

State Forest Management Public Questionnaire Summary

Public perceptions of Michigan’s state forests



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Introduction

A healthy, diverse and abundant forest can provide renewable forest products, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and a place for people to seek solitude and renewal. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is developing a new State Forest Management Plan that will guide the conservation, protection and management of the state's natural and cultural resources for current and future generations to use and enjoy.

The DNR wants to ensure that the forest management plan represents a variety of public values. One of the first steps in our planning process is to better understand public and stakeholder interests, concerns, values and perceptions of current and past management related to state forests. To do this, we surveyed both the public and key stakeholder groups to ask each group a unique set of questions.

The public questionnaire was distributed through the state’s email system to the DNR’s *general news* subscription list, which includes more than 70,000 subscribers. A similar questionnaire was also sent to just under 400 stakeholder groups that included conservation, wildlife, forestry and other natural

resources-related interest groups. We received a total of 1,321 complete responses from the public questionnaire and 39 complete responses from the stakeholder questionnaire. The focus of this report will be on the public questionnaire and associated responses.

Location Questions

The first survey question asked was, “Where do you recreate most frequently?” The responses show that 50% of respondents recreate in the northern Lower Peninsula, 31% in southern Michigan and 19% in the Upper Peninsula. Results specific to each region are displayed in table 1 and figure 2.

Region	Number of Responses
Northeast Lower Peninsula	327
Northwest Lower Peninsula	331
Southeast Lower Peninsula	207
Southwest Lower Peninsula	197
Upper Peninsula	259
Total	1321

Table 1. Number of responses by region.

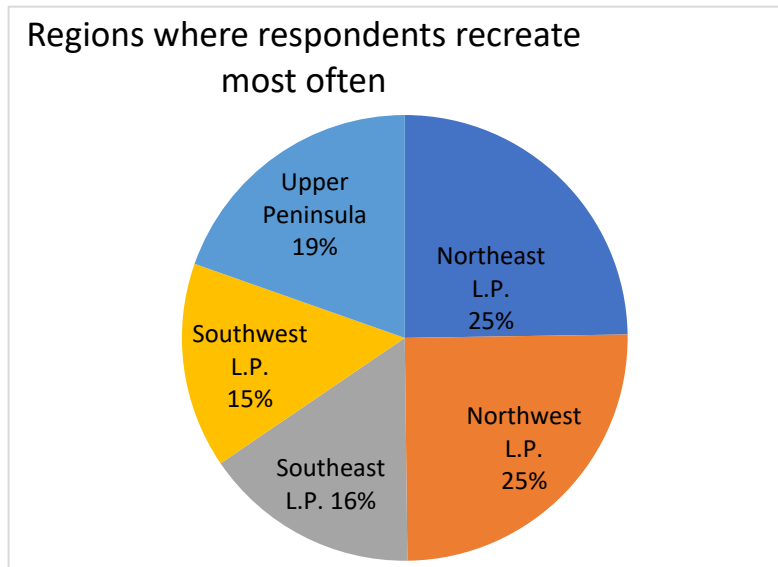


Figure 2. Location where respondents recreate most often.

Our second question was specific to state forests: “Which state forest is most important to you?” All 15 state forests were mentioned in survey results; 73% of the respondents identified state forests in the northern Lower Peninsula, while 23% of respondents identified state forests in the Upper Peninsula (figure 3).

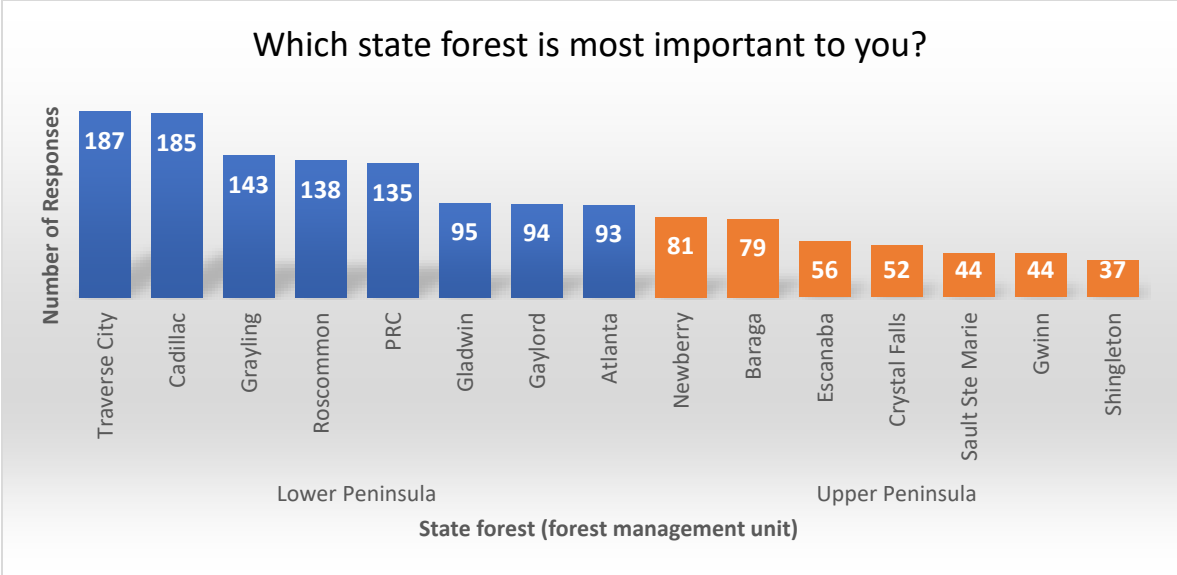


Figure 3. Graph showing the state forests by importance to respondents.

We asked two questions related to the importance of state forests in Michigan. The first question was, “How important are Michigan’s state forests to you?” More than 98% of respondents felt that state forests are very or extremely important to them (figure 4).

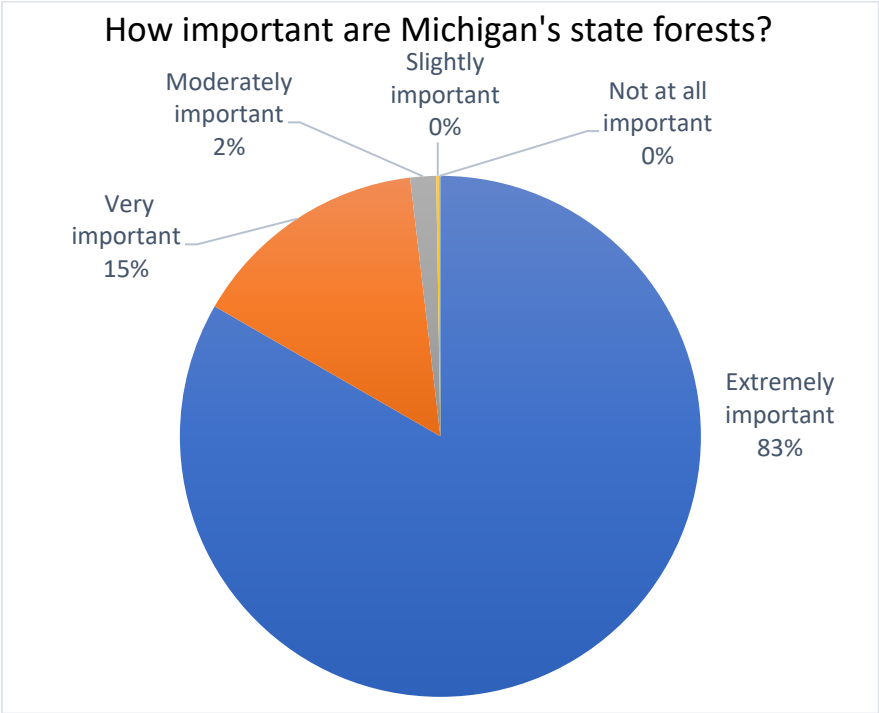


Figure 4. Pie chart showing the distribution of results related to how important state forests are to our respondents.

The second question related to importance asked about management activities on state forest land. The results in table 2 show the list of activities and their corresponding level of importance according to our respondents.

Of the activities rated as “extremely important,” the five most common choices were:

1. Managing forests for wildlife habitat.
2. Managing and controlling invasive species.
3. Managing forests for clean water resources.
4. Ensuring that natural gas drilling, oil drilling and solar array construction in forests are done in an environmentally responsible way.
5. Increasing or maintaining the amount of forested land.

Value and management activities	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Increasing or maintaining state forest land	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Sustainable forestry	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Oil and natural gas	4%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Managed forests	4%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Wildfire protection and prevention	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Managing forests for wildlife habitat	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Managing forests for hunting	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Managing forests for threatened/endangered species	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Managing forests for wildlife viewing	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%
Managing and controlling invasive species	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Climate change adaptation and mitigation	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Managing the forest for forest products	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Improving recreation and access to it	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%
Education and outreach	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%

Table 2. Level of importance to respondents of common forest management activities.

“Producing and promoting products made from forests (such as paper, wood, lumber or syrup)” and “Managing the forest for wildlife viewing opportunities” were rated lower in importance than other forest management activities. These results are consistent with other DNR surveys regarding public knowledge about forest-based activities and suggest a need for continuing public education.

Frequency Questions

We also asked questions related to how often respondents use state forests. The first question was “In the last five years, have you visited a state forest?” Many of the respondents (96%) had visited a state forest in the last five years (figure 5).

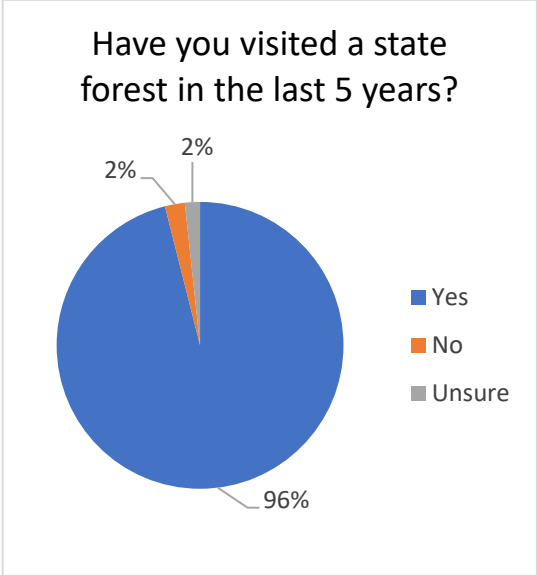


Figure 5. Responses to "Have you visited a state forest in the last 5 years?"

The second question related to frequency of visits was, “How many visits do you make to the state forest in a typical calendar year?” As shown in figure 6, most respondents visited a state forest 10 times or fewer in a typical year; some people visited much more. These results show that a “typical” state forest user visits fewer than 30 times a year.

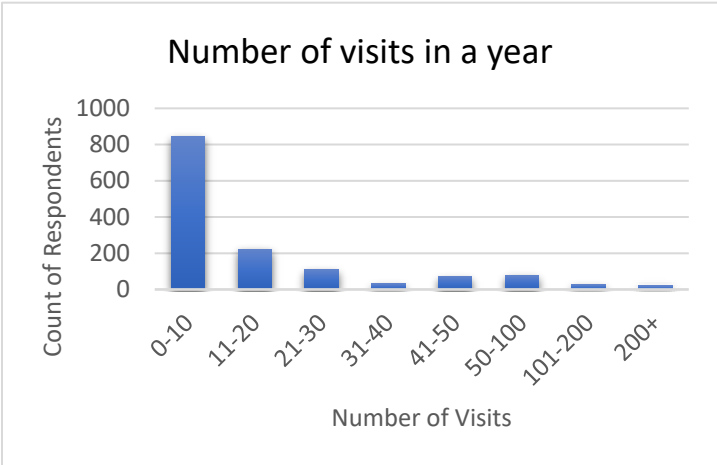


Figure 6. The number of visits were grouped into categories and displayed by the number of corresponding responses.

Type of Experience Questions

The revision of the forest management plan requires a firm understanding of what the public values about state forests. Part of those values can be illustrated by type of experiences people seek in state forests. Figure 7 shows the array of forest attributes respondents enjoy while visiting state forest land.

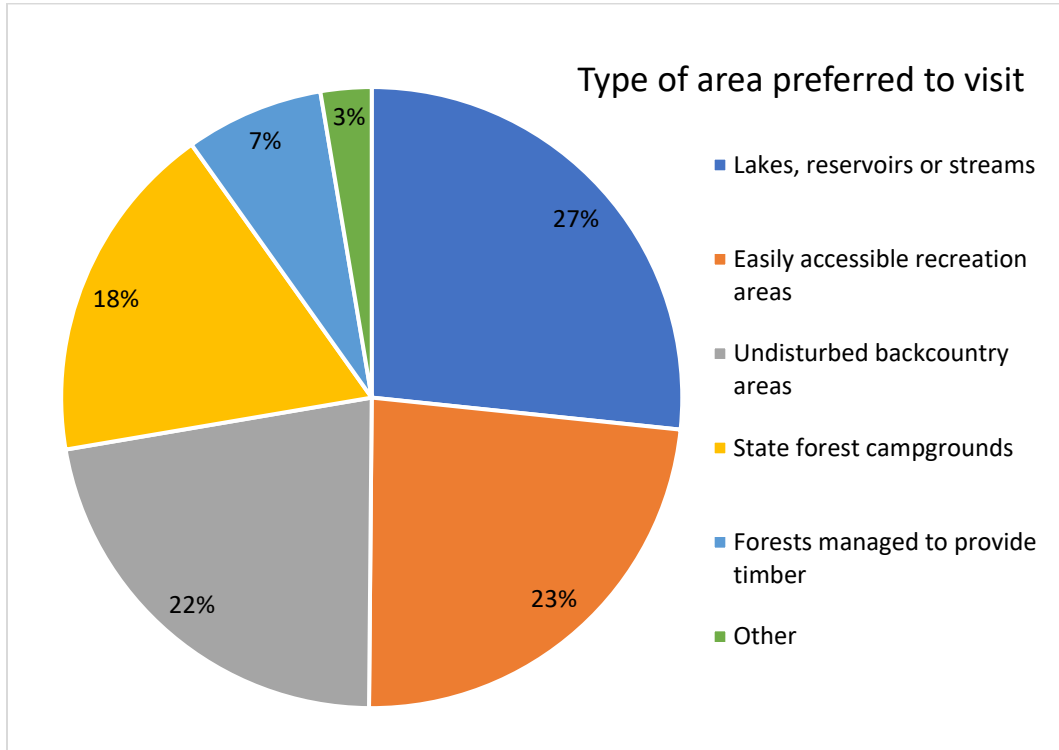


Figure 7. Shows the distribution of responses to the types of areas preferred by respondents.

Respondents also were asked to select all that apply from a supplied list of activities. “Snowmobiling” did not appear on the list provided and commonly showed up in the comment field for “other” types of activities. There were 25 “snowmobile” responses in addition to the activities shown in figure 8. If snowmobiling had been included, it likely would have received many more selections. It will be considered among popular outdoor activities during our planning process.

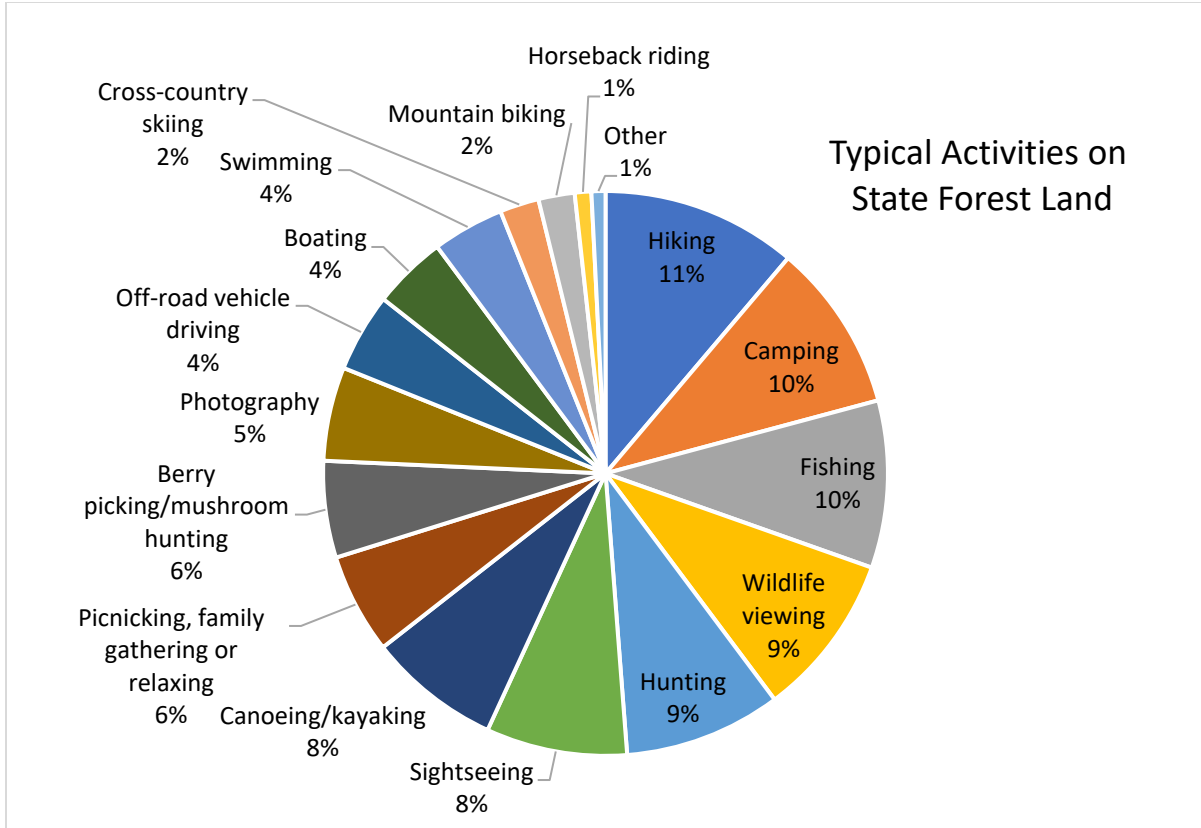


Figure 8. Pie chart showing the distribution of different activities typically engaged in while using state forests.

The relatively even distribution of selections is comparable to other survey results and anecdotal observations made by state forest managers during public meetings and open houses. The results indicate a wide array of uses in state forests, with the top five activities being hiking, camping, fishing, wildlife viewing and hunting.

Values and Threats

The next question asked about the value respondents place on Michigan’s state forests. Common values were provided, and respondents were asked to select their top three.

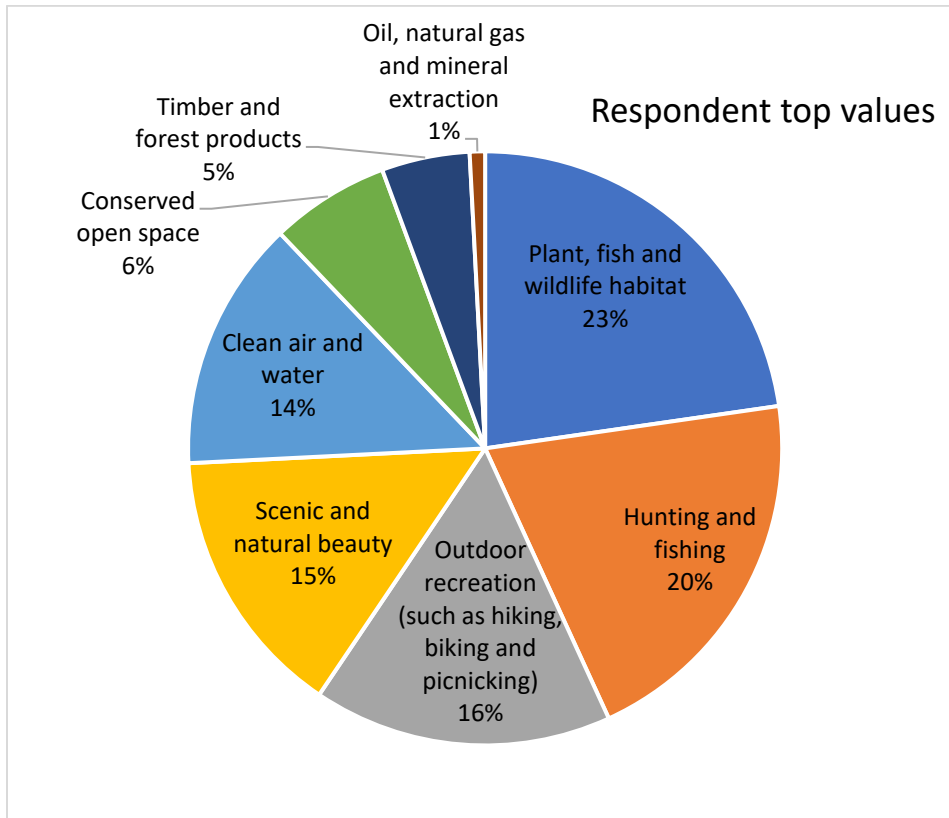


Figure 9. Pie chart showing the highest values that respondents place on Michigan's state forests.

The results indicate that conserving habitat; providing for hunting, fishing and other recreational opportunities; maintaining scenic and natural beauty; and protecting vital ecosystem services that provide for clean air and water are valued highest among the other options listed (figure 9).

“Timber and forest products” and “oil and gas extraction” were not commonly in respondents’ top three most important values. Michigan’s residents commonly consume and use these commodities but don’t necessarily want to view their impact on the forest landscape. This is often a topic of discussion at meetings where DNR staff reviews proposed management plans with the public and stakeholder groups. The balance DNR forest managers strive for is to have a healthy and sustainably managed state forest with vast opportunities for a variety of activities.

Next, respondents were asked to identify what they believe are the top three threats to the state forest; a list of eight choices was provided. More respondents selected “forest loss due to development,” “forest pests” and “decreased public appreciation or loss of connection with the forests” as top threats (figure 10). Climate change was the fourth most-selected threat, representing 11% of the selections.

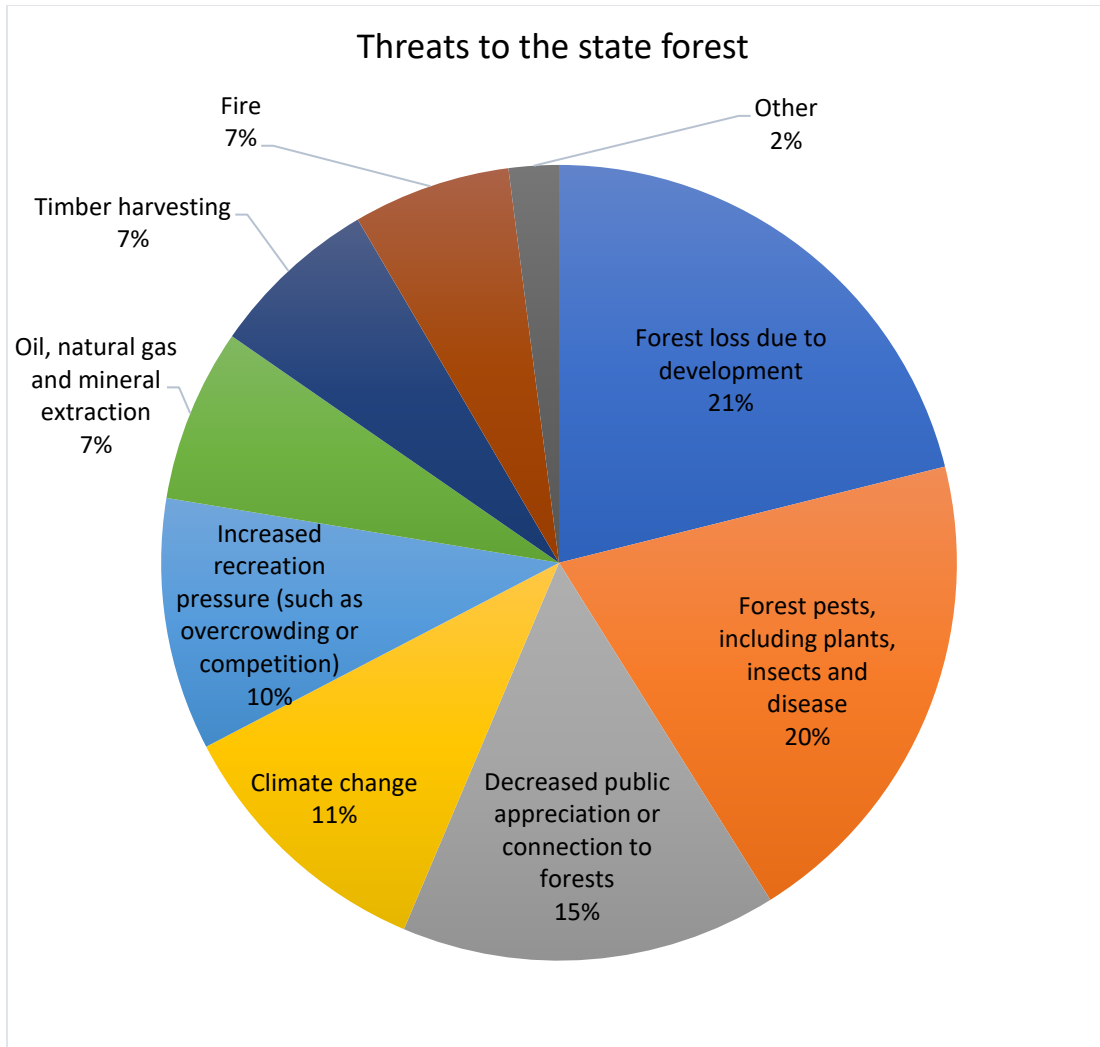


Figure 10. Chart showing the allocation of selections for the top threats to state forests.

The DNR’s public [land strategy](#) is currently under review and provides a robust framework for the conservation, use and management of all state-owned public lands to ensure their best use for the benefit of Michigan residents, visitors and natural resources.

DNR forest health professionals work with other state and federal agencies and universities to prevent, evaluate and manage the occurrence and impact of native and exotic forest insects and diseases. More information on how the department is managing these evolving threats to the state forests can be found at Michigan.gov/ForestHealth.

Information about state forests is readily available at Michigan.gov/StateForests and in all DNR customer service centers around the state. The DNR’s Marketing and Outreach Division has created an informational [video on the importance of forests](#), and the Forest Resources Division is sponsoring a public information campaign across the southern Lower Peninsula regarding the importance of forests for a variety of purposes. The Michigan Forest Association also has produced a [video](#) that helps explain why it is important to manage forests. The new state forest management plan will highlight existing

measures taken to increase appreciation of state forests, with a section providing our plan for continuing this effort.

Climate change is a focal point in many areas of the 2023 forest management plan to help ensure forests stay resilient for decades to come.

The new plan will focus on state forest recreational opportunities, infrastructure and the interface with management activities such as logging or oil and gas extraction. Learn more about recreation in the DNR’s [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#).

These and the remaining threats all will be discussed in detail in the new state forest management plan, with the greatest emphasis on timber production.

Trust and Confidence

The last set of questions focused on the trust and confidence respondents have in the DNR to manage the state forest on their behalf. The following three statements were provided in the survey:

1. I am confident that the DNR will do a good job managing Michigan's state forest resources.
2. I expect that the DNR will make the right decisions regarding forest management.
3. I trust the DNR to make decisions about forest management on my behalf.

The respondents were then asked to provide the extent they agreed with or disagreed with each statement.

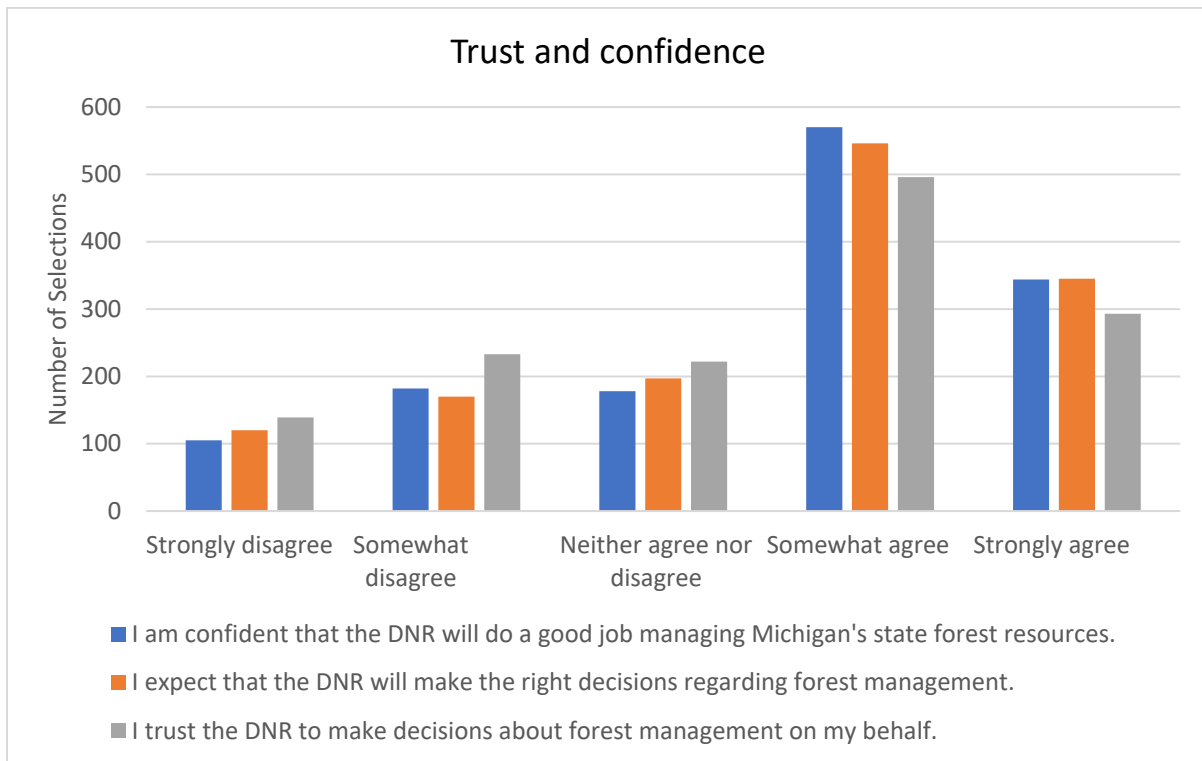


Figure 11. Bar graph showing the level of trust and confidence in the DNR to manage state forests.

Demographic Questions

We asked four demographic questions to understand how representative the results are across the state. Of the respondents to our questionnaire, 70% were male and more than 79% were older than 40 years old. People of all income brackets responded to the survey (Figure 14).

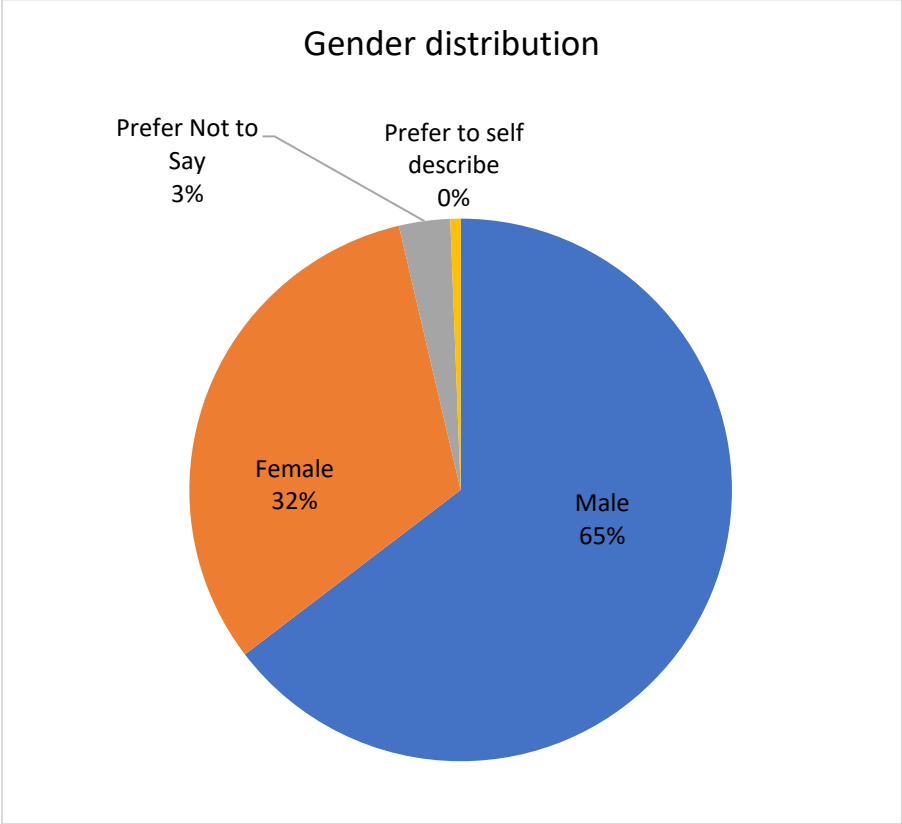


Figure 12. Distribution of responses by gender.

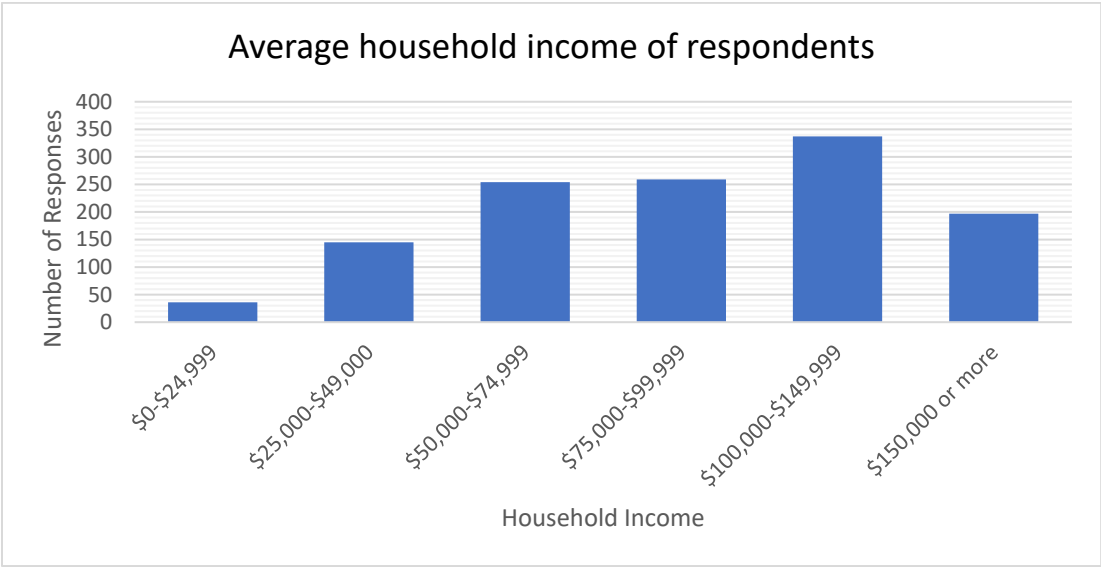


Figure 14. Distribution of income.

Using the results to inform the plan

Information from this questionnaire, as well as the stakeholder group questionnaire, will be used to help us understand the values of the public and stakeholder groups and the ways people use the state forests. This will ensure these values are considered in plan development and implementation.

Data from the public and stakeholder group questionnaires, summarized in this report, give the planning team important insights about the values and perspectives of Michigan citizens regarding our state forests. We will continue to engage the public and stakeholder groups at different points in plan development to get additional input. We will provide multiple ways for people to connect with this effort, including email updates, updates on [the state forest plan webpage](#), in-person or virtual meetings and live webinars. We want to receive diverse input, strengthen the plan and ensure it reflects the wide array of desires for the future of our forests.

We will also continue to provide opportunities for [public input](#), through the compartment review process, as we implement the state forest management plan. Please feel free to reach out or to learn more by emailing the Michigan DNR's forest planning team at ForestPlanComments@Michigan.gov.