This document presents public survey data and responses to the public comments received by the Bureau of Forestry (bureau) on the Susquehannock 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 Susquehannock DSFRMP. The public comment period was open for two months following the date of the Susquehannock DSFRMP public meeting, which was held on June 16, 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 71 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 Susquehannock DSFRMP survey. It shows that hiking, peace & solitude, and wildlife viewing are the most common uses of state forest land amongst survey respondents. Hunting and Backpacking were next with over 30% of respondents participating in these activities.
All of these popular activities are readily available on the Susquehannock State Forest. The district maintains 212 miles of public use roads and drivable trails to access the state forest and also has 363 miles of maintained hiking or shared use trails and 519 miles of administrative roads that are open to hike or bike to gain access to the state forest. We also open up around 60 miles of administrative roads to motor vehicles in deer season for better access.

The Susquehannock State Forest is the place to be if you seek peace and solitude. We have more acres of primitive and semi-primitive ROS zones than any other district and we are also home to the Hammersley Wild Area. The Hammersley includes the Dutlinger Natural Area and the two together total over 31,000 acres. It is the most remote and largest roadless area in Pennsylvania.

**State Forest Values**

In Question 2, survey respondents were asked to select the top three values they perceive for Susquehannock State Forest. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Susquehannock DSFRMP survey. It shows that outdoor recreation (such as hiking, biking, and picnicking) and plant & wildlife habitat, at over 60%, are the top-rated values amongst survey respondents. It should be noted other intrinsic values of forest land such as clean air and water and conserved open space are highly rated by over 50% of the respondents. In addition, scenic and natural beauty was chosen by over 30% of respondents and hunting and fishing recreational pursuits and timber and forest products were included as separate choices that scored around 15-19%.
It is easy to understand why these values are important to the Susquehannock State Forest user. The forest district provides an almost endless amount of recreational opportunities, whether its hiking, biking, camping, or horseback riding in the summer to snowmobiling and cross country skiing in the winter. With wildlife viewing being one of the most popular activities on the Susquehannock, it is not surprising that plant and wildlife habitat is one of the top values.

**State Forest Threats**

In Question 3, survey respondents were asked to select the top three threats they perceive for Susquehannock State Forest. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Susquehannock DSFRMP survey. It shows that coal, natural gas, and mineral extraction is rated as the top threat amongst survey respondents. Forest pests are a distant second followed by climate change and forest loss due to development.

![Primary Threats to SFL](image)

**Number of Respondents**=71  **Percentage of Respondents**

- Coal, natural gas, and mineral extraction: 82%
- Forest pests, including plants, insects, and disease: 61%
- Climate change: 46%
- Forest loss due to development: 44%
- Decreased public appreciation for forests or connection with forests: 30%
- Other (please specify): 21%
- Timber harvesting: 20%
- Deer overpopulation: 11%
- Fire: 6%
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

The Susquehannock has the distinction of having the most acreage of severed oil & gas rights of the state forest districts. We have 93,250 acres of severed rights. We also have 40,435 acres of SFL leased for oil & gas activity. The vast majority of that is 2 gas storage fields in southern Potter County. As a Bureau, we strive to follow our current Oil & Gas Guideline standards when managing oil & gas activity whether severed or leased. With the severed gas rights, we have limited control of activity. We work to have good relationships with those companies and we also pursue surface use agreements if there is interest. We currently have some form of a surface use agreement on over half of that acreage. We also have a very thorough review process for approving all oil & gas activity. We also treat severed and leased projects the same for reviews.

Regarding Forest Pests

The Bureau of Forestry recognizes that the effects of invasive plants, insects, and disease threaten the overall health and sustainability of Pennsylvania’s forests. Such effects may include alterations to nutrient cycling, hydrology, natural fire regimes, light levels, regeneration of native tree species and understory species, and physical habitat structure. The Bureau follows Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that utilizes a combination of prevention, monitoring, and control methods to deal with invasive forest pests. Strategies may include directly attacking an invasive pest population for eradication, using preventive measures for invasive pest introduction and spread, or mapping and evaluating invasive pest risks across the landscape.

As new invasive species continue to migrate into Pennsylvania, and existing species spread further, the impact of pests, coupled with the expense of controlling them, is a continuing challenge and requires a
coordinated effort within the Bureau and with other agencies or landowners. Several examples of the Bureau’s response to forest pests include:

- Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) protocols to track novel populations of invasive plants and treat them promptly to slow their spread on state forest lands;
- Development of an Invasive Plant Species Management Plan;
- Aerial survey programs to detect tree dieback, mortality, and defoliation;
- Development of an Ash Management Plan and Eastern Hemlock Conservation Plan;
- Collaboration with the PA Department of Agriculture on addressing the recent invasion of spotted lantern fly; and
- Education, outreach, and assistance to private forest landowners and communities dealing with invasive pests.

**Regarding Climate Change**

As the caretaker of 2.2 million acres of state forest land and the state’s primary conservation agency, DCNR has a unique role and responsibility in helping the Commonwealth reduce and adapt to climate change.

DCNR’s Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan (PDF) -- developed with the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science -- outlines 123 action steps to be undertaken to make the Commonwealth more resilient to potential impacts from a changing climate. During 2017, staff members from across all DCNR’s bureaus, including the Bureau of Forestry, participated in a rigorous process to determine and prioritize the department’s greatest climate change vulnerabilities and identify strategies to address them. The resulting plan includes objectives to prepare for and mitigate the risks associated with potential climate impacts to Pennsylvania, including higher temperatures and more extreme weather events, range shifts for wildlife and plant species, and an increase in invasive species.

While climate change presents significant challenges, Bureau of Forestry efforts to address it include:

- Managing our forests to sequester an increasing amount of carbon;
- Adding forested acres to the state forest system to conserve the forests for the climate change mitigation benefits they provide;
- Ensuring that our public lands remain resilient to climate change with sound ecosystem management; and
- Helping private landowners and communities practice sustainable forest management that is climate change resilient.

**Other Comments from Public**

**Regarding Public Trust**

Through the development of the SFRMP and the DSFRMP, the bureau has developed plans that take into account public opinion/comments, science and processes that ensure we do our due diligence
when planning and completing projects. We perform PNDI reviews, look at various alternatives, try to minimize impacts to traditional SFL use, and do internal reviews for projects.

**Regarding ATV trails and illegal ATV riding**

The Susquehannock State Forest is home to a 43 mile designated ATV trail located on Denton Hill. The current DCNR policy on ATV trail development is to fund private trail development and to keep expansion of existing trails to a minimum unless there is a strategic connector that can link state forest ATV trails to additional legal riding opportunities on private land or open township roads. In the past, the Susquehannock completed a project to link our trail system to the open Sweden Township road system. We are currently working on several projects that would link to other township roads in Potter County.

The employees and Forest Rangers are always on the watch for illegal ATV riding. In the past on high use weekends, we have done special patrols with State Forest Officers and Forest Rangers to address problem areas.

**Regarding additional Recreational Development**

The forest district is focused on maintaining the trails and recreational infrastructure that we currently have with the minimal resources we have. Our major goal is to provide visitors with the best possible experience we can. We have only one staff position that is devoted to recreation. Others help as they can with trail maintenance and other projects. Our equipment operators do run our snowmobile groomers in the winter as we are snowmobile destination. In the past 10 years we have focused our limited resources on bringing some trails up to better standards. We have spent time on the God’s Country Shared Use Trails, the Mount Brodhead Area Trails, the Billy Lewis Area Trails, the Denton Hill XC Ski Trails, and the Hammersley Trails. We currently are maintaining over 350 miles of trail with our own resources and volunteers. These trails are on a 3 year rotation for maintenance. This means that unless we receive information about problems, we plan to clear and mark them every 3 years. We also developed new trail brochures for each of the areas mentioned above. This is our capacity at the current time. The district cannot take on more recreational development unless funding and personnel are included with the project for both construction and maintenance.