



2015 Indiana State Forest Open House Summary

Between April and September 2015, the DNR Division of Forestry conducted nine open houses. Each state forest management unit except Salamonie River/Francis Slocum participated in an open house event.

The purpose is to share information about programs and activities at each state forest, engage with neighbors and constituents, and receive input about the state forest's management and policies. Open houses were advertised locally and through a statewide news release.

Each open house featured displays with topics that included recreation management, resource management, land management, community affairs, and property direction. Several properties hosted additional educational events such as guided hike or having an archaeologist present to identify artifacts. Staff asked each visitor to register and made comment sheets available. The comment sheet asked for ideas or opinions about 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 visitors and the property staff.

2015 marked the 14th year for annual open house events for Division of Forestry properties. Conservation Officers were invited, both to provide security and to answer questions. District Foresters, staff from DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife, and partners of the Division also provided displays and information.

Total registered attendance at the 2015 open houses was 271, down from the previous year primarily due to the change of venue for the Martin State Forest open house. In previous years, the open house was held in conjunction with the county's popular Ag Day. This year, the event was held in conjunction with the county fair. The highest attending event was Yellowwood/Morgan-Monroe's (100 people) due to the proposed Yellowwood Lake Road Project. Both Martin and Selmer SF held their open house in conjunction with county fairs (Martin and Jennings, respectively). The displays were viewed by a higher number of individuals than is reflected in the registered attendees number (35 and 7, respectively), which counted only people who had one-on-one conversations with property staff. The remaining six open houses were attended by a combined 129 registered people (although actual attendee numbers were higher).

Formal, written comments were received at four of the nine open houses: Ferdinand SF, Greene-Sullivan SF, Jackson-Washington SF/Starve Hollow SRA, and Yellowwood/Morgan-Monroe SF. Two comment sheets were received from the Jackson-Washington/Starve Hollow and Greene-Sullivan open houses while four were collected from Ferdinand's. Sixteen comments were received at the Yellowwood/Morgan-Monroe open house, including several submitted by email from people who could not attend the event. Verbal discussions/comments/questions were received at all 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 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. In one instance the same organization submitted comments at two different open houses. Comments were counted for

each property where specific property concerns were addressed; however, general comments on the Division that was repeated in both letters were counted as one and included with the first property in 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 (9), recreation (15), fish and wildlife (4), the Division in general (6), and others (3). Comments on forest management included two comments opposing clear cutting, three comments against the current management plan, and two comments favoring reduced harvest levels. One comment was also received that recommended stricter BMP regulations and developing a procedure to address repeat BMP offenders. One comment supported current management. It should be noted that two comments supported increasing early successional habitat; however, these comments were tabulated under Fish and Wildlife since the habitat was to support the decreasing species populations that require this landscape.

Two comments applauded recreation on the properties while two recommended limiting recreation opportunities. Six comments favored a proposed North Loop trail at Morgan-Monroe; one favored the addition of bike trails at Greene-Sullivan; and one comment supported the planned bike trail at Morgan-Monroe. In addition a comment encouraged working with user groups in reclaiming roads/trails after harvests; one comment was received to developing set-aside areas; and one comment requested more signage.

Fish and wildlife comments included decreasing fishing limits rather than closing the lake while Starve Hollow Lake level is lowered. Also, two comments supported developing early successional habitat for species such as grouse, deer, etc.; and one comment commended the fishing at Greene-Sullivan.

General comments related to the support/enjoyment of the property (3), expansion of public comments on the strategic plan (2), and a request to develop maps showing High Conservation Value Forests. Other comments included three responses against the proposed Yellowwood Lake Road Improvement project.

Verbal discussion covered a variety of topics, echoing the ones above, and included discussion on timber harvesting, managing private woodlands, trails, wildlife, hunting, fishing, emerald ash borer and other forestry related issues.

Additional details on attendance and comments are in the attached table. Property staff, in conjunction with Central Office staff where appropriate, evaluated each comment and decided what, if any, changes to make in 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 constituents. All properties regularly receive suggestions on area management from our visitors. Properties send annual newsletters to all of our neighbors and to potentially affected neighbors of 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-house 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 providing 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											10
Ferdinand		2		2			1				39
Greene-Sullivan			2	1	1		1				21
Harrison-Crawford											12
Jackson-Washington/ Starve		1				1					17
Martin											35
Owen-Putnam											30
Selmier											7
Yellowwood/ Morgan-Monroe	1	5	7	3	2		1	3		3	100
Totals											271

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. In one instance the same organization submitted comments at two different open houses. Comments were counted for each property where specific property concerns were addressed; however, non-property specific comments that were repeated in both letters 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 the Yellowwood Lake Road improvement project.