

## **2019 Loyalsock State Forest Resource Management Plan**

### **Public Survey Data and Response to Public Comments**

Public comments were collected through an online survey for the Loyalsock and at a public meeting that was held on August 15, 2018 at the Loyalsock Forest District Resource Management Center in Dushore. Below you will see Figures that reflect survey response for primary uses of SFL, perceived values and perceived threats to SFL. Peace and solitude, wildlife viewing, hiking and backpacking were the top 4 uses. The top 3 values of SFL were outdoor recreation, plant and wildlife habitat, and scenic and natural beauty. Forest pests, loss of land to development and coal, natural gas and mineral extraction were the top 3 perceived threats to SFL. Comments were collected in relation to each question. From those comments, three main themes stood out. They were concerns or comments for a variety of recreational pursuits, concerns about oil & gas activity, and the need to protect public lands from any further development.

Recreation is clearly highly valued among the constituents of the Loyalsock State Forest. Recreation was the chief topic area receiving comments. While we received comments regarding mountain biking, hunting, ATVs, equestrian trails and wildlife viewing, by far the dominant theme was low-density, dispersed hiking and backpacking trails.

There was a notable amount of comments regarding the protection of the existing low-density hiking trail system and to prevent encroachments and impacts to the hiking trails. The Loyalsock State Forest is home to two popular hiking trails, The Loyalsock Trail and The Old Loggers Path. These trails are designated for foot traffic only and are protected from encroachment with a buffer. Where opportunities were present, the district has harvested white ash trees in the trail buffer as a safety measure, especially where the buffer was comprised of a very high component of ash trees that were succumbing to the emerald ash borer, an invasive pest. It was determined that the benefits to hiker safety outweighed the disturbance within the trail buffer. Further encroachments to the trails are unlikely because since the white ash trees are beyond the point of salvaging in most cases.

Several comments were in favor of seeing trail shelters installed along The Old Loggers Path. Enhancing and protecting recreational opportunities is included in the principle goals of the LMUs that contain The Old Loggers Path. We will continue to monitor trail shelter use and determine if additional shelters are feasible.

Comments regarding ATVs were grossly negative as were comments regarding off road motorized recreation in general. Many persons surveyed indicated that they preferred an increase in law enforcement efforts pertaining to the illegal riding of ATVs on the Loyalsock State Forest and were opposed to the development of any ATV trails on the Loyalsock State Forest. Currently, the Loyalsock State Forest has no trails open to ATVs except for those authorized for use to disabled persons with a DCNR Mobility Device Permit.

The public stressed great emphasis on the importance of state forest roads and their quality. Many accolades were received for the Loyalsock State Forest roads, despite the high amount of damage

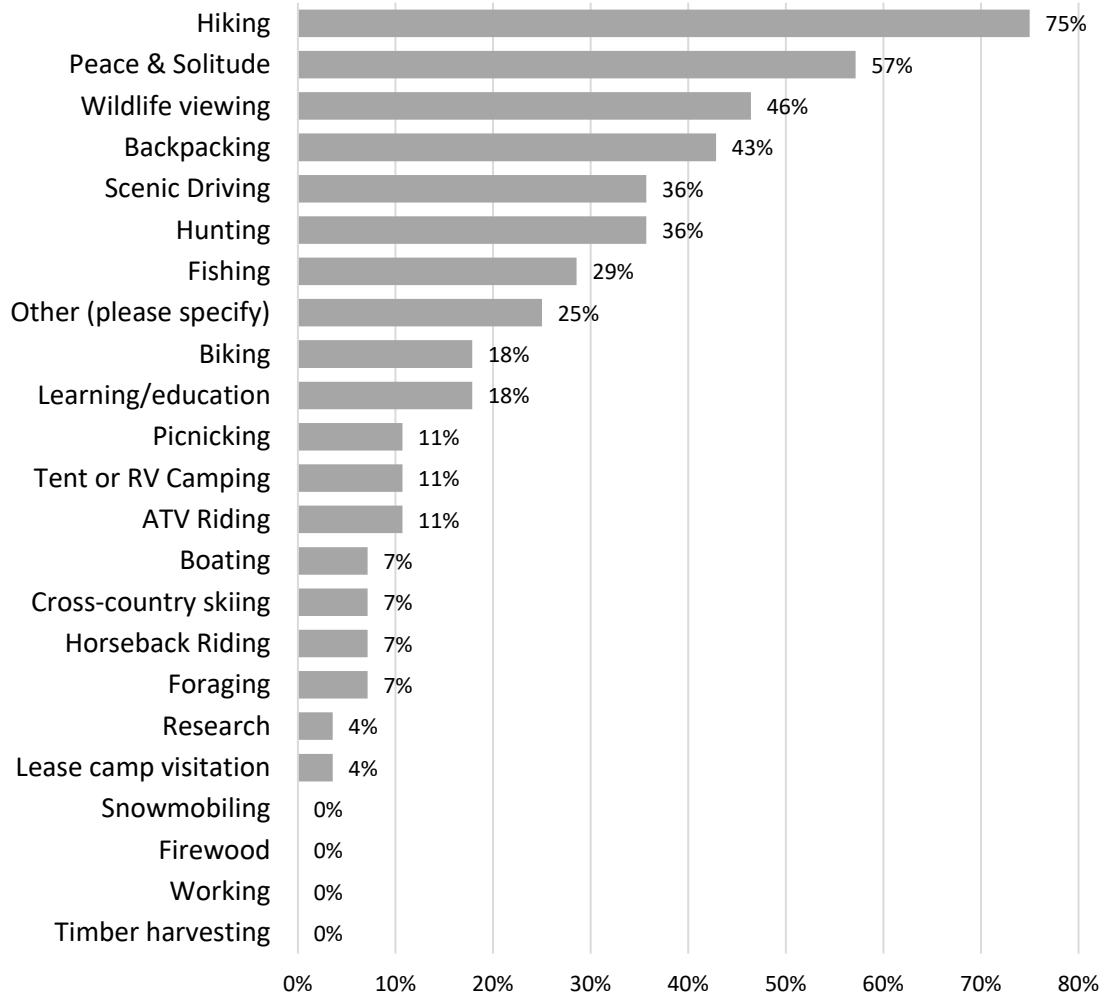
received in the October 2106 flooding event. The district recognizes this as a principle goal and will continue to place road maintenance and public access in general among its top priorities.

The survey reinforced the overall public concern of the impact of the oil and gas industry on state forest lands. The DCNR Bureau of Forestry's mission statement clearly identifies the environmentally sound utilization of mineral resources, which includes oil and gas, as a key component of state forest management. Oil and gas management decisions must be based on the mission, and work toward ensuring the long-term health, viability, and productivity of the commonwealth's forests and conserving native wild plants. Oil and natural gas development is one of the management activities that historically has occurred on state forest land. The activity contributes significantly to Pennsylvania's economy and provides a source of domestic energy. Natural gas development, however, especially at the scale seen in the modern shale-gas era, affects a variety of forest resources and values, such as: recreational opportunities, the forest's wild character and scenic beauty, and plant and wildlife habitat. The district will manage the natural gas leases on state forest land in accordance with the Bureau's Guidelines for Administering Oil and Gas Activity on State Forest Lands. The Loyalsock Forest District will pursue opportunities to cooperatively manage geologic resource development where the commonwealth is not the fee-simple land owner. The district will maintain a close working relationship with natural gas operators to minimize impacts where the state does not own the sub-surface rights.

Results from the survey indicated that another major topic of concern was the protection of the state forest from further development and its preservation for future generations. Based on the bureau's mission statement, sustainability is the overarching goal of state forest management. Sustainability is a complex idea involving economic, environmental, and social factors. The term "forest sustainability" implies the continued existence and use of forests to meet human physical, economic, and social needs; the desire to preserve the health of forest ecosystems in perpetuity; and the preservation of options for future generations while meeting the needs of the present. The Bureau of Forestry, to include the Loyalsock Forest District, will continue to manage the state forest land as a "working forest" as detailed in the 2016 State Forest Resource Management Plan. So, while some developments may occur, in general they are of a temporary nature or are minimized to cause the least amount of disruption to other uses and values as possible.

Through the development of the SFRMP and the DSFRMP, the bureau has developed plans that consider public opinion/comments, science and processes that ensure we do our due diligence when planning and completing projects. In addition to gathering public input during plan development, for individual projects on state forest land that may impact forest land or conflict with other uses, the State Forest Environmental Review process ensures that we conduct a holist analysis of twenty-three different criteria to include PNDI reviews, consideration of alternatives, and minimizing impacts to traditional SFL use. This review process helps to ensure that individual projects are all tied back into the state and district-level Forest Resource Plans that were developed with public input.

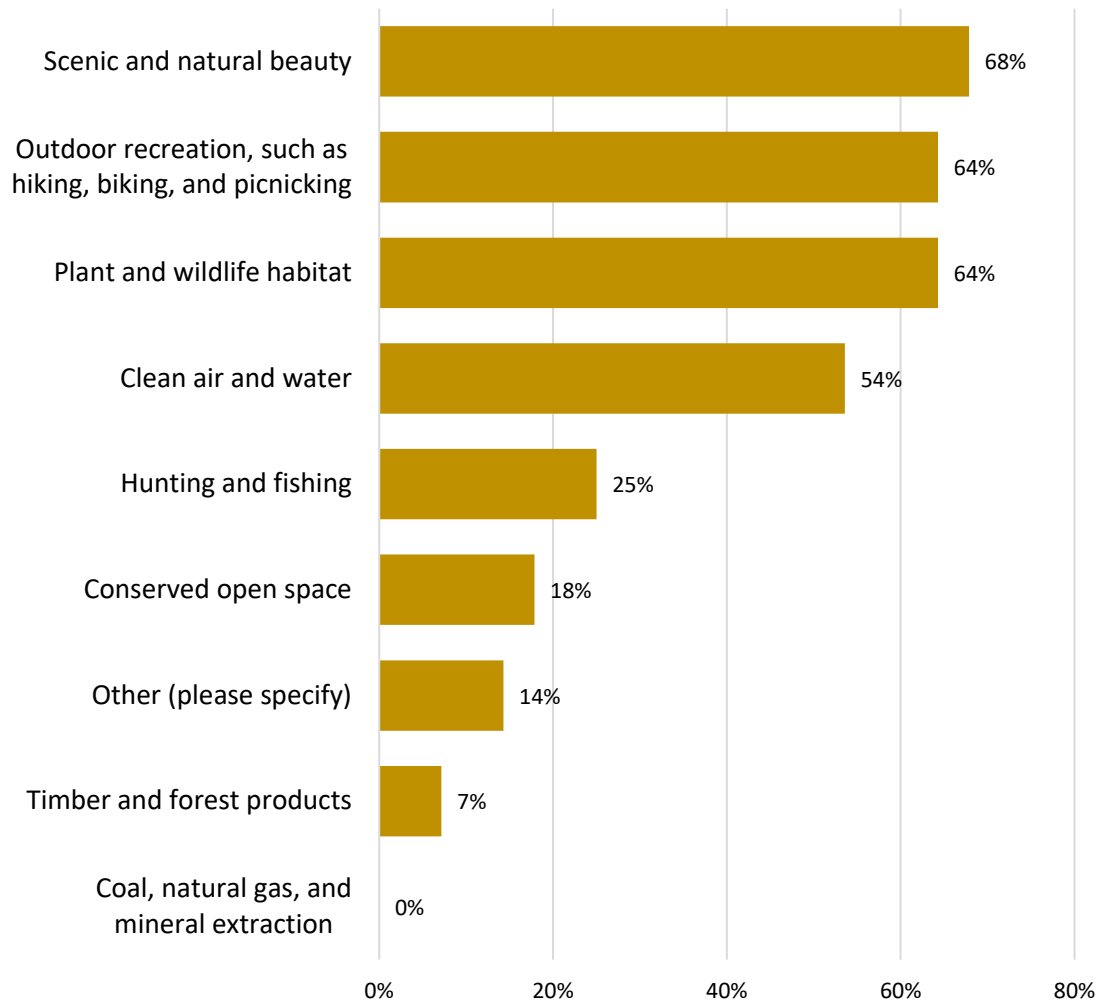
## Primary Uses of SFL



**Number of Respondents=28**

**Percentage of Respondents**

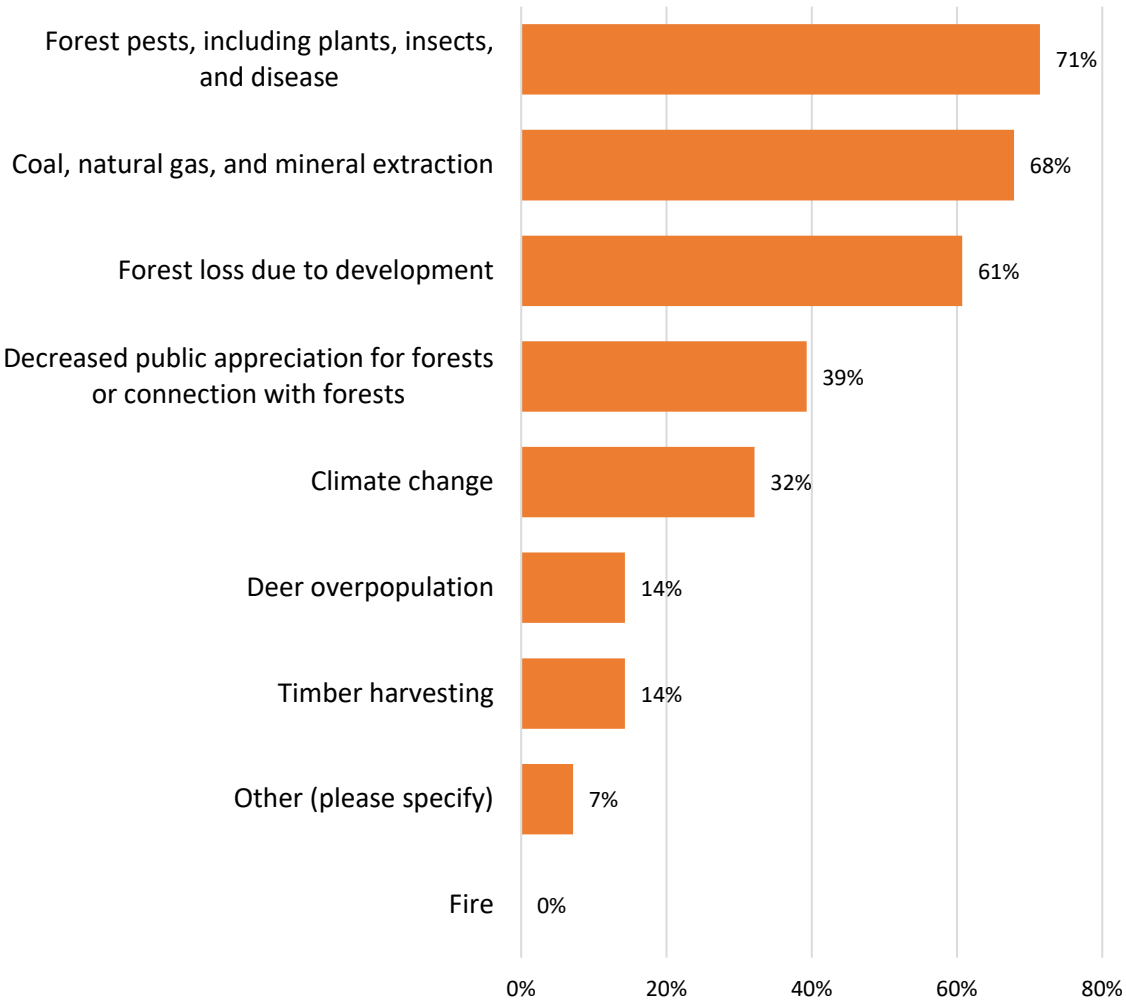
## Primary Values of SFL



**Number of Respondents=28**

**Percentage of Respondents**

# Primary Threats to SFL



Number of Respondents=28

Percentage of Respondents