

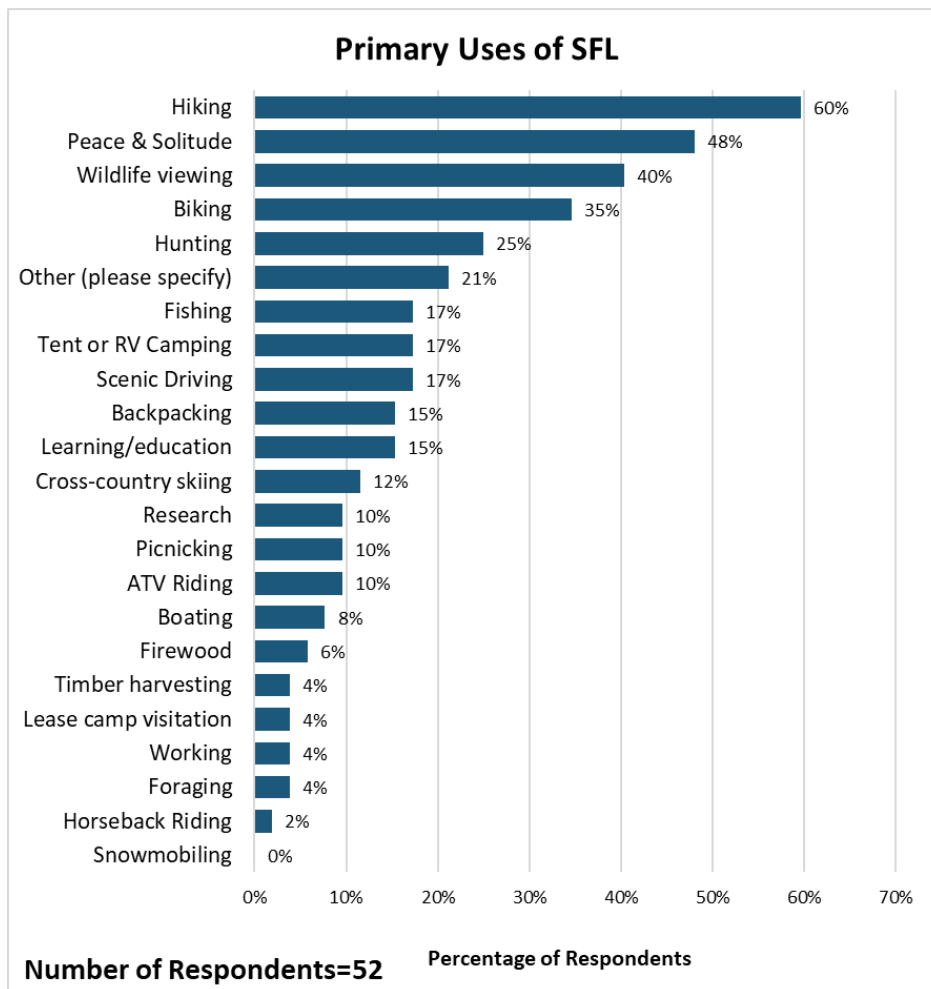
2020 Michaux State Forest Resource Management Plan

Public Survey Data and Response to Public Comments

This document presents public survey data and responses to the public comments received by the Bureau of Forestry (bureau) on the Michaux District State Forest Resource Management Plan (DSFRMP). The public survey data is based on online poll results as well as paper comment forms received during the public comment period on the Michaux DSFRMP. The public comment period was open for two months following the date of the Michaux DSFRMP public meeting, which was held on August 2, 2018. The public survey data is not a statistically valid public poll, but rather the opinions of interested stakeholders that chose to fill out the online or paper survey. The bureau received 52 responses to the survey.

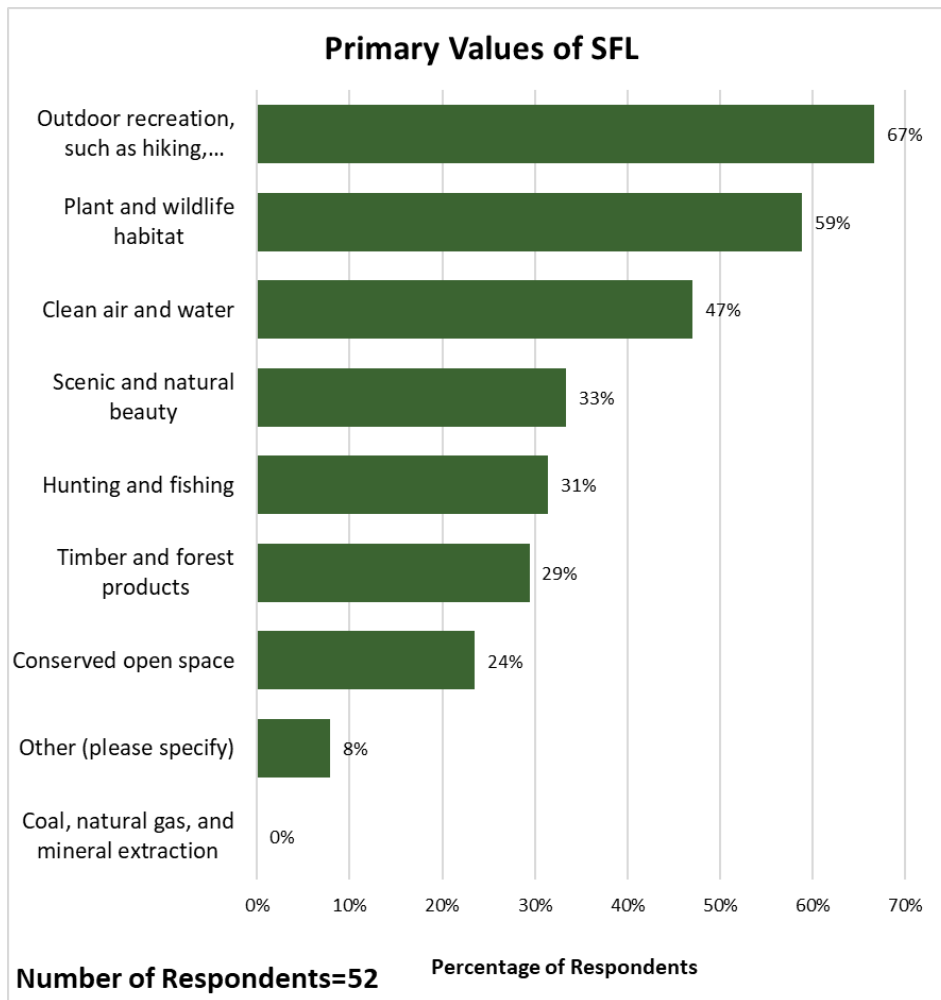
State Forest Uses

In Question 1, survey respondents were asked to check their primary uses of state forest land. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Michaux DSFRMP survey. It shows that hiking is by far the most common use of state forest land amongst survey respondents followed by peace and solitude and wildlife viewing at 48 and 40% respectively.



State Forest Values

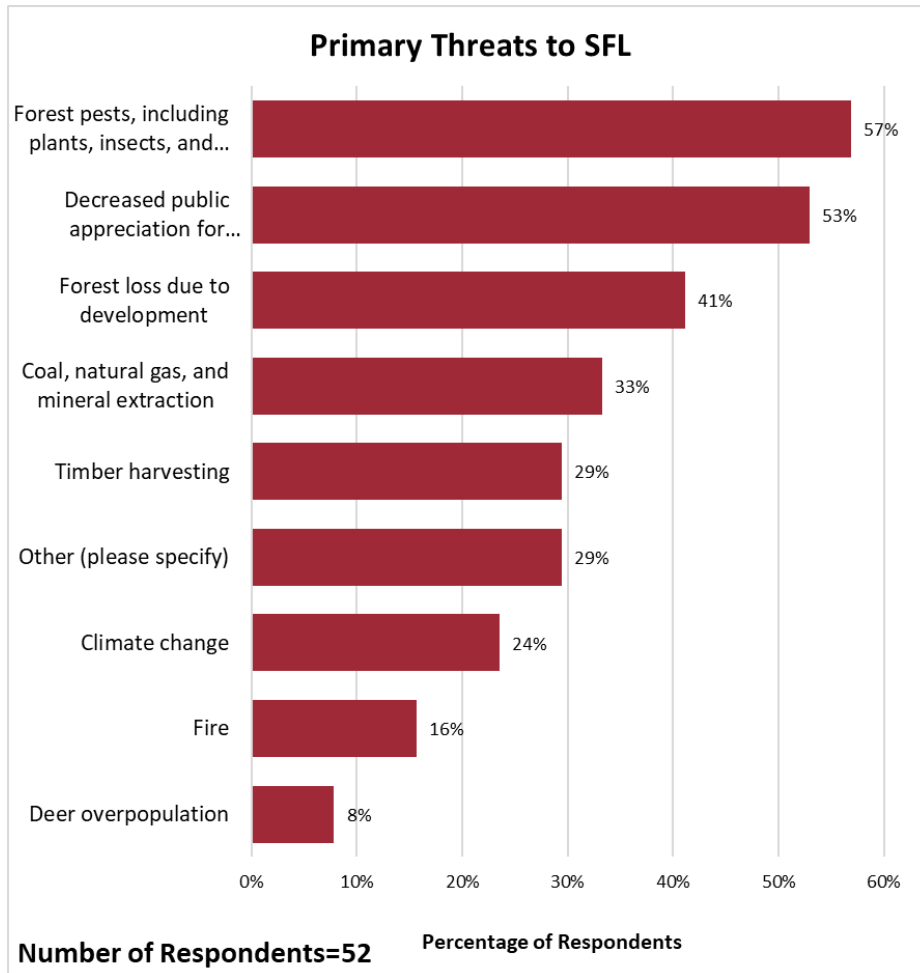
In Question 2, survey respondents were asked to select the top three values they perceive for Michaux State Forest. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Michaux DSFRMP survey. It shows that outdoor recreation (such as hiking, biking, and picnicking), at 67%, is the top-rated value amongst survey respondents followed by plant and wildlife habitat at 59%. Other intrinsic values of forest land such as clean air and water, natural beauty, and conserved open space are highly rated by over 40% of the respondents. As the largest block of land available to public hunting in the Pennsylvania Game Commissions 5A Wildlife management unit and a unique bio-reserve of high quality brook-trout waters in the southern portion of the state; public hunting and fishing were ranked as top forest value on the Michaux by 31% of respondents.



Michaux State Forest lands occupy the northern terminus of the Blue Ridge Mountain, covering an area of roughly 140 square miles between Blue Ridge Summit and route 16 in the south to Mount Holly Springs and Route 34 in the north. It provides backdoor recreation for the dense rural population of the Cumberland valley surrounding the forest as well as Pennsylvania population centers such as Harrisburg, Gettysburg, Carlisle, Shippensburg, and Chambersburg. It is also a day trip and vacation destination for Baltimore and Washington D.C. metropolitan areas.

State Forest Threats

In Question 3, survey respondents were asked to select the top three threats they perceive for Michaux State Forest. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Michaux DSFRMP survey. It shows that forest pests including invasive plants, insects, and disease, Decreased public appreciation for nature, and forest loss due to development were rated as the top threats amongst survey respondents.



Regarding forest loss due to development:

All forests, public and private, provide many benefits and services to citizens of Pennsylvania, visitors, and the businesses and industry of the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania forests offer wood products, watershed values, recreation opportunities, plant and wildlife habitat, and a variety of other values. However, as forested lands are fragmented and disappear, so do the benefits they provide. To meet its mission of ensuring the long-term health, viability, and productivity of the Commonwealth's forests, one of the foundational challenges is to keep forests as forests. This aim can be very complex to achieve with the 12 million acres of privately own forest land in Pennsylvania that are receiving ever increasing land use change pressure.

Measures and activities that the Bureau undertakes to address forest loss include:

- 35 Service Foresters stationed throughout the state to provide guidance to private forest landowners;
- Assistance to municipalities with land use planning;
- Partnering with Penn State Center for Private Forests on Forest Landowner Legacy that focuses on forest ownership succession planning;
- Administering the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program that provides funding for forest acquisitions and easements;
- Development of a working forest easement program;
- Pursuing key forest acquisitions to add to the state forest system;
- Supporting many different conservancies and the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association; and
- Promoting forestry and the knowledge of forests by educating and assisting other government agencies, communities, landowners, forest industry, and the general public in forest stewardship and value of forest resources.

Regarding coal, natural gas, and mineral extraction:

The Bureau of Forestry's mission statement identifies the *environmentally sound utilization of mineral resources*, which includes coal, natural gas, and other minerals extraction, as a key component of state forest management. There is presently an Executive Order prohibiting additional oil and gas leasing of state forest land, subject to future advice and recommendations made by DCNR. Management decisions related to currently permissible extraction activities are guided by many sources of information including: applicable laws and regulations; the 2016 State Forest Resource Management Plan; leases and contracts; and guidelines and procedures, such as the Guidelines for Administering Oil and Gas Activity on State Forest Lands. The Bureau's approach for managing negative effects of extraction activities is "avoid, minimize, mitigate, and monitor."

The Bureau of Forestry established a shale gas monitoring program in 2011 that consists of an integrated monitoring team, on-the-ground management activities, and research and external partner collaborations. The program monitors a suite of forest values to identify the effects of oil and gas development on state forest land, inform management decisions, and develop best management practices for administering oil and gas development. The shale gas monitoring program published its second comprehensive report in 2018. Information on the Bureau's oil and gas management can be found at this web address:

<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/ForestsAndTrees/NaturalGasDrillingImpact/Pages/default.aspx>

Other Comments from Public

Regarding Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution:

Michaux District received several comments regarding the DSFRMP and its relation to Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

Article 1, Section 27 of the Constitution, the Conservation and Natural Resources Act, the Wild Resource Conservation Act, and Penn's Woods are all described in the 2016 state-wide SFRMP as "Planning Foundations" on which the SFRMP and all state forest management is based. The Preface to the District SFRMPs also acknowledges the importance of Article 1, Section 27 in defining the bureau's stewardship responsibilities for state forest lands. The bureau recognizes the people's right to "clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of natural, scenic, historic, and esthetic values of the environment." The priority goals of the Michaux District SFRMP, as well as the policies, goals, and objectives of the 2016 state-wide SFRMP, serve to conserve these rights and will help the bureau sustainably manage the state forest system for the benefit of all Commonwealth citizens, including generations yet to come.

Other themes captured from public comments include:

Michaux Recreational Pressure and Demand

A desire for more engagement in planning, developing, and sustaining improved shared use trail systems on the forest and in general managing the forest for the host of recreational expectations and pressures that it currently supports. Many of these comments reflected concern that the management plan and planning process does not adequately address the recreational dynamics and trajectories currently playing out on the Michaux in terms of equipping either the public or local managers with adequate management framework or tools to ensure positive outcomes.

Engagement with Forest Conservation/Management Work

More engagement/education opportunities around habitat, species conservation, and timber management activities on the forest. Some comments of this nature reflected some level of concern about the potential negative impacts of management activities (e.g. timber harvesting, herbicide, prescribed fire) while others reflect more an interest in better understanding or even opportunities to volunteer or otherwise engage in forest management activities with district staff.

Infrastructure and Site Management

Need for increased site signage and infrastructure upkeep at trailheads, parking areas, and high use sites (Long Pine Run Reservoir), along with comments on the level of dumping, littering, graffiti, and vandalism were other themes reflected in a subset of comments.

Public Relations and Communication

There was a positive response to the District's "open house" planning meeting coupled with a general desire for more regular opportunities for such types of interactions with district staff and the issues facing the forest.

District response to public comment themes:

In part as a response to the public input received during the District Management plan process, the district worked with Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation to establish the Friends of Michaux in 2019. The purpose of the Friends of Michaux is to help improve the District's capacity and effectiveness in meeting the need for greater public and stakeholder engagement in our plan implementation efforts,

as well as to improve how efficiently we harness volunteer capacity to address habitat and recreational infrastructure management needs. To learn more about and get involved with the Friends of Michaux please visit <https://friendsofmichaux.org/>

The district also formed two internal district level Committees to better align internal district commitment to respond positively to some of the themes heard from the public. Staff liaisons from both of these internal committees will work with Friends of Michaux leadership to integrate and align outreach and volunteer needs that meet the mission of both groups. The Outreach and Engagement Committee will be working to ensure some of the district's annual activities are designed to improve short and long term public relations and communications strategies around critical forest management functions and issues. This committee will leverage internal district efforts to begin planning a couple events each year that help showcase how Michaux staff try to integrate public interests and concerns into our work as public forest trustees. The ultimate objective of this committee will be to then partner with external expertise and capacity through the Michaux Friends Group and the South Mountain Partnership to use photo-documentation of these events to support greater availability and outreach opportunities through web-based products supported by these partners.

The other district committee formed in response to public input throughout the management planning process is the Signage and Interpretation Committee which has been tasked to update and sustain our fixed signage/interpretive resources on the forest to ensure we are meeting both standardized (i.e. the BoF Road and Sign Manual Guidelines) and opportunistic engagement through our forest signage and interpretive infrastructure. This committee's objective is to ensure site and signage maintenance on the Michaux consistently welcomes and sustains opportunities for safe, enjoyable public forest use while also encouraging greater curiosity, understanding, and public stewardship commitment. As work with the Friends of Michaux progresses and we improve our ability to redesign and improve the Michaux's shared use trail system to better accommodate the needs of current and future forest users while also improving our ability to sustain the diverse habitats, wildlife species, and ecosystem services this forest provides, the District Signage and Interpretation Committee will work with the Friends of Michaux to ensure improved site, infrastructure, and habitat stewardship is supported among forest user communities through improved signage across the forest.

Infrastructure improvements are being planned for Long Pine Run Reservoir to include latrine facilities, improved parking area design and boat launch, improved signage, and better designed and signed trail connectivity to provide trail opportunities around the high use site. The intent of these improvements is to minimize public health risks posed by current recreational pressures at the reservoir. Better trail design, connectivity, and signage around the reservoir site is needed to help disperse user densities during high use periods, minimize the attraction of current illegal use issues swimming and wading in the reservoir and spillway, climbing on spillway and impoundment, and picnicking and overnight camping around the perimeter of the water body. Improved mapping and signage, and educational materials on the public health risks posed by illegal use of this recreational site are also needed to enhance the effectiveness of enforcement efforts.