

Iowa's Lost National Forests

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Iowa is primarily an agricultural landscape. It is perhaps then not a surprise that Iowa lacks a national forest. This initial reaction, however, misses the fact that Iowa very nearly had several national forests covering thousands of acres in the state. This Article explores this history, examines why these national forests did not materialize, and provides context for the use of other potential tools for securing contemporary conservation objectives in the state.

To this end, Section II of this Article explores the state's landscape history. Section III provides a history of the U.S. Forest Service and the creation of the eastern National Forests. Section IV specifically explores Iowa's efforts towards establishing national forests. Section V briefly touches upon the state's subsequent conservation efforts, while Section VI explores why more recent efforts to facilitate large-scale federal purchases have not materialized. Last, Section VII considers how current conservation tools may replicate at least some of the benefits that extensive national forests would have provided. Ultimately, Iowa's lost national forests can help us to understand the process of National Forest formation, evolving conservation priorities, and the lasting benefits of landscape-level conservation efforts and how such projects can be pursued today.

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