

Honorable Senator Richard Durbin
711 Hart Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Durbin,

I urge you to support changing the designation of the 290,000-acre Shawnee National Forest, administered by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the **Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve**, under the oversight of the Department of the Interior, Park Service.

Mature deciduous forests, like those found in the Shawnee, store massive amounts of carbon, helping mitigate climate change. Since the Shawnee contains the largest single ownership of these carbon-trapping forests in Illinois, as well as diverse historic and scenic landscapes, clearly our best use of the Shawnee is keeping its unique natural and historic features intact.

Not all public land is protected. The USDA Forest Service is currently prepared to log more than 12,000 acres of the Shawnee's forests, employing non-selective, shelterwood logging practices. This process will release tons of climate-changing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Besides cooling the planet via carbon sequestration and storage, mature forests also provide physical cooling to a region. As a national forest, much of the Shawnee's land is also available for oil and gas development and even mining. Shade is cool and we need to keep our public forests standing.

The Midwest has few national parks. Tourism-based businesses and cottage industries are growing across Southern Illinois, with potential to provide positive economic growth to the region. A new national park and climate preserve would attract more regional tourism and bring long-term sustainable jobs and businesses to Southern Illinois.

This new designation will benefit our changing climate, wildlife, recreation users, and neighbors, while stimulating much-needed economic development in Southern Illinois. Climate preserves will serve as a vital tool in combating the climate emergency. Protecting the Shawnee from resource extraction merely involves transferring management responsibility of already federally owned land from the USDA to the Department of Interior, Park Service.

Unlike the USDA Forest Service, the National Park Service is mandated to provide quality recreational opportunities and to protect the natural and cultural values of the land in an unimpaired state. A new classification protecting more of the nation's forests for recreation and carbon sequestration while establishing the state's first national park would also serve the greatest good.

Please support and encourage federal legislation to establish the new **Shawnee National Park and the nation's first Climate Preserve**. *The Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve is Illinois Best Idea*

Sincerely,