

2014 Indiana State Forest Open House Summary

Between March and October 2014, the IN DNR - Division of Forestry conducted nine open houses. Each state forest management unit, with the exception of Salamonie River/Francis Slocum, participated in an open house event.

The purpose of the open houses is to provide a venue in which detailed information about programs and activities held at each state forest can be distributed to the public, to create a dialogue with neighbors and constituents, and to allow an opportunity to receive input about the state forest's management and policies. Open houses were advertised locally and through a state-wide news release.

Each open house featured a number of displays. Areas of interest covered by the displays included Recreation Management, Resource Management, Land Management, Community Affairs, Property Direction, etc. Several properties hosted additional educational event such as a forester led trail hike, a mushroom presentation and hike, or an archaeologist present to identify artifacts. Each attendee was asked to register and comment sheets were made available. The comment sheet asked for any ideas they wished to share about that particular state forest. Division of Forestry/Central Office staff attempted to attend each open house; however, as planned, much of the interaction was between the visitors and the property staff.

2014 marked the thirteenth year of the annual open house events for Division of Forestry properties. Local Conservation Officers were invited to attend, both to provide security and to answer questions. The District Foresters, the Division of Fish and Wildlife, and partners of the Division also provided displays and information at some open houses.

Total registered attendance at the 2014 open houses was 546, down slightly from the previous year. The highest attending events were those that were held in conjunction with other nearby public events. Most of the attendance occurred at the Martin State Forest open house held at the Martin County Ag Day program and Selmier State Forest open house event held during the Jennings County Fair (an estimated number of individual talked with is used for Selmier's attendance number; however a far larger number stopped to look at the display). The remaining seven open houses were attended by a total of 121 registered people (actual attendee numbers were higher).

Formal, written comments were received at five of the nine open houses. Ferdinand SF, Jackson-Washington SF/Starve Hollow SRA, and Owen-Putnam SF each received one comment. Five comment sheets were received at the Harrison-Crawford open house and three comment sheets were received at the Yellowwood/Morgan-Monroe open house. Verbal discussions/comments/questions were received at all of the open houses; however, most were typically general in nature and no written comments developed from the dialogs. Multiple comments may have been received on a single comment card. Comments were counted individually unless within the same category (Forest Management, Recreation, Fish and Wildlife, General, or Other) and subcategory (support/concern). 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. At several of the properties the Customer Satisfaction Survey cards were used to leave comments. In these instances written comments were included in this summary, but the responses to the nine point questionnaire were not included; however, they will be included in the summary of the comment cards which can also be found on the Division webpage.

Form letters received which stated the same concerns or accolades were counted as a single comment rather than representing distinct individual comments for each property at which they were received. Specific comments in regards 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.

Written comments were received on Forest Management (3), Recreation (1), and the property in General (6). One comment regarding their appreciation of the permanent display at one office was also received and placed in the Other category. All Forest Management comments indicated concern for the program – two regarding the amount of timber being harvested and one related to the amount of resources available for invasive control. The single recreation concern was in regards to the reopening of the caves, which had been closed due to White Nose Syndrome in the bat populations. Five of the six General comments were in support of the Division and pertained to how well they liked the property and the staff. One concern was listed for better property maps. Verbal discussion covered a wide variety of topics, echoing the ones above and included discussion on wildlife, hunting, shelter houses, 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, if any, changes should be made in their operations. Comments were sent to the Central Office to be compiled into a system-wide database for tracking.

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

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

Comment Summary

Location	Forest Management		Recreation		Fish & Wildlife		General		Other		Attendance
	support	concern	support	concern	support	concern	support	concern	support	concern	
Clark/Deam											5
Ferdinand							1				40
Greene-Sullivan											8
Harrison-Crawford		1		1			3				13
Jackson-Washington/ Starve		1									5
Martin											400
Owen-Putnam		1									29
Selmier											25
Yellowwood/ Morgan-Monroe							1	1	1		21
Totals		3		1			5	1	1		546

Notes:

--All of the comments received were reviewed by the Division of Forestry and placed into broad categories shown above. Copies of each of the original comments 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. A copy of a form letter was supplied at multiple open house events; the letter was counted as a single comment under the first event at which it was delivered. Phoned and emailed comments were counted as comment sheets.

--Comments in the "Other Issues" category included: appreciation of the permanent display at the property office.