

# Family Forest Owners Who? Why?



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So, we've talked about the importance of family forest owners, and that they own over 10 million acres in Virginia. There are over 375,000 of them in the Commonwealth. This presentation will discuss this diverse group: who they are, what their motivations for owning land are, and how we can reach them. We hope this presentation will give you additional insight into these folks, as they are your clients as well (82% of forest landowners have purchased all or some of their land).

- *“Peace and tranquility. It’s a naturally wonderful setting. It’s nice living out in the woods where you have the deer coming up and coyotes.”*
- *“I would be in trouble if I drove my three-wheeler through the neighborhood and cut trees down. I was out killing trees today [for] firewood. If I did that in town, I’d probably get arrested.”*
- *“It is an investment. As much as you love the scenery and the trees and hugging them and everything it’s still an investment.”*
- *“This land was handed to me. It’s old family land for generations and generations. They say ‘Why don’t you sell it?’ But that’s all we got. They said ‘Will you keep it?’ I said, ‘Yes, I’ll keep the land.’”*

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As I mentioned, family forest landowners are a diverse group. These quotes demonstrate the differences in landowner opinions about their forest land. These were taken from the publication “Family Forest Owners: Insights into Land-Related Stewardship, Values and Intentions” from Roper Public Affairs and Media.

Information presented here also comes from:

1. The Sustaining Family Forests Initiative (SFFI) from the USDA Forest Service – TELE – Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively <http://www.engaginglandowners.org/>
2. The National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS) is the official census of forest owners in the United States. Full results from these surveys can be found at the USDA Forest Service website: [www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos](http://www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos). Much of the information in these slides has been gleaned from the results of the NWOS.
3. Kendra, A., and R.B. Hull. 2005. Motivations and Behaviors of New Forest Owners in Virginia. *Forest Science* (51). 142-154.
4. Butler, B.J. and E.C. Leatherberry. 2004. America’s Family Forest Owners. *Journal of Forestry* (102). 4-9.

# Key Variables

- Reasons for Owning Land/Landowner Type
- Size of Land Holding
- Tenure or Tradition of Land Holding
- Residence on the Land
- Farming Background



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Based on the National Woodlot owner Survey, key variables have been identified which predict landowners actions and decisions. We'll go through each of these variables in more detail.

## General Characteristics

- 46% have a college degree
- 46% have annual incomes < \$50,000
- 6% < 45 years old
- 34% > 65 years old
  
- Most are Caucasian men



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Before we get into specific types of landowners and their reasons for owning land, let me share with you some general characteristics of forest landowners in Virginia—these hold true for all the landowner types I will discuss. First, 46% of them have a college degree; 46% earn less than 50k a year, while 37% earn between 50-99k/year and 16% earn more than 100k year

The majority of Virginia's landowners are between the ages of 45-64, but 1/3 are over 65.

In general, forest landowners tend to be older, white men.

# Landowner Types

## •Woodland Retreat Owners

- Value lifestyle amenities the most
- Not very interested in financial aspects
- Largest segment of forest landowners (40%)
- Have the smallest parcels of land
- Likely to have a home or cabin on their land
- 42% own more than one parcel
- Likely to have purchased their land (84%)
- Average ownership tenure is 21 years



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Now let's talk more specifically about the different types of forest landowners. These numbers are for forest landowners nationally, but Virginia's numbers are quite similar.

First up are the Woodland Retreat Landowners. Woodland retreat landowners defining characteristic is that they own their land primarily for its beauty and recreational value.

Assign high importance to beauty, biodiversity, privacy, hunting, and recreation. Assign low importance to financial reasons for owning land (investment and timber income).

They constitute the largest segment of forest landowners and they have the smallest parcels of land (average parcel size is 43 acres versus 50 acres for the general landowner population) and they are more likely than other landowner types to have a home or cabin on their land. Less than 42% own more than once parcel.

## Now, even though these folks tend to have owned their land for a

while, most of them, 84% have purchased it; only 23% inherited it.

# Landowner Types



## •Woodland Retreat Owners

- Unlikely to harvest timber
- Unlikely to harvest timber for commercial purposes
- Unlikely to work with a forestry professional
- Most aren't planning any significant forest management activities
- **6% have a management plan for their land**
- **21% have received woodland management advice**

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Woodland retreat owners are least likely of all the landowner types to report harvesting timber (52%)

And only 25% have done so in the past 5 years

Of those who did harvest timber, only 34% harvesting timber for financial reasons (reasons why they did cut trees included to improve the quality of the remaining trees, salvage damaged trees, mature trees, personal use, improve recreation.

Of those who harvested timber, only 29% worked with a professional forester

Only 10% indicated that they were planning any significant forest management activities in the next 5 years. Most commonly, they plan on cutting firewood (31%), keeping the land intact for heirs (12%) or collecting non-timber forest products (11%).

Only 6% of them have forest management plans for their land and only 21% have received woodland management advice.

# Landowner Types



## •Working the Land Owners

- Value multiple reasons for owning land
- Second largest segment of forest landowners (30%)
- Second largest parcel size
- 50% own more than one parcel
- As likely as Woodland Retreaters to have a home or cabin on their land
- Likely to have purchased their land (82%)
- Average ownership tenure is 24 years

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Financial and amenity benefits of forest land ownership are equally important to these landowners

Second largest segment of landowners (30%).

Owners of the second largest parcel size (average 58 acres)

50% own two or more parcels

As likely as WR's to have a house or cabin on their lands, but more likely to also have an attached farm or ranch (38%)

Most have purchased their land (82%) and the average ownership tenure is 24 years

# Landowner Types



## •Working the Land Owners

- Very likely to harvest timber
- Least likely to harvest timber for commercial purposes
- Somewhat likely to work with a forestry professional
- Most aren't planning any significant forest management activities
- **9% have a management plan for their land**
- **25% have received woodland management advice**

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WLT owners value their woods highly – as a productive asset, as an investment, and for ongoing recreational use.

WTL owners are the group second most likely to have harvested timber in the past 5 years (61% overall and 28% in the past 5 years).

About 36% have consulted with a forester....reasons for harvesting included: trees were mature, improve remaining trees, salvage damaged trees, personal use, needed the money (this wasn't a reason for the WR owners).

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Only 6% of them have forest management plans for their land and only 21% have received woodland management advice.

# Landowner Types



## •Supplemental Income Owners

- Primarily own land for investment and income
- Not very interested in lifestyle aspects
- Smallest segment of forest landowners (8%)
- Have the largest parcels of land
- Not likely to have a home or cabin on their land
- 50% own more than one parcel
- Likely to have purchased their land (75%)
- Average ownership tenure is 25 years

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Aesthetics, lifestyle, conservation, and recreation are far less important to them than timber and investment. They are a very small segment of the landowner population – only 8%

Although the general demographics for landowners hold true for this group as well, recall, old white guys, this group tends to be better education (50% BS) and have higher incomes. They are also somewhat older than the general landowner populations (45% are 65 or older).

Not likely to have a home or cabin on their land.

They do tend to have the largest parcels of land (average size is 74 acres) and more than 50% own two or more parcels. About 33% have a farm included in their land holdings.

Although 75% of them have purchased their lands, this group is the one that was most likely to have inherited their lands.

# Landowner Types



## •Supplemental Income Owners

- Very likely to harvest timber
- Very likely to harvest timber for commercial purposes
- Likely to work with a forestry professional
- Planning to harvest saw logs, firewood, and to sell some or all of their land
- 15% have a management plan for their land**
- 33% have received woodland management advice**

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Most likely of all types to have harvested timber on their lands, particularly for commercial purposes. 66% have harvested trees and 58% have done so for commercial purposes. 46% have used a professional forester.

Common plans for future forest management include harvesting saw logs, cutting firewood and selling some or all of their land (14%). They are the most likely of all the landowner groups to have sold some of their lands.

Twice as many landowners in this group have a management plan for their property – good, but at 15% not great. And about 33% have received woodland management advice.

# Landowner Types



## •Uninvolved Owners

- No real interests in the forestland at all
- Not very interested in lifestyle amenities
- Constitute 22% of forest landowners
- Average plot size is 44 acres
- 43% own more than one parcel
- 1 in 7 owners is a farmer
- Likely to have purchased their land (75%)
- Average ownership tenure is 25 years

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This group were the least likely of any group to rate any reasons for owning forest land as important. Judging from their behaviors, we may assume they are unwilling or accidental owners of land. However, they are the group MOST likely to be farmers or have a farm attached to their forestland. These are the folks who happen to have woodlots on their farmland.

Although the general landowner demographics apply to this group as well, they do tend to be somewhat older than the general landowner population (50% are 65 or older). And, more importantly, 1 in 7 UN owners is a farmer (more than double any other landowner type).

# Landowner Types



- **Uninvolved Owners**

- Very likely to harvest timber
- Very likely to harvest timber for commercial purposes
- Likely to work with a forestry professional
- Planning to harvest saw logs, firewood, and to sell some or all of their land

- **6% have a management plan for their land**

- **18% have received woodland management advice**

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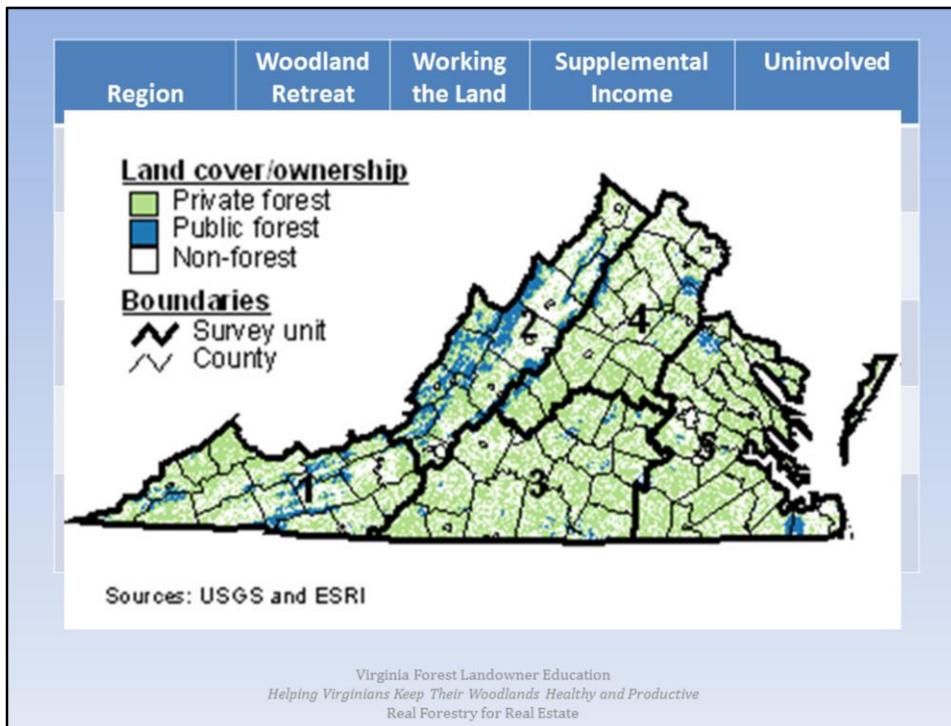
58% of UN Owners have harvested timber and 44% did so for commercial reasons; 33% worked with a forester

This group is the least likely to have received advice from a forestry professional.

Landowner Type (Percent of total)	Most Valued Amenity	Avg. Parcel Size	Percent Purchasing Land	Percent Harvesting Timber Commercially	Percent w/ Management Plan?/Received Advice?
Woodland Retreat (40)	Lifestyle	43	84	34	6/21
Working the Land (30)	Multiple-use	58	82	48	9/25
Supplemental Income (8)	Income	74	75	58	15/33
Uninvolved (22)	Nothing-Farmland	44	75	44	6/18

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Here is a summary table of the previous slides – a copy is included in your red folders.  
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Each of these types of landowners I found throughout Virginia; but when we look at state regionally, we do see the percentages of each type of landowner change. One thing that really stands out is the high percentage of woodland retreat landowners in the Southern Mountains. Of course, this makes sense. And here is a map which shows where these different regions are.

## Size of Land Holding

- People with larger plots tend to:
  - See woodlands as a financial asset
  - Have a family tradition of land ownership
  - Harvest timber regularly
  - Employ foresters
  - Participate in government cost share programs
  - Be concerned about restrictions on land use



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So, one variable which can be used to predict landowners attitudes and behaviors is what type of landowner they are and why they own the land. The second variable which can be used to predict behavior, is the size of the landholding. In general, people who own larger parcels of land, tend to behave like traditional forest landowners – they actively manage their land and seek professional and financial advice and assistance.

## Tenure or Tradition of Land Holding

- People with family land (inherited) tend to be most concerned about keeping their land intact and passing it on to heirs
- New landowners tend to be less knowledgeable, but are also more open to advice and information



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Owners who have inherited their land are often most concerned about keeping it intact and passing it on to their heirs. New owners tend to be less knowledgeable but also more open to advice and information.

## Residence on the Land

- People who live on their land tend to:
  - Be more emotionally attached to it
  - Spend more time in their woods
  - Know their woods better than people who do not live on their land.



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People who live on their woodland are usually more emotionally attached to it than people who don't. They spend more time in their woods, and may know their woods better.

On the other hand, absentee landowners may have little attachment to their land at all (this will vary – there are the absentee landowners who spend weekends/vacations there and may be very strongly attached to it). In Virginia, about 30% of our landowners are absentee (meaning they live more than 1 mile from their lands).

# Farming Background

- Farmers tend to:
  - Have a deep understanding of land management
  - Take a pragmatic approach to tending and managing woodland
  - Value farmland more than woods
  - Prefer to use resources on their agricultural holdings



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Farmers tend to have a deep understanding of land management and a pragmatic approach to tending and managing woodland. However, they value farm land more than woods, and prefer to attend to their agricultural holdings.

Many of these factors are interrelated and work together to affect landowners' decisions.

# Key Variables

- Reasons for Owning Land/Landowner Type
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So, just to review, we just went over the five key variables which predict landowners actions and decisions.

Many of these factors are interrelated and work together to affect landowners' decisions.

So, for me, as a forestry educator, where do I concentrate my efforts? Who do I try and reach?

## Prime Prospects

- Have a stewardship mindset but are not engaged in managing their woods
- Nationwide, about 66% of landowners are prime prospects
- In Virginia, the majority of our Prime Prospects fall into the Woodland Retreat Owner category



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Well, all this research into forest landowners can Prime Prospects are landowners who have a stewardship mindset but are not engaged in forestry education, as it allows us to identify forest landowners who are prime prospects. These are folks who are not currently engaged in managing their woodlands, but have a stewardship mindset and are willing to listen to the advice of professionals. These are the folks we want to reach!

In Virginia, 84% of the folks categorized as Woodland Retreat Owners are also Prime Prospects. And, if you recall, about 84% of these folks are purchasing their land. So, we can make the leap that these are folks who are working with real estate professionals at some point. These are the folks we hope to reach by partnering with you all.

How we intend to do that is through the New landowner Packets, which I will talk about in more detail at the end of the class. But, essentially, this is a way to get forest management information into the hands of new landowners.

I hope this presentation gave you a better understanding of who forest landowners are, and what things affect they way they think and behave. Of course, this research is a generalization, and each forest landowner is unique!

For more information on forest landowners, visit these websites. All of these are

listed on your resources list in your red folders.