

Comparing the 2009 and 2024 Public Surveys on Indiana's Forests and Woodlands

Addendum Report



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Executive Summary

This addendum to *Indiana's Forests and Woodlands: Public Opinion Survey Results* provides a comparison of findings from the 2009 *Indiana Forests and Woodlands Survey* and the 2024 follow-up survey. Together, the two studies capture both long-term shifts and enduring consistencies in Hoosiers' use, perceptions, and values related to forests and woodlands.

While the 2009 telephone survey emphasized broad household experiences and used simpler response categories, the 2024 online/mail survey allowed for more nuanced questions, better alignment with national instruments such as the National Woodland Owner Survey, and respondent-level insights. These methodological differences mean that direct numerical comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Still, the paired results provide complementary perspectives: 2009 showed the cultural footprint of forests across households, while 2024 offered a clearer view of current awareness, activity, and attitudes.

Key findings include:

- **Visitation and Use:** Once accounting for the public misidentifying other public properties as state forests in 2009, reported state forest visitation was higher in 2024 than in 2009. Woodland use and activities remain important in Hoosiers' lives, though the 2024 results showed smaller percentages of residents engaging in woodland use or activities over the past 12 months compared with lifetime household use and activities reported in 2009.
- **Threat Perceptions:** Indiana residents' perceptions of threats to forests have shifted from broad ecological concerns toward land-use change and development. Perceptions of wildfires or unplanned fires as a threat remained stable, but concern over planned or prescribed fires declined significantly. Perceived threats from insects, diseases, and the spread of non-native plants and animals also remained largely unchanged between 2009 and 2024.
- **Broad Support for Balanced Management:** Across both surveys, Indiana residents strongly supported managing forests to balance wood products, biodiversity, recreation, and environmental benefits, while also endorsing active management to enhance ecological benefits such as improving wildlife habitat and biodiversity and reducing disease and wildfire risks.
- **Awareness of Agencies and Programs:** Public familiarity with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources increased from 2009 to 2024, though awareness of the Division of Forestry remained limited. Public awareness of forest certification remained low, but once explained, the program received strong support, indicating engagement opportunities.
- **Information Sources:** Informal networks such as friends, family, and mass media remained the most common channels for forest-related information, while professional and institutional sources were less frequently used but considered the most trusted. Bridging this gap remains essential for effective public outreach.



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Comparing the 2009 and 2024 Public Surveys on Indiana's Forests and Woodlands: Addendum Report

This addendum should be read in conjunction with the main report, *Indiana's Forests and Woodlands: Public Opinion Survey Results*.¹ The main report provides detailed background on the 2024 survey's methodology, sampling, and analysis. Here, we focus specifically on comparisons with the 2009 *Indiana Forests and Woodlands Survey*.² This addendum highlights both consistency and change in public attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors across the 15 intervening years. By examining changes and continuities across this period, the report highlights both long-term trends and current conditions in public awareness, attitudes, and engagement with forests.

The two surveys differed in the mode of administration and design. The 2009 survey relied on telephone interviews, favoring shorter and simpler response categories. In contrast, the 2024 survey used online and mail formats, allowing for more nuanced questions and alignment with national survey instruments, such as the National Woodland Owner Survey. These design choices limited direct comparability but still allowed for complementary perspectives: the 2009 results captured broad, household-level views, while the 2024 survey offered detailed, respondent-level insights into recent experiences and opinions.

Topics covered include state forest visitation, woodland use, perceptions of threats to forests, perceptions of forest management practices, attitudes toward the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Division of Forestry, and the role of information sources. Together, the findings illustrate both enduring values and shifting perceptions, revealing where awareness and engagement have strengthened, where uncertainty has grown, and where opportunities exist to enhance communication and public trust.

¹ Longmire, C., E. Kronenberger, and Z. Ma (2024). *Indiana's Forests and Woodlands: Public Opinion Survey Results*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University.

² Amberg, S.M., D.J. Witter, and D. Case (2009). *Indiana Residents' Perceptions of Woodland Management: Indiana Woodland Monitor 2009*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University.



Indiana Residents & Forests

State Forest Visitation

In 2009, survey respondents were asked whether they or a member of their household had ever visited a state forest, followed by an open-ended prompt to name the forest.³ While 76% reported visiting a state forest, only 14% correctly identified an actual state forest, with most naming other types of public land (Figure 1). The authors of the 2009 report concluded that the visitation results were likely inflated because respondents misidentified other kinds of public land as state forests. Considering both stated visitation and identification of the state forests visited, approximately 11% of respondents in 2009, or a member of their household, had ever visited a state forest.

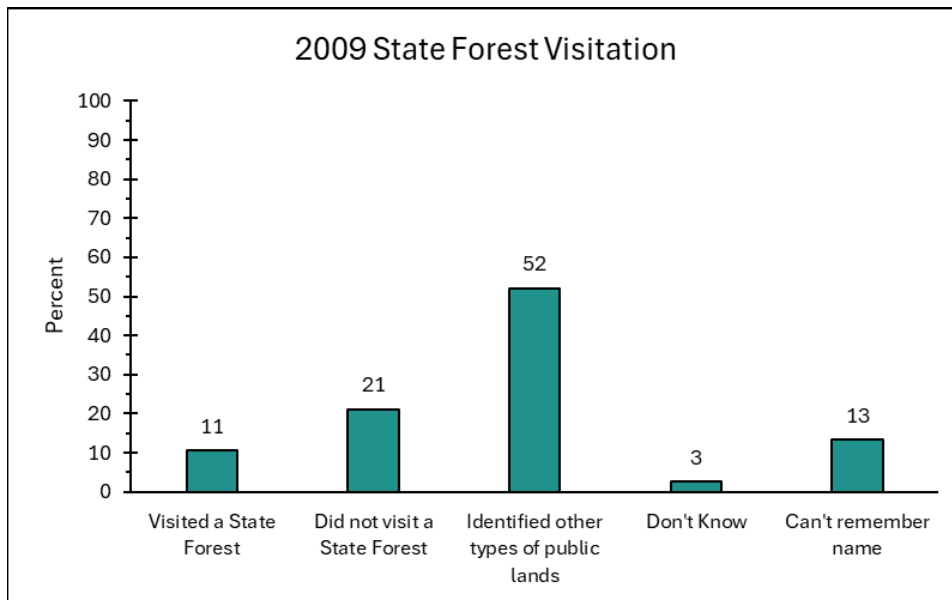


Figure 1. State Forest Visitation in 2009

Note: 2009 survey respondents were asked if they or members of their household had ever visited an Indiana state forest, and if so, what was the name of the state forest visited.

In 2024, survey respondents were provided with a complete list of state forest names and asked if they had visited any of them in the past 12 months (Figure 2). Respondents were also able to indicate if they did not visit any state forest, could not remember the name of the state forest visited, or did not know if they had visited a state forest. This design was used to help decrease recall issues or misclassification of public lands. Using this format, 29% of respondents reported visiting a state forest, while just over half (53%) stated that they did not visit one. About one in five residents did not know if they had visited a state forest (10%) or could not remember the name of the state forest (8%). A similar format was used to ask respondents about their visits to Indiana state parks, and over two-thirds (69%)

³ Amberg, S.M., D.J. Witter, and D. Case. (2009). Indiana Residents' Perceptions of Woodland Management: Indiana Woodland Monitor 2009. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University.



indicated that they had visited one within the past 12 months. Only a small proportion of respondents reported not knowing if they had visited a state park (1%) or did not recall the name of the park they had visited (2%).

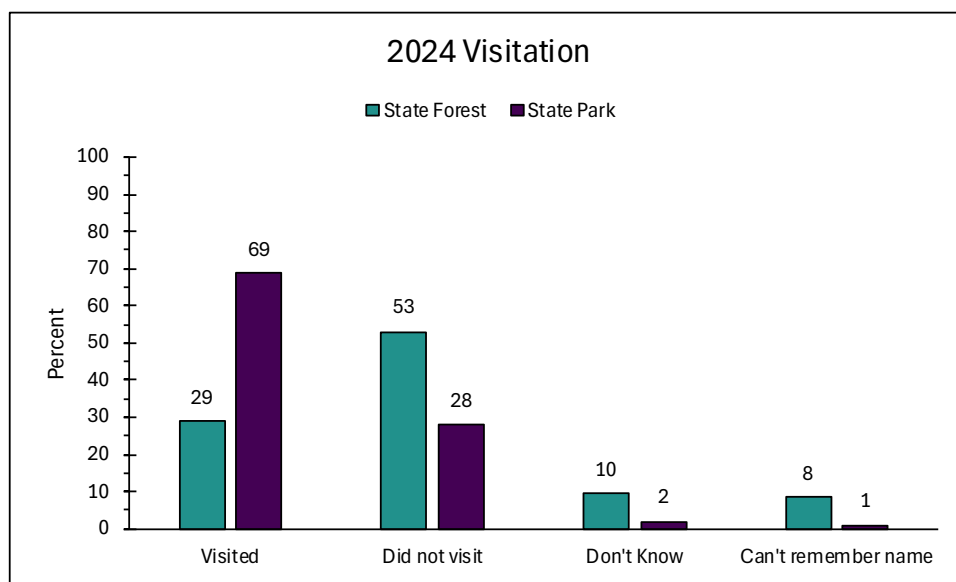


Figure 2. State Forest and State Park Visitation in 2024

Note: 2024 survey respondents were asked if they had visited any of the 15 listed Indiana state forests or any of the 24 listed state parks in the past 12 months.

Awareness and recognition may be as important as actual use. The misidentification by 2009 respondents suggested that many residents lacked a clear understanding of what qualifies as a state forest; instead, they equated “state forest” with public land more broadly. The 2024 survey design attempted to reduce such misidentification. In brief, more Hoosiers visited state forests in 2024 than in 2009. However, the 2024 survey revealed lower visitation of state forests than of state parks, which may reflect differences in amenities and accessibility, as well as lower public awareness of the role of state forests in recreation.

Woodland Use and Activities

In 2009, survey respondents were asked if they or anyone in their household had ever gone fishing or hunting in Indiana’s woodlands, collected trees for firewood, or gathered non-timber forest products (e.g., mushrooms, nuts, or berries). Nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents reported fishing or hunting at least once in their lifetime, about half (51%) had collected non-timber forest products, and nearly half (44%) had cut or collected trees for firewood (Figure 3).



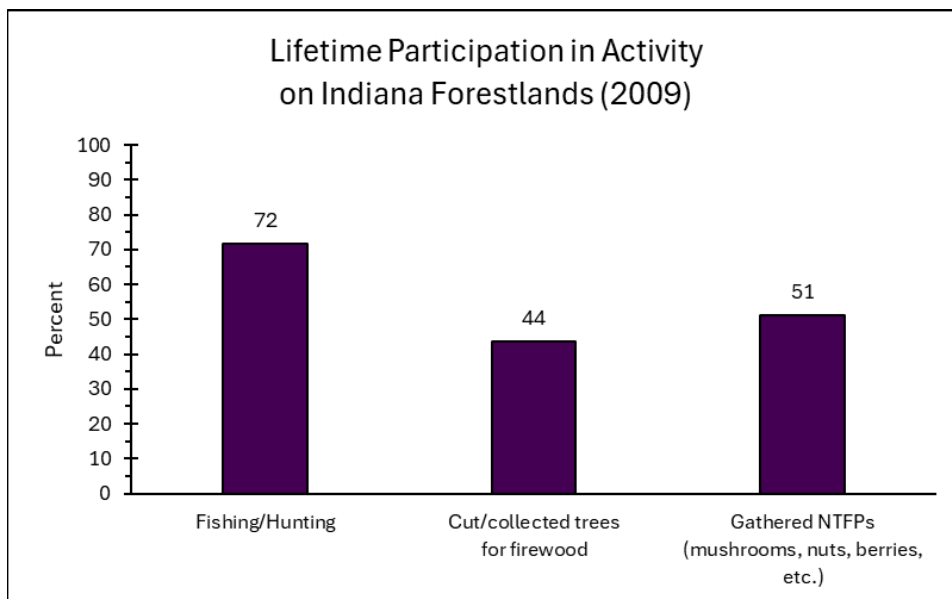


Figure 3. Participation in Woodland Activities 2009

Note: 2009 asked if respondents or members of their household had EVER hunted or fished in Indiana woodlands.

Respondents to the 2024 survey were also asked about these activities in Indiana's woodlands. There were, however, slight modifications to the questions. The timeframe was limited to the past 12 months to increase recall accuracy. Respondents were only asked about their personal activities (not those of their households), and hunting and fishing activities were explored separately. These modifications enabled a more accurate understanding of public activities in Indiana's woodlands. About one-third (35%) of respondents reported fishing, and 17% reported hunting in Indiana's woodlands in the past 12 months. About one-quarter of respondents said they had collected firewood (24%) or gathered non-timber forest products (23%) in Indiana's woodlands in the past 12 months (Figure 4).

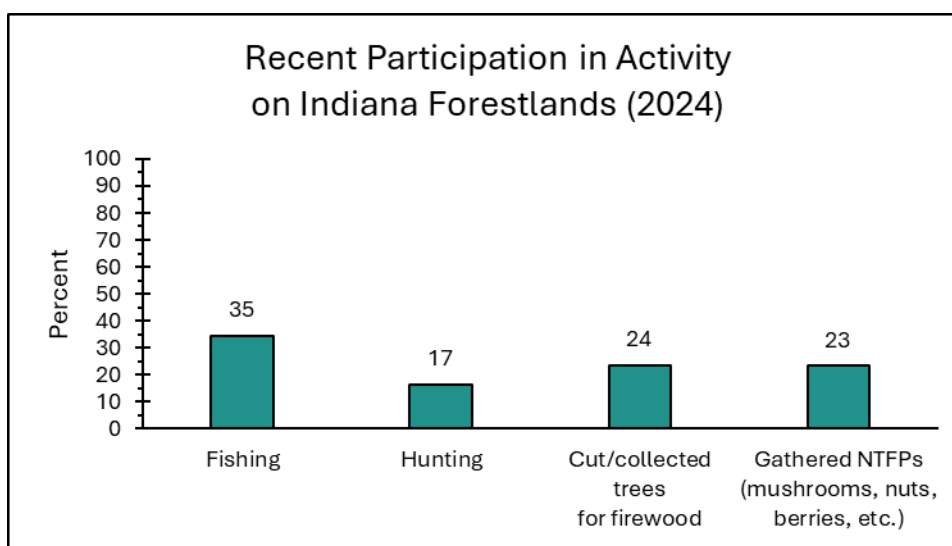


Figure 4. Recent Participation in Woodland Activities 2024

Note: 2024 asked about participation in the PAST 12 MONTHS, separately for fishing and hunting.



While not directly comparable in percentages due to differences in timeframe used (lifetime in 2009 vs. past 12 months in 2024) and the person who participated in the activities (respondents or anyone in their household in 2009 vs. respondents in 2024), the survey results can be interpreted to provide insight into the general trend in woodland use and activities over time. The 2009 results demonstrated the broader footprint of woodland use and activities across Indiana households, while the 2024 results provided a snapshot of ongoing individual use and activities. The complementary perspectives revealed that woodland use and recreation remained widely shared public experiences, even though less than half of Hoosiers were actively engaged with Indiana’s woodlands. Woodlands continue to be an important part of Indiana’s cultural and recreational fabric. Public agencies need to monitor both the public’s perception of the relevance of forests over time and current public engagement with forests to strengthen long-term forest planning.

Woodland Ownership and Professional Involvement

Fewer survey respondents self-identified as forest landowners in 2024 than in 2009 (Figure 5). About one-fifth (18%) of 2024 respondents indicated they owned at least one acre of woodlands in Indiana, compared with one-third (36%) of respondents in 2009.

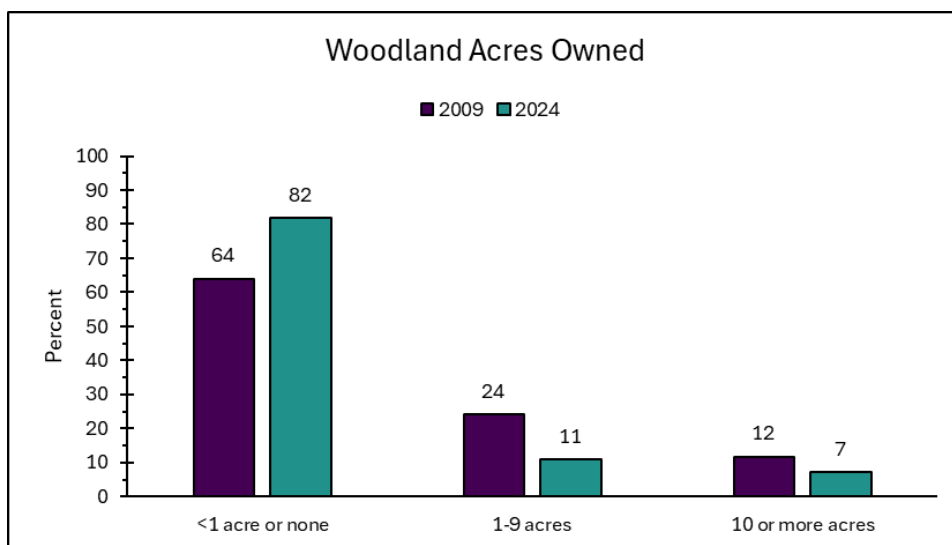


Figure 5. Total Wooded Acres Owned in Indiana

Similarly, fewer respondents in 2024 (6%) than in 2009 (12%) reported having worked in the wood products industry. However, these differences are likely due to variations in how the questions were framed. In 2009, respondents were asked about both themselves and members of their household, whereas in 2024, the question referred only to the individual respondent (Figure 6). According to the 2018 National Woodland Owner Survey, Indiana



had about 174,000 family forest owners with 10 or more acres of woodland.⁴ The 2020 U.S. Census reports that Indiana had 5,192,579 residents aged 18 and older. Therefore, although the 2024 survey results remained an overestimate, they more closely reflected woodland ownership among Hoosiers than the 2009 survey results.

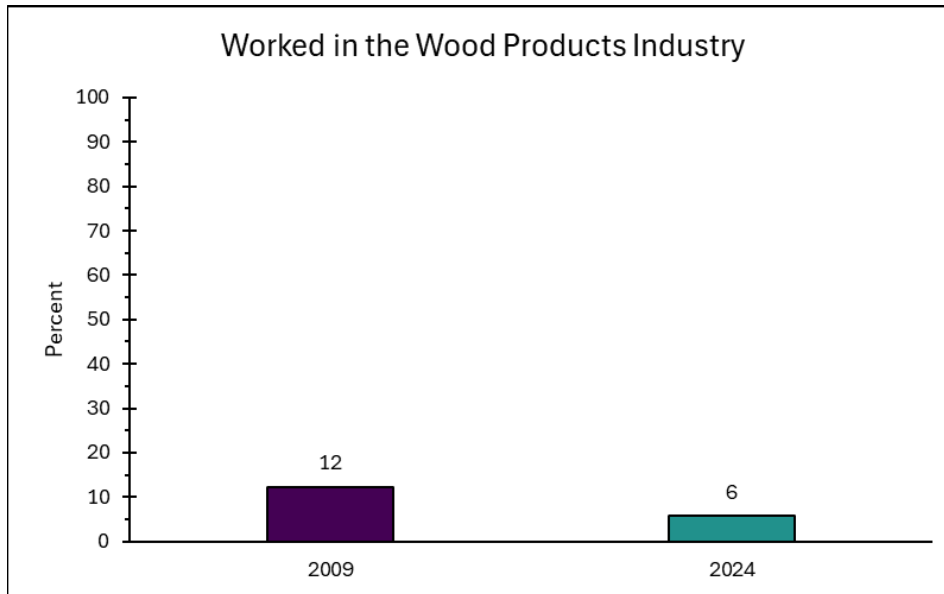


Figure 6. Wood Products Industry Employment

Note: 2009 asked if respondents or members of their household had ever worked in the wood products industry. In 2024, this was only asked of the respondents themselves.

⁴ USDA Forest Service. (2021). Family Forest (10+ Acres) Ownership Characteristics: Indiana, 2018. Res. Note NRS-273. Madison, WI: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. 2p. <https://doi.org/10.2737/NRS-RN-273>.



Attitudes Toward Forests & Woodlands

Amount of Land in the State Forest System

In both 2009 and 2024 surveys, residents were asked about their perceptions of the amount of land in Indiana’s State Forest system, which accounts for about 3% of Indiana’s total woodlands (Figure 7). Across both years, a majority of Indiana residents believed there was not enough land in the State Forest System. In 2024, fewer residents felt that the current amount was “about right,” while the proportion with no opinion increased substantially, indicating greater uncertainty or less familiarity with the issue. Very few residents in either year felt there was “too much” State Forests in Indiana.

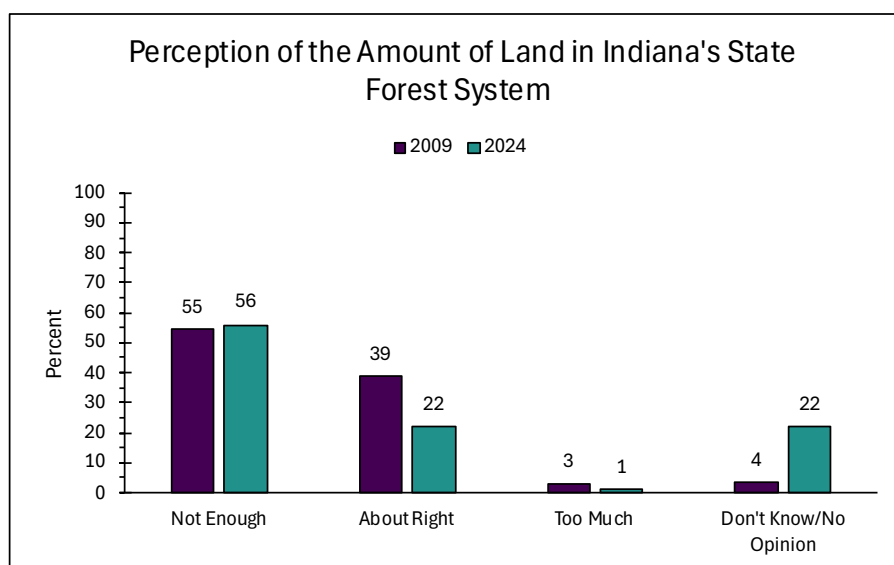


Figure 7. Perceptions of the Amount of State Forest Land

Forest Threats

Across both survey years, Indiana residents were asked to what degree they believed several factors or conditions were affecting Indiana forests. Figures 8 and 9 display the results for 2009 and 2024, respectively. The 2024 question was altered from 2009 to provide more precision in responses by offering a “not a threat” response option instead of “don’t know” and by splitting some composite factors into individual factors, such as air and water pollution or urban sprawl.

Respondents’ perceptions of urban sprawl as a threat to Indiana’s forests showed a slight increase from 2009 to 2024. In 2009, 50% of respondents viewed urban sprawl as a significant threat to Indiana’s forests, and 31% considered it a moderate threat. In 2024, however, 57% of respondents viewed land conversion to housing development as a significant threat, and 28% considered it a moderate threat. Similarly, 60% viewed land conversion to industrial and other development as a substantial threat, and 26% considered it a moderate threat.



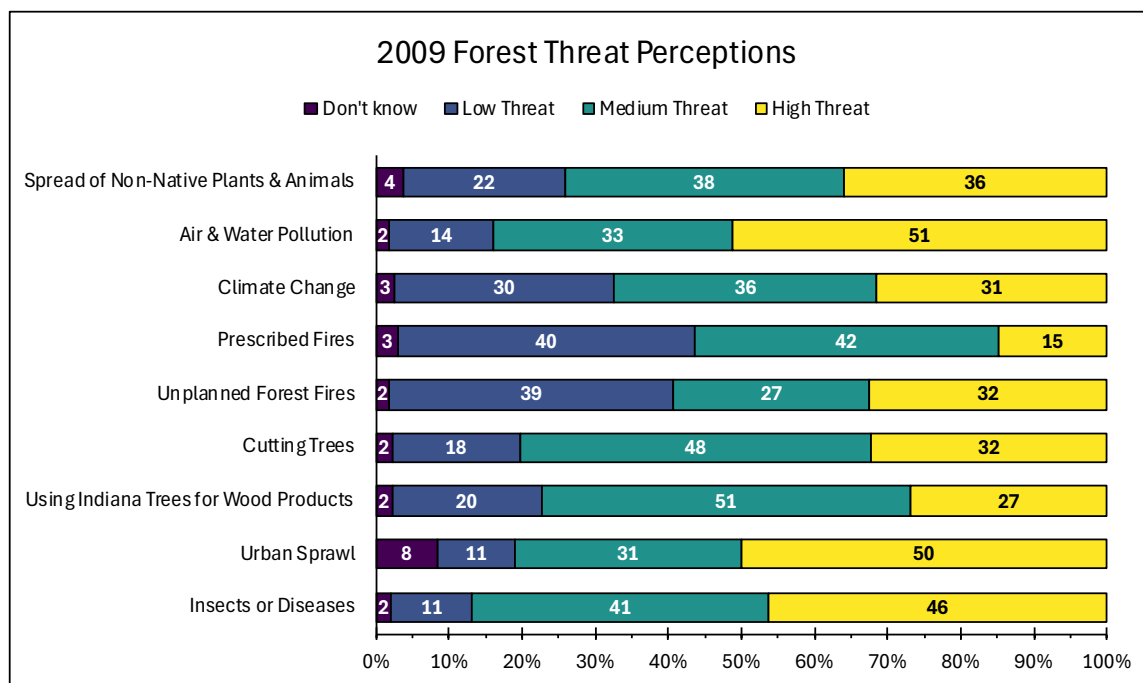


Figure 8. 2009 Forest Threat Perceptions

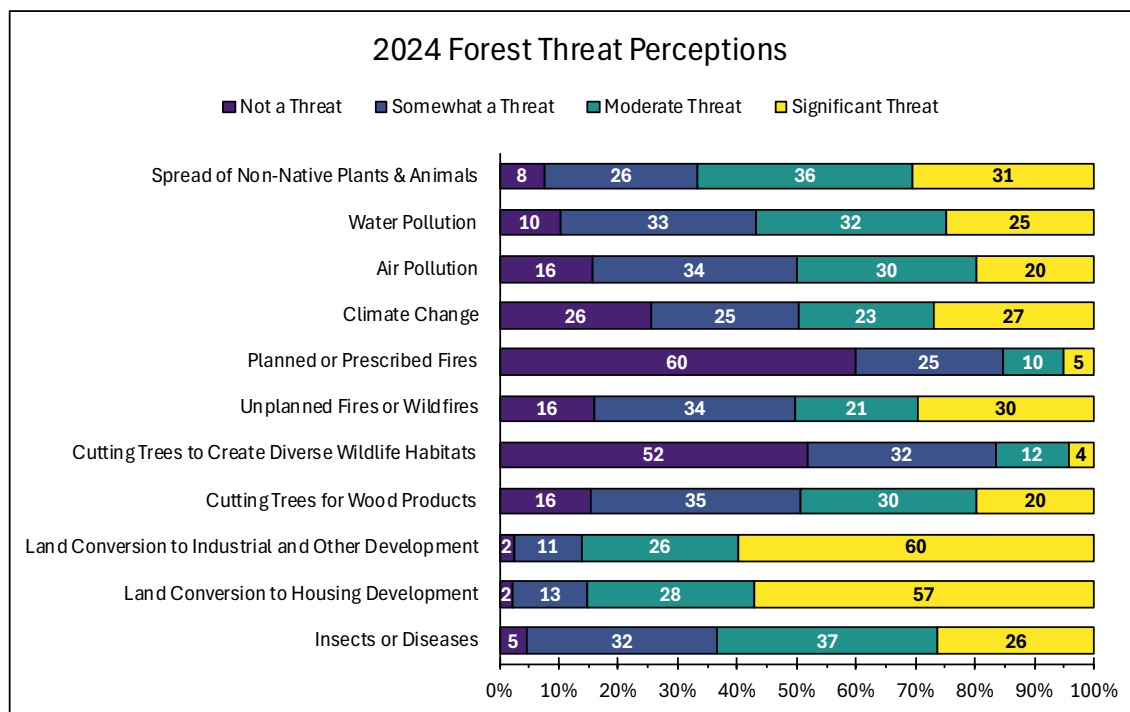


Figure 9. 2024 Forest Threat Perceptions



In 2009, most respondents viewed cutting trees from Indiana's forests as a substantial (32%) or moderate (48%) threat to the state's forests. A similarly high proportion of respondents viewed using Indiana trees for wood products as a substantial (27%) or moderate (51%) threat to the state's forests. In 2024, respondents were asked about cutting trees for use in wood products and cutting trees to create diverse wildlife habitats. When the harvest purpose was for wood products, about 20% viewed cutting trees as a significant threat, and 30% considered it a moderate threat. While together half of the respondents considered cutting trees for use in wood products a moderate/significant threat, this number is considerably lower than the 78% in 2009. When the harvest objective was the creation of diverse wildlife habitats, about half of the respondents (52%) viewed cutting trees as *not a threat* to the state's forests, and one-third (32%) saw it as somewhat of a threat. Only 4% of respondents viewed this as a significant threat to Indiana's forests. This stark contrast in the threat level of harvesting for wood products versus harvesting for wildlife habitats suggests that the perceived threat to Indiana's forests from tree cutting is highly contextual.

About one-third of respondents in 2009 (32%) and in 2024 (30%) viewed wildfires or unplanned fires as a significant threat to Indiana's forests. Roughly one-quarter in 2009 (27%) and in 2024 (21%) viewed it as a moderate threat, and another one-third viewed it as a low threat. While the perceptions of wildfires or unplanned fires were fairly similar across the survey years, there was a significant decrease in perceiving planned or prescribed fires as a threat. In 2009, 97% of respondents stated that prescribed fires pose a threat to Indiana's forests; however, in 2024, most respondents (60%) indicated that prescribed fires are not a threat.

The perception of threat to Indiana's forests from insects and diseases, as well as the spread of non-native plants and animals, remained consistent overall from 2009 to 2024. However, the degree of the perceived threat from insects and disease decreased over the survey years. In 2009, almost half of respondents (46%) considered insects and diseases a high threat; however, in 2024, about one-quarter of respondents (26%) considered them a significant threat. About one-third of respondents in 2024 (32%) said insects and disease were somewhat of a threat, compared with 11% in 2009.

The perception of threat to Indiana's forests from climate change, air pollution, and water pollution appeared to have decreased over the survey years. In 2009, about half (51%) of respondents said air and water pollution was a high threat. This proportion was cut in half in 2024, with 20% of respondents indicating air pollution was a significant threat and 25% indicating water pollution was a significant threat. In 2009, 31% of respondents said climate change posed a high threat to Indiana's forests, compared with 27% in 2024.



Forest Management

In both 2009 and 2024, Indiana residents were asked about several forest management actions. Figures 10 and 11 display the results for 2009 and 2024, respectively. Please note that in both figures, the scales were combined to show approval versus disapproval in 2009 and agreement versus disagreement in 2024. Additionally, while the 2009 questions measured respondents' acceptance or endorsement of management actions and the 2024 questions measured respondents' attitudinal alignment with various management actions, both years captured respondents' support or opposition. As such, the survey results were broadly comparable. It is important to note, however, that the shift in question wording may have slightly influenced responses, especially for ambivalent respondents. Some questions in 2024 were also framed more broadly. For example, the 2009 survey specifically asked about cutting trees for wildlife habitat, while the 2024 survey asked about cutting trees to support biodiversity, including wildlife habitat. For this reason, we treat them as comparable but not directly equivalent measures of support for ecological management, focusing on the directions of attitudes as opposed to percentage shifts.

Overall support for cutting trees for ecological reasons remained strong over the survey years, with most respondents indicating support for cutting trees to improve wildlife habitat and/or biodiversity. Additionally, residents showed strong support across survey years for harvesting trees to protect forests from the spread of disease or wildfires. When it comes to utilizing forests for wood or wood products, respondents indicated lower levels of support in 2024 than in 2009. Respondents in 2024 were nearly evenly split between agreeing and disagreeing with this management objective, whereas about two-thirds of respondents in 2009 approved of it. There was, however, a substantial shift towards support for cutting trees to make room for new homes in 2024, compared with 2009. There was less support in 2024 for importing wood products from other states instead of harvesting Indiana trees; however, this did not translate to increased opposition, but rather a substantial increase in the proportion of unsure respondents. Regardless of the survey year, Indiana residents indicated strong support for professional foresters overseeing activities that involve harvesting trees in Indiana.



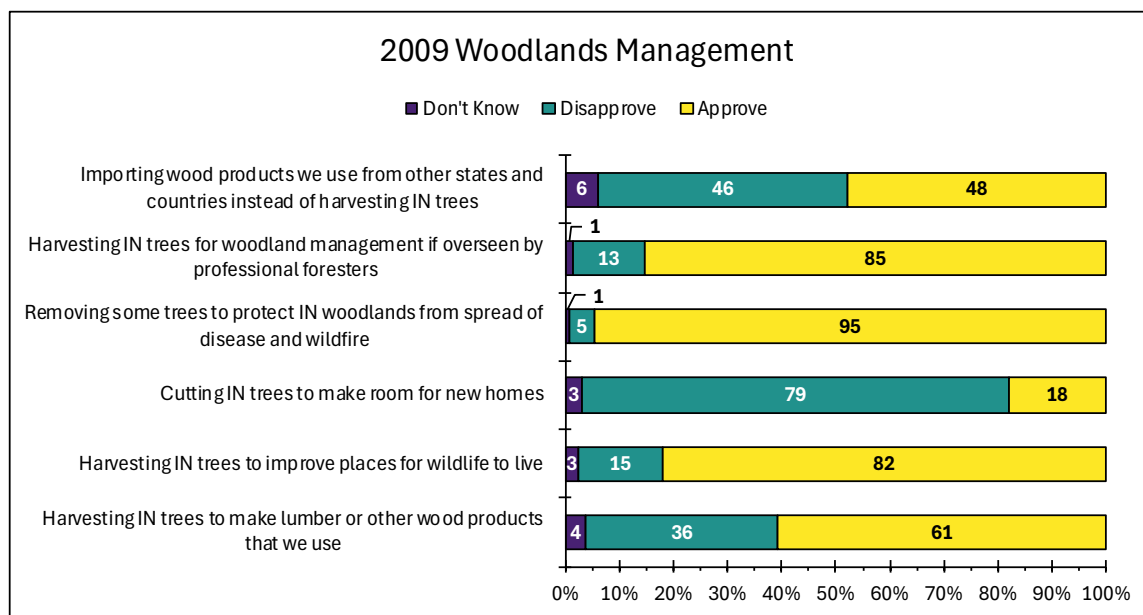


Figure 10. Acceptance of Forest Management Actions (2009)

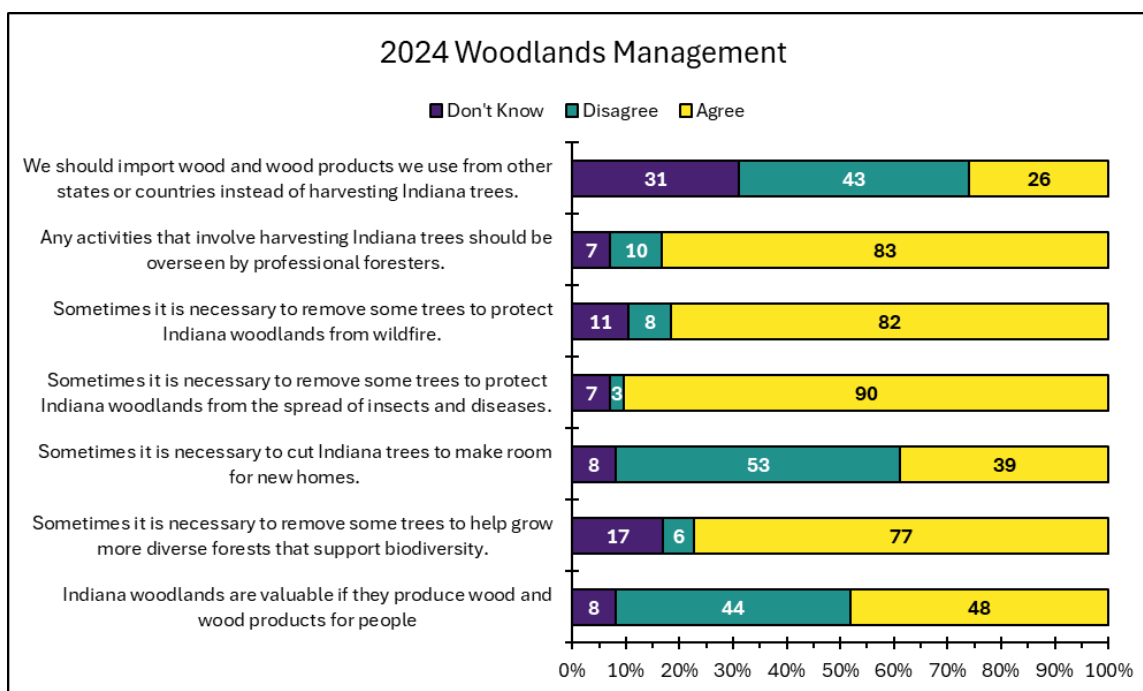


Figure 11. Attitudes Toward Forest Management Actions (2024)

Forest Attitudes and Values

In both survey years, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements about the values of Indiana's forests. These statements comprised a list of both what people believe is happening and what people think should happen in Indiana's forests. Figures 12 and 13 display the results for 2009 and 2024, respectively. The



intentional omission of a neutral option in the 2024 questions may have contributed to higher “don’t know” responses for some survey items than in 2009, because some respondents may have used “don’t know” as a proxy for neutral opinion in 2024. This design choice may have potentially inflated uncertainty for some survey items in 2024, even if underlying attitudes stayed the same. As such, our direct comparisons focus on broad agreement or disagreement trends, while understanding that difference in scale used may partly explain observed shifts.

Overall, Indiana residents maintained strong support for managing Indiana’s woodlands for a balance of wood products, environmental benefits, biodiversity, and outdoor recreation opportunities. While there appeared to be a substantial increase in agreement that Indiana’s woodlands are valuable if they produce jobs and income, the increase was likely partly due to the removal of an exclusionary word from the 2024 statement. In 2009, only 15% of respondents agreed that *Indiana woodlands are valuable **only** if they produce jobs and income*. The word “only” implies that this is Indiana woodlands’ only value. Given that nearly 9 in 10 respondents in 2009 agreed that the state’s forests should be managed for a balance of outputs, it was not surprising that so few agreed that forests are only valuable if they produce jobs and income. In 2024, the word “only” was dropped from the statement. Nearly two-thirds of respondents agreed that Indiana woodlands are valuable if they produce jobs and income.

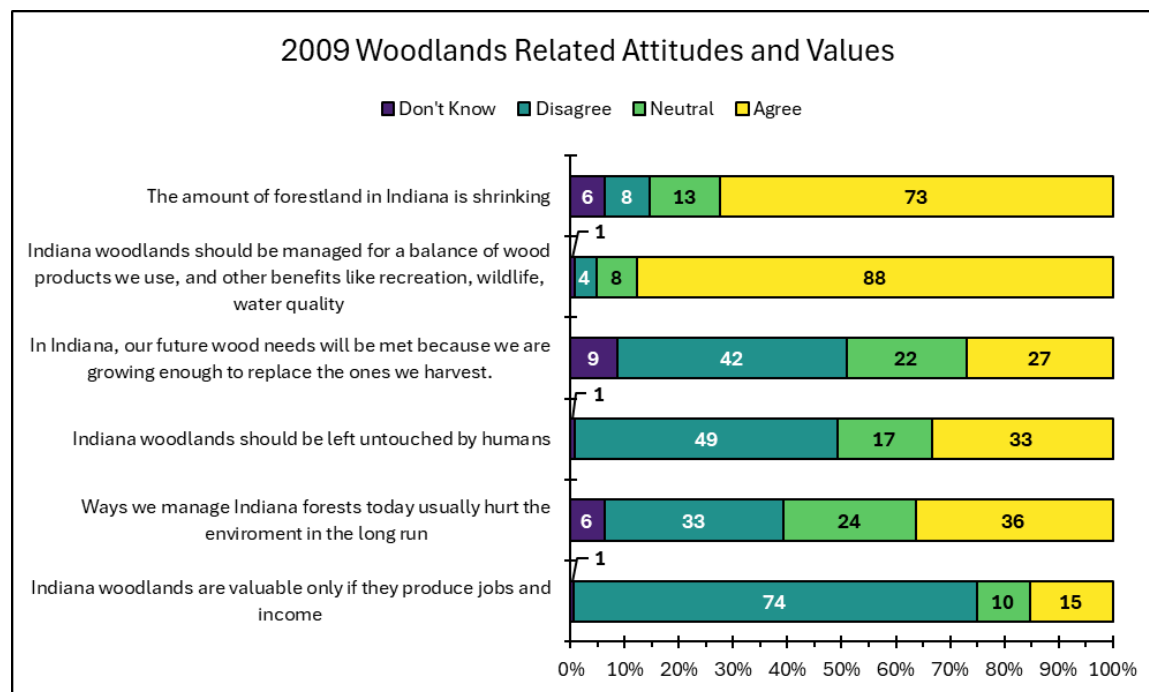


Figure 12. Attitudes and Values Toward Forests (2009)



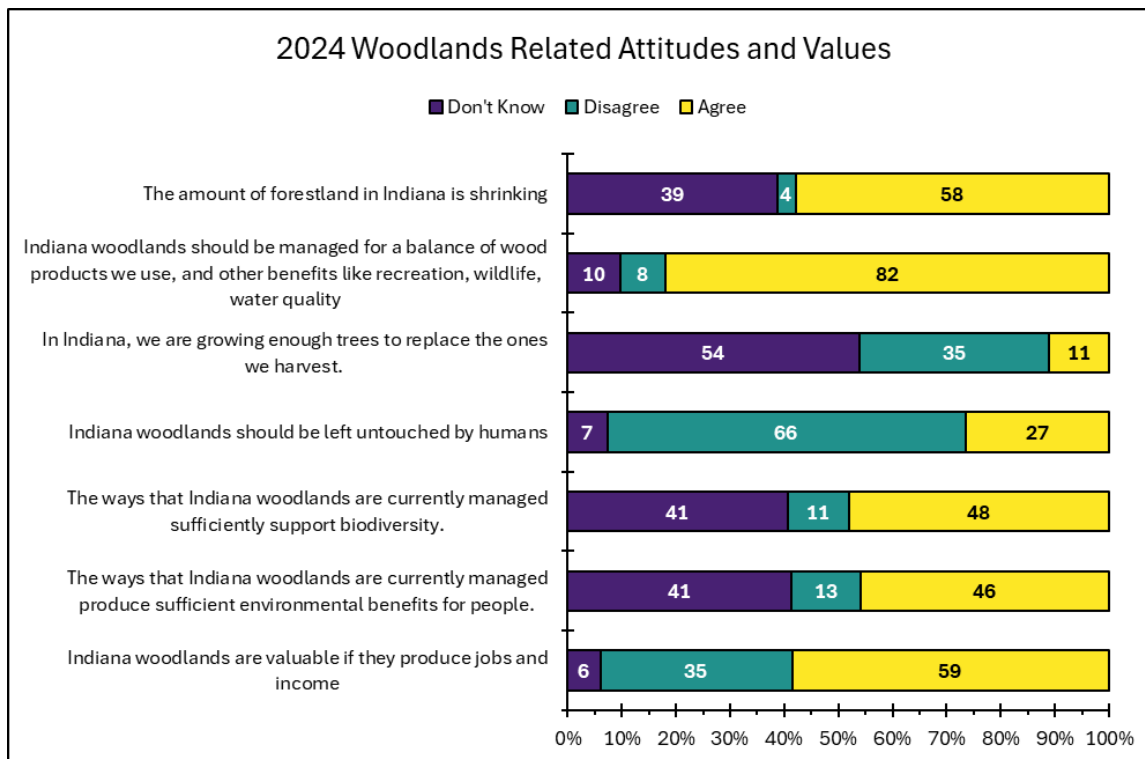


Figure 13. Attitudes and Values Toward Forests (2024)

About one-third (36%) of respondents in 2009 agreed that the ways Indiana woodlands were currently managed usually hurt the environment in the long run. About one-third (33%) disagreed, and another one-third were neutral (24%) or didn't know (6%). In 2024, almost half of respondents agreed that the ways Indiana woodlands were currently managed sufficiently support biodiversity (48%) and produce sufficient environmental benefits for people (46%). In both cases, 4 in 10 respondents were uncertain about these statements. Overall, there appeared to be higher levels of agreement in 2024 that current forest management has positive environmental outcomes. Support for active management of the state's forests seemed to have increased in 2024, with two-thirds of respondents (66%) disagreeing with the statement: *Indiana woodlands should be left untouched by humans*; an increase over the level of disagreement (33%) in 2009. Between 2009 and 2024, confidence in Indiana's ability to grow enough trees to replace those harvested declined, with agreement falling from 27% to 11%.



Attitudes Toward Indiana DNR

The 2024 survey used a more robust scale to measure respondents' level of familiarity with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Division of Forestry within DNR, while the 2009 survey used a more restricted scale, resulting in more clustered ratings in the middle. Overall, Indiana residents' familiarity with the Indiana DNR appeared to have deepened between 2009 and 2024 (Figures 14 and 15). In 2009, about one-third of respondents (31%) reported being unfamiliar with the agency, while only 15% described themselves as very familiar. By 2024, only 4% of respondents reported having never heard of the DNR, while a larger share identified themselves as moderately or extremely familiar (37% combined).

In contrast, Indiana residents' familiarity with the Division of Forestry remained more limited. In 2009, the majority (57%) of respondents reported being not familiar with the Division, and only 5% said they were very familiar. By 2024, 30% of respondents reported having never heard of the Division, and only 8% described themselves as moderately or extremely familiar. Most respondents placed themselves in the lower familiarity categories (slightly or somewhat familiar), indicating that while awareness of the Division of Forestry may have increased slightly, overall familiarity remained lower than with the broader DNR.

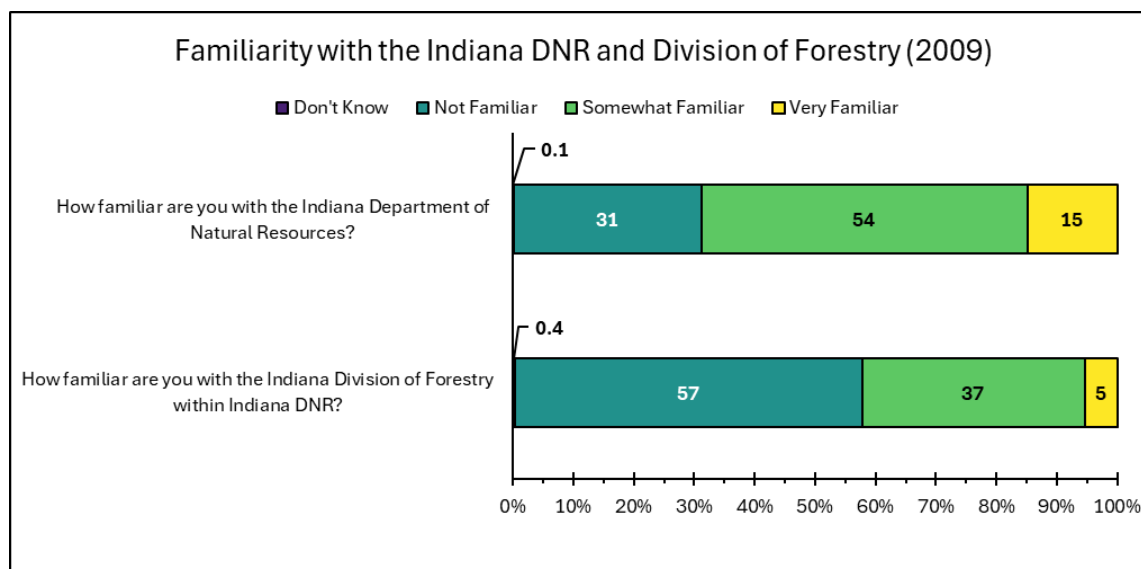


Figure 14. Familiarity with the Indiana DNR and Division of Forestry (2009)



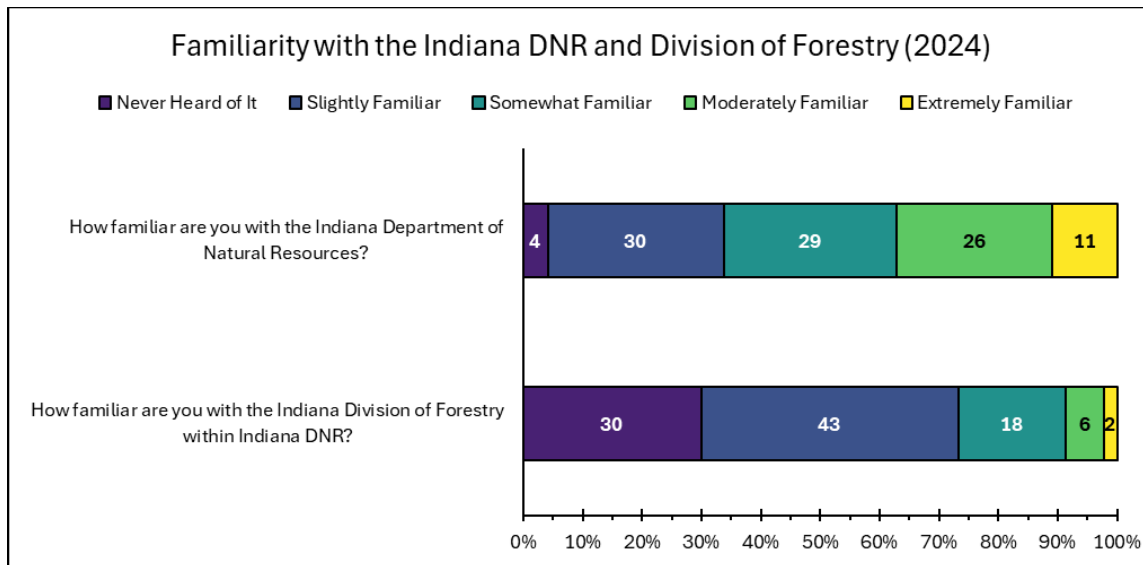


Figure 15. Familiarity with the Indiana DNR and Division of Forestry (2024)

Beyond measuring overall familiarity, both the 2009 and 2024 surveys asked residents what comes to mind when they think of the Indiana DNR Division of Forestry. The 2009 survey established the baseline of unprompted perceptions, while the 2024 survey measured how widely those associations are recognized today. However, differences in survey modes (i.e., phone survey in 2009 versus online/mail survey in 2024) and question formats produced results that are complementary but not directly comparable.

Specifically, in 2009, respondents were asked an open-ended question, “What first comes to mind when you think of the Indiana Division of Forestry?”, without any prompt. Eighty percent of respondents provided a verbal response, which clustered around a narrow set of salient themes such as forest management (27%), parks (18%), and wildlife (16%). Other grouped responses were mentioned by fewer than 10% of respondents. To improve data quality, the 2024 survey used a structured list developed from the 2009 verbal responses and broader landowner literature. This change in question design resulted in much higher recognition across a broader range of categories. For example, environmental conservation increased from 9% in 2009 to 62% in 2024, planting trees increased from 6% to 53%, and natural resources increased from 3% to 51% all of which emerged as major associations among respondents in 2024. Even less frequently mentioned ideas in 2009, such as wildfires (2%) and Smokey Bear (1%), saw sizable recognition when explicitly listed in 2024 (31% and 25% respectively).

These shifts should be interpreted with caution—they may not represent a direct increase in the ideas Indiana residents associated with the Division of Forestry. Instead, the difference may partly reflect the contrast between what respondents spontaneously volunteered in 2009 and what they affirmatively recognized in 2024 when presented with specific options. Taken together, the two surveys offer complementary insights: the 2009 results revealed the most salient, top-of-mind associations with the Division of Forestry, while the 2024 results captured the breadth of ideas that resonated when people were



prompted. The persistence of “I don’t know” or “never heard of it” responses at about 11% in both survey years suggests that a consistent segment of the population remained unfamiliar with the Division of Forestry, regardless of question format.

Division of Forestry Service Quality

Overall impressions of the Indiana DNR Division of Forestry remained largely favorable in both 2009 and 2024, though the surveys used different question formats. In 2009, 57% of respondents rated the Division’s performance as good or excellent, compared to 27% who rated it as poor or fair, with 15% “don’t know” (Figure 16). In 2024, we used a 1-10 scale to more accurately measure Indiana residents’ perceptions of the Division. However, to make the 2024 results more directly comparable to the 2009 results, the 1 to 10 ratings were collapsed into four categories, as shown in Figure 17. Sixty-nine percent of respondents rated the Division as good or excellent, while 32% rated it as poor or fair (Figure 17). These results suggest a generally positive view of the Division’s performance in both survey years, and positive perceptions have increased among Indiana residents from 2009 to 2024. It is worth noting that there was a slight difference in question wording. The 2009 survey asked broadly about “services provided” by the Division, while the 2024 survey focused on how the Division is doing in terms of managing forests and woodlands. This difference means the results from the two survey years should be compared with caution.

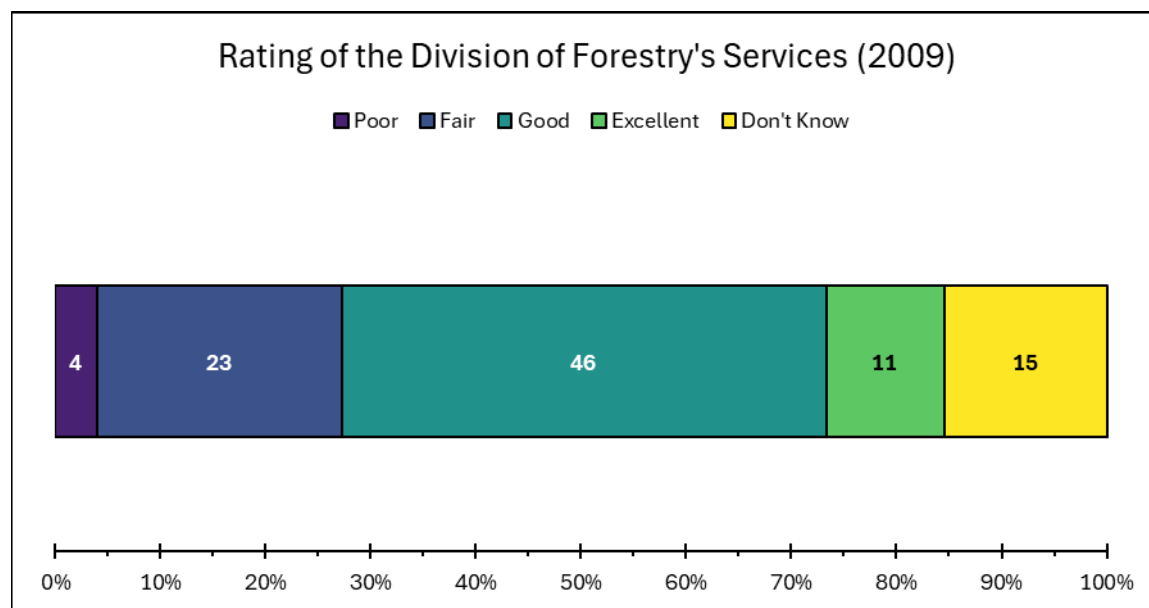


Figure 16. Rating of the Division of Forestry's Provision of Services to the State (2009)



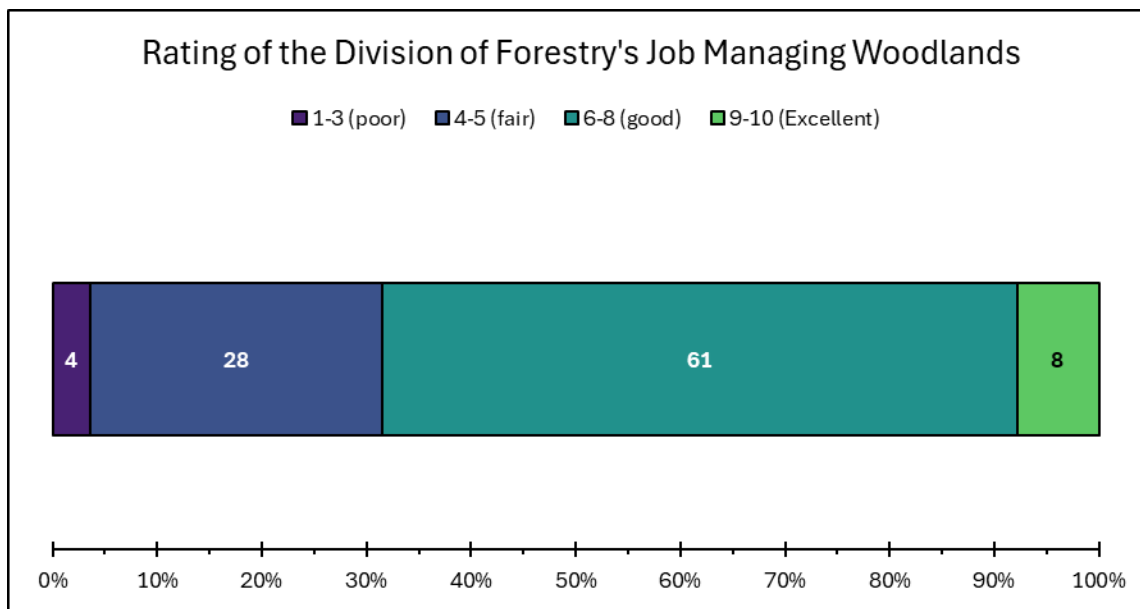


Figure 17. Rating of the Division of Forestry's Management of Forests (2024)

Public support for the Division of Forestry (DoF)'s role in advising private landowners on harvesting decisions was very strong in 2009, with 85% approving and only 13% disapproving (Figure 18). In 2024, when residents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, *"It is the job of DoF to advise Indiana landowners on how many and what kinds of trees they might harvest and sell,"* support remained positive but was less pronounced: 49% agreed or strongly agreed, 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 25% did not know (Figure 19). Although both questions measured public endorsement, the 2009 wording and format (approve/disapprove) may have invited stronger affirmation, while the 2024 version, framed around the appropriateness of the DoF's role, may have led to more "don't know" responses. Taken together, results from the two surveys suggest that most Hoosiers continued to support the Division's advisory role to private landowners, although unqualified endorsement declined in 2024 and a larger share expressed uncertainty.



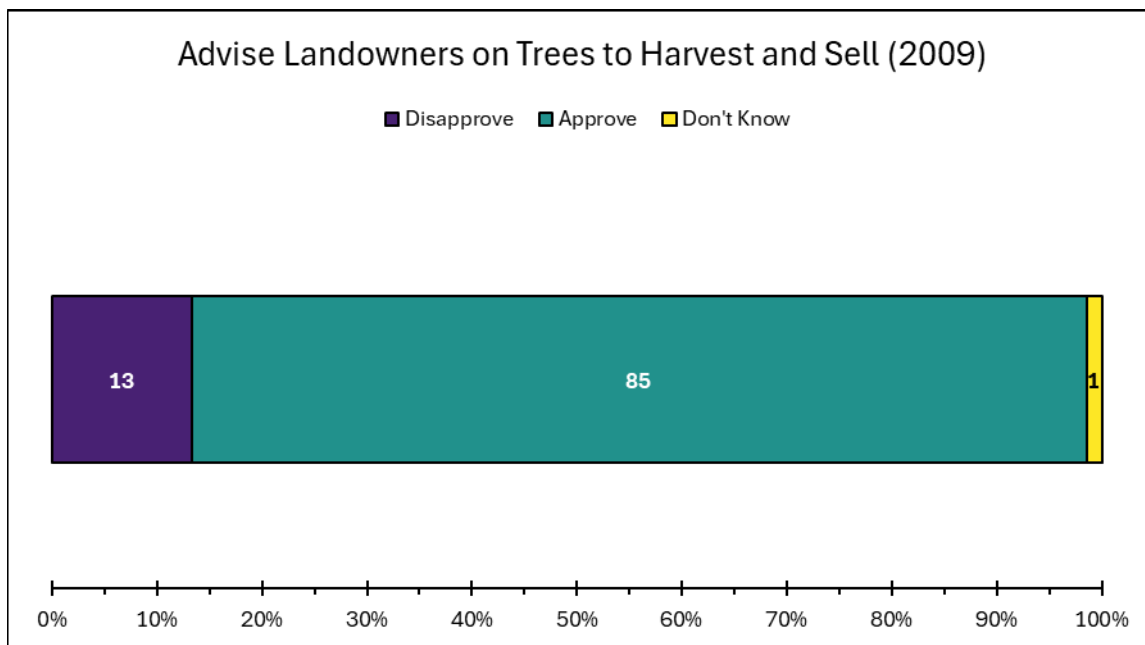


Figure 18. Approval of the Division of Forestry Advising Landowners (2009)

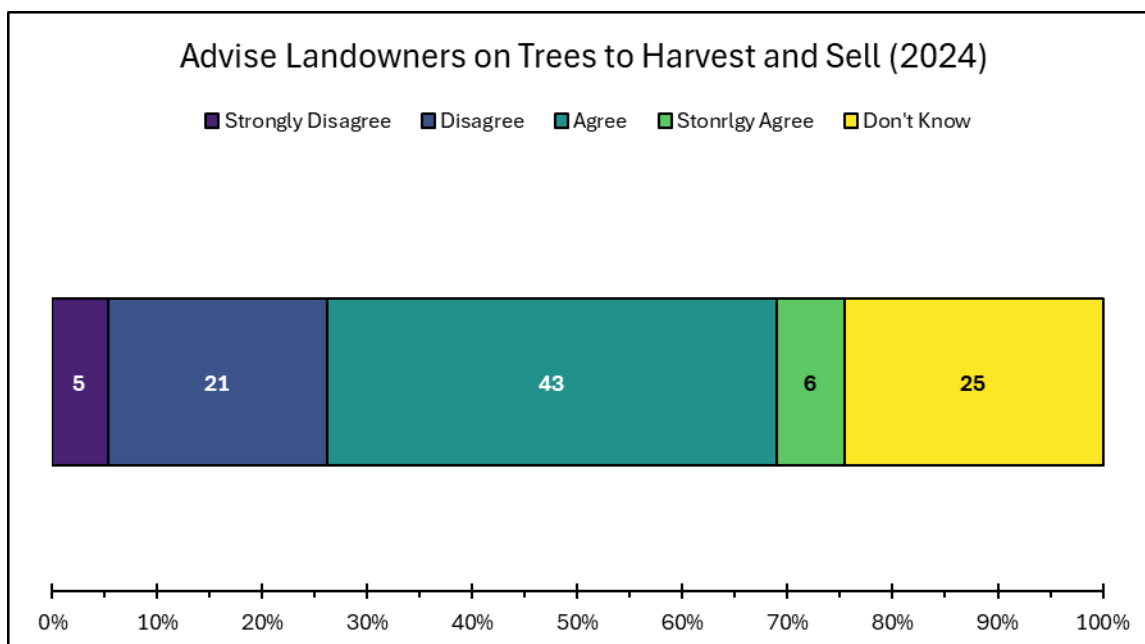


Figure 19. Approval of the Division of Forestry Advising Landowners (2024)



Forest Certification

Public perceptions of “certified green forests” reflect low familiarity with the term but openness to the concept once explained. In 2009, while 76% of respondents agreed that certified green forests signaled wise management for future generations, most (68%) acknowledged they could not define the phrase. Similarly, in 2024, nearly nine in ten respondents reported they had never heard of the state’s Private Forestland Green Certification Program. Yet after receiving a brief description, a majority expressed support (60%). Taken together, the two surveys suggest that while awareness of forest certification programs is limited, Hoosiers consistently view the concept favorably once introduced, highlighting both a communication gap and an opportunity to enhance public engagement.



Information Sources

Both the 2009 and 2024 surveys indicated relatively modest public exposure to information about Indiana’s forests and woodlands, although the 2024 results provided a more detailed picture. In 2009, only 14% of respondents reported “often” hearing or reading about Indiana’s forests, while nearly half reported doing so only “occasionally,” suggesting low salience (Figure 20). Similarly, in 2024, most respondents reported infrequent exposure to forest-related information, with only 17% hearing something weekly or more frequently, and approximately one-third doing so monthly (Figure 21). It is important to note that more than half of respondents reported encountering forest-related information no more than once a year, underscoring that while forests are valued, they remain a relatively low-visibility topic in most residents’ everyday information environment.

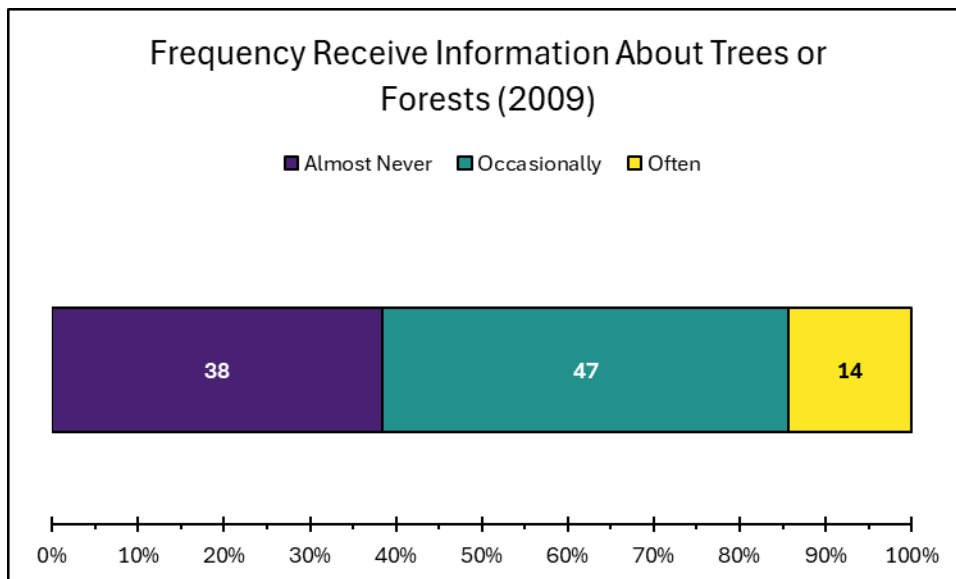


Figure 20. Frequency of Receiving Information About Indiana Trees or Forests (2009)

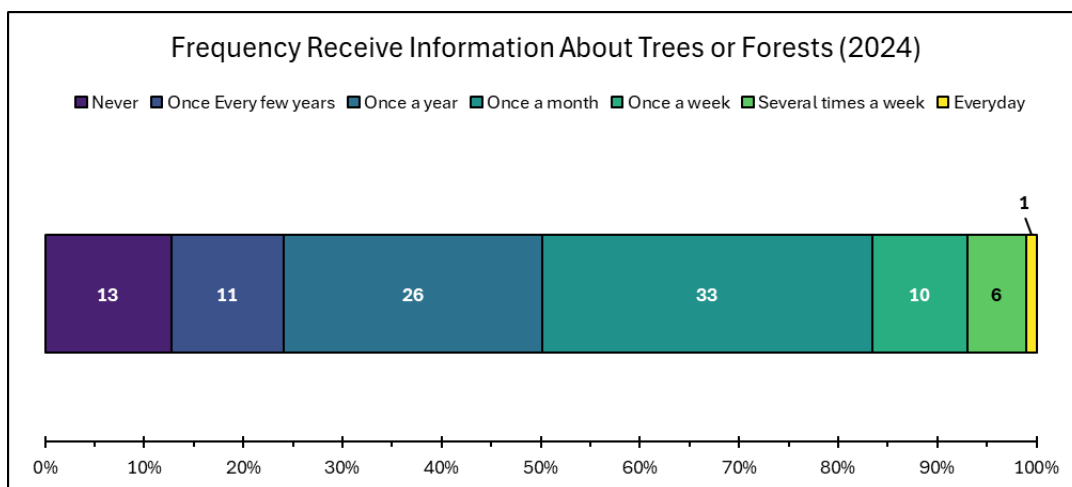


Figure 21. Frequency of Receiving Information About Indiana Trees or Forests (2024)



In 2009, one-quarter of respondents reported that they or someone in their households had requested information about trees from the Indiana DNR. In 2024, when asked about their own experiences in the past 12 months, about one-third (32%) said they had received information through DNR websites or newsletters, while smaller shares cited Conservation Officers (12%) or District Offices (4%). While the 2009 and 2024 measures are not directly comparable because the 2024 question focused on individual respondents rather than their households and specified DNR information sources, the findings suggest that DNR's overall reach to the public remained substantial and had likely expanded since 2009.

In 2009, Indiana residents reported learning at least “some” information about forests and woodlands primarily through two mass media outlets: TV shows (84%) and news media (81%), while the least-cited source was university experts, though 49% still reported learning “some” or “a lot” from them (Figure 22). Approximately 63% of respondents also reported learning “some” or “a lot” from the U.S. Forest Service. By 2024, survey results showed a more complex picture (Figure 23): Indiana residents most often reported receiving forest-related information from friends and family (53%), followed by news media (42%), TV shows or documentaries (39%), and YouTube or other social media (39% and 36%). About one-third used the Indiana DNR website or newsletters (32%). Professional and institutional sources like universities, Purdue Extension, federal agencies, as well as private forestry and natural resource professionals were consulted less frequently, typically by fewer than 20% of respondents.

The 2024 survey included new questions on the perceived trustworthiness of different information sources. Comparing these results with patterns of information use between 2009 and 2024 reveals a gap between exposure and credibility. While Indiana residents most often encounter forest-related information through informal and mass media channels, they place the greatest trust in professional and institutional sources, such as the DNR website or newsletters, universities, Purdue Extension, Conservation Officers, and federal agencies (Figure 24). This suggests that while everyday conversations and media drive visibility, effective public engagement requires public agencies and private professionals to make their content easily accessible and shareable, allowing trusted information to circulate through the networks that people are already using to obtain forest-related information.



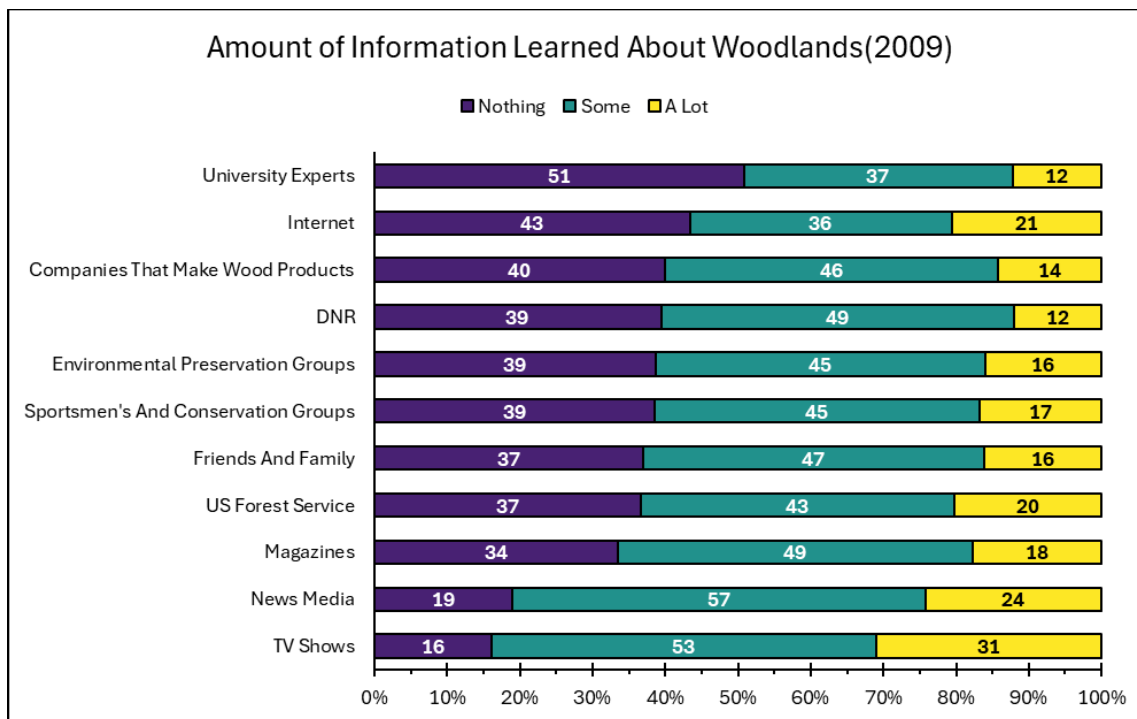


Figure 22. Sources of Woodlands Information (2009)

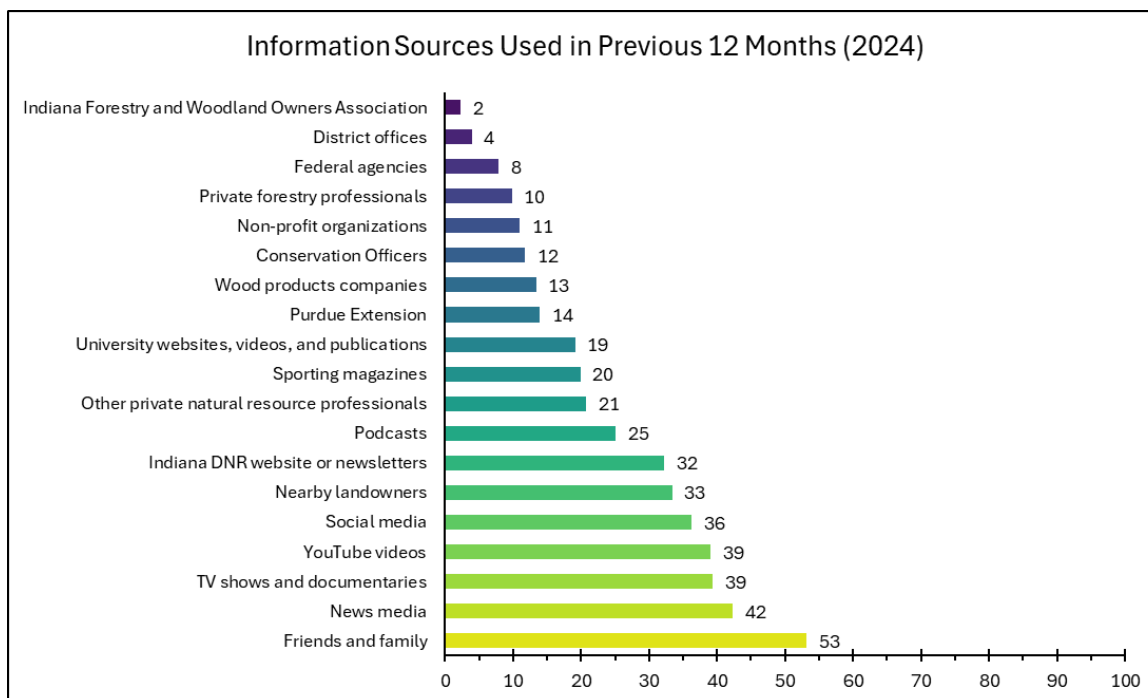


Figure 23: Recently Used Sources of Information (2024)



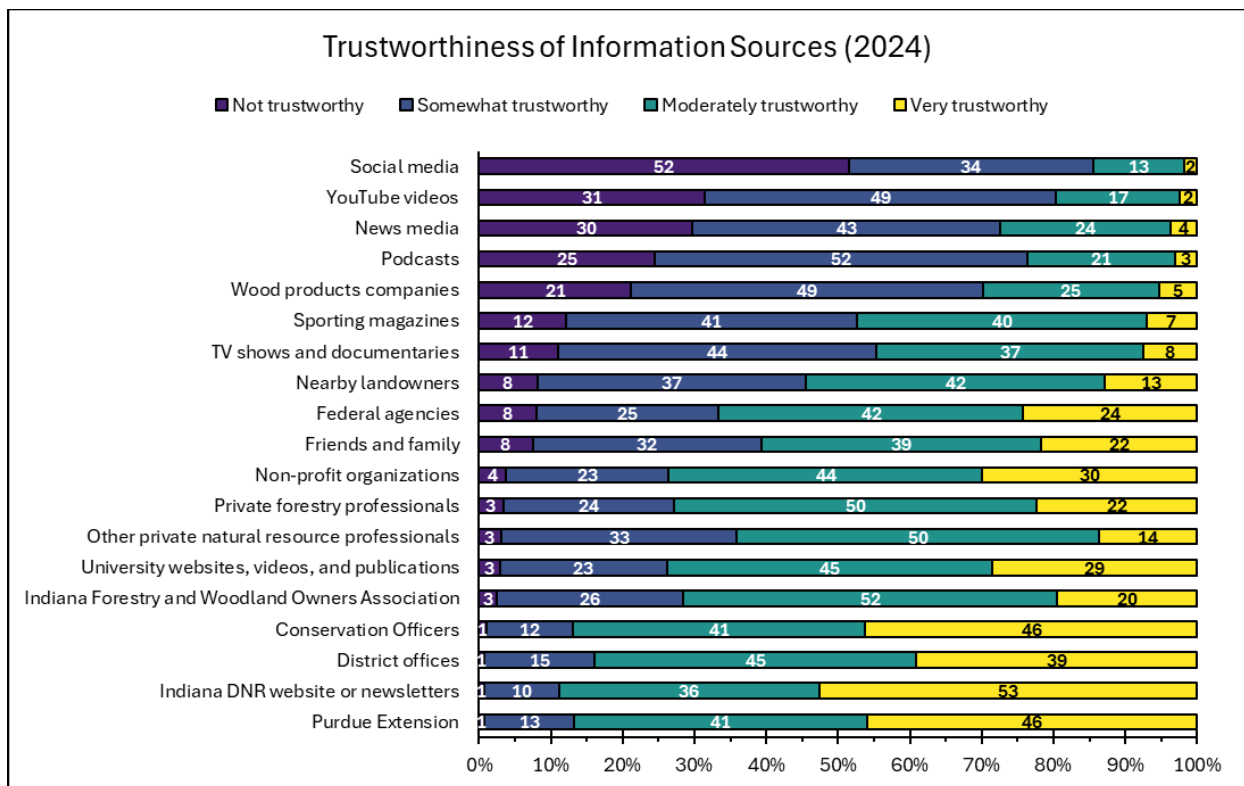


Figure 24: Rating of Information Source Trustworthiness (2024)

Conclusion

The comparison of the 2009 and 2024 public surveys on Indiana’s forests and woodlands highlights both the enduring importance of forests to Indiana residents and changes in public perceptions and information sources over time. Support for a balanced approach to forest conservation and management, as well as for active management for ecological purposes, remained strong. Public support for the Division of Forestry also remained strong, with most Hoosiers continuing to endorse the Division’s advisory role to private landowners. However, awareness of specific programs was limited. At the same time, when programs were explained, Hoosiers consistently responded favorably, indicating a clear opportunity to enhance communication and engagement and build broader public support.

These comparisons should be understood in light of the differences in survey design, which provide complementary perspectives rather than strictly equivalent measures. Taken together, the 2009 and 2024 survey results highlight a critical direction for future work: forest management strategies should continue to emphasize balance, and public outreach should bridge the informal channels where Indiana residents most often encounter information (i.e., friends, family, and mass media) with the professional and institutional sources they trust most. Doing so will help ensure that Indiana’s forests are both well-managed and well-understood by the public in the years ahead.

