



**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

***Laura Hare Charitable Trust***

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## **Dr. Laura Hare Charitable Trust Offers a Viable Option to Protect Indianapolis's Only Old Growth Forest – a Forest Slated for Its Own Burial at Crown Hill**

*The destruction of this unique, high quality forest is imminent without immediate action from the US Department of Veterans Affairs.*

INDIANAPOLIS – A rare and ecologically significant forest is being offered a second chance at survival. The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), as part of an expansion of the National Veterans Cemetery at Crown Hill Cemetery, plans to build a columbarium in which to inter the remains of some 25,000 veterans. This project, as proposed, involves the destruction of the only pre-settlement, characteristic old growth forest in Indianapolis, a rare 14.75 acre ecological and historical jewel. It is the last of its kind; known best for its many large, old trees, some dating back to before the area was settled. Previous development pressures have been thwarted by significant public opposition; however, the current proposal is on a fast path that may result in selective cutting before the year's end if the DVA doesn't change course.

In an effort to permanently protect the forest, the Laura Hare Charitable Trust (LHCT), a private foundation whose primary purpose is to protect and preserve ecologically significant land, recently presented the DVA with a negotiable offer to purchase the property and recover related expenses. Because the property's historic and inspiring trees are at the center of current public opposition to the project, the DVA has indicated that they may attempt to work around the largest of the trees. LHCT representatives remain concerned that while it is possible that this effort may salvage the many hundred-year-old trees that anchor the site, weaving development in an around them would essentially destroy the forest as a whole and risk the future health of the remaining trees. The uniqueness of the site's interdependent plant and animal communities have been acknowledged by scientists at state agencies, universities, and from the within the private sector. As one ecologist with the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves put it, "(Crown Hill's North Woods) is a relict

natural area, not a planting or 'restoration', but a true remnant of the once-vast hardwood forests of Indiana. ... This site carries inordinate biological and cultural value."

If allowed to purchase the property, the LHCT would make the site open to the public for passive recreation while preserving the forest intact. Lenore Tedesco, Chairperson for the Trust, commented, "The Laura Hare Charitable Trust is pleased to step forward to purchase the Crown Hill North Woods. The forested parcel is a true gem and represents a piece of Indiana's heritage. It is timeless and priceless. All of us honor and value our veterans and support the expansion of burial services for them. We believe there are more suitable locations and are hopeful that our offer to purchase the parcel from the VA will enable them to find a more suitable site for the development that can be celebrated by all."

The Trust hopes to hear from the DVA within the next few weeks. Several other community and environmental organizations share that hope. If the project continues to move forward as proposed, the residents of Indiana will lose one of only a handful of old growth characteristic hardwood forests remaining in the entire state. Moreover, the site is only one of a few dozen such tracts remaining in the entire lower Midwest. By all accounts, there is considerable cultural history inherent in remnant old growth forests like this one – a history that the LHCT is concerned will disappear along with the trees. Hare Trust representatives point out that it is the type of cultural heritage for which many soldiers have fought and died; thus, a cooperative solution would be a fitting tribute to them as well as to Laura Hare herself, who cherished her regular walks around the grounds of Crown Hill and is now buried there with her family.

### **ABOUT THE OLD GROWTH FOREST AT CROWN HILL:**

- Scientists writing for a 2006 Indiana Department of Natural Resources Site Assessment described the Crown Hill North Woods as an "Indiana tillplain flatwoods characterized by a mixed swamp forest with ephemeral wetlands ..." "The stand is complex in structure and species rich, indicating "old-growth" qualities." ... "As a true high quality remnant of Indiana's pre-settlement forest, this site carries inordinate biological and cultural value. In the context of Marion County, it is a very rare and special resource. Any alteration or modification of site is highly likely to impact its overall high integrity."
- As described in the coffee table book *Crown Hill: History, Spirit, and Sanctuary*, published in October 2013 by the Indiana Historical Society Press, Indianapolis' 555-acre Crown Hill Cemetery is a spiritual, historical, and ecological treasure. The North Woods of Crown Hill Cemetery (the site of the proposed columbarium) has its own chapter in the book, emphasizing the beauty and importance of this old-growth forest.
- The North Woods contain at least 47 species of trees and its interior is largely free of invasive plants.
- As a "pre-settlement remnant," the historic trees on the site have been largely undisturbed for some 300 years and contain the heritage gene pool of early Indiana, thus connecting the past with the present. The stand includes at least one burr oak tree with a 15-foot circumference, estimated to be several hundred years old.

- According to the City's parks plan statistics, greenspace is sorely lacking in Indianapolis. Loss of the Crown Hill woods would only exacerbate this. Tangible benefits of greenspace include personal respite and recreation, as well as wildlife habitat, clean air and clean water benefits, flood prevention, reduced stormwater runoff, and climate resiliency. One mature tree can consume 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and absorb up to 1,000 gallons of rainfall per year. There are hundreds of mature trees in Crown Hill's North Woods with dozens measuring more than four feet in diameter.
- For more information about the Woods and past activities, visit the Crown Hill Woods Initiative at <http://haretrust.org/mission.html>

### **ABOUT RELATED PAST EVENTS:**

- The City of Indianapolis' Metropolitan Development Commission halted developers' plans to develop this land in 2007.
- A public meeting held on September 29, 2016 drew more than 175 concerned citizens voicing objections to the DVA's project.
- A peaceful picket was conducted on November 16, 2016 to demonstrate continued public opposition to the development.

### **ABOUT LAURA HARE CHARITABLE TRUST:**

- The Laura Hare Charitable Trust is a private foundation whose primary purpose is to protect and preserve ecologically significant land through acquisition and grants to other qualified non-profits whose primary purpose is to protect and steward ecologically sensitive land.
- Since 2007, the Laura Hare Charitable Trust has made gifts in excess of \$1,000,000 for the acquisition of more than 2,300 acres of ecologically significant land in Indiana.
- Notable projects include the Blossom Hollow Nature Preserve in Johnson County and Turtle Bend Preserve in Parke County with the Central Indiana Land Trust.
- The Downey Hill Preserve in Brown County and additions to Patoka National Wildlife Refuge with the Sycamore Land Trust.
- Additionally, the Trust has funded nineteen ecological restoration projects totaling more than \$285,000 with Indy Parks, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and numerous area schools.
- The Trust's namesake, Laura Hare ('Lolly' as she was called by her friends) was a physician and long-time resident of Indianapolis. She held a PhD from the University of Chicago in Conservation Biology and studied at the famous tropical biology field station in Barro Colorado, Panama. Laura is buried in Crown Hill with her family. Crown Hill was always a special place for her as she frequently walked the grounds and enjoyed the woods. Trust representatives are certain that 'Lolly' would want to preserve these woods and the important heritage that they represent.
- For more information, visit <http://haretrust.org>

## **CONTACTS:**

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## **PHOTOS AVAILABLE AT:**

### **North Woods Photos –**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/139729494@N08/albums/72157672906416976>

### **September 2016 Public Meeting Photos**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/139729494@N08/albums/72157674456064136/with/29468169604/>