This document presents public survey data and responses to the public comments received by the Bureau of Forestry (bureau) on the Weiser 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 Weiser DSFRMP. The public comment period was open for two months following the date of the Weiser DSFRMP public meeting, which was held on November 8, 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 30 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 Weiser DSFRMP survey. It shows that hiking, wildlife viewing, and peace & solitude are by far the most common uses of state forest land amongst survey respondents.
Non-motorized activities such as hiking, and biking are permitted on most state forest trails. In Weiser State Forest District, there are 80 miles of state forest hiking trails and 73 miles of shared-use district trails that may be used for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing and other non-motorized activities.

**State Forest Values**

In Question 2, survey respondents were asked to select the top three values they perceive for Weiser State Forest. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Weiser DSFRMP survey. It shows that plant and wildlife habitat, at 70%, is the top-rated value amongst survey respondents. It should be noted other intrinsic values of forest land such as clean air and water, outdoor recreation (such as hiking, biking, and picnicking), conserved open space, and natural beauty are highly rated by over 40% of the respondents.

### Primary Values of SFL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant and wildlife habitat</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean air and water</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor recreation, such as hiking, biking, and picnicking</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conserved open space</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic and natural beauty</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber and forest products</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting and fishing</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal, natural gas, and mineral extraction</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Respondents=30  
Percentage of Respondents
Weiser State Forest lands occupy the mountains, ridges, and valleys which surround the heart of the anthracite coal region and provides a host of outdoor recreation opportunities to the region and beyond. Great efforts have and continue to be made in this area to improve wildlife and aquatic life habitat after decades of ecosystem degradation.

**State Forest Threats**

In Question 3, survey respondents were asked to select the top three threats they perceive for Weiser State Forest. The figure below displays the responses from those that took the Weiser DSFRMP survey. It shows that coal, natural gas, and mineral extraction, as well as forest loss due to development are rated as the top threats amongst survey respondents.

**Primary Threats to SFL**

- **Coal, natural gas, and mineral extraction**: 67%
- **Forest loss due to development**: 63%
- **Climate change**: 43%
- **Forest pests, including plants, insects, and disease**: 40%
- **Decreased public appreciation for forests or connection with forests**: 27%
- **Timber harvesting**: 23%
- **Other (please specify)**: 7%
- **Fire**: 7%
- **Deer overpopulation**: 0%

*Number of Respondents = 30*

*Percentage of Respondents*

*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

Weiser Forest district is in the heart of the anthracite coal mining region and a significant amount of former coal mine lands comprise the state forest located on the Roaring Creek, Mahantango, Mammoth Vein, and Fishing Creek. Although there are no current mine operations on state forest lands the legacy of the coal mine past is evident in the remnants of patch towns, mine shafts, pits, and culm banks. With time, nature will reclaim most of the landmarks to this industrial past. Currently the district is working with the Department of Environmental Resources, Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation, to identify and reclaim some of these areas that present the most hazards to public safety and to reduce acid mine run off into the local watersheds.

Mineral rights to the coal reserves are still held by outside parties; however, current economics and uses for anthracite coal are greatly reduce and future anthracite mining on state forest lands is not anticipated. Future coal mining and its associated infrastructure is not considered as a high threat to state forest land.

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.

Other Comments from Public

*Regarding Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution:*

Weiser Forest 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 Weiser 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.

*Regarding provision of bird habitat on Weiser state forest lands:*
Weiser Forest District cooperates with PA Game Commission and other local conservation groups on the management of forest habitats and the monitoring of wildlife populations. The approach is to not manage for species specific habits but to create healthy, biologically diverse forest habits in various successional stages. These varied sites from early successional to closed canopy forests will provide habitat for a variety of birds and other wildlife species.

**Regarding Timber Harvesting on Weiser state forest lands:**

Undisturbed by human activity, a forest changes; like all living systems it cannot remain static. Natural disturbances such as windstorms, fire, insects, and diseases interrupt natural succession and affect forest structure and composition. Timber harvesting is an artificial disturbance that also affects the forest ecosystem. Fortunately, trees are renewable and respond well to scientific management techniques to keep them growing, healthy, and valuable.

Part of the Bureau of Forestry’s mission and of its ecosystem management approach is to manage state forest land for sustained yields of quality timber. This is accomplished through timber harvesting. The Bureau practices sound silviculture and sustainable timber management. Silviculture is the art and science of tending a stand of trees based on ecological principles. Timber harvests are a vital land management tool that promotes desired landscape conditions, such as wildlife habitat, and provides valuable products to society, such as paper and lumber. When done in a sustainable manner and with silvicultural best management practices, timber harvesting is not a threat, but rather a benefit to the forest and the economy. State forest lands are third-party certified as being sustainably managed.

The Bureau also recognizes that poor harvesting techniques can degrade forest ecosystems and can have a negative effect for generations. The Bureau works on landowner education and outreach, along with many partners, to try to promote sustainable forestry practices on private lands.