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Planned logging in Coopers Rock State Forest draws flak

By [Rick Steelhammer](#)

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Plans by the state Division of Forestry to log a 210-acre tract in Coopers Rock State Forest are drawing fire from area environmental groups, who maintain that the timber harvest would harm rare snail and bat species.

The Coopers Rock Forest Foundation and the Friends of Blackwater sent letters to the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the West Virginia Attorney General's office seeking to halt the proposed Scott II timber sale.

The groups also want state officials to conduct annual population studies for threatened and endangered species within 12,713-acre state forest before proceeding with any timbering projects there.

The Scott II sale was designed by the state Division of Forestry to help regenerate a variety of tree species and provide more diverse wildlife habitat and forest growth potential. The area to be timbered is located on the south side of the forest, between Raven Rock Trail and McCullum Campground.

The state forest is known to contain populations of the Cheat threetooth snail, known officially as the flat-spined three-toothed snail, considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be one of the world's rarest land snails.

The snail species, first identified in 1933, is found only in a section of the Cheat River Gorge, where it lives in cracks and crevices in sandstone cliffs and outcroppings and in nearby leaf litter. It is listed as a threatened species under the terms of the federal Endangered Species Act.

Barbara Breshock, state lands manager for the Division of Forestry, said Scott II project plans call for including 200-foot buffer zones around areas know to contain Cheat threetooth populations, and 150-foot zones around habitat capable of sustaining the rare snail.

"That goes beyond what's required and what's recommended by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," she said.

While Indiana bats are not known to hibernate within the state forest, the endangered bat species is known to spend summers at locations across West Virginia. The Coopers Rock Foundation and Friends of Blackwater maintain that the endangered bat is likely to be found in the Scott Run site during temperate months, but Breshock said mist net surveys have turned up no Indiana bats at the Coopers Rock site.

Logging takes place at all West Virginia state forests except Kanawha State Forest, where legislation banned that activity several years ago. A portion of Coopers Rock State Forest is set aside for use by WVU's forestry department for use as a research and demonstration area.

Coopers Rock State Forest, located about 12 miles east of Morgantown, is the largest state forest in West Virginia.

Portions of the Scott Run II project's boundaries have been marked, as have some of the buffer zones for the threatened snail. Bids have yet to be solicited for the 210-acre tract.

If plans to log on the Scott Run II site proceed, cutting is not expected to begin until late this

summer or early in the fall.

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