



# FIA National Woodland Owner Survey

The [Forest Inventory and Analysis](#) (FIA) program of the USDA Forest Service conducts the [National Woodland Owner Survey](#) (NWOS) to quantify:

- Who owns the forests of the United States
- Why the forests are owned
- How the forests are used
- What the intended future uses of the forests are

The NWOS serves as the social complement to the biophysical forest inventories and economic, mill surveys FIA conducts.

## Data Collected

The NWOS collects data on:

- Forest characteristics
- Ownership objectives
- Ownership history
- Forest use
- Forest management
- Information sources
- Concerns
- Intentions
- Demographics

For more information:

<https://www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos/>

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Of the over 700 million acres of forest land in the United States, excluding interior Alaska, 60 percent is privately owned. These 420 million acres are owned by an estimated 10 million corporations, families, individuals, and other private groups.

**History** — The first national report on private forest owners was produced by the U.S. Forest Service in 1958 (Josephson and McGuire 1958). This early survey was focused on quantifying the number of owners and size of holdings. The next national efforts involved surveys conducted in 1978 (Birch et al. 1982) and 1993 (Birch 1996). These were more in-depth studies with similar content in subsequent iterations of the NWOS (see sidebar) and from which the survey has expanded and evolved. The next NWOS iterations were completed in 2006 (Butler 2008) and 2013 (Butler et al. 2016). The NWOS began being implemented on an annual basis in 2019.

**Data Collection Methods** — The NWOS asks approximately 6,000, randomly selected private forest ownerships from across the United States to participate every year. These ownerships are chosen using an area-based, systematic random sampling design. Random points are selected and for those points determined to be forested, the ownership is determined from property tax and other records. Following a pre-notice postcard, a self-administered survey is mailed to each of these ownerships, followed by a reminder postcard, and, as necessary, a second questionnaire. The current cooperation rate is 40 percent. Telephone interviews are conducted with a subset of non-respondents to assess potential non-response bias. The NWOS covers all U.S. states and is expanding to include U.S. territories and protectorates.

**Data Confidentiality** — No information provided by landowners will be released that can be used to identify an individual landowner. This confidentiality is assured and mandated by Federal law.

**Reporting and Data Distribution** — Results from the NWOS are distributed through reports, presentations, and on-line tools that can be accessed via the [NWOS website](#).

**The Future of NWOS** — Planning for the next iteration of the NWOS has commenced. Consistency with historic data is always paramount, but it is also important to track emerging issues and ensure that data collected are as accurate and reliable as possible.

### References

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Butler, B.J., J.H. Hewes, B.J. Dickinson, K. Andrejczyk, S.M. Butler, and M. Markowski-Lindsay. 2016. USDA Forest Service National Woodland Owner Survey: National, Regional, and State Statistics for Family Forest and Woodland Ownerships with 10+ Acres, 2011-2013. [Res. Bull. NRS-99](#). Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. P. 39.

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