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Extension Forestry and Family Forest Owners: A Data Source

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Abstract: Family forests account for 92% of private forest owners in the United States and 62% of private forestland acres. These are the main clients of Extension forestry. The most recent National Woodland Owners Survey (NWOS) was completed in 2006, and, besides the published results, the U.S. Forest Service has developed NWOS Tablemaker, which can develop useful tables from these data. Tables can be developed to illustrate family forest ownership trends, demographic characteristics, forest management and timber harvesting activities and plans, and forest management information sources. This is an ideal tool to get a "handle" on family forest owners.

Introduction

Characteristics and motivations of family forest owners are of obvious interest to Extension forestry professionals. This group of forest owners was previously called nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) owners, but much of the land that transferred ownership from forest industry over the last two decades is now owned by business-minded financial interests that are also classified as nonindustrial. It became necessary to break family forest owners out as a separate classification. The U.S. Forest Service still has the NIPF category in its inventory system, and family forest owners are a subset of the NIPF owners. NIPF owners control 372 million acres, with 264 million of those acres controlled by family forest owners. There are 11.3 million NIPF owners and 10.4 million family forest owners (Smith, Miles, Perry, & Pugh, 2009).

Family forest owners control 35% of America's total forested acres, and the ownership pattern is regional. Most of the private forestland is located in the eastern United States, and, since family forests account for 92% of private forest owners and 62% of private forestland acres, family forests are also concentrated there. Thirty-six percent of the family forestland acres and 45% of family forest owners are located in the North, while the South has 48% of family forestland acres and 43% of family owners. The five states with the greatest family forest area are Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, and New York. The five states with the greatest number of family forest owners are New York, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania (Butler, 2008).

Interaction of family forest owners with forestry Extension professionals affects the level of forest management activity on family forests (Munsell & Germain, 2004) and participation in local forestry conservation programs (Straka & Franklin, 2008). Forestry Extension professionals have a keen interest in their client base, and a new tool exists that provides valuable information on family forest owner characteristics and motivations. Family forest owners across the United States were surveyed from 2002 to 2006 by the U.S. Forest Service, and a summary report was published in 2008 (Butler, 2008). This summary report also includes a CD with more detailed information, even one-page summary sheets for each state (Butler, 2008). These data will be the foundation of any Extension forestry report on the family forest, and they provide detailed descriptions of family forest owners in terms of demographics, motivations, preferences, and activities. These data even provide insight into which family forest owners have forest management plans, which ones participate in cost-share programs, and what they think of green certification programs.

National Woodland Owner Survey Tablemaker

The data set from the survey is available in an interactive screening model format on the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS) website (USDA Forest Service, 2009a). Virtually all the interesting data are included, and screening may be performed by both columns and rows (USDA Forest Service, 2009b). For example, the demographic of age might be a column, and source of management advice might be a row. Results would be provided by area and number of owners by age classes and various advice sources (that is, in a table). By looking at just Extension forestry, for example, one could find the age distribution of family forest owners who used this source. An additional screen is one that allows for individual state data or any combination of states.

The number of tables that can be produced is vast, and many questions posed in the Extension literature are reflected in the tables. Type of preferred forestry information transfer format is a longstanding question asked by Extension foresters (Downing & Finley, 2005). NWOS Tablemaker has the capacity to make national-level tables just showing preferred forestry information source or a state-level table or one that shows preference by any number of demographics or other characteristics. Information is also included to help answer the question, "How do family forest owners prefer to learn," a question often asked by Extension foresters (Mercker & Hodges, 2007). A table could also be produced showing preference for various forestry information sources by various types of organizations, including Extension.

Some very interesting tables can be produced. What percent of family forest owners, state by state, have used forestry Extension as an information source for forest management decisions? Table 1 shows this information by number of family forest owners and associated forest area. About 2.4% of family forest owners who control about 7.7% of family forest acres have used Extension forestry as a forest management information source. For family forest owners it ranges from 0.6% in Arkansas to 7.1% in Oregon and for family forest acreage it ranges from 2.9% in Missouri and West Virginia to 17.0% in Oregon.

Table 1.

Percent of Family Forest Owners and Associated Acreage That Used Extension Foresters as a Source of Information on Forest Management, by Select States, 2006 (National Woodland Owner Survey, 2009)

State	Area %	Owners %		State	Area %	Owners %
AL	9.4	1.3		NY	3.4	1.5
AR	4.9	0.6		NC	6.5	1.6

CA	7.7	1.6		OH	7.7	3.7
FL	7.0	5.8		OR	17.0	7.1
GA	12.3	1.6		PA	4.4	1.1
IL	5.0	1.1		SC	10.8	3.6
IA	5.2	1.4		TN	4.8	0.9
KY	3.4	1.2		TX	13.9	3.6
LA	7.8	1.9		UT	10.6	1.6
ME	4.2	0.9		VT	7.3	2.4
MD	4.0	0.7		VA	4.7	1.0
MI	6.1	4.0		WA	8.2	2.1
MN	4.3	3.8		WV	2.9	0.8
MS	14.8	2.6		WI	7.9	4.4
MO	2.9	1.2		US	7.7	2.4

Table 2 shows selected family forest demographics from Tablemaker. For instance, questions about the age, income, and education demographics of family forest owners who use Extension as a forestry information source can be answered with these data. There are dozens of characteristics that could be associated with this question. The data shows that most of the family forest owners who consulted Extension professionals are older (92% are 45 years of age or older and 39% are 65 or older); most are highly educated (85% attended college and 68% have a college degree); and most have a high income (76% have an income of $50,000 or greater). The responses could have just as easily been evaluated in terms of acres owned rather than number of family forest owners.

Table 2.
Selected Demographics for Family Forest Owners Who Used Extension as Their Source of Forest Management Information, 2006 (National Woodland Owner Survey, 2009)

AgeEducationIncome
YearsPercentLevelPercentDollarsPercent
<351Grade school3<25,0005
35-447High school1225- 49,99919
45-5423Some College1750-99,99938
55-6430Associate degree9100-199,99920
65-7422Bachelor's Degree32200,000+18
75+17Advanced degree27

Table 3 indicates the preferred source of forest management information for family forest owners. About 11% of family forest owners, representing 9% of family forest acres, preferred Extension professionals as their information source. State forestry agencies and consulting foresters came out on top in terms of preferred information source.

Table 3.
Source of Information for Family Forest Owners Who Obtained Forestry Advice in the Last Five Years and Preferred Delivery Method of Forestry Information, by Percent of Owners and Associated Acreage, 2006 (National Woodland Owner Survey, 2009)

Organization	**Area %**	**Owner %**
State forestry agency	24	25
Extension	9	11
Other state agency	2	3
Federal agency	13	12
Consulting forester	23	16
Forest industry	7	4
Logger	9	10
Nonprofit organization	2	1
Another landowner	9	13
Other	2	5
Preferred Delivery Method		
Publications, book, or pamphlets	16	18
Newsletters, magazines, or newspaper	13	14
Internet	7	10
Conferences, workshops, or video conference	6	4
Video tapes for home viewing	8	10
Television or radio program	6	8
Visiting other woodlands or field trip	7	6
Talking with forester/natural resource professional	19	16
Talking with other woodland owners	9	7
Talking with a logging contractor	5	4
Membership in a landowner organization	4	3

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between size of family forest holding (tract size) and use of Extension foresters as a forestry information source. Most of these family forest owners owned small tracts (72% of owners held under 50 acres), but, as suggested by Figure 1, in terms of overall acreage owned, family forests tend to be large holdings (nearly one half are 500 acres or more). Size of forest holding is a known key variable controlling management on family forests and it should play a large role in planning Extension forestry programs.

Figure 1.
Size of Forest Holding (Tract Size) of Family Forest Owners Who Utilize Extension for Forest Management Advice, by Percent of Owners and Associated Acreage, 2006 (National Woodland Owner Survey, 2009)

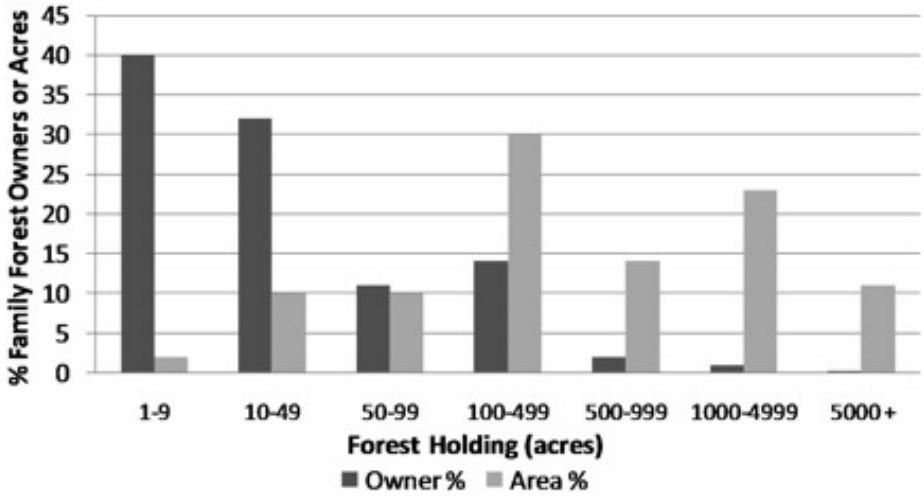

Figure 1. Size of Forest Holding (Tract Size) of Family Forest Owners Who Utilized Extension for Forest Management Advice, by Percent of Owners and Associated Acreage, 2006 (National Woodland Owner Survey 2009)

Conclusion

The NWOS Tablemaker can be a valuable tool in the hands of Extension forestry professionals. It can be used to develop family forest ownership trends and to illustrate family forest owner relationships involving size of forest holding, ownership objectives, timber harvesting plans and actions, nontimber forest products, forest management plans and advice, preferred methods for receiving information, and future plans for the property. It is easy to use and produces high quality tables. This is an ideal tool to get a "handle" on family forest owners.

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