



USDA FOREST SERVICE FAMILY FOREST RESEARCH CENTER

October 10, 2008

Major Findings from the U.S. Forest Service, National Woodland Owner Survey

The U.S. Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis program conducts the National Woodland Owner Survey to better understand: who owns the forests of the United States; why they own them; how they use them; and what they intend to do with them. We do this by contacting over 6,000 private forest owners from across the United States every year and ask them questions about: forest characteristics; ownership objectives; ownership history; forest use; forest management; information sources; concerns; intentions; and demographics.

Based on the National Woodland Owner Survey¹, we know that:

- Family forest owners rule!
 - Over half of the forest land in the United States is privately owned and of this land, nearly two-thirds is owned by over 10 million families and individuals.
- Family forests are not being managed sustainably!
 - One in four family forest owners have commercially harvested trees, but only one in twenty have a written forest management plan.
- Family forest owners are old!
 - Nineteen percent of family forest owners are between 65 and 74 years of age and an additional 15 percent are 75 years or older; related, 14 percent of the family forest owners plan to sell or transfer their land in the next *five* years.

The fate of America's forests lies primarily in the hands of families and individuals. There is a widespread misperception by the general public, forestry professional, and landowners about who owns America's forests that needs to be changed.

Most family forest owners have a deep love of their land and a strong desire to do "what is right," but they need help in knowing what their options are and what is best for them and their woods. Programs, tools, and resources need to be tailored to better meet the needs of family forest owners whose primary ownership objectives are related to aesthetics, privacy, and family legacy. Although family legacy is a major objective, many family forest owners are worried that they will not be able to hold onto the land or their heirs are not interested in owning it.

The U.S. Forest Service will continue to conduct the National Woodland Owner Survey to monitor trends in family forest owners – the critical link between forests and society.

For additional information, visit: www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos or contact: Brett Butler (413-545-1387; bbutler01@fs.fed.us).

¹ Butler, B.J. 2008. Family forest owners of the United States, 2006. Gen. Tech. Rep. NRS-27. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station: Newtown Square, PA. p. 73.