have considerable flexibility. Among the possibilities for use of the funds are building/improving roads and trails that access or go through parcels, tree planting or timber stand improvement, trash removal, and even limited surveying. Funds do not necessarily have to be used directly on the purchased parcel. For example, funds can be used to build a trail to a parcel. Properties should contact the Property Specialist to initiate use of these funds. The Property Specialist is responsible for tracking use of the

Stewardship funds.

Division of Forestry Land Acquisition Funds

The Division of Forestry has committed a portion of its dedicated funds toward land acquisition. Funds in this account will be used to purchase parcels of various sizes or easements (right of ingress and egress across land owned by someone else) that provide reasonable access to existing state forest property. These funds may be used to supplement large Heritage Trust projects.

Prior to submitting a parcel for acquisition, a property is expected to have thoroughly inspected the parcel and checked the use of the land and if there are any structures. To initiate a parcel for Forestry dedicated funds acquisition, the property must complete a Forestry Land Acquisition Request Form. This form and requested attachments should be complete. In addition, properties should be prepared with county commissioner names and their official address for the counties parcels are submitted for. This is sent to the Property Specialist when the information is complete. All sellers must be willing, and must be contacted by the property prior to submission. The property may contact the Property Specialist prior to submitting the form regarding the parcel.

Properties are expected to be the primary contact with the selling landowners and/or his representatives unless other arrangements are made with the Property Specialist. Properties should not have selling landowners/representatives contact the Division of Land Acquisition. Any questions regarding land acquisition should be relayed through the properties to the Property Specialist.

Central Office staff will evaluate submitted parcels/easements against each other and available funds to determine what is submitted for acquisition through the Division of Land Acquisition. The Property Specialist will contact the properties if parcels or easements are submitted for acquisition.

The property should be available to show submitted parcels to the Property Specialist. The submitted parcels may be visited twice - once for photos and review, and once for Environmental Inventory to complete the Environmental Statement. The property can contact the Property Specialist for the status of a project through the acquisition process.

The Division of Land Acquisition will order the title insurance and handle the appraisal process. The Property Specialist may assist with presenting the offer paperwork.

Other Land Acquisition Funds

Occasionally land acquisition can come through other sources. CRR funds can be earmarked for land acquisition. These will likely be large, special opportunities.

Land acquisition funds can come through partners or other sources. Common partners include the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Nature Conservancy, Indiana Trail Riders Association, and the Hoosier Hikers Council. Sometimes “funding” comes in the form of donations, partial or whole. This can be from outside groups or even from some landowners. Partners that provide funds or partial donations can be used as match in Heritage Trust projects. Some funds not directly associated with land acquisition can also be used as match. For example, tree planting grants from the Hardwood Forestry Fund can be used as Heritage Trust match.

Other Land Transactions

Occasionally there are other land transactions that properties may wish to conduct. One example is the disposal of outholdings. Properties considering other land transactions should contact the Property Specialist.

Section Bullet Summary

- The Indiana Heritage Trust Program provides substantial funds for acquiring critical parcels for the state forest properties. Stewardship funds provide for minor management projects on the purchased parcels.
- The Division of Forestry Acquisition Account contains limited funds used for the purchase of small parcels or easements.
- Other land transactions will be submitted to the Property Specialist.