

Woodland Management



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Meeting the needs of today's private woodland owner



On the cover: © Drumming ruffed grouse by Rick Baetsen. This photo, in full color, and others are for sale by Baetsen's NorthWind Photography, (615) 535-2123, or www.rickbaetsen.com

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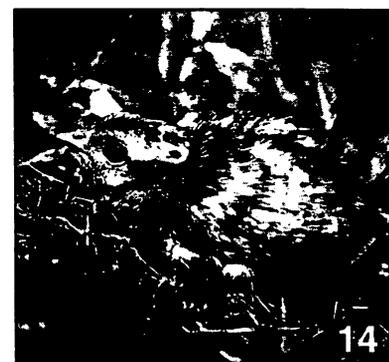
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Nancy C. Bozek
P.O. Box 286
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-4798
FAX (715) 346-4821
www.wisconsinwoodlands.org
Please call Nancy with your
WVOA questions.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Virgil D. Kopitske, President 2001
N795 Lessor-Navarino Road
Bonduel, WI 54107
(715) 758-8960

Marvin Meier, President Elect 2002

4801 Blackberry Drive
Wausau, WI 54401
(715) 355-9034

Beverly A. Schendel 2001

Secretary
9532 Russell Avenue S.
Bloomington, MN 55431
(852) 881-7810

Dale Lightfuss, Treasurer 2002

N5172 County E
Ogdensburg, WI 54962
(920) 244-7668
E-Mail: dales-trails@juno.com

DIRECTORS

Alvin Barden 2003
4427 Chain O'Lakes Rd
Eagle River, WI 54521
(715) 479-8449

Evelyn Charlson 2003

E9598 Manske Rd
New London, WI 54961
(820) 882-4076
E-mail: charlson@uspower.net

Michael Gehrke 2003

W6272 Everson Rd
Windsor, WI 54896
(715) 266-8951
E-mail: treefar@win.bright.net

Fred Koenecke 2002

22821 Co. Hwy. NN
Richland Center, WI 53581
(608) 585-2406

Nancy Livingston 2003

Full Cycle Tree Farm
832 8th Ave
Hancock, WI 54943
(608) 564-7086

E-mail: nancy@palacenet.net

Roger J. Perrault 2001

6476 Potawatomi Road (City V)
Gillett, WI 54124
(920) 655-8739

Eugene M. Roark 2001

16 Grand Avenue
Madison, WI 53705
(608) 238-5348

EDITOR

Timothy Eisele
129 South Segoe Road
Madison, WI 53705
(608) 233-2904
E-Mail: teisele@chorus.net

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Helen Moberg
2306 City Highway G
Neenah, WI 54457
(715) 886-4601 FAX (715) 886-4601
E-Mail: hnmobres@wctc.net

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President's Message



by Virgil Kopitske

Talking to woodland owners about their property can be both gratifying and frustrating.

Shirley and I experienced these "highs" and "lows" this past summer when we helped at the WVOA and American Tree Farm booths for Farm Progress Days and the Ducks Unlimited Great Outdoors Festival. A teenage boy's concern about his grandfather's woodland and a Milwaukee man who recently purchased 160 acres in Oneida County are examples of why we experienced these feelings.

The teenager asked a number of pointed and well thought-out questions about what he and his dad should or could be doing to maintain and improve the woodlot.

The absentee woodland owner bought his acreage for deer hunting and intended to "leave it just as it is." We tried to impress upon him the point that Buzz Vahradian, DNR forester, has stated for years: nothing stays just as it is. We stressed that without management, the canopy will close in, the understory will diminish and the food sources for deer and turkey will disappear. I wonder if he heard what we were saying to him?

When you really get down to it, it's all a matter of education for good forest stewardship, and that is what WVOA is all about. We are not alone in working toward this objective. Other organizations with similar objectives include Trees for Tomorrow, the Forest Productivity Council, cooperatives, landowner associations and of course the DNR.

Paul DeLong, director of the DNR Bureau of Forestry, shared some of the DNR's concerns and plans for future action with the WVOA Board of Directors at our winter meeting. He stated that the challenge now is forest fragmentation: more owners of smaller parcels. Requests for assistance from these new owners,

plus others entering land under the Managed Forest Law (MFL) because of land use assessment, has created a backlog of work for the local DNR foresters. Of the 28 percent of non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners that request assistance only 19 percent receive timely help. A brief look at forest ownership in Wisconsin provides some insight on the magnitude of the challenge.

Forty-six percent (16 million acres) of Wisconsin's land area is forested, of which 60 percent (9.7 million acres) is NIPF land controlled by 262,000 owners. Based on 1997 data from Tom Birch and Earl Leatherberry of the USDA Forest Service, 170,000 individuals own more than 10 acres, which amounts to approximately 9.4 million acres. About 1.5 million acres are under MFL or Forest Crop Law, representing 25,000 contracts or 60 acres per contract.

The American Tree Farm System has 4,000 members in Wisconsin with 1.7 million acres, or 425 acres per average ownership. Other woodlands are under management plans furnished by the forest industry to their tree farm families. Cooperative and landowner associations are actively doing the same. There probably is a lot of overlap where land is in both the Tree Farm System and MFL, etc., which is the case for our farm. A 'guesstimate' therefore might be that 2 to 2.5 million acres out of the 9.4 million acres are under active management. This is what's called fuzzy math, but the point is that there is a lot of room for improvement.

What can WVOA do about this? First as an organization, and as individual members, we should encourage our legislators to include more DNR foresters in the budget. Secondly, the WVOA Board of Directors needs to rejuvenate the activities of the Education Committee. We also need the participation of individual members in the following ways:

- Attend UW Extension/WVOA Winter Forestry Conferences
- Staff WVOA booths
- Support the Seno Center
- Participate at chapter field days
- Attend the WVOA Annual Meeting
- Recruit new members

This is where the action is, so let's get with it! 🌲

Virgil Kopitske is WVOA president and owns woodland in Shawano County. He and his wife Shirley were named Tree Farmers of the Year for Shawano County in 1996.

Woodland Management is produced by the WVOA Publications Committee: Nancy Bozek, Jack Densmore, David Downs, Jack Edson, Ann Hockerman, Dave Johnson, Don Krohn, Jerry Lapidaks, Jeff Martin, Mary Meier, Helen Moberg, Russ Moody, Paul Pingray, Mark Rickenbach, Gene Roark, Clyde Samsel, Ken Witte, and Tim Eisele. The committee's mission is to produce an informative and interesting quarterly magazine to help WVOA members be good woodland stewards.

A profile of Wisconsin's private forest landowners



by Earl C. Leatherberry

In 1997, the USDA Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program at the North Central Research Station in St. Paul, Minnesota contacted approximately 3,000 private forest landowners in Wisconsin as part of a comprehensive statewide survey. FIA routinely collects and analyzes forest resources data.

Wisconsin's private forest landowners were surveyed because they are stewards of a vitally important resource. With nearly one-half (15.3 million acres) of Wisconsin's land area in forest and 70 percent of the forestland in private ownership, there is a great demand for information about private landowners.

A variety of public and private organizations need current, reliable information to deliver services to landowners, and to monitor resource supply, availability, and potential output from private forestlands.

Information is essential because private forestland is the greatest source of timber supply, supporting the forest products industry (the second largest manufacturing sector in the state), and because it produces goods and services (such as recreation opportunity and ecological diversity). Outputs from private forestlands are for the individual owner's benefit as well as for the benefit of others. Developing information about forest owners will ensure that owner's rights are protected and that appropriate assistance or incentives can be made available.

How the survey was conducted

Wisconsin is divided into five Forest Survey Units along county boundaries. Each unit represents homogeneous areas based largely on geographic conditions and the industrial/economic character of

the region. An estimate of forestland in each unit was obtained from a comprehensive forest resources inventory in 1996. Questionnaires were mailed to a sample of private forest landowners, and 49 percent responded.

Findings-landowner numbers

If you own forestland in Wisconsin, you are one of the more than 262,200 private forest landowners holding an estimated 10.8 million acres of forestland. Private forest landowners are well distributed throughout the state (Figure 1).

The relationship between number of owners and land owned varies by unit and presents interesting patterns (Table 1). The Southeastern Unit, for example, has a lower percentage of private forestland (9 percent) than it has of forest landowners (21 percent), suggesting that forested tracts are comparatively small there. In the Northeastern Unit, the opposite condition applies, suggesting larger tract sizes.

Forms of ownership and ownership size

Ninety-five percent (248,600 owners) of Wisconsin's forest landowners are individual owners, and collectively they hold 80 percent of the state's private forestland (8.6 million acres). The term "individual owners" refers not only to single persons but also to joint ownerships, such as land held jointly by spouses and relatives. Most Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association members are individual owners

and make up the core of what are commonly called non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners.

Non-industrial corporations, partnerships, and associations account for four percent of owners but collectively own 11 percent of all private forestland. Industrial forest landowners are only one percent of owners, but collectively they hold nine percent of Wisconsin's private forestland. Their holdings total over one million acres.

Although individual owners hold the largest share of forestland, their holdings are generally small. Half of the individual owners have tracts that are smaller than 20 acres, and slightly more than one-third own less than 10 acres of forestland. On the other end of the spectrum, a few owners, mostly industrial owners, hold

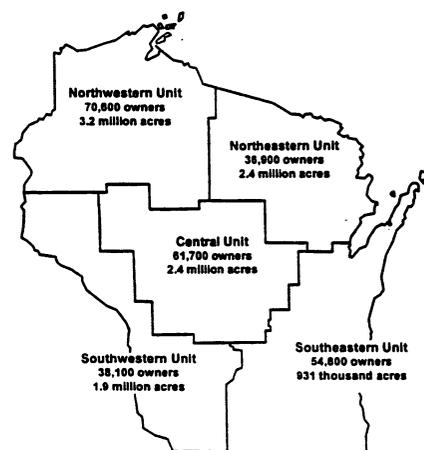


Figure 1. Distribution of private forestland owners and acres owned, Wisconsin, 1997.

Owners and Acres by Unit				
Unit	Owners		Acres	
	Thousand	Percent	Thousand	Percent
Northeastern	36.9	14	2,432.3	23
Northwestern	70.7	27	3,165.7	29
Central	61.7	23	2,394.9	22
Southwestern	38.1	15	1,888.2	17
Southeastern	54.8	21	930.8	9
State total	262.2	100	10,811.9	100

Table 1. Estimated number of private forestland owners and acres owned by unit, Wisconsin, 1997.

sizeable tracts of forestland. For example, less than one percent of owners have tracts of 1,000 acres and larger, but collectively they own 13 percent of Wisconsin's private forestland.

Individual owners' holdings are scattered throughout the state. However, industrial, and other corporate group ownerships are concentrated in Northern Wisconsin where nearly 30 percent of the private forestland is in some type of group ownership. Approximately 70 percent of the group-owned forestland in the north is industrial forest. Also, forestland owned by clubs/associations is likely to be in the Northern and Central area of the state and is generally held for recreational purposes. The size of holding differs significantly among type of owner, as shown below:

Type of owner	Average size of holding (acres)
Individual	35
Forest industry Corporation	4,793
Club/assoc.	105
Other group	62

Wisconsin individual private forest landowners

Given the prevailing ownership patterns, it is clear that individual owners have a crucial role to play in maintaining the sustainable flow of economic, social, and environmental benefits from forests. However, because of the size of their holdings, individual owners face increasingly difficult challenges in holding and managing forestland. An important first question is, who are Wisconsin's individual forest landowners and how do they use their land?

Individual forest landowners are employed in a variety of occupations. Twenty-one percent are white-collar workers, 18 percent blue-collar workers, and 13 percent farmers. However, the most distinguishing factor about individual owners is that over one-fourth of them are retired. Collectively, retired owners hold nearly one-fourth of all private forestland in Wisconsin. Retired owners have taken the place of farmers as the predominant forestland holders because farmers have been divesting their holdings. For example, in 1956, farmers owned 6.4 million acres of forestland in Wisconsin. By 1997, farmer-owned forestland had declined to 1.5 million acres.

Individual forest landowners are older than the general population. With a large

share of forest landowners retired, it follows that 25 percent are 65 years of age or older, whereas only 13 percent of the general population is 65 or older. Young forest landowners, those under 44 years of age, make up only 16 percent of all owners.

Wisconsin's individual forest landowners have higher household incomes than the state's general population. In 1995, the median household income in Wisconsin was \$40,955. In 1997, (the year of the survey) 55 percent of the individual forestland owners who answered the question about income had annual incomes greater than \$40,000. Nineteen percent had incomes greater than \$75,000.

Most individual owners reside within a mile of their forestland. However, more than one-fourth of all owners have forestland that is more than 25 miles from their residence. Thirteen percent of the owners maintained their primary residence outside of Wisconsin, mostly in Minnesota and Illinois.

Reasons for owning forestland

Two reasons stand out as to why people own forestland: recreation and aesthetic enjoyment. Almost one-half of all individual owners hold forestland for these reasons. Interestingly, timber production is not an important reason for owning forestland for individual owners. Less than one percent of all individual owners hold forestland for timber production. However, those holding forestland for timber production own about half a million acres of forestland. Benefits derived from owning forestland correspond closely to reasons for owning forestland. Recreation and aesthetic enjoyment are the primary benefits received from owning forestland.

Timber harvesting

Although many individual owners hold forestland for recreation and aesthetics, nearly one-half (46 percent) of all owners have harvested timber from their land. About one-fourth of all harvesters removed timber because they thought it was "mature." One-fifth harvested timber for their own use, primarily for fuelwood. Few harvested because they needed money or received a good price.

A majority (54 percent) of individual owners, holding one-fourth of all private forestland in Wisconsin, have never harvested timber. Nineteen percent of owners who did not harvest believe harvesting would reduce the beauty of their land. Other important reasons for not harvesting are that owners generally do not



Nearly one-half of all owners have harvested timber from their land. Harvesting operations, such as shown here, play an important role in Wisconsin's economy. Photos by Earl Leatherberry

believe their timber is of a size or quantity that warrant harvest (18 percent), or holdings are too small (15 percent). Sixteen percent of the owners did not harvest because they are opposed to harvesting. Those owners hold nearly half a million acres (430,172 acres).

Timber harvest intentions

Of the owners who did not harvest, many plan to harvest in the future. About 70 percent of all individual owners, holding 86 percent of individual private forestland, intend to harvest timber sometime in the future. However, 26 percent of owners say they will never harvest timber. Those owners hold 11 percent of individual private forestland and are from all occupational backgrounds, but 42 percent of them are retired and hold over 300,000 acres.

Knowledge and use of forest management assistance

About one-third (35 percent) of all individual owners surveyed did not know of an agency or office to contact for forest management assistance. Tract size has a very strong influence on whether an owner has knowledge about whom to contact for assistance as shown below:

Size of holding (acres)	Do not know whom to contact for assistance (percent of owners)
1-49	40
50-499	22
500+	6

Twenty-eight percent of owners have sought advice or assistance in managing their forestland. Knowing whom to contact for assistance and seeking assistance obviously are strongly related, and are influenced by tract size. As size of holding increases, owners are more likely to use assistance as shown below:

Size of holding (acres)	Sought assistance (percent of owners)
1-49	20
50-499	53
500+	86

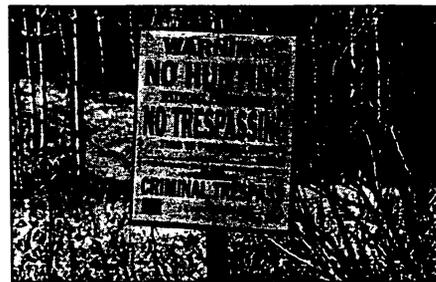
Forest recreation

Two-thirds of individual owners use their forestland for recreation. This is not surprising, as recreation is an important reason for owning forestland. Hunting is the most popular activity. Individual private owners tend to limit public use of their forestland; only 20 percent of all individual owners make their forestland available for public recreation. Owners who allow public use permit a variety of activities, primarily snowmobiling, hunting, and hiking. Owners with larger tracts are more likely to permit public access to their forestland than are owners with smaller tracts. To discourage or to control public access, 44 percent of all individual owners post their land. Fifty-five percent of all individual private forestland is posted. Primary reasons for posting land are to control or prohibit access and to control hunting.

What about the future?

One of the most obvious likely outcomes is that the average size of individual private forestland holdings will decrease. Many owners are under increasing pressure to sell or subdivide their land. Retirees, a substantial group of owners, are most likely to divest their holdings. Clearly, this would have an adverse effect on the flow of timber products from individual private forestlands. Presently, most individual owners value their land as a recreation resource, but many harvest timber or plan to do so. However, as the number of owners increases and tract sizes decrease, forest management will become more difficult and less cost effective. Further, smaller tract owners, many of whom have little knowledge of forest management, are less likely to seek assistance or advice, and will also be less likely to manage for timber products.

There is a clear need to improve communication with individual owners. The small proportion of owners who are knowledgeable about sources of management assistance indicate this as one area where much more effort could be directed. For example, landowner incentive programs must be effectively targeted. Programs that target owners whose objectives are most consistent with program goals likely possess the greatest potential for success. Therefore, present and near-term timber production incentives should be directed to the larger tract owners because they are more likely to harvest timber. Providing individual assistance to many small-tract owners who are subjected to high costs associated with



Some owners post their land to control access. Many will allow activities such as hunting, however permission must first be obtained.

harvesting small tracts may not be a productive use of limited funds and resources. However, to assist interested small landowners, integrated and cooperative forest management should be encouraged and promoted. The Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association is an organization that is effective in promoting forest management among forest landowners.

The flow of other goods and services from individual private forestland is also likely to be adversely impacted by an increase in the number of smaller tracts. Presently, only about one-fifth of owners allow the public to use their land for recreation. As the number of farmers and other traditional owners continues to decline, it is likely that posting will increase.

Things are changing. More people want to own forestland and many new owners have different backgrounds from previous owners. Nonetheless, action must be taken to maintain a sustainable flow of economic, social, and environmental benefits from individually owned forestland. A primary challenge is to ensure that owners' rights and benefits are protected. The concept of forest stewardship will need to be taken to another level. This will undoubtedly require unique and creative thinking to develop acceptable initiatives. 🌲

Earl C. Leatherberry is Resource Analyst with the USDA Forest Service, North Central Research Station in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Data for this article were derived from the publication, *Wisconsin Private Timberland Owners: 1997*, Research Paper NC-339.

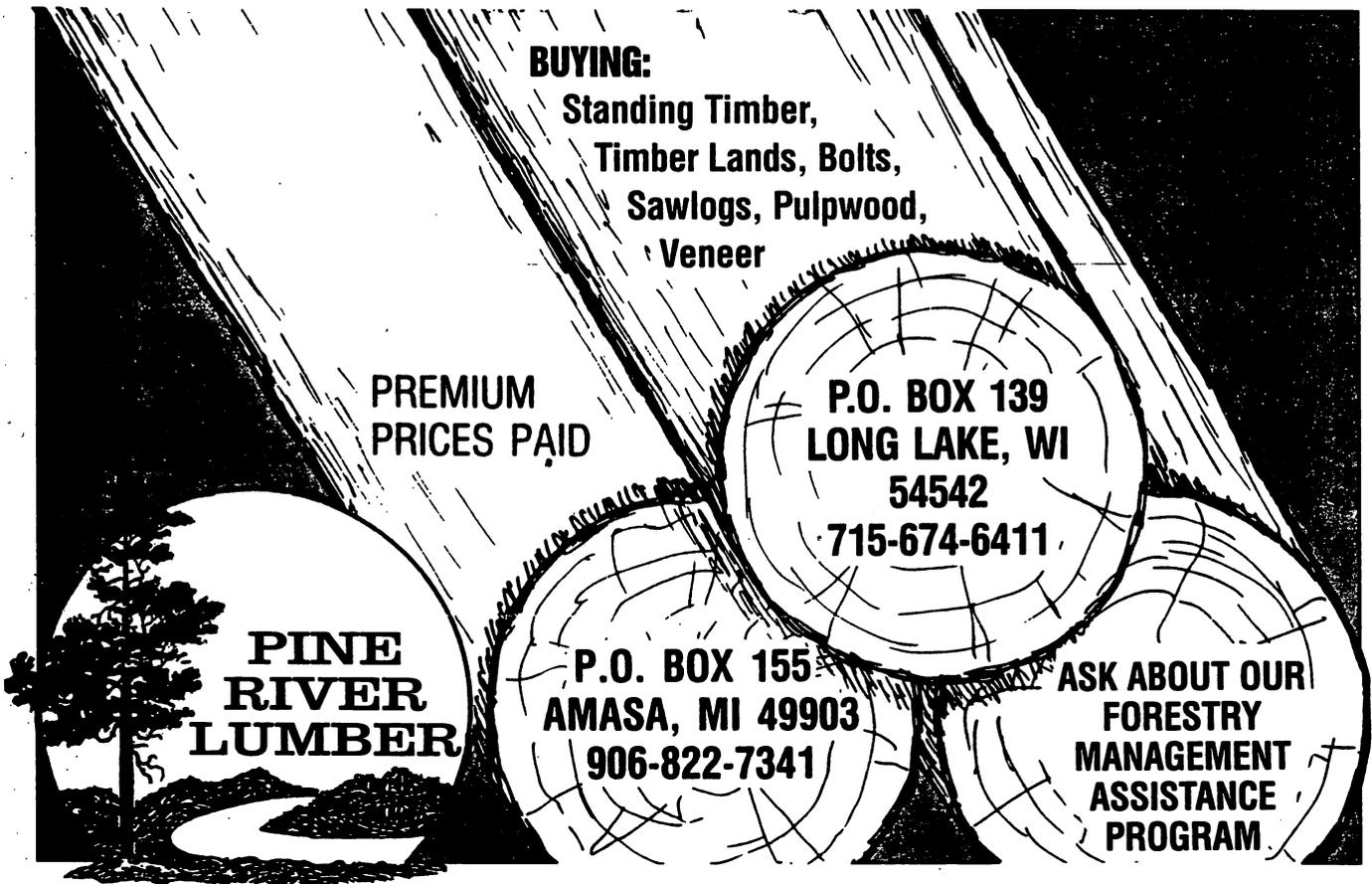
Information about Wisconsin's forest resources can be found in the publication, *Wisconsin Forest Statistics, 1996*, Resource Bulletin NC-183.

Both reports were published by the USDA Forest Service and are available from the North Central Publication Distribution Center, One Gifford Pinchot Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53705-2898.

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