



Forest Inventory and Analysis National Woodland Owner Survey



FIA Fact Sheet Series

The U.S. Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program conducts the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS) to quantify:

- Who owns the forests of the United States;
- Why do they own them;
- How they use them; and
- What they intend to do with them.

The NWOS serves as the social complement to the biophysical forest inventories FIA conducts.

Of the 751 million acres of forest land in the United States, 56 percent is privately owned. These 423 million acres are owned by over 11 million corporations, families, individuals, and other private groups. If we want to fully understand the forests, we need to understand the people and groups that control it.

History. The first national survey of private forest owners was conducted by the U.S. Forest Service in 1953 (Josephson and McGuire 1958). This early survey was focused primarily on quantifying the number of owners and size of holdings. The next national surveys were conducted in 1978 (Birch et al. 1982) and 1993 (Birch 1996). These were more robust studies with content similar to that in the current incarnation of the NWOS and from which the survey has expanded and evolved. Along with FIA's transition to annual inventories, the NWOS is currently conducted on an annual basis with the most current cycle being completed between 2002 and 2006 (Butler 2008).

Data collected. Based on stakeholder input, the NWOS collects data related to:

- Forest characteristics;
- Ownership objectives;

- Ownership history;
- Forest use;
- Forest management;
- Information sources;
- Concerns;
- Intentions; and
- Demographics.

Data collection methods. The NWOS asks approximately 6,000, randomly selected private landowners from across the United States to participate every year. These owners are chosen using an area-based, systematic random sampling design. Random points are selected and for those points determined to be forested, the owner is determined from tax records.

Following a pre-notice postcard, a self-administered survey is mailed to each of these owners. Using standard survey protocols, follow-up mailings and telephone interviews are conducted to maximize the cooperation rate, which currently averages 51 percent.

During the latest iteration of the NWOS, questionnaires were sent to forest owners in all states except interior Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, western Oklahoma, and western Texas. We are planning to rectify these deficiencies during the next iteration of the survey and also begin to expand to the 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 a 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 the NWOS. We are currently planning for the next iteration of the NWOS. Consistency with historic data is paramount, but we are also concerned about tracking trends in emerging issues and ensuring that we are collecting the best data possible. This next iteration will for the first time include state-specific questions to permit assessment of key regional issues.

References:

- Birch, T.W. 1996. Private forest-land owners of the United States, 1994. Radnor, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Forest Experiment Station.
- Birch, T.W., D.G. Lewis, and H.F. Kaiser. 1982. The private forest-land owners of the United States. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service: Washington, DC. p. 64.
- Butler, B.J. 2008. Family forest owners of the United States, 2006. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station: Newtown Square, PA. p. 73.
- Josephson, H.R. and J.R. McGuire. 1958. Ownership of forest land and timber. In: Timber Resources for America's Future. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service: For. Res. Rep. No. 14.

For more information about the National Woodland Owner Survey:

- Visit: www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos
- Contact: Brett Butler (bbutler01@fs.fed.us; 413-545-1387)

For more information about the FIA program:

- Visit: <http://www.fia.fs.us>