

Indiana Division of Forestry 2020 State Forest Open House Summary

In February 2020, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry conducted ten open house events. Each state forest participated in an open house. Each was advertised locally through newspapers and radio as well as regionally through a statewide news release. Newsletters with an article announcing the event were also sent to neighbors and interested stakeholders. State Forests that held events on their property included Clark State Forest/Deam Lake State Recreation Area, Ferdinand State Forest/Pike State Forest, Greene-Sullivan State Forest, Harrison-Crawford State Forest, Jackson-Washington State Forest/Starve Hollow State Recreation Area, Jasper-Pulaski State Nursery, Martin State Forest, Morgan-Monroe State Forest/Yellowwood State Forest, Owen-Putnam State Forest, and Salamonie River State Forest/Frances Slocum State Forest. Selmier State Forest conducted its open house event at the Jennings County fair in July 2019.

Designed as an opportunity in which detailed information about programs and activities held at each state forest can be distributed to the public, the open house events assist in creating a dialogue with neighbors and constituents and allow an opportunity for DNR Forestry to receive their input on state forest management and policies. This year the open house also presented an opportunity for the division to gather input on the development of the 5-Year Strategic Direction for 2020-2024.

Each open house featured a number of displays and included such interest areas as recreation management, resource management, land management, community affairs, property direction, etc. Information pertaining to the Strategic Direction and its planning process was also on display. Each attendee was asked to register, and comment sheets were made available for any ideas or opinions that an individual wished to share on that particular state forest. At least one representative of the division's Central Office staff attend each open house; however, as planned, much of the interaction was between the visitors and the property staff.



2020 marked the eighteenth set of the annual open house events for Division of Forestry properties. Local Conservation Officers, District Foresters, other DNR divisions, and partners of the division were invited to attend and to provide displays and information.

Total registered attendance at the 2020 open houses was 198, a nearly 9% decrease from the previous set of open houses. This number, however, does not reflect the number of contacts made at the Selmier SF event, which was held in conjunction with the Jennings County Fair. This year the highest attending events were Harrison-Crawford SF (33) and Owen-Putnam SF (32). The remaining eight open houses were attended by a total of 163 registered people. While most properties (Ferdinand/Pike SF, Greene-Sullivan SF, Jackson-Washington SF/Starve Hollow SRA, Martin SF, and Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF) saw a decline in participation at their events, Clark SF/Deam Lake SRA, Harrison-Crawford SF, and

Owen-Putnam SF witnessed a rise in attendance. This was the first open house held at Jasper-Pulaski SN, and attendance at Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF remained the same. Jackson-Washington SF, Jasper-Pulaski SN, and Martin SF had the lowest attendance of the properties.

Formal, written comments were received from eight of the ten open houses: Clark SF/Deam Lake SRA, Ferdinand SF/Pike SF, Greene-Sullivan SF, Harrison-Crawford SF, Jackson-Washington SF/Starve Hollow SRA, Morgan-Monroe SF/Yellowwood SF, Owen-Putnam SF, and Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF. Forty-five comment cards were submitted to the division, representing a nearly 50% increase in written comments from the previous series of open houses. Comments included a single card received at Greene-Sullivan SF and Jackson-Washington SF/Starve Hollow SRA, three comment sheets from Ferdinand/Pike SF and Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF, seven cards from Harrison-Crawford SF and Owen-Putnam SF, eleven comment sheets from Clark SF/Deam Lake SRA, and twelve cards from Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF. Three properties did not receive any written comments: Jasper-Pulaski SN, Martin SF, and Selmier SF.



Multiple written comments may have been received on a single comment card. Comments within the same card were counted individually unless they covered the same topic. For example, if a card was received that stated *fishing was great* and *trails needed maintenance*, it was counted as two comments; however, if a card was received that stated *campground is great*, *campsite was awesome*, then it was counted as a single comment. Specific comments in regard to individual management guides that are received through the division webpage and comments from individual property Facebook pages are not included in this summary, but were addressed individually as

they were received. Comments received at an open house but specifically intended for the Strategic Direction were also not included in this summary (separate comment sheets were available for comments on the Strategic Direction).

Written comments were categorized into the following classifications: Recreation (40), Forest Management (22), Volunteering (5), Fish & Wildlife (3), the Division in General (10), and Others (8), for a total of 88 individual comments.

Nearly half of the comments pertained to recreation on the property and included comments as diverse as supporting the dredging of a lake to concerns over special use permits; from general support of the recreation opportunities on the properties to recommendations to add gravel to access points on the trails. The majority of the comments (16) recommended construction of new trails, primarily bike trails, but also hiking and motorized vehicles (i.e., dirt bike and ATV) trails. The development of new trails or trail reroutes will be considered on a case by case basis by the property affected by the proposed trail. Seven comments were received supporting various recreation improvement projects, such as addition of cabins, improvements to playgrounds, campground improvements, and lake dredging. Five comments were received concerning the maintenance or conditions of trails, the majority of which expressed concern on

trail conditions after harvests. The remainder of the comments included suggestions on increasing visitation, concerns over safety, recommendations to improve access, working with interest groups, concerns over special-use permits, and a recommendation to develop a recreation management plan.

A quarter of the comments related to forest management practices. The largest number of comments under this category was received in support of current management practices (5). Three comments were received in support of a set aside for old growth; however, two comments strongly opposed the set aside concept. Three comments were received concerning invasive species control and treatment, and one comment was received for each of the following topics: appreciation for public access to information in management guides, support of old forest designation, support for more early successional forests, concern about pine clearcuts, concern that not fire is not used more for oak retention, concern that more management is necessary for oak/hickory regeneration, recommendation to improve BMPs, recommendation for post-harvest plantings, and a recommendation to evaluate remaining hemlock stands.

Five comments were received from visitors expressing a desire to volunteer at the properties. Two of the three comments received relating to fish and wildlife were in regard to the Learn to Hunt program: one in support of the program and the other expressing concern over the program. The final fish and wildlife comment expressed a desire for increased early successional habitat for diminishing species.

Nearly a third of the general comments expressed how well the individual believed that the property/division was doing. Other comments received in this category included concerns about security, and recommendations for recycling bins, more state forests, to listen to ecologists and wildlife biologists, to create a public accessible map in INMap with compartment and tract designations, to continue to communicate with interested parties, and developing trust.

The remaining comments were classified as “others” and included topics such as carbon sequestration (3), improvements to the CFM program, concerns about road closures for the proposed gun range at Clark SF, and recommendations to visit the Forest Center in southern Indiana, to transfer Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF to the State Parks division, and to set a value on ecosystem services provided by the properties.

In addition to the comments gathered in regard to planning and management of the properties, 6 comments were received directly relating to the 2020-2024 Strategic Direction. These comments, and others received via the division webpage, through the mail, emails, and phone conversations, will be taken into consideration when drafting the Strategic Direction document. Once the draft document is completed (projected for June 2020) it too will be made available for additional public comment.

Verbal discussion during the open houses covered a wide variety of topics, including discussions on timber harvesting, managing private woodlands, trails, wildlife, hunting, fishing, invasive species, and other forestry related issues.

Additional details on attendance and comments received can be found in the attached table. Property staff, in conjunction with Central Office staff where appropriate, evaluated each comment and decided what changes, if any, should be made in their operations. Comments were sent to the Central Office to be compiled into a system-wide database for tracking.



Indiana Department
of Natural Resources

The open house program is one of the many ways the division interacts with its constituents. All properties regularly receive suggestions on area management from our visitors. Properties send newsletters to all of their neighbors and to potentially affected neighbors of nearby management activities. All tract management guides that propose natural resource management are posted on the State Forest web site and are open for, at minimum, a 30-day public comment period. Users of developed recreational facilities are also given the opportunity to submit comments on the Customer Satisfaction Survey cards.

The division remains convinced that the open house program is an important part of its public input process; however, we will also continue to evaluate whether there are more efficient and effective formats that can be used in future years. Notwithstanding potential changes in format, the division is committed to providing information about scheduled forest management activities and opportunities for public input.



Comment Summary

	Forest Management	Fish & Wildlife	Recreation	Volunteers	General	Other	No. of Comment Cards	Total Attendance
Clark SF/Deam Lake SRA	3	2	9	2	3	3	11	22
Ferdinand SF	1	0	8	0	1	1	3	26
Greene-Sullivan SF	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	14
Harrison-Crawford SF	2	0	6	1	0	0	7	33
Jackson-Washington SF/ Starve Hollow SRA	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	9
Jasper-Pulaksi State Nursery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Martin SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Morgan-Monroe SF/ Yellowwood SF	9	1	11	0	1	0	12	24
Owen-Putnam SF	4	0	5	1	0	0	7	32
Salamonie River SF/ Frances Slocum SF	2	0	0	1	4	3	3	25
Selmier SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Total	22	3	40	5	10	8	45	198

Notes:

All of the comments received were reviewed by the Division of Forestry and placed into the broad categories shown above. Copies of each of the original comment sheets are on file in the Division of Forestry. Some sheets contained more than one comment. Single comment sheets bearing more than one signature were counted as one comment sheet; however, the comments were counted individually in the appropriate categories. Phoned and emailed comments were counted as comment sheets.