

2022 Indiana State Forest Open House Summary

Between October 17-19, 2022, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry conducted nine open house events. Each state forest participated in an open house, which were advertised locally through newspapers and radio as well as regionally through a state-wide news release. Newsletters announcing the events were also sent to neighbors and interested stakeholders. State Forests who held events on their property included Clark State Forest, Ferdinand State Forest/Pike State Forest, Greene-Sullivan State Forest, Harrison-Crawford State Forest, Jackson-Washington State Forest, 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 in conjunction with the event at Jackson-Washington SF.

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 to receive input on state forest management and policies. Each open house featured a number of displays and included such interest areas as recreation management, forest management practices (including timber stand improvement and invasive species management), land management, community affairs, property direction, etc. Properties also offered forester guided hikes to interested participants. Each attendee was asked to register and comment sheets were made available for any suggestions or opinions that an individual wished to share on that particular State Forest. The Division's Central Office staff attempted to attend each open house; however, as planned, much of the interaction was between the visitors and the property staff.



2022 marked the twenty-first year of the annual open house events for Division of Forestry properties, and the second event for the year with a virtual open house occurring in January. Local Conservation Officers, District Foresters, other DNR Divisions, and partners of the Division were invited to attend and to provided displays and information.

Total registered attendance at the 2022 fall open houses was 115, with 51 (44%) of the attendees opting to participate in the field tours. This year the highest attending events were Clark SF (26), Owen-Putnam SF (25), and Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF (20). Martin SF, Greene-Sullivan SF, and Jackson-Washington SF/Selmier SF had the lowest attendance of the properties. Although attendance was significantly lower than previous in-person open house events, this was the first series of open houses held on the properties since February 2020 and it may take a few years to re-establish the event.

Attendees participated in the offered guided tours on six of the properties: Clark SF, Ferdinand SF/Pike SF, Jackson-Washington SF/Selmier SF, Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF, Owen-Putnam SF, and Salamonie River SF. Discussions on the hikes encompassed a wide variety of topics including property histories, invasive management, multiple use management, prescribed burns, timber management, tree planting, water quality, and wildlife habitat.

Formal, written comments were received at six of the nine open houses: Clark SF, Ferdinand SF/Pike SF, Greene-Sullivan SF, Harrison-Crawford SF, Morgan-Monroe SF/Yellowwood SF, and Owen-Putnam SF. Thirty comment cards were submitted to the Division and included a single comment card from Greene-Sullivan SF, two cards from Morgan-Monroe SF, three cards from both Ferdinand SF/Pike SF and Harrison-Crawford SF, five comments from Clark SF, and sixteen cards from Owen-Putman 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 regards to individual management guides that are received through the Division webpage and comments from individual property emails are not included in this summary, but were addressed individually as they were received.

Written comments were categorized into the following classifications: Forest Resource Management (20), Recreation (2), Volunteers (2), Fish and Wildlife (1), General Division Operations (6), and Others (4). The majority (85%) of the comments regarding forest management were received from Owen-Putnam SF and regarded opposition of the harvest around the campground. Of the three remaining forest management comments two were opposed to timber management and one supported the property's timber management practices.



Of the two comments pertaining to recreation, one regarded support of the hiking and horse trails while the second was a request to reopen Stagesop, a recreation area at Harrison-Crawford SF. The two comments regarding volunteering were both from Clark SF and expressed the positive experience of one volunteer and the eagerness of a new volunteer to work with the property. The single comment relating to Fish & Wildlife was received from an individual who was advocating for the release of black bears.

General Division Operation comments generally included thank yous for the good work the properties perform and commendations of the staff. One comment was received from an individual requesting clarification of the Division's budget. Comments received in the Other category included interest in part time positions, two thank yous for the open house, and a request to update the Natural Heritage Database, which is maintained by the Division of Nature Preserves and outside of DoF's purview.

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, upgrades to property recreation features, and other forestry related issues. Specific topics pertaining to individual properties included discussions on individual trail repairs, deer fencing, shelter repairs, and the million tree initiative.

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 its constituents. All properties regularly receive suggestions on area management from our visitors. Properties keep neighbors informed on management activities that may impact them and open house events through mailings and web postings. 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 utilized 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	Recreation	Volunteer	Fish & Wildlife	General DoF Operations	Other	No of Comment Cards	Total Attendance
Clark SF	0	1	2	0	2	1	5	26
Ferdinand SF/Pike SF	2	0	0	1	1	0	3	11
Greene-Sullivan SF	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Harrison-Crawford SF	0	1	0	0	2	0	3	12
Jackson-Washington SF/Selmier SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Martin SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Morgan-Monroe SF/ Yellowwood SF	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	14
Owen-Putnam SF	15	0	0	0	1	3	16	25
Salamonie River SF/ Frances Slocum SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Total	20	2	2	1	6	4	30	115

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.