

Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

*A Study of Absentee Woodland Owners in Pennsylvania,
Colorado, and North Carolina*

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1. Background and Objectives

The Sustaining Family Forests Initiative (SFFI) is a collaborative effort of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Center for Nonprofit Strategies. The goal of SFFI is to gain and disseminate information about family forest owners throughout the United States.

Because individuals and families own nearly a third of the forested land in the United States, the decisions and actions of these woodland owners significantly impact the health and maintenance of these forest resources. SFFI serves as a generator and integrator of information about woodland owners, in order to help a broad range of organizations be more strategic and effective in their outreach to this important constituency.

Through a multivariate analysis of responses to the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS), SFFI has identified four unique types of woodland owners based on their attitudes and interests regarding woodland ownership¹. Focus groups across the country have contributed to an increased understanding of the behaviors and needs of these distinct landowner types². This information is shared with local government agencies, extension agencies, and natural resource professionals in order to inform and improve outreach efforts using the principles of targeted marketing.

The purpose of this report is to complement these efforts by examining the attitudes, interests, and behaviors of an understudied segment of woodland owners: absentee landowners. While many land use professionals have noticed an increase in absentee land ownership, little research has focused exclusively on the orientation of these landowners to their land³. Yet this group comprises an important audience for education and outreach, because efforts to protect and improve forestland in the United States rely on their conservation and management actions.

In the absence of a common definition for absentee forest landowners, it is challenging to determine precisely how much forestland is under absentee ownership. The closest approximation may come from the U.S. Forest Service, which administers the NWOS. Defining absentee owners as families or individuals who live at least one mile from their woodlands, the 2013 NWOS indicates that absentee owners account for 38% of family forest ownerships and 44% of all family forestland in the United States⁴.

For the purposes of this study, absentee landowners are defined as those whose primary residences are located either in a different county or at least thirty miles from their woodlands. This alternative definition was chosen based on the assumption that the motivations, interests,

¹ For a detailed discussion of the segmentation, see the following: Butler, B. J., Tyrrell, M., Feinberg, G., VanManen, S., Wiseman, L., and Wallinger, S. 2007. Understanding and Reaching Family Forest Owners: Lessons from Social Marketing Research. *Journal of Forestry*, 105(7): 348-357.

² Findings from the latest focus group study of Woodland Retreat Owners and Working the Land Owners in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Colorado can be found in the report, “Motivating Woodland Owners to Take Action” (2014), available on the SFFI webpage: <http://sffi.yale.edu/about-sffi/resources>.

³ Petrzalka, P., Ma, Z., and Malin, S. 2013. The elephant in the room: Absentee landowner issues in conservation and land management. *Land Use Policy*, 30: 157-166.

⁴ Unpublished preliminary data from the 2013 National Woodland Owner Survey, made available by Brett Butler, SFFI partner and contributor, USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station.

and concerns of more distant landowners likely differ from those living in close proximity to their forestland. Distant landowners may also be harder to reach by local land agencies, making this group a particularly critical subject for study within the context of landowner outreach and improved forest management outcomes.

To this end, this report addresses such question as: Who are absentee landowners? For what reasons do they hold woodlands? In what kinds of land use activities do they engage? What are their challenges and concerns? What do they desire and anticipate for the future of their woodland? The report begins with a description of the methods used to collect information about absentee woodland owners and is followed by an analysis of the study participants' responses. Seven key findings from the data are then presented, along with the implications for absentee landowner outreach and engagement.

2. Methodology

2.1 Absentee Landowner Recruitment and Classification

A total of 50 absentee landowners owning between 10 and 999 acres of forestland in three states—Pennsylvania, Colorado, and North Carolina—were interviewed by phone between February and October 2014 (Figure 1). Twenty-four landowners participated in a brief preliminary interview and declined to participate in a longer follow-up interview. Twenty-six landowners participated in both the preliminary and follow-up interviews⁵.

As in past SFFI research, woodland owners were identified from tax rolls in counties within the aforementioned states⁶. Woodland owners were classified as absentee owners if their mailing addresses were located in different counties than the woodlands, or if the mailing addresses were at least thirty miles from the location of their woodlands⁷.

⁵ Discussion guides for the preliminary and follow-up interviews are located in Appendix A.

⁶ Participants were selected from Centre County, Pennsylvania, from La Plata County, Colorado, and from six counties in North Carolina: Franklin, Greene, Johnston, Nash, Warren, and Wayne. Tax rolls from six counties were used in North Carolina due to the small size of the counties and due to difficulties with recruitment.

⁷ This is more restrictive criterion than the one used in the National Woodland Owner Survey, which defines absentee landowners as those living at least one mile from their woodland. The more restrictive selection requirement was chosen based on the assumption that the motivations, interests, and concerns of more distant landowners likely differ from those living in close proximity to their forestland.

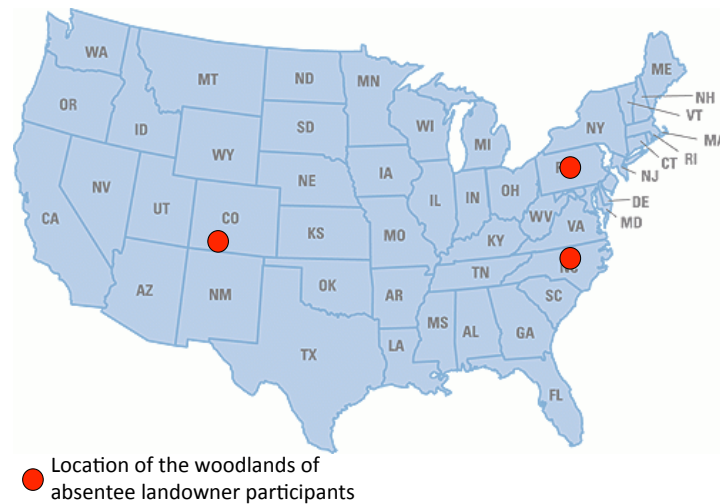


Figure 1. Map of the locations from which absentee woodland owners were identified for the study. Red dots represent the counties in which the woodlands are located. The landowners themselves reside throughout the United States.

A phone match service was then used to generate phone numbers for the lists of absentee landowners. In the preliminary interview, each woodland landowner was verified as an absentee landowner based on his or her response to the following questions:

*Is your primary residence located on this woodland or in another place?
How far is this woodland from your primary residence?*

Each landowner who responded that his or her residence was located in another place and was at least thirty miles from the woodland was confirmed as an absentee woodland owner.

Each participant was also classified into one of four SFFI landowner types—Woodland Retreat, Working the Land, Supplemental Income, or Uninvolved—based on his or her expressed interests for owning woodlands⁸. These interests were assessed through the following preliminary interview question:

People own land for a variety of reasons. I'm going to read five statements that describe different feelings people might have about their land. Please tell me how well you feel each one describes you on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means it describes you completely and 1 means it doesn't describe you at all. First...

- A. I generate income from my land or own it for financial investment purposes*
- B. I own my land for the enjoyment of the scenery*
- C. I own my land for the privacy it affords*
- D. I use my land for recreation purposes*
- E. I'm not particularly involved with my land*

⁸ For a detailed discussion of SFFI landowner classifications, see: Butler, B. J., Tyrrell, M., Feinberg, G., VanManen, S., Wiseman, L., and Wallinger, S. 2007. Understanding and Reaching Family Forest Owners: Lessons from Social Marketing Research. *Journal of Forestry*, 105(7): 348-357.

“Woodland Retreat” absentee owners were identified as those whose highest scores were assigned to B and C, B and D, or C and D. They also rated both A and E lower than B, C, or D. Woodland Retreat owners strongly value the lifestyle amenities of their woodlands, particularly the aesthetics, the privacy, and/or the recreational benefits.

Absentee woodland owners who assigned scores about equally high (i.e. 5 or greater) for statements A, B, C, and D—and who assigned a significantly lower score for question E—were considered “Working the Land” owners. These are multiple-use land managers who are interested in a broad array of forest amenities, including scenic, recreational, and financial benefits.

“Supplemental Income” absentee landowners were identified as those who assigned a particularly high score to statement A. These woodland owners also ranked statements B, C, and D significantly lower, and they assigned low or moderate scores to statement E (i.e. 5 or less). These woodland owners are generally most interested and/or experienced in timber harvesting practices or in the cultivation of non-timber forest products.

Finally, absentee woodland owners who assigned the highest score to statement E, and/or who assigned low scores to all other statements, were classified as “Uninvolved” landowners. These landowners rarely engage in any type of activity on their land. Butler et al. (2007) indicate that “Uninvolved” woodland owners are more likely to be absentee landowners than are woodland owners of any other group⁹.

Regardless of their classification, absentee woodland owners who owned between 10 and 999 acres of wooded land were invited to participate in the full follow-up interview. Participants were also required to meet the following criteria:

- They had to be responsible for making decisions regarding their woodlands, either alone or jointly.
- They were not foresters, forestry experts, or loggers.

2.2 Absentee Landowner Interview Content

This research is informed by and builds upon prior research by SFFI. Most importantly, it adds to a set of surveys and focus groups exploring the orientations, motivations, and barriers to action for different types of family forestland owners¹⁰. This set of interviews complements the former studies by examining these dimensions as they relate to absentee woodland owners.

⁹ Butler, B. J., Tyrrell, M., Feinberg, G., VanManen, S., Wiseman, L., and Wallinger, S. 2007. Understanding and Reaching Family Forest Owners: Lessons from Social Marketing Research. *Journal of Forestry*, 105(7): 348-357.

¹⁰ See the GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media reports prepared for SFFI, “Family Forest Owners: Insights into Land-Related Stewardship, Values, and Intentions” (2008) and “Family Forest Owners: An In-Depth Profile” (2006); and the SFFI reports, “Getting the Attention of Family Forest Owners: Lessons from Social Marketing Research” (2007), and “Motivating Woodland Owners to Take Action” (2014). These reports are available on the SFFI website: <http://sffi.yale.edu/about-sffi/resources>.

Each interview lasted between 15 minutes and one hour, based on the landowner's ability, interest, and willingness to share information. Most interviews were completed in 15 to 25 minutes. Each conversation began with a question about how the landowner came to own his or her woodland. The body of the interview then centered on several key themes:

- The importance of owning woodland
- Current activities and land use patterns
- Additional activities of interest
- Actions to improve and protect the health of the woods
- Worries and concerns about the woods
- Help or advice needed regarding the woods
- Attitudes or experiences related to foresters or forest consultants, landowner associations, educational programs, and collaborative management

The landowner was then asked questions about his or her future plans for the land—including formal estate plans and/or plans to acquire a conservation easement. To close, the landowner was asked to summarize his or her general feelings about the woodland in a few words. As with previous research, this study aimed to investigate not just the superficial interests and behaviors of each landowner, but also the motivations and assumptions behind his or her actions and attitudes.

3. About the Participants

3.1 Absentee vs. Non-absentee Landowners in PA, CO, and NC

Absentee landowners from eight counties in Pennsylvania, Colorado, and North Carolina were identified from county tax rolls, from which large businesses, government entities, and corporations were removed. Individual and family ownerships, trusts, limited liability corporations, small businesses, and estates were retained. A landowner was classified as an absentee owner if his or her mailing address was located in a different county from the property on the tax roll, or if his or her mailing address was located at least thirty miles from the property address.

Based on this definition, 21% of landowners in Centre County, PA who owned between 10 and 999 acres were classified as absentee. Collectively, these landowners held 31% of the land between 10 and 999 acres in this county. In La Plata County, CO, 31% of ownerships containing 33% of the land area were classified as absentee ownerships. In the six counties selected from North Carolina¹¹, 27% of ownerships were absentees, accounting for 29% of the land area between 10 and 999 acres.

Collectively, the eight tax rolls listed 21,335 individual and family ownerships representing 977,486 acres of land. *Absentee* landowners accounted for 5,659 (27%) of these ownerships and 288,119 (29%) acres of land. The details for each county are presented in Table 1.

¹¹ Multiple counties were selected in North Carolina due to their small size and to challenges in participant recruitment.

It is important to note that these data represent absentee *land* ownerships, not exclusively *woodland* ownerships. While study participants were explicitly required to own between 10 and 999 acres of *wooded* land (landowners were screened in the preliminary interview), the county tax roll data contained only information about the total land area under ownership. Secondly, while the county tax rolls represent the best data available for research at this scale, some of the landowners who were contacted reported not owning land in the county or reported having recently sold their land.

In sum, it is important to recognize that the data below represent the total amount of land—including, but not limited to, woodland—owned by families and individuals in eight counties throughout Pennsylvania, Colorado, and North Carolina. Given the nature of tax roll data, these numbers are to be understood as estimates, not as absolute values. Nevertheless, the data suggest that absentee landowners comprise a substantial fraction of land ownerships in these counties.

| Parameter | Centre County, PA | La Plata County, CO | Franklin, Greene, Johnston, Nash, Warren, and Wayne Counties, NC | TOTAL |
|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--|------------|
| Non-absentee Ownerships | 3,496 | 3,134 | 9,046 | 15,676 |
| Absentee Ownerships | 908 | 1,415 | 3,336 | 5,659 |
| Total Ownerships | 4,404 | 4,549 | 12,382 | 21,335 |
| % Absentee Ownerships | 21% | 31% | 27% | 27% |
| Non-absentee Acres | 194,469 | 155,651 | 339,247 | 689,367 |
| Absentee Acres | 60,725 | 78,222 | 149,172 | 288,119 |
| Total Acres | 255,194 | 233,873 | 488,419 | 977,486 |
| % Absentee Acres | 31% | 33% | 31% | 29% |

Table 1. Absentee and non-absentee land ownerships of families and individuals in eight counties throughout Pennsylvania, Colorado, and North Carolina. Data were retrieved from county tax rolls. Large businesses, government entities, and corporations were removed. A landowner was classified as absentee if his or her mailing address was located in a different county from the property on the tax roll, or if his or her mailing address was at least thirty miles away from the property address.

3.2 Absentee Woodland Owner Demographics

Twenty-six absentee woodland owners participated in both preliminary and follow-up phone interviews¹². The preliminary interview was used to screen participants, to gather demographic information, and to identify each qualified participant’s SFFI landowner classification. The follow-up qualitative interview was used to develop a deeper understanding of each absentee landowner’s motivations, interests, attitudes, behaviors, and concerns regarding woodland ownership and management.

¹² Ten absentee woodland owners who held land in PA were interviewed, as well as ten who owned land in CO and six who owned land in NC.

Overall, almost two thirds of the participants were at least 65 years of age and retired. Participants included a relatively even representation of males and females. About half of the participants inherited their land or received it as a gift, while the remainder purchased it. The distance between landowners' residences and their woodlands ranged from 32 miles to 2,000 miles, and averaged 363 miles (Table 2).

| Parameter | Number of Participants (unless otherwise indicated) | | | | TOTAL | |
|--|--|------------------|--------------------------|------|-------|--|
| | Pennsylvania n=10 | Colorado n=10 | North Carolina n=6 | n=26 | | |
| Age 35-49 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4% | |
| Age 50-64 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 35% | |
| Age ≥ 65 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 16 | 62% | |
| Male | 4 | 5 | 2 | 11 | 42% | |
| Female | 6 | 5 | 4 | 15 | 58% | |
| Retired | 6 | 8 | 6 | 20 | 77% | |
| Employed Full-time | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 15% | |
| Employed Part-time | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 8% | |
| Inherited Land | 6 | 2 | 6 | 14 | 54% | |
| Purchased Land | 4 | 8 | 0 | 12 | 46% | |
| Median Woodland Area (acres) | 33 | 47 | 63 | 46 | | |
| Avg Woodland Area (acres) | 47 | 130 | 83 | 86 | | |
| Median Distance from Residence (miles) | 55 | 490 | 175 | 190 | | |
| Avg Distance from Residence (miles) | 140 | 677 | 212 | 363 | | |

Table 2. Background information about the 26 absentee woodland owner study participants from PA, CO, and NC. In the preliminary interview, participants were asked to select their corresponding age group and employment situation. The size of the woodland and the distance from each owner's primary residence are also self-reported. In the follow-up interview, each landowner described how he or she came to own the woodland, indicating whether it was purchased or inherited.

3.3 Regional Differences

Many differences in landowners' responses are related to the nature of the land in each county (hydrology, topography, remoteness), as well as historic land use patterns and characteristics of the broader landscape.

In Pennsylvania's Centre County, most wooded land was historically attached to farms and represented the hilly, less fertile terrain that was ill suited for crop growth. Many of the current owners grew up on or near farms and express nostalgic or sentimental feelings toward their land. In many cases, the owners' relatives divided and sold significant portions of the original farmsteads. In a region that is highly developed, many absentee owners view their land as an important respite, a valuable legacy, and as a place for recreation and family gatherings.

The woodlands in La Plata County, Colorado are often interspersed with ranch or pasture land, and some absentee landowners lease a portion of their property for grazing. Many landowners describe the woods as a “scrubby” mixture of Pinyon pine, Ponderosa pine, oak brush, sagebrush, and juniper. Concerns over drought and beetle kill are mentioned frequently. For many landowners, the appeal of the land is the scenery—especially the view of the La Plata Mountains—and the opportunities for recreation. Many also describe the prevalence of gas and oil drilling in the area, and some landowners mention drilling activity on their land.

In north central North Carolina, most absentee landowners report that much of their land was historically farmed (grain and tobacco), and some landowners continue to lease portions of their land for cultivation. There is also a history of tree farming in the area, and many absentee landowners still grow and harvest trees—especially pine—on their properties. Many landowners lease their properties for hunting or invite friends and family members to hunt their land. On the whole, scenery and recreation are not of *central* importance for this group of absentee landowners, who instead tend to emphasize the productive aspects of their woodlands.

3.4 Absentee Woodland Owner Classification

Fifty absentee landowners participated in the preliminary interview, which was used to gather demographic information and to evaluate each landowner’s SFFI classification¹³. Landowners were classified based on their relative ranking of five statements, which described feelings they may or may not have toward their land. The four SFFI segmentations—Woodland Retreat, Working the Land, Supplemental Income, and Uninvolved—are intended to reflect the general nature of the owner’s orientation toward his or her woodland. The distribution of landowner types within and across locations is illustrated in the Table 3 below.

| SFFI Landowner Classification | Pennsylvania <i>n=22</i> | | Colorado <i>n=14</i> | | North Carolina <i>n=14</i> | | TOTAL <i>n=50</i> | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Woodland Retreat | 12 | 55% | 4 | 29% | 1 | 7% | 17 | 34% |
| Working the Land | 1 | 5% | 3 | 21% | 3 | 21% | 7 | 14% |
| Supplemental Income | 3 | 14% | 1 | 7% | 5 | 36% | 9 | 18% |
| Uninvolved | 6 | 27% | 6 | 43% | 5 | 36% | 17 | 34% |

Table 3. Absentee landowner classification of fifty preliminary interview participants in PA, CO, and NC. Participants were asked to rank five statements describing different feelings they might have about their land. Each individual’s response was used to identify his or her general orientation toward the land, which may be described as Woodland Retreat, Working the Land, Supplemental Income, or Uninvolved.

The twenty-six landowners who participated in the follow-up interview—and whose responses supported the detailed findings of the study—included members of each landowner type.

¹³ Participants in the preliminary interview included 22 individuals with woodlands in PA, 14 with woodlands in CO, and 14 with woodlands in NC.

| SFFI Landowner Classification | Pennsylvania n=10 | | Colorado n=10 | | North Carolina n=6 | | TOTAL n=26 | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Woodland Retreat | 4 | 40% | 3 | 30% | 0 | 0% | 7 | 27% |
| Working the Land | 0 | 0% | 3 | 30% | 2 | 33% | 5 | 19% |
| Supplemental Income | 2 | 20% | 1 | 10% | 2 | 33% | 5 | 19% |
| Uninvolved | 4 | 40% | 3 | 30% | 2 | 33% | 9 | 35% |

Figure 2. Distribution of absentee landowner types within and across eight counties in PA, CO, and NC. Twenty-six absentee landowners who participated in the follow-up interview were asked to rank five statements describing different feelings they might have about their land. Each individual’s response was used to identify his or her general orientation toward the land, which may be described as Woodland Retreat, Working the Land, Supplemental Income, or Uninvolved.

The ways in which absentee landowners use and value their woodlands—reflected in their landowner type—vary considerably by region. Much of this may be attributed to the regional differences in landscape characteristics and land use history, described in section 3.3.

Woodland Retreat landowners were the most common in central Pennsylvania, for example, where absentee owners tend to live in close proximity to their land, have connections to family near their land, and where the moist, temperate climate provides year-round opportunities for recreation and wildlife viewing. Supplemental Income owners, on the other hand, were more common in north central North Carolina, where properties tend to be larger and timber harvesting practices are more routine.

Despite regional differences, two general trends emerged among participants as a whole in this study. Relative to the general population of family forest owners, as indicated by the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS), absentee landowner participants were more likely to be Uninvolved or Supplemental Income landowners (Figure 3)¹⁴. In this way, the sample is not an exact representation of the general population of family forest owners. This may be a result of the methods used to sort and contact study participants. Alternatively, it may reflect an increased proportion of Uninvolved or Supplemental Income woodland ownership orientations, in general, among absentees relative to the general population. This result would not be inconsistent with studies suggesting a greater representation of Uninvolved ownership types among absentees¹⁵.

¹⁴ Landowner profiles for the general population of family forest owners were developed using data from the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS), conducted by the U.S. Forest Service. They are based on a sample of 8,452 families and individuals who own between 10 and 999 acres of woodland in the contiguous United States and are extrapolated to the population of family forest owners. Data were collected in 2013. For more information about the NWOS, visit www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos.

¹⁵ See the GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media report prepared for SFFI, “Family Forest Owners: Insights into Land-Related Stewardship, Values, and Intentions” (2008), available on the SFFI webpage: <http://sffi.yale.edu/about-sffi/resources>.

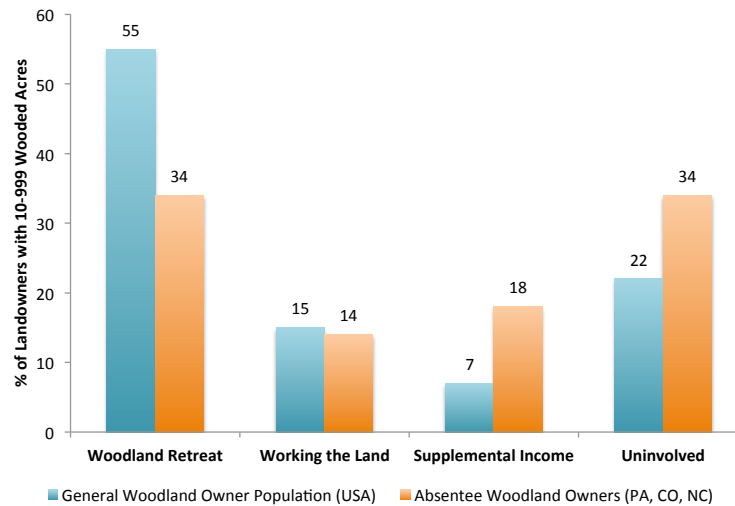


Figure 3. Comparison of family forest landowner profiles for the U.S. general population and for the fifty absentee preliminary interview participants in PA, CO, and NC. Only individuals and families who owned between 10 and 999 wooded acres were included. Profiles for the general population are from the results of the National Woodland Owner Survey (2013).

In sum, the participants in the follow-up interview included a broad range of landowner types. The relative frequency of each type tended to vary by region, which may be a result of regional differences in landscape characteristics and land use history. Relative to the general population of family forest owners, the participants in this study were less commonly Woodland Retreat or Working the Land owners, and they were more commonly Supplemental Income or Uninvolved owners.

The following section presents seven central themes that emerged from the interviews regarding absentee landowners' motivations, interests, attitudes, and concerns regarding their woods.

4. Key Findings

Twenty-six absentee landowners participated in both preliminary and follow-up interviews. The follow-up interview was a semi-structured interview used to qualitatively assess each absentee landowner's motivations, interests, attitudes, behaviors, and concerns regarding woodland ownership and management. Seven central themes emerged from these interviews. Each theme and its implications for absentee landowner outreach are explored here in detail.

4.1 Absentee woodland owners are diverse in terms of their motivations for owning their land, their land use practices, and their attitudes about land ownership. Nonetheless, with the exception of landowners interviewed in North Carolina, absentee owners tend to regard their land as an important *escape* from daily life.

Although it may seem obvious, it is worth emphasizing that absentee landowners own and use their land in a variety of ways. In other words, it is very difficult to generalize about ways in

which this group of landowners values, utilizes, or thinks about the land. Furthermore, not only is there considerable variation *among* participants, but even many *individual* participants described owning their land for several different reasons. As one participant from Colorado stated:

We bought it, for, you know—recreation and for investment and for farming. For income and all those things... We have picnics. And we play horseshoes. We throw darts. And we do lots of crazy improvements... -CO

Despite differences, many participants were united by a consideration of their land as an escape—as a special place of great symbolic and sentimental value. Many described the hectic nature of daily living and the prevalence of technology and digital entertainment. To them, the land provided a way to reconnect with nature and to deepen their relationships with family and friends. With their land located at a distance from their homes, absentee owners are able to achieve not only mental but *physical* separation from their daily stresses in a way that resident landowners may not. Woven into their narratives were expressions of nostalgia, good feeling, appreciation, and reverence. The physical separation of absentee landowners from their woods may enhance this perception of the land as a retreat from daily routine.

When asked, for instance, what words came to mind when they thought about their woods, participants' responses included:

*Get away from it all.
Pristine, untouched.
Peaceful, family, growing up.
Enjoyment and family.
Privacy... serenity.
Pride.
A sentimental love.
Rejuvenating spiritually.
Absolute love.
Get away from the hubbub of life.*

In many cases, participants described their woods as places for reflection, contemplation, and togetherness:

We stare at the view. We're on a mountain top. We just stare at the view. Fires and a hot tub. It's a relaxation home. -CO

*Well, I really appreciate nature. I'm a farmer at heart and love bark. I appreciate the texture of the bark, the sunlight shining through the trees—all those things.
-NC*

We play games and we ride our vehicles and have a volleyball tournament. Privacy. We can be loud and we can be running around and we're not bothering anybody.... -CO

Importantly, absentee owners with woodlands in North Carolina did not have the same overall tendency to view their land as an escape or retreat. Instead, this group exhibited a much more pragmatic and utilitarian orientation toward their woodlands. Many North Carolina landowners emphasized the security-related benefits of their land over the aesthetic, recreational, or sentimental aspects.

I would say that it's important because at this point we may be 10 years from harvesting. –NC

We lease the open land to someone who tends it. And we go down to see where he places things and just if he's keeping up the area. And just recently cut some trees. –NC

Primarily we manage—we have a pine plantation. As well as we use it as a hunting reserve for my family and their guests. –NC

4.2 Uninvolved does not mean unimportant. Even owners who visit their land infrequently are often proud to own it, especially when the land provides benefits to family, friends, or neighbors.

The most prevalent landowner type among all of the participants interviewed in this study was Uninvolved (35%). These were owners who agreed with the statement, “I am not particularly involved with my land,” or who did not indicate a strong interest in any particular aspect of their land.

This self-reported lack of involvement may be a result of the distance between the owner and the woodland. Many landowners do not—or are unable to—visit their land frequently. The average number of visits per year reported by participants was approximately 13, or roughly one visit per month. A minority of landowners reported visiting their land weekly, one quarter reported only seasonal visits, and 27% reported no longer visiting their property at all. For many, old age has made visiting their land more difficult, if not impossible. As one landowner put it, “I can’t pick up and move anymore like I used to.”

Despite the difficulty of engaging directly with the land on a regular basis, most of these landowners still described their land as “important” or even “very important.” Although more than one-third of the participants were classified as Uninvolved, just two landowners described their land as a nuisance or expressed a strong interest in selling their land. For many, the family’s history of land ownership imparted value to the land (section 4.7). Participants also took pride in the benefits that others received from the land—especially friends and family members.

It's a little hard for my husband [to visit the land]... [but] my family are in their early 60's and they still love going up there. And our grandson who is in his mid-30's, he loves going up there. –PA

We don't visit much anymore, but the cousins and kids, they live closer and visit [the land] almost every weekend. They hike, hunt, and the family built a small primitive cabin... The kids really enjoy their time in the woods. –PA

Anyone we know who wants to go gets to go... you're not gonna have a house in the mountains and not tell people to visit it. -CO

Well, [we don't visit] very often anymore. We've got kids and grandkids that go up there... Just recently, my son that lives nearby went up and spent the weekend there. We've got four-wheelers and they drive those around. And it's just neat to get up there and walk around... you quite often see wildlife. -CO

I do not walk through [the woods] anymore because I'm afraid I will fall and break a limb or something... [but] my nephew who lives closer by does go down there and hunts occasionally. -NC

Many absentee landowners do not consider themselves to be very involved with their land, but their responses make clear that *uninvolved* does not mean *unattached*. While they may not visit their land frequently—or at all—many maintain close connections to the land through their families and friends.

4.3 Many absentee owners rely on local family members or neighbors to help care for their land, or to alert them of issues regarding their land.

Although many absentee landowners do not visit their land frequently, the land is often cared for, to some extent, by others. The majority of participants in this study reported receiving help from friends, neighbors, or family members who monitor or actively care for the land. Some absentee owners also lease their land to farmers, work with contractors, or offer hunting permits to neighbors or nearby hunting clubs.

[I visit the land] about four times a year, sometimes with my sisters... My son lives in town—he keeps an eye on the woods... and once a year he hunts it. -PA

We manage the land financially now... but my husband's brother is more in charge of the upkeep. -PA

I have two people who regularly help me. One is a farmer who lives about 15 miles away who does a lot of the weed work. And the other is our general contractor, a handyman and earth moving specialist. Helps me with building paths and cutting roads... -CO

The neighbors on both sides of the property call me if there's obvious trespass. If they're bringing in hounds pursuing a panther I get a call. Or if a barn door sags open I get a call. -CO

We have a good friend lives down in ___ and he and his wife have spent time [at the property]. He needs the firewood because his house is heated strictly by fire... And so he's been up there and helped thin our woods... -CO

[My brothers] own 30 acres around [my husband's] 30 acres... They help each other out whenever they're needed. -NC

We do not use or visit or go to the land or farm area actively at all... But I have a cousin, and I'm going to call her the manager. She's the one who's working closely with the county. –NC

Participants with land in North Carolina, many of whom owned pine plantations, were often the most actively engaged in the management of their woodlands. While many hired contractors to conduct thinnings and final harvests, they frequently walked the properties themselves to check the growth and condition of their trees. Despite residing at a distance from their properties, these landowners tended to visit their land frequently and exhibited a “do-it-yourself” attitude, often seeking help from family members or friends before hiring professionals.

Owners of land in Pennsylvania and Colorado also enlisted the help of trusted neighbors to monitor or help care for their land. In Colorado, most owners were more concerned with the upkeep of their farmlands than with the maintenance of their woodlands. Pennsylvania landowners were the least likely to actively manage their woods, but their neighbors and families frequently hunted or passively monitored the properties.

As a whole, landowners consider these cooperative efforts to be mutually beneficial. The owners stay abreast of the activities on their land and, in some cases, receive services. Meanwhile, friends, family members, and neighbors may enjoy the aesthetic, recreational, or productive aspects of the land.

One disadvantage of this system is that neighbors and family members may be less invested in the long-term health of the woods than the absentee owners. They may visit the woods infrequently themselves, or alert the owners only in emergency situations. Visits to the land from friends or family members may provide a false sense of security to the absentee owner, who may consider such activities sufficient to guard against future problems.

4.4 Many absentee owners view their land as an investment, but with varying degrees of importance.

Most absentee owners agree that their land represents an investment, but the *type* and *importance* of the investment tends to vary by region. Landowners in Pennsylvania and Colorado tend to view the land itself as an investment, while landowners in North Carolina tend to view timber as their primary resource. Likewise, North Carolina landowners are more likely to place high importance on the financial benefits of their land, while this aspect is of less significance to other absentee owners, especially those in Pennsylvania.

Several participants also described how their motivations for owning land had changed over time. For older landowners who visit their land less frequently, the financial benefits of the land have become increasingly important, while the scenic or recreational benefits are of less consequence. Many also described the importance of the land as an investment for their children.

[The land] is very important... they're not making any more ground. –PA

It's important to us because at this time the land has appreciated in value considerably and so I'm thinking of it now in terms of an investment and perhaps leaving it to my kids... I've got the

80 acres and it's been a good deal for us. We've thoroughly enjoyed it and the family has used it. -CO

[It is] wise to invest in land because they're not making any more land. And the land that we have up there has paid for itself in a number of ways. -CO

It is a slow money making project. You've got to wait 30 years. It's a teaching lesson for young people. That's the reason I want that timber cut by my sons probably after my death. But they will see the value of re-planting it for their children. -NC

My intention is to pass it on to [my children]. Because then they get a stepped-up value... -NC

You don't own land for the scenery. We really enjoy it. We can see for miles... and it's real beautiful. But you don't—you buy land to make a living... -CO

Oh, I've been a rancher and... it was a successful investment for us. It was a mix of things [that motivated us to acquire the land]... We're facing health problems so it's much more a financial thing at the moment. -CO

This perception of land as an investment—whether it is an investment for the present landowner or for the landowner's children—suggests that these landowners may be open to opportunities to improve the woods' value, even if they have not taken steps to do so in the past. Many landowners are thinking about the future of their land, and some acknowledge that their motivations for owning the land have shifted over time. As landowners become less able to use the land as actively as they once did, the financial benefits of the land may become more important for themselves and for their families.

4.5 Ignorance is bliss? For a variety of reasons, many absentee landowners have not actively sought help or information about caring for their woods. Many—but not all—also express few concerns or worries about their woods.

As suggested earlier, many of the differences in absentee owners' practices, priorities, and interests are rooted in regional differences in landscape characteristics and land use histories. These differences are especially evident in the concerns that they express regarding their woodlands, and in their desire to seek information about the care of their woods.

Owners of land in Pennsylvania expressed few concerns about the health of their woods, and were more concerned about encroaching development. A minority of owners mentioned the hemlock wooly adelgid or the gypsy moth as potential or existing problems. Most landowners either did not have the time to consider taking action to protect their woods, or they believed that the best course of action was to "let nature take its course."

Landowners in Colorado were likely to express concerns about drought, fire, and susceptibility to the pine bark beetle. Yet while most landowners mentioned at least one of these issues, only about half of the landowners had taken action to protect their woods from damage (such as clearing brush or dead wood from the woods), and fewer had sought information or help from a forester, an extension service, or a government agency. For some landowners, this is because

the farm—and not the forest—is a greater priority. Others chose not to seek information because they believed that they were capable of making appropriate decisions regarding the care of their woodlands.

Finally, most participants from North Carolina have spoken with foresters or wildlife specialists, and many have thinned the woods and constructed fire lanes. Those participants who had not sought help were either too busy or were unsure about where to access information.

In sum, there are a number of reasons why landowners choose not to take action or seek information to improve the health of their woods. Many of these reasons reflect attitudes or cultural norms informed by regional histories and patterns of land ownership and use. Others span regional boundaries. Altogether, the reasons for inaction can be divided into six broad categories, examples of which are given below.

“Let nature take its course.”

I thought it's just best to let nature take its course. For example, our neighbor's been cutting down diseased trees. I think there's some kind of little green critter that kills trees. Well, we just kind of decided to let the green critters kill the trees and let them—what do you call it—survival of the fittest? –PA

I'm an avid Bible reader, and the Bible says that you shouldn't worry about those things... because you trust in God to take care of it. –PA

“I know what I'm doing.”

I don't feel the need to [be in touch with a forester]. I grew up around this stuff all my life... –PA

I think [you learn how to care for your land] by experience, what you do in life... We're elderly and you just learn... When you're a country person you're country. I think if we lived in the city it'd be another story. But we've always been in the country.... I don't like anybody telling us what to do. –CO

Woodland is not a priority.

Why would I need any [help]? I'm not doing anything with it. We have Pinyon trees and cedar and sagebrush and oak brush. And stuff like that. It's just there. That's all I can say. What's gonna damage it? –CO

I've never talked to forester or a wildlife specialist about it... 'cause, you know, the trees, they're just doing their own thing. And about the only thing I can do is make firewood out of the trees that have fallen down since the drought. –CO

I haven't spoke to [a forester or wildlife specialist] but it has a grazing lease... The woods part... they seem to be doing alright... [and] I don't intend to do anything with it. –CO

“Foresters only care about timber.”

No [I haven't talked to a forester], because it's not woodlands that would be used for forestry. Only the trees that die. Because you want to remove the dead trees. For safety reasons as much as anything. -CO

The forester, no... the reason behind all of the no's is the continuing drought and the fact that very little—trying to change the natural habitat to a desirable species of timber seems to me to be counter-indicated in the face of the drought. -CO

[Professional help] is not necessary. Well, no—we needed someone to stop the pine beetle... Those are not things that a management consultant can help us with. That's a massive ecological issue that's outside of any one human consultant. So no. There's nothing on our property that we need a consultant for. -CO

Never thought about the issues.

Hmm. I've never even thought of [getting help]. I guess we probably could [use advice]. There must be someone that does that... I've never really thought about the health of the woods—but it IS important to keep it healthy. -NC

Interested, but unaware of programs or unsure about where to look.

If there were government programs to help with cutting we'd probably be much more radical about it. We could, say, be part of a program that wanted to do some cutting for fire amelioration... [but] I think the reality is governments are all so strapped... You know, I don't hold out a lot of hope for state programs... if Colorado had a program... but I think that's probably not likely. -CO

It is unclear whether—or how much—absenteeism factors into landowner's decisions about caring for their land. Most participants did not suggest that their distance from the land influenced their decision-making. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that distance may affect their assessment of the risks associated with the land. Perhaps more importantly, it may be harder for county agencies or extension services to provide information to absentee owners using traditional methods, such as mailings and phone calls.

This may be of particular concern to professional land managers in Colorado seeking to reduce the risk of fire on private forestlands. While some landowners have taken steps to reduce fire risk in and around their property, this study suggests that many landowners may underestimate the risk of fire, may be unaware of local programs to support fire risk reduction efforts, or may feel as though “they know best” when it comes to managing their woodlands. A strategy for reaching these absentee landowners—who comprise a substantial population of woodland owners in Colorado—will be extremely important for professionals in the years and decades to come.

4.6 Most absentee landowners who *do* seek help – or when asked where they *would* seek help – mention local government services and extension agencies.

It may be encouraging to local government agencies and extension agencies that many absentee landowners who do seek help consider these to be important resources. Even landowners who have not actively sought help frequently refer to these organizations when asked where they *would* turn for information.

That's one of the things I'm going to research some with the person at the North Carolina extension service.... I do a lot of reading and I tap the resources of the extension, yes. The county location and also the state location. –NC

With questions and when I planted more pines and so forth, I check with the extension service [to learn] what programs are available there and I also check with the forester for the county. –NC

I've been thinking of going to the... extension agents—and then somebody told me about an organization, it's a government organization to go to. –CO

[I use the] county agent for weed control issues. And the Bureau of Ag for counsel on habitat improvement. For habitat and also for weed control. –CO

Well, the Forestry Service is always willing to help you. And we've talked with them, both in New Mexico and in Colorado. –CO

While landowners are often aware of these organizations, the majority still do not use the services or programs that they provide. They may be unaware of the specific programs, lack time to seek out information, fail to understand how they might benefit from the programs, or—for any number of reasons described in section 4.5—feel that their services are unnecessary.

4.7 Legacy plays an important role in both land acquisition and land planning among absentee woodland owners.

One of the most common motivations among participants for owning woodlands was the connection to family and the family history. This was a central motivation for absentee owners across regions. The vast majority of participants inherited their land, received the land from a family member as a gift, bought the land from a family member, or bought their land because of its connection to the family.

Likewise, most of the participating landowners intended to pass the land down to a family member, and about half have completed some form of formal estate planning. Some landowners feel more anxious about this decision than others. While some landowners' children are very involved with the land and excited to receive it, others live far from the land and/or are less interested in owning it.

I didn't want any of the land at first, but later I think I realized that... it meant I was owning some of the family history. –PA

It's important that this land stays in the family. It was passed down to me and it's a way of staying connected and remembering the past... and also my children will have good memories of spending time there. It wouldn't be right for the land to be with anyone else. -PA

I will not sell it. Not while I'm alive. I'll pass it on to heirs. -PA

It's just nostalgic for us. We were born and raised there. -CO

It's important to the family... a place where we've always enjoyed over the years. We're all fly fishermen and it's been important... we hope to keep it in the family as long as we can. -CO

I wanted to develop something that I thought would be valuable to my kids as they grew older and would leave something to them... The kids are anxious—they'd like to have ownership. -CO

Well, since it's in my son's family, my husband's family... and so I use it more or less for something that my sons can someday enjoy. -NC

It was my husband's farm... [and] his father's farm. And the reason I like it is because it belonged to him and upon his death, he left it to me. -NC

It's part of my inheritance. I don't feel as though I have the ownership of the land—I feel like the land owns me. Passed down by generations and I hope it continues. -NC

I'm going to leave all those future plans to later generations... my children are very close to the land. -NC

[The land] gives me a peaceful thought, gives me a sense of security. It gives me a sense of my history and my inheritance. It gives me a connection with the past and it gives me the promise of the future through my children. And it's something that I hope will be in perpetual connection with my family. -NC

Well, basically I love it. I used to—growing up in the summertime—visit my uncle and aunt who lived in the larger house and I was there also with their kids, my cousins. Therefore, there is a sentimental love as the home place or whatever... My portion of the land is in my will to my daughter, son and grandson. And more than likely, I believe, the other cousins perhaps are going to do the same thing. -NC

The importance of family legacy for absentee landowners has a number of implications. The majority of landowners in this study intend to keep their land in the family, and only two participants expressed an intention to sell their land. The conversion of forestland is still a major concern as landowners grow older and make decisions about the future of their land. It is clear, however, that most absentee owners still have deep, sentimental connections to their properties and are proud of maintaining their family legacies even if they visit the land only infrequently.

Because of the overarching importance of legacy for these landowners, outreach strategies may build upon the sense of pride and family connection in order to increase landowners' motivations to be good stewards of the land. Likewise, outreach strategies may encourage stewardship as a means of improving the woods' health, quality, and value for future generations.

Many absentee landowners in this study, however, have already turned over the management of the land to their children and maintain only nominal ownership. Others expressed disinterest in making management decisions or taking on new projects as they get older, and instead wished to leave those decisions to their children for when they inherit the land.

For land managers and professions seeking to improve the health and management of private family forestlands, learning more about the intentions of *future* owners—the next generation—is a critical imperative. The relatives of aging landowners poised to inherit woodlands may be a more receptive audience at which to target outreach campaigns. Of course, reaching these future landowners is a challenge unto itself, but one that may be worth the investment.

5. Conclusion

Seven central themes emerged from these interviews. First, it is clear that absentee woodland owners are remarkably diverse in terms of their motivations for owning land, their land use practices, and their attitudes about land ownership. Nonetheless, with the exception of landowners in North Carolina, absentee owners tend to regard their land as an important escape from daily life. This sense of retreat may be accentuated by owners' distance from the land, as memories of their land are distinct in time and space from those of their daily lives. Absentee owners tend to speak of their land in reflective, nostalgic, or sentimental terms.

Second, even owners who visit their land infrequently are often proud to own it, especially when the land provides benefits to family, friends, or neighbors. Landowners may feel as though they are uninvolved with their land, but this does not translate into a view that the land is unimportant. Many participants emphasized the value of the land to their families and neighbors—who may use the land for hunting, recreation, firewood, or other reasons. Participants also expressed satisfaction in maintaining a connection to the family legacy.

Third, many absentee owners rely on local family members or neighbors to help care for their land, or to alert them of issues regarding their land. Many view this cooperative effort as mutually beneficial. Landowners can stay abreast of issues or activities on their land, while trusted residents nearby derive recreational, aesthetic, or resource-related benefits from the woods. Overall, participants expressed a sense of responsibility for the land, even if they differed in what this responsibility entailed. At the very least, staying aware of activities on their land, with the help of family members and neighbors, was important to them.

Fourth, many absentee owners view their land as an investment, but with varying degrees of importance. North Carolina landowners commonly emphasized the importance of the financial benefits of their land. Many grew timber as an important investment for themselves and for their children. Absentee owners in others states tended to place less importance on the financial benefits of their land, but several were pleased with their lands' appreciated value. To

many owners, the financial benefits had grown more important as they spent less time actively visiting and recreating on the land.

Fifth, many absentee landowners have not actively sought help or information about caring for their woods, and many also express few concerns or worries about their land. Absentee owners express a variety of reasons for this. They may feel it is best to “let nature take its course,” or they may feel as though they have enough expertise to manage the land properly. To some owners, the forest simply isn’t a priority. Others perceive that foresters only care about timber, or that natural forces—such as drought stress or invasive species—are beyond foresters’ control. Finally, some landowners have never thought about managing their woods, some do not feel they have the time to seek out information, and some are interested but unsure about where to start.

Sixth, most absentee landowners who do seek help—or when asked where they would seek help—mention local government services and extension agencies. This suggests that many absentee owners trust these organizations. Nevertheless, the infrequency with which absentee owners visit their land presents challenges for organizations trying reach these owners through the traditional methods of mailings and phone calls.

Lastly, legacy plays a very important role in both land acquisition and land planning among absentee woodland owners. This was a central motivation for absentee owners across regions. The vast majority of participants inherited their land, received the land from a family member as a gift, bought the land from a family member, or bought their land because of its connection to the family. Likewise, most of the landowners intended to pass the land down to a family member, and about half have completed some form of formal estate planning.

Collectively, these characteristics present both challenges and opportunities for organizations seeking to reach absentee landowners and increase their engagement in the care and management of their woodlands. One of the many challenges for land managers or forest professionals is that a majority of absentee owners are unaware of or skeptical about the programs that address their needs and concerns. Another is that absentee owners simply may not think of themselves as forest landowners during much of the time that they are away from their land, and may instead identify with those interests and activities that command more of their time. Most of the participants in the study, for example, were more than 65 years of age, and many expressed a preoccupation with other concerns, such as their health or their families. They may be difficult to reach through traditional channels, such as mailings and phone calls, as many spend only brief periods of time visiting the land.

Many older absentee owners also do not feel inclined to make major decisions or start projects on their land. A number of participants in the study wished to let their children, the inheritors, make the next decisions about how they would use and care for the forest. This result suggests that an important goal of future research may be to learn more about the next generation of forest landowners. How do they feel about inheriting woodland? In what ways do they value the land? And what needs and concerns do they have regarding woodland ownership and care?

Despite these challenges, insights from this study also suggest a number of opportunities for targeting absentee landowners. For one, absentee owners tend to have deep, sentimental

attachments to their land. Despite their self-expressed lack of involvement, many still strongly value the benefits that their land provides to family members and friends. Many also express great pride in owning land that once belonged to their ancestors, or that was once a part of their childhood home. This emotional connection to the land and appreciation for the family legacy suggest that successful outreach strategies might appeal to this sense of pride and responsibility to encourage good stewardship for future generations. The increased importance of the financial benefits of their land—relative to the aesthetic or recreational benefits—may also open opportunities for outreach. Effective strategies may emphasize the financial rewards of the woodland management, perhaps for their retirement or for their families.

Appendices

A.1 Absentee Landowner Screener

SUMMARY OF RESPONDENT QUALIFICATIONS:

- All respondents must say they own 10-999 acres of wooded land.
- All respondents must say they either make decisions concerning their land alone or share decisions about equally with someone else. If respondent on the list interviewed first does not qualify, ask to speak to someone who is a joint owner and makes decisions concerning the use of the land. That person may either be in the same household or live somewhere else; start from the beginning of the screener.
- All respondents must be 21 years or older.
- Terminate if respondent is in forestry, land conservation or other natural resource industry.
- It is important that respondent be articulate and speak clearly. If you feel that the respondent has difficulty expressing her thoughts or feelings, or you have difficulty understanding them, thank and terminate.

Hello, my name is Katie. I am calling from the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative, which is a group of organizations that are interested in promoting good stewardship on wooded lands. I am a student at Yale University, which is one of the organizations in this group. We are conducting a research study among owners of woodlands or woodlots in your area today. The results of this study will be used to design better services for woodland owners. We are not selling anything and all of your responses will be kept confidential.

May I ask you a few questions?

IF RESPONDENT IS HESITANT OR ASKS, SAY: This will take no more than 5 minutes.

[RECORD GENDER: Male...() Female...()]

1. Do you currently own any wooded land in Colorado/Pennsylvania?

- a) Yes () - CONTINUE
- b) No () - THANK AND TERMINATE

2. About how many acres of woodland do you own?

_____ acres (MUST BE BETWEEN 10 AND 999; ELSE TERMINATE.)

If respondent owns farm or ranch land and is unsure how much is wooded, ask them to give total land acreage and estimate what proportion of that land is wooded. Then compute wooded acreage from that.

If respondent asks what wooded land/woodland means, say: "Land that is covered by trees, not necessarily close together."

3. Is your primary residence located on this woodland or in another place?

- a) On the land () - TERMINATE
- b) In another place () - CONTINUE

3A. How far is this woodland from your primary residence?

_____ miles (SHOULD BE AT LEAST 30 MILES OR IN A DIFFERENT COUNTY. ELSE: THANK AND TERMINATE.)

4. Which of the following statements best describes your involvement in decisions concerning the use of your land? [READ LIST AND CHECK ONE]

- (a) You alone make the decisions.....() - [CONTINUE]
- (b) You share the decisions equally with someone else.....() - [CONTINUE]
- (c) You play little or no role in the decisions.....() [SEE BELOW]

[ALL RESPONDENTS MUST SAY THEY EITHER MAKE DECISIONS CONCERNING THEIR LAND OR SHARE THESE DECISIONS ABOUT EQUALLY WITH SOMEONE ELSE. IF THE RESPONDENT DOES NOT QUALIFY, ASK TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE WHO IS A JOINT OWNER AND MAKES DECISIONS CONCERNING THE USE OF THE LAND. THAT PERSON MAY EITHER BE IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD OR LIVE SOMEWHERE ELSE; START FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE SCREENER WITH THAT PERSON. IF NO OTHER PERSON WHO FITS THIS ROLE IS AVAILABLE TO TALK TO NOW OR A LATER TIME, TERMINATE.]

5. For background purposes, which of the following groups describes your age? [READ LIST]

- Under 21.....() - [THANK AND TERMINATE]
- 21-34 years old.....() - [CONTINUE]
- 35-49 years old.....() - [CONTINUE]
- 50-64 years old.....() - [CONTINUE]
- 65 years or older.....() - [CONTINUE]
- [Prefer not to say]....() - [CONTINUE, IF OVER 21]

6. Which of the following statements describes your current employment situation. Are you currently employed full- or part-time, a homemaker, unemployed, retired or a full-time student?

Full-time (30 or more hrs/week).....() - [ASK Q. 6b]

Part-time (less than 30 hrs/week)....() - [ASK Q. 6b]

Homemaker.....()

Unemployed.....()

Retired.....() - [ASK Q. 6b]

Full-time student.....()

6b. And what is/was your occupation [before you retired]?

[EXCLUDE ANYONE WHO IS OR WAS A FORESTRY OR LAND CONSERVATION PROFESSIONAL. THANK AND TERMINATE.]

7. People own land for a variety of reasons. I'm going to read four statements that describe different feelings people might have about their land. Please tell me how well you feel each one describes you on a 1 to 10 point scale, where 10 means it describes you completely and 1 means it doesn't describe you at all. First...
[WRITE IN # FOR EACH STATEMENT.]

a. I generate income from my land or own it for financial investment purposes ()

b. I own my land for the enjoyment of the scenery ()

c. I own my land for the privacy it affords ()

d. I use my land for recreation purposes ()

e. I'm not particularly involved with my land ()

INVITE QUALIFIED OWNERS: Thank you for answering my questions. I would like to invite you to participate in a slightly longer phone interview to learn your opinion on land ownership and stewardship. This interview will take no more than 20-25 minutes of your time and you will be paid \$50 for your participation. Would you be willing to participate?

IF NO: Thank and terminate. IF YES, ASK:

- Can we talk now?

IF YES: Conduct interview. IF NO, SET UP A TIME:

- When would be a good date and time to speak with you?
- And what is the best phone number to reach you at that time?

- May I have your email address so I can send you a message reminding you of our appointment?

RECORD FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS:

Name: _____

Interview date: _____ Interview TIME: _____

Phone: _____ (home/work/mobile)

Email for reminder: _____

Interviewer: _____

Language to terminate:

Those are all the questions I had for you. Thank you so much for your help.

A.2 Absentee Landowner Interview Guide

A. Introduction (NEEDED ONLY IF YOU DON'T CONDUCT INTERVIEW IMMEDIATELY AFTER SCREENER)

My name is _____ and I'm talking with you today on behalf of the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative, which is a group of organizations that are interested in promoting good stewardship on wooded lands. These organizations include the Sustaining Family Forest Initiative at the Yale University School of Forestry where I work.

B. Consent and Confidentiality

Thank you for participating in our study.

Before we get started, I need to read you a statement about this study.

"This study is being conducted to examine CO/PA woodland owners' attitudes, objectives, and stewardship behaviors. Although it will not benefit you personally, we hope our results will lead to better outreach and more useful programs for woodland owners in CO/PA.

All your responses will be held in confidence. Only the researchers involved in this study and those responsible for research oversight will have access to the information you provide. The interview will be audio-taped, and the tapes maintained for reference by the researchers only. Results will generally be published as summaries of the discussions, not individual transcripts. The study report may contain quotes from participants, but they will not be identified by name or any other means by which the participant may be identified by a reader of the report.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or refuse to answer any individual question without penalty or loss of compensation.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investigator, Mary Tyrell at (203) 432 5983 or mary.tyrell@yale.edu."

As I had told you earlier, we'd like to understand your views on land ownership and stewardship. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions - just your point of view. A lot of these questions are about what you do and what you want to do on your land, and your opinions on different ideas and issues.

C. Interview (25 min)

1. To get started, can you tell me when and how you came to own your woodland?
2. How important is owning this woodland to you?

ASK THE QUESTION AS WRITTEN ABOVE, BUT IF YOU DON'T GET A GOOD ANSWER USE THIS: Would you say that owning this woodland is very important to you, somewhat important, or not too important.

PROBE: Why do you say that?

IF NO CLEAR VALUE ARTICULATED OR OWNING WOODS IS NOT IMPORTANT, ASK:
Why do you keep this woodland?

3. How often do you or your family members visit your woods? What do you do there?

PROBE: Have you ever harvested any trees from your woods?

4. Have you done anything on your woodland to improve the health of your woods or protect them from damage? IF YES, ask them about these activities.

PROBE IN CO: Have you undertaken any measures to minimize fire damage in your woods? Why/why not?

5. What kind of help, support or advice do you need regarding your woods, and where do you turn for this?

5a-5e. IF NOT MENTIONED, ASK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING: Have you ever...

- a) Talked with a forester or wildlife specialist?
- b) Joined a landowner association?
- c) Been to a woodland owner workshop or other educational program?
- d) Considered hiring a consulting forester to manage your woods on an ongoing basis?
- e) Considered working collaboratively with neighboring woodland owners to address common issues or concerns?

WHEN THE ANSWER IS NO, ASK: Why not?

IF YES, ASK: What prompted you to do that? Was it helpful?

6. Do you have any worries or concerns regarding your woods? IF YES: What are they?

7. Are there any additional activities or projects that you would like to do in your woods (don't currently do)? These could be things that improve your enjoyment of your woods, make your woods healthier or maybe increase their value?

7a. ASK FOR ONE OF THOSE ACTIVITIES:

- What keeps you from doing this?
- If you decided to do this, to whom would you turn for help, support or advice?

IF THEY DON'T MENTION ANY ACTIVITIES, ASK ABOUT AN ACTIVITY BASED ON THEIR USE PATTERNS OR EXPRESSED CONCERNS: For example: You said you're worried about X/ you like doing X. What keeps you from ... improving habitat for deer / removing non-native species/ adding fire breaks, etc. IN CO, ASK ABOUT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO FIRE WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

8. Have you given much thought to the future of your woodland, e.g. would you sell it or pass it on to your heirs, or perhaps use it differently?

PROBE:

- Have you done any formal estate planning? Why/why not?

IF NEEDED, EXPLAIN: Estate planning means formal or legal planning for the future of your woods, such as specifying how it is handed down to your heirs in a will or including it in a trust.

- Have you considered getting a conservation easement? Why/why not?

IF NEEDED, EXPLAIN: A conservation easement is a legal instrument whereby the development rights on your land are sold or given away to a nonprofit organization or the state, thereby restricting future development on the land.

9. My last question is about how you feel about owning woodland. What words come to your mind when you think about your woods.

- **PROBE AS TIME ALLOWS:** What is it about owning your woods that makes you feel [insert emotion]?

D. CLOSE & ACKNOWLEDGMENT (1 minute)

Thank you very much for participating in our study.

May I have your full name and address so I can mail out a check for \$50 to thank you for your help?

RECORD NAME AND ADDRESS.