

WWNC Bow Hunting Survey

Survey Summary

The Bow Hunting Survey was available for to FWW members for two weeks and subsequently promoted to all park users for three additional weeks. Most of the 150 respondents reside in zip code 15701, and approximately one half reside in White Township. It is clear from these data that WWNC is used by the greater Indiana community and surroundings, which is the intent of Project 70 lands.

The most relevant finding of this survey is that respondents do not support the current proposal for bow hunting in WWNC (14%), and or even a shorter (<1 week) hunting season (16%).

While the most frequent reason for visiting WWNC is walking/hiking, the park is used for a wide variety of functions, including other forms of exercise, spiritual renewal, socializing, and creating art.

Although WWNC is most heavily used in moderate weather (between 20° F and 85° F), 30% of respondents use the park regardless of temperature. This is particularly significant, since the majority of respondents (80%) indicated hunting in WWNC would prevent them from using the park. Although the proposed hunting season is in cold weather, many regularly use WWNC at that time.

Respondents do not support bow hunting in WWNC, but do support other methods of limiting deer browse. Furthermore, they do not believe that hunting will enhance forest growth or reduce deer damage to residential properties. Their greatest concern about the proposed hunt is safety to hikers and their pets, followed by concern about containing the hunt within the bounds of WWNC and keeping injured deer and hunters off neighboring residential properties.

Finally, respondents are interested in attending a public meeting about the proposal. However, they are generally not willing to attend in person, presumably because of the COVID surge. Many are willing to attend virtually, if the Township can provide adequate technological support.

Development

Friends of White's Woods designed the attached survey (Appendix A) with accompanying background information (Appendix B), which ran on SurveyMonkey.com from August 11, 2021 through September 17, 2021. The survey link was initially emailed to the Friends of White's Woods member list (August 11-26). On August 26, when the Township first called for public input, it was made available throughout the Indiana Community by:

- distribution of hard copies at the 12th Street entrance to WWNC;
- posting the QR code at bookstores and coffee shops;
- posting on two Facebook accounts;
- email to distribution lists of non-partisan community groups (e.g. community garden, League of Women Voters);
- distribution of the QR code at the Northern Appalachian Folk Festival;
- door-to-door solicitation in White Township neighborhoods.

In addition to completing the survey, respondents were strongly encouraged to provide input to the Township through email, per the Township’s invitation.

Data

Raw data are presented on the survey instrument (Appendix C).

The survey received 150 responses over the 5+ week period; 123 (82%) were from zip code 15701, and 76 (52%) reported residence in White Township. All responses are anonymous unless the respondent choose to provide identifying information. The aggregated data are discussed by question.

3. How frequently do you use WWNC?

Over 40% of respondents visit WWNC at least weekly, across seasons, with the remaining respondents visiting monthly or less. Although more respondents use WWNC during warm and moderate weather, 30% or more use it at least weekly during temperature extremes.

4. Why do you visit WWNC?

The most frequent reason for visiting WWNC is for walking (97%), followed closely by “enjoying fresh air” (82%), and “relaxing, relieving stress, mental health” (75%). A considerable proportion responded “spending time with family, friends” (57%) and “walking dog” (42%). Many also reported using the park for photography, birdwatching, teaching/learning about nature, and pursuing other sports such as biking and cross country skiing.

5. If bow hunting is approved for WWNC, what impact would it have on your use of the park?

Most respondents (80%) indicated that hunting would prevent them from using the during the entire hunting season (40%) or on all days that hunting is permitted (40%).

6. What is your position on deer management in WWNC?

Answers are listed according to frequency:

- 43% Hunting should never be permitted in WWNC
- 42% Support use of deer fencing to protect seedlings from deer browse
- 41% Leave “forest management” to natural succession, as much as possible
- 39% Collect data first to see how many deer are now in the WWNC
- 36% Use of deer contraception should be implemented
- 17% Deer are not a problem in WWNC, there’s no need for management
- 16% Bow should be approved for ≤ 1 week/year
- 14% Bow hunting should be dependent on the level of human traffic/use of the park
- 14% Bow hunting should be approved for the season as proposed (Dec 26-Jan 23)

Combining answers gives a better picture of the sample’s position on hunting, as follows:

- 29% Support limited bow hunting in WWNC, agreeing with one or both of the following statements:

- Bow should be approved for ≤ 1 week/year

- Bow hunting should be approved for the season as proposed (Dec 26-Jan 23)

- 43% Indicate that decisions about bow hunting be based on data collection, agreeing with one or both of the following statements:
Bow hunting should be dependent on the level of human traffic/use of the park
Collect data first to see how many deer are now in the WWNC
- 67% Support the use of an alternative method for deer management, agreeing with one or both of the following statements:
Use of deer contraception should be implemented
Support use of deer fencing to protect seedlings from deer browse
- 71% Oppose hunting in WWNC center, agreeing with one or more of the following statements:
Hunting should never be permitted in WWNC
Leave “forest management” to natural succession, as much as possible
Deer are not a problem in WWNC, there’s no need for management

7. If bow hunting is permitted, what do you believe would be the consequences?

Possible **positive** outcomes:

Agree Disagree

- 77 23 The deer herd in WWNC would **NOT** be reduced due to migration from surrounding areas
- 31 69 It would reduce property damage to neighboring residences
- 31 69 It would reduce deer browsing and improved tree growth

Possible **negative** outcomes:

Agree Disagree

- 84 16 Deer from WWNC would move to surrounding properties
- 76 24 Risk of injury to WWNC users would be increased
- 76 24 Deer carcasses would be found on neighboring properties
- 85 15 There would be problems with hunters following injured deer on to neighboring private properties and university recreation areas
- 76 24 Risk of injury to pets walking in WWNC would be increased
- 56 44 Natural balance would be disturbed
- 65 35 Since many factors affect forest regeneration, including climate change, killing deer in this one area probably won’t make much difference

8. How are you willing to participate in providing your opinion about bow hunting to the township?

23% Attend a public meeting in person

67% Attend a virtual meeting (e.g. Zoom)

Appendix A: Survey

Appendix A: Survey

1. What is your zip code? _____
2. Do you currently live in White Township, Indiana County, PA? ____yes ____no
3. How frequently do you use WWNC?

	Daily	≥ 3 X/Week	2-3 X/Month	Monthly	Occasionally	Never
Hot weather (>85°)						
Warm weather (75°-85°)						
Moderate weather (45°-74°)						
Cold weather (20°-44°)						
Frigid weather (<20°)						

4. Why do you visit WWNC? Check all that apply:

- Walking, hiking
- Running
- Cross country skiing
- Biking, mountain biking
- Enjoying fresh air, being outdoors
- Relaxing, relieving stress, mental health
- Spending time with family, friends
- Walking dog
- Bird watching
- Teaching others about nature
- Photography
- Other: please specify

5. If bow hunting is approved for WWNC, what impact would it have on your use of the park?

- None at all, I would still go into the woods
- None at all, I don't use WWNC during the proposed time (December 26-January 23)
- Would avoid WWNC during hunting season except for non-hunting days (e.g. non-approved Sundays). Will go in the woods only if it is safe from hunters.
- Would avoid WWNC entirely during any hunting season

6. What is your position on deer management in WWNC? Check all that apply.

- Deer are not a problem in WWNC, there's no need for management

- Leave “forest management” to natural succession, as much as possible
- Collect data first to see how many deer are now in the WWNC
- Hunting should never be permitted in WWNC
- Bow hunting should be dependent on the level of human traffic/use of the park
- Bow hunting should be approved for the season as proposed (December 26-January 23)
- Bow should be approved for ≤ 1 week/year
- Support use of deer fencing to protect seedlings from deer browse
- Use of deer contraception should be implemented

7. If bow hunting is permitted, what do you believe would be the consequences?

	SA	A	D	SD
The deer herd in WWNC would NOT be reduced due to migration from surrounding areas				
Deer from WWNC would move to surrounding properties				
It would reduce property damage to neighboring residences				
Risk of injury to WWNC users would be increased				
It would reduce deer browsing and improved tree growth				
Deer carcasses would be found on neighboring properties				
There would be problems with hunters following injured deer on to neighboring private properties and university recreation areas				
Risk of injury to pets walking in WWNC would be increased				
Natural balance would be disturbed				
Since many factors affect forest regeneration, including climate change, killing deer in this one area probably won't make much difference				

8. How are you willing to participate in providing your opinion about bow hunting to the Township? Check all that apply

- Attend a public meeting in person
- Attend a virtual meeting (e.g. Zoom)
- Write a letter to the Township
- Write a letter to the editor

Contact information (optional)

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email _____

Address:

Appendix B: Survey Background Information

White's Woods Hunting Survey

Bow Hunting in White's Woods Nature Center

PUBLIC INPUT MATTERS:

Bow hunting in the WWNC has been proposed by the White Township Board of Supervisors (BOS), possibly beginning after Christmas 2021 through January 2022. Please fill out the following survey so that your voice can be heard! Some information that might be useful to you in your consideration can be found in the sections below.

HUNTING

- Bow hunting on both private and government-owned property is legal in Pennsylvania,
- Many people use hunting as a form of recreation.
- WWNC is the only regional natural area park that currently prohibits hunting and is open for other types of recreation year-round.
- Deer hunting is prohibited in most/all Western Pennsylvania urban parks but is allowed in others, depending on their location relative to residential areas and the ecological sensitivity of the forest understory.
- The 500 forested acres adjoining WWNC are posted as No Hunting and will not permit removal of deer carcasses through their property.

SAFETY

- In 2019, the White Township Supervisors banned hunting in the WWNC “out of concern for safety.”
- The IUP COOP has banned hunting on COOP land, which borders on White's Woods, out of concern for safety.
- A significant number of residential properties border on WWNC
- WWNC is a heavily used park by families, bikers, runners, walkers, & skiers in the Fall and Winter months, particularly during holidays. Bow hunting can pose a risk to hikers and pets.

CONTROLLING DEER BROWSE

- Deer can alter forest ecology by browsing on desirable native plant species and seedlings.

- FWW consultant and forester Mike Wolf recommended use of deer fencing, concluding that attempting to reduce the deer population by hunting in the WWNC would be futile, as the herd would retreat to nearby properties when hunting commenced.
- Some foresters endorse reducing the deer herd to reduce damage from deer browsing
- In addition to hunting, deer fencing and deer contraception may reduce damage from deer browsing
- WWNC is a 250-acre park that adjoins approximately 500 additional forested acres, and deer live throughout the 750-acre area

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Some municipalities that reduce deer herds by lethal means employ sharpshooters and close their park for as few as two days per year.
- Some people consider bow-hunting as a less ethical option because it produces a clean kill only about 50% of the time. Science has documented that deer are sentient beings.
- WWNC hosts three valuable vulnerable plant species, according to the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage association that can be damaged by off-trail activity.
- In proposing the new plan for hunting in WWNC, BOS cited three possible goals for a bow hunt: Recreation, assisting adjacent residential property owner with preserving landscaping plants, and forest regeneration.

Appendix C

Survey: Numerical Data

1. What is your zip code? _(15701)_ 82% N=150

2. Do you currently live in White Township, Indiana County, PA? _52%_ yes
48% no

3. How frequently do you use WWNC?

In %	Daily	≥ 3 X/Week	2-3 X/Month	Monthly	Occasionally	Never
Hot weather (>85°)	4.9	16.1	15.4	11.9	32.9	18.9
Warm weather (75°-85°)	7.8	23.2	18.3	14.8	29.6	6.3
Moderate weather (45°-74°)	8.2	29.0	15.9	15.3	28.3	3.4
Cold weather (20°-44°)	6.2	21.9	15.8	13.0	32.9	10.3
Frigid weather (<20°)	2.8	14.5	11.7	7.6	26.2	37.2
Summary						

4. Why do you visit WWNC? Check all that apply:

- _97%_ Walking, hiking
- _24%_ Running
- _ 9%_ Cross country skiing
- _16%_ Biking, mountain biking
- _82%_ Enjoying fresh air, being outdoors
- _75%_ Relaxing, relieving stress, mental health
- _57%_ Spending time with family, friends
- _42%_ Walking dog
- _27%_ Bird watching
- _14%_ Teaching others about nature
- _23%_ Photography
- _12%_ Other: please specify

5. If bow hunting is approved for WWNC, what impact would it have on your use of the park?

- _13%_ None at all, I would still go into the woods
- _7%_ None at all, I don't use WWNC during the proposed time (December 26-January 23)
- _40%_ Would avoid WWNC during hunting season except for non-hunting days (e.g. non-approved Sundays). Will go in the woods only if it is safe from hunters.

- 40% Would avoid WWNC entirely during any hunting season
- 6. What is your position on deer management in WWNC? Check all that apply.
 - 17% Deer are not a problem in WWNC, there's no need for management
 - 41% Leave "forest management" to natural succession, as much as possible
 - 39% Collect data first to see how many deer are now in the WWNC
 - 43% Hunting should never be permitted in WWNC
 - 14% Bow hunting should be dependent on the level of human traffic/use of the park
 - 14% Bow hunting should be approved for the season as proposed (December 26-January 23)
 - 16% Bow should be approved for ≤ 1 week/year
 - 42% Support use of deer fencing to protect seedlings from deer browse
 - 36% Use of deer contraception should be implemented

7. If bow hunting is permitted, what do you believe would be the consequences?

In %	SA	A	D	SD	++	--
The deer herd in WWNC would NOT be reduced due to migration from surrounding areas	36.6	40.1	21.1	2.1	76.7	23.2
Deer from WWNC would move to surrounding properties	37.0	46.6	13.0	3.4	83.6	16.4
It would reduce property damage to neighboring residences	6.5	23.9	49.3	20.3	30.4	69.6
Risk of injury to WWNC users would be increased	43.1	33.3	13.9	9.7	76.4	23.6
It would reduce deer browsing and improved tree growth	6.6	24.1	51.1	18.2	30.7	69.3
Deer carcasses would be found on neighboring properties	25.0	50.7	20.1	4.2	75.7	24.3
There would be problems with hunters following injured deer on to neighboring private properties and university recreation areas	38.6	46.2	11.7	3.4	85.8	14.1
Risk of injury to pets walking in WWNC would be increased	41.6	33.8	15.5	9.2	75.4	24.7
Natural balance would be disturbed	19.3	37.0	31.8	11.8	56.3	43.6
Since many factors affect forest regeneration, including climate change, killing deer in this one area probably won't make much difference	27.8	37.5	22.2	12.5	65.3	34.7

8. How are you willing to participate in providing your opinion about bow hunting to the Township? Check all that apply
- 23% Attend a public meeting in person
 - 67% Attend a virtual meeting (e.g. Zoom)
 - 59% Write a letter to the Township

_24%___ Write a letter to the editor

Contact information (optional)

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email _____

Address: