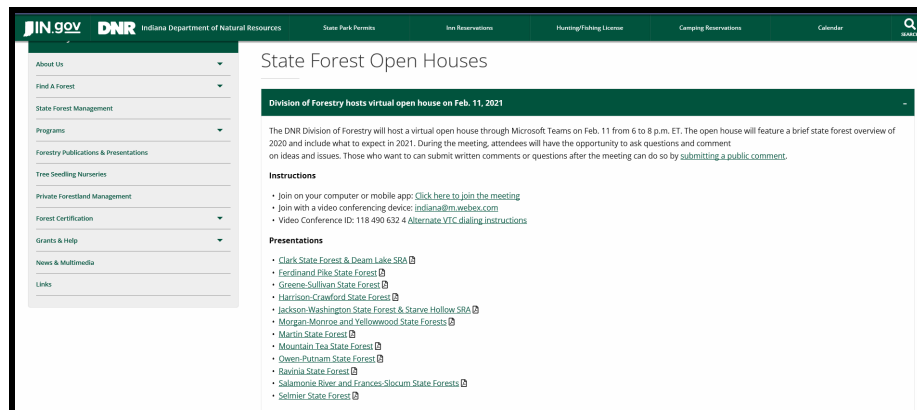


Indiana Division of Forestry 2021 State Forest Open House Summary

On February 11, 2021, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry conducted a virtual open house event. Each state forest (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, Martin State Forest, Morgan-Monroe State Forest/Yellowwood State Forest, Mountain Tea State Forest, Owen-Putnam State Forest, Ravinia State Forest, Salamonie River State Forest/Frances Slocum State Forest, and Selmier State Forest) participated in the online event by preparing presentations that could be viewed through the division's webpage before the event. Presentations provided a property overview and described completed, in-progress, and proposed projects, and resource management activities.

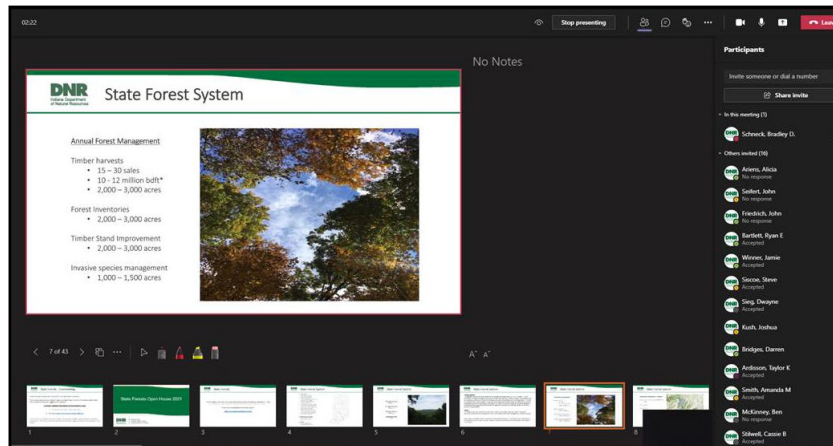
Designed as an opportunity in which detailed information about programs and activities held at each state forest can be distributed to the public, the open house event assists in creating a dialogue with neighbors and constituents and allows an opportunity to receive their input on state forest management and policies. The event was advertised via a statewide news release, the Division of Forestry webpage, articles in local newspapers, and in property newsletters that were sent to neighboring landowners and interested stakeholders.



A total of 45 registered 'guests' attended the virtual meeting; however, each guest may consist of more than one person viewing from a single computer or mobile device. In addition to the 45 registered guests, 21 DNR staff members attended, consisting of property staff, property managers, and Central Office staff.

The two-hour meeting was opened with a welcome and overview of the State Forest system. Topics discussed included forest management, recreation management, the ForestIN initiative, invasive species, timber sales, certification, Best Management Practices, caves, research conducted through the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment, deferred maintenance projects, property improvement projects, the nursery, online bidding, property access, signage, and the new Woods on Wheels display.

After the presentation by division staff the meeting was opened for comments and discussions. Questions and comments could be either asked in the open forum or submitted via the chat. Questions addressed to the overall operations of the division were addressed by Central Office staff via video, while questions specific to a property were answered by property staff via the chat. General topics covered in the discussion included forest aging and mortality, the use of Round-Up® and its effects, climate change, clearcutting, 5-year property plans, the proposed online bidding process, young forest stands and old growth stands, ticks, caves, diminish of cherry trees, property level biodiversity inventories, hiking and mountain bike trails, post-harvest conditions, prescribed burns, the budget, and clarification of information presented during the opening presentation. Five properties (Ferdinand SF, Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF, Mountain Tea SF, Owen-Putnam SF, and Ravinia SF) received questions specifically related to their operations. These comments pertained to harvest activities, recreation trails, and the proposed High Conservation Value Forest.



Comments were also encouraged to be submitted via the public comment page on the division's website, and 17 comments relating the Division of Forestry were received via this method. These comments were categorized into the following classifications: Recreation (13), Forest Management (3), and Volunteering (1). The majority of the comments pertaining to recreation (9) were in favor of more mountain bike trails, particularly at Ferdinand/Pike. The remaining recreation comments included support for disc golf courses, more hiking trails, concerns about ebikes, and a request to continue funding of recreation projects. Harvest comments expressed concerns for openings, clearing forests for oaks, and post-harvest debris. One comment was received concerning the volunteer program. In addition, 58 comments were received that referenced non-Division of Forestry properties; 56 pertained to management on State Parks and 2 referenced federal properties. All of these comments pertained to recreation and particularly of mountain bike trails.

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 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 website 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.