

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2021

Vicki Christiansen
Chief of U.S. Forest Service
US Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C.
20250-0003

Dear Chief Christiansen:

The Shawnee National Forest spans 11 counties in southern Illinois and protects nearly 289,000 acres of diverse natural resources. We request the U.S. Forest Service review the lands of the Shawnee National Forest to determine if any meet the requirements to be considered for wilderness protection.

Since 1933, the Shawnee National Forest has been part of the U.S. Forest System, ensuring protection of its stunning lakes, canyons, wetlands, oak hickory forests, unique geological features, and razorback ridges. The Shawnee is made up of six natural ecological regions, which provide a great deal of plant and animal biodiversity. Currently there are seven designated wilderness areas making up about 10 percent, or 30,000 acres, of the Shawnee National Forest.

Each year, the Shawnee National Forests welcomes nearly 350,000 visitors. The majority of visitors spend their time hiking and viewing the beautiful natural features of the forest. However, there a number of other activities that the forest is used for including picnicking, backcountry camping, kayaking, climbing, horseback riding, and fishing. Properly protecting and managing forestlands is important to ensure visitors can continue to use them for years to come.

This Congress, the *Shawnee Wilderness Designation Act* was introduced in both the House and the Senate. If passed, the bill would protect all 289,000 acres of the Shawnee National Forest as wilderness. Although some of the Shawnee Forest may meet the need for this level of protection, we request that you review this bill to determine if wilderness designation is the most appropriate level of protection for the entire forest.

Protecting the Shawnee National Forest and its diverse ecosystems is key to ensure that the forest and its unique features can be enjoyed for years to come. We look forward to hearing your recommendations.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator