

Sierra Club: Friends of Black River Forest fights for standing in WI Supreme Court Case

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Madison, WI — Kohler Co. and DNR have sought to dismiss a suit Friends of Black River Forest filed opposing the DNR's decision to convey park land to Kohler Co. for a golf course, in an attempt to deny the organization standing to defend state parks. Today, the Wisconsin Supreme Court will hear arguments on Kohler Co. and DNR's attempts to dismiss the Friends of the Black River Forest's suit.

"Today the headline should read, "Citizens' rights to defend their state park is on the line in Wisconsin Supreme Court." Citizens and users of the state parks should be able to go to court to protect what they use and enjoy," said **Mary Faydash, President of Friends of Black River Forest.** "In fact, our, right to bring suit against the Natural Resources Board and the DNR regarding this land swap deal was affirmed by an appellate court, noting that particularly in environmental matters a citizen has standing to bring suit against a state agency."

This court case is of importance, as it will determine who has the right to intervene in natural resource development and in DNR decisions related to public lands.

"That four-lane road and that maintenance facility would be sitting in the park right now, if it hadn't been for the very courageous intervention of a group of neighbors from the area, the Friends of the Black River Forest. They stepped up to do what the DNR at that time wouldn't do and held off that golf course.," explained **RT Both, Member of the Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Forest and Lands Team.** "If that road and that maintenance facility are built, the character of our state park will change forever. And the people of Wisconsin will not get their resources back. The Sierra Club is here because we believe in public lands, and we believe in the rights

of citizens to stand up for their public lands when the government doesn't protect them."

The Kohler Company plans to build its fifth course in Sheboygan County (which currently home to a total of 16 golf courses) on the sensitive Kohler-Andrae lakeshore area and private property north of Kohler-Andrae State Park, which is Wisconsin's 4th most popular park. Community

groups including Friends of the Black River Forest have opposed this plan, citing environmental, cultural and economic concerns. Community advocates gathered in support of Friends of Black River Forest at the Supreme Court hearing.

"If my years of research on local, state, and federal public lands have told me anything, it is that public lands like Kohler Andrae State Park are not only cherished by the public and very heavily used, but they are outrageously valuable in obvious and not so obvious ways," said **Steven Davis, Professor of Political Science at Edgewood College and author of *In Defense of Public Lands***. "Environmental economists have been researching the economic value of public lands for quite some time using conventional tools like job creation, gate revenue and economic spin-off effects, and also by measuring the value of usually ignored ecosystem services, like water retention and filtration or carbon sequestration. What we find is that the Kohler Andrae is spectacularly valuable—UW researchers rank it the second most profitable park in the system and one which creates nearly \$20 million annually in regional economic spin-off. And the ecosystem service value of these pristine dunes and forests is many times greater. In the end, it's as simple as this: something super valuable and much loved is being taken from the public who owns it and given to a private business."