

## Family Forest Landowner Survey Summary

### Introduction

In order to identify needs of family forest landowners and what programs can meet those needs, Conkling, Fiskum & McCormick, conducted a telephone survey of 400 family forestland owners. The survey was done under contract for the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) and the Oregon Department of Forestry. This was a stratified survey based on acres owned. One hundred interviews each were conducted within ownership classes of 10 acres or less, 11 to 40 acres, 41 to 80 acres, and 81 to 5,000 acres. The sample was based on an Oregon Department of Revenue list of about 31,000 Oregon family forestland owners. This list was reduced to about 8,400 owners when cross-matched to generate a list of phone numbers. The results of the survey are presented and discussed here. A full report on the survey is available from OFRI.

The survey is unique in its comprehensiveness in reaching forest landowners who traditionally have not been asked for input. The information generated by this survey will help the Department of Forestry shape and implement its new Private and Community Forests Program.

### Highlights by Topic

The survey results are highlighted here by topic or question.

- **Current Activities** – Family forest landowners are generally active managers. More than six in ten say they have controlled unwanted vegetation (74%), reduced fire hazards (66%), and maintained a forest road (64%), in the past five years. More than half have also planted trees (58%) and harvested trees (51%). Less than half conducted pre-commercial thinning (44%), improved fish or wildlife habitat (38%), or developed a written management plan (20%). The most active landowners are those who own 81 acres or more. Generally, level of activity increases as size of forestland gets larger. Overall, landowners are more likely to have performed forest management activities than prepared a management plan.
- **Top-of Mind Concerns** – Forest fires (30%) and government regulations (17%) are the most commonly mentioned concerns. Marketing timber (9%), sustainable growth/forest yield (8%), destructive pests (8%), unwanted vegetation (6%), and trespassers (5%) are also frequently mentioned. Concern about fire is greatest for owners who own smaller acreages. Concern about government regulations is greatest among larger landowners. Of special note is the fact that only 1% of respondents listed retaining family ownership as their greatest concern. The demographic data indicate that this should be of more concern.
- **Helping Meet Forestland Goals** – In response to an open-ended question, less government regulation (14%) and more information about how to manage forestland (7%) were given as activities or programs that would be most helpful. No more than 3% mention any other activity. However, after combining similar responses, forestland maintenance (14%) is a frequently mentioned activity. Of special note, is the fact that 38% don't know what one thing will help them meet their goals. This fact is consistent across size classes, age classes, and incomes.

- **Important Sources of Information** – Among seven different sources of information, owners rate written materials (46%) as most important, followed by forestry education programs (43%). Less important sources are site visits from agency foresters or resource professionals (28%), site visits from private consultants (24%), site visits from loggers (19%), web sites (15%), and private conservation groups (11%). Owners who rated three information sources as more important were asked how well each source met their needs. Just over half say each source - site visits from agency professionals (53%), forestry education programs (52%), and written material (51%) – very well or somewhat meets their need. Of special note is that among landowners, who consider the three sources important, 68% use site visits, 78% use forestry education programs and 85% use written material.
- **Potentially Helpful Topics** – The topics rated most helpful by over half of the respondents are insect and disease control (64%), fire hazard reduction (60%), control of invasive plants and animals (56%), and controlling unwanted vegetation (53%). Topics rated helpful by at least 40% are tree planting (47%), forest practices regulations (46%), marketing forest products (42%), and estate planning or ownership transfer (40%). Topics rated helpful by at least 30% are logging (39%), visual appearance (38%), fish and wildlife habitat (36%), and financial assistance (34%). Fewer than 25% rated developing a management plan (24%) and green certification (11%) as helpful.
- **Motivations to Sell** – Nearly half of all family forest landowners (49%) say they would not consider selling their forestland for any reason. Of owners who would sell, financial reasons (29%) are a strong motivation for selling family forestland.
- **Demographics** – Forty-nine percent of landowners are age 65 and older (including 19% age 75 years and older), 44% are age 45 to 64 and 6% are under age 45. Sixty-eight percent have had their forestland in the family for more than 25 years. Seventy-two percent live on their forestland. Men manage a majority of family forestlands but women are responsible for managing roughly 40% of family forestlands. Income distribution among forestland owners is very similar to that of the general population.

## Discussion and Summary

- **Active Management**
  - Oregon family forest landowners surveyed are active managers. Owners who own larger acreages are more active owners. The type of activities that landowners are doing is closely tied to improving forest health and productivity. This is consistent with concerns the public have about forestland management and the apparent lack of active management on federal forestlands.
  - Landowners are more likely to participate in management activities than in planning activities, which is the reversal of what we see on federal lands.
  - Certification and management planning are not very important to landowners. However, these are becoming more important in both market and regulatory arenas.

- **Concerns**

- Forest fires and government regulations are the most important top-of-mind concerns of family forestland owners. Passing the land to the next generation is not a high level concern to the landowners.

- **Sources of Information**

- Written information and education were rated most important. Site visits from agency professionals were somewhat less important. All three of these sources of information appear to meeting the needs of landowners, but many landowners still don't use them. Given the long term ownership of many of these folks, and the fact that this wasn't an open question, we might speculate that trial and error/personal experience has been the "most used" source of information.

- **Topics**

- Topics important to family forest landowners are related to forest health issues such as insects and disease control, fire hazard reduction, control of invasive species, and controlling unwanted vegetation.

- **Motivations to Sell Land**

- Half of all forestland owners have no plans to sell their property for any reason.
- Landowners who are likely to sell land will be motivated by socio-economic reasons. Having a strong market and potential for financial gain should reduce the likelihood of selling land.
- What programs will be most helpful in keeping folks on the land is an important point to consider.
- Although regulations were an important overall concern, it does not appear that increasing regulations would be a critical trigger point for ownership transfer.

- **Demographics**

- Who owns the land and who is going to own the land in the future are important questions raised by this survey.
- There will be a dramatic transition of title for family forestlands over the next 20 years due to the large share of owners age 65 and older (almost 50% of all owners).
- Family forestland ownership has been stable in the past. Most owners live on their land and the land has been in the family for a long time. Having stability in family

forestland ownership is becoming more important to Oregon as industrial landownership is becoming less stable than in the past.

- It is most likely that land will be deeded to the next generation rather than sold, but passing land to the next generation is a major concern to only a very small percentage of landowners. A better understanding of that next generation, their land ownership interests and motivations could be very important to the state.
- The annual income of the family forestland owner is no different than that of the average Oregonian.
- Managing forestland is not exclusively a male domain. A large share of women manages or helps manage family forestland. Programs need to be developed that are accessible to both men and women.

- **Ownership & Strategy**

- A large number of owners own small tracts that represent a fairly small total acreage, while a relatively small number of owners own large tracts that represent a large total acreage. Different strategies will likely be needed to reach a large number of owners versus the large total acreage.

- **Information Needs Raised by the Survey**

- Rate of ownership turnover by ownership size.
- When ownership changes, do you anticipate keeping your land in the family or selling it?
- Do you have written plans for transfer of ownership to the next generation?
- Of the 72% that live on their land, are there differences in sources of information or management activities.
- Are people that live on the land more likely to be active managers?
- What do we know about the next generation of landowners and their needs and motivations?

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