

2023 Indiana State Forest Open House Summary

Between October 24-26, 2023, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry conducted nine 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. Postcards announcing the event were also sent to neighbors and interested stakeholders. State Forests that 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, while Mountain Tea State Forest and Ravinia State Forest were held in conjunction with the Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF open house.

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 also attended the open houses; however, as planned, much of the interaction was between the visitors and the property staff.



The year 2023 marked the 22nd year 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 2023 fall open houses was 141, with 50 (35%) of the attendees opting to participate in the field tours. This year the highest attending events were Clark SF (45), Owen-Putnam SF (18), and Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF (16). Martin SF, Greene-Sullivan SF, and Jackson-Washington SF had the lowest attendance of the properties. Attendance was slightly higher than the previous year's open houses with 26 more people visiting the properties for the events.

Attendees participated in the offered guided tours on seven of the properties: Clark SF, Ferdinand/Pike SF, Harrison-Crawford SF, Martin SF, Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF, Owen-Putnam SF, and Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF. Discussions on the hikes encompassed a wide variety of topics including carbon, invasive management, multiple use management, prescribed burns, timber management, trail maintenance, tree planting, water quality, and wildlife habitat.

Formal, written comments were received at four of the nine open houses: Ferdinand/Pike SF, Harrison-Crawford SF, Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood SF, and Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF. Five comment cards were submitted to the division, a significant decline from previous years. A single comment card

was received at Ferdinand/Pike SF, Harrison-Crawford SF, and Salamonie River/Frances Slocum SF, while two cards were submitted at Morgan-Monroe/Yellowwood 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 regarding individual management guides that are received through the division webpage and comments from individual property emails received throughout the year 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 (1), Recreation (2), General Division Operations (3), and Others (1). The only comment received concerning forest resource management was from the Ferdinand/Pike SF open house and was about prescribed fires.

Of the two comments pertaining to recreation, one regarded plans for building camping cabins and the second was in favor of the reopening of caves. The general division operation comments included commendations of the staff and of the property. One comment received in the other category included concerns about invasives (not in relation to forest management activities).

Verbal discussion during the open houses covered a wide variety of topics, including discussions on timber harvesting, oak management, 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 boundary lines, individual trail repairs, beaver management, mountain bike trails, fire tower repairs, and safety zones.



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 systemwide 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. 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	Fish & Wildlife	General DoF Operations	Other	No of Comment Cards	Total Attendance
Clark SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	45
Ferdinand/Pike SF	1	1	0	0	1	1	12
Greene-Sullivan SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Harrison-Crawford SF	0	1	0	0	0	1	15
Jackson-Washington SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Martin SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Morgan-Monroe SF/ Yellowwood SF	0	0	0	2	0	2	16
Owen-Putnam SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Salamonie River SF/ Frances Slocum SF	0	0	0	1	0	1	12
Selmier SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Total	1	2	0	3	1	5	141

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 received as part of the open house event were counted as comment sheets.