

# Report from the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative



## Wingspread Conference

Racine, Wisconsin  
July 24-26, 2006

Sponsored by the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative  
and the Johnson Foundation

## **Sustaining Family Forests Initiative**

The Sustaining Family Forests Initiative is a collaboration of government, industry, NGOs, certification systems, landowners, and academics organized to gain comprehensive knowledge about family forest owners in the United States—credible, useful information for those who wish to create a climate in which forest owners can easily find the information and services they desire to help them conserve and manage their land.

The Initiative stems from a stakeholder panel that met at Wingspread on October 6-8, 2003. That panel, representing broad forestry and forest conservation interests, concluded there is woefully inadequate knowledge about family forest owners in the US and that a social marketing approach would be a useful means to gather information about these diverse landowners, their management practices, their information and service needs, and the prospects for reaching them. Thus we began a social marketing research process. In 2006 we returned to Wingspread to share our findings and engage these same stakeholders in a discussion about how to carry the research forward into action.

The Initiative is being led by a management team, with the support of an *ad hoc* advisory committee of diverse stakeholders (see page 28). The Yale Program on Private Forests and the American Forest Foundation administer it collaboratively.

### **Management Team**

Bill Banzhaf, *Sustainable Forestry Board*

Brett Butler, *USDA Forest Service*

Bob Fledderman, *MeadWestvaco Corporation*

Mary Tyrrell (Project Coordinator), *Yale Program on Private Forests*

Scott Wallinger (2002-2006), *Retired, MeadWestvaco Corporation*

Larry Wiseman, *American Forest Foundation*

### **Support and Funding**

The Sustaining Family Forests Initiative has benefited from a broad constituency of advisors representing government, industry, and the conservation community. Generous financial support was provided by:

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USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation

## Forward

The conservation and sustainable forestry challenge on family forests is multi-sectoral and national. No organization or agency has the resources, knowledge or credentials to meet this challenge alone. This private land is perhaps the last frontier to extending sustainability concepts to all of the nation's forests. And it is the forest most at risk of being fragmented and converted to development. Decisions made by large numbers of small private landowners collectively enhance or degrade the landscape. How they manage their forests and whether or not they convert them to other uses is of significant public interest.

However, current evidence and opinion is that most individual landowners are not reached with credible, useful, and compelling information and services. Although there exists sample census information about their forests and demographics, there is no comprehensive information about their personal attributes, how they value and relate to their forests, how they make decisions, what sources and kinds of information they value, or the contemporary services they need.

The objective is to:

- Serve as a wide-ranging information resource for the initiative's various constituents (i.e., government agencies, industry, consulting foresters, landowner associations, land trusts, conservation and biodiversity NGOs, sustainable forestry certifiers, universities, and foresters,) and
- Provide direction for enhanced outreach to these landowners and aid a broad spectrum of organizations to be more strategic in meeting education and service goals with limited resources.

To begin this research, we worked with the National Woodland Owners Survey (NWOS) database, linking this tremendous resource on forest owners with demographic and behavior information. The NWOS was not explicitly designed to capture all of the details that would ideally be available for a social marketing project. Even so, there is enough information in the current NWOS to begin to get an idea about the attitudes and behaviors of family forest owners that are important to good stewardship and a land ethic that will keep forests as forests. This is a good start, providing a unique perspective on family forest owners from a social marketing lens. It also helps to clarify what other information would be most useful for communicating with family forest owners on various topics of conservation and forestry interest.

The first step was to cull as much information as possible from existing data sources, including the NWOS, Acxiom<sup>1</sup>, and the American Institute of Consumer Studies MRI Media

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<sup>1</sup> Acxiom compiles information about individuals and sells it in a form that can be added to existing databases (such as the NWOS), expanding their utility for analytical purposes. Information available from these services is wide ranging and comprehensive — political party ID, household income, computer ownership, home value, type of car, occupation, hobbies, etc. Not all of the information was available for every respondent — and little of it is specific to forestry — but it expands our knowledge of the NWOS respondents.

Study. The results of this research and analysis are reported in *Family Forest Owners: An In-depth Profile* and summarized in *Getting the Attention of Family Forest Owners: Lessons from Social Marketing Research*, both available on [www.sustainingfamilyforests.org](http://www.sustainingfamilyforests.org).

The first phase of the research is finished. Using social marketing principles, along with standard statistical techniques, we have segmented the family forest owner population in ways strategically useful to the organizations on the Initiative advisory committee and others working on outreach to forest landowners. We have then identified characteristics of each segment that might be useful for reaching them with effective messages about land stewardship.

The next step is to understand the implications for communication and messaging to family forest owners—in other words, to put the research into action. The 2006 Wingspread meeting was designed to engage a small group of stakeholders in thinking about how to do just that.

### **Participants**

Bill Banzhaf, *Sustainable Forestry Board*

Ted Beauvais, *USDA Forest Service, Cooperative Forestry*

Brett Butler, *USDA Forest Service, Family Forest Research Center*

Paul Catanzaro, *University of Massachusetts*

Paul DeLong, *Wisconsin Division of Forestry*

John DuPlissis, *University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point*

Geoff Feinberg, *Roper Public Affairs & Media, GfK America*

Don Ferguson, *Fleishman-Hillard Inc.*

Bob Fledderman, *MeadWestvaco Forestry Division*

Warren Gaskill, *Rapid Improvement Associates, LLC*

Jim Hull, *Texas Forest Service*

Sara Leiman, *Coast Range Conifers, LLC and Oregon Small Woodlands Association*

Catherine Mater, *Mater Engineering, and Pinchot Institute for Conservation*

Eric Norland, *USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service*

Beth Richardson, *Clemson Extension Service*

Al Sample, *Pinchot Institute for Conservation*

Kirk Titus, *Weyerhaeuser*

Mary Tyrrell, *Program on Private Forests, Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies*

Scott Wallinger, *MeadWestvaco Corporation (retired)*

Mimi Wright, *Tree Farmer, Maryland and Delaware*

Dale Zaug, *Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association*

## Wingspread 2006 Highlights

The goals of the meeting were fourfold:

1. To report on the results of the research.
2. To engage in a dialogue on how participants can use the knowledge gained from this social marketing research in their ongoing work to reach landowners with credible, useful, and compelling information and services.
3. To recommend the next steps for the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative to complete the mission to assist organizations in developing efficient and effective outreach, service, and policy programs that will enhance stewardship of private lands and help keep forests as forests.
4. To recommend to the USDA Forest Service enhancements to the National Woodland Owner Survey such that it can provide more comprehensive and useful information on a routine basis to the various constituencies interested in private forest owners.

These goals were achieved with a balance of presentations, panel discussions, small group discussions, and whole-group discussions. Many participants have been involved to varying degrees with the Initiative for the last two or three years. But most importantly they represent the broad spectrum of organizations servicing family forest owners—folks who can bring what they learn back to their own work. Many are landowners themselves, adding a necessary reality check to the discussions.

### Conclusions of the Meeting — Next Steps

Four themes emerged from the discussion.

1. Develop a road show, essentially sharing the results of the research to date and ideas for putting the research into action. This will extend the dialogue on this subject to different parts of the country and hopefully encourage additional buy-in from local and environmental stakeholders.

**Plans are in place to present this work to various groups which can be lumped into two broad categories: 1) Groups that can put this knowledge to good use; and 2) potential funders for the next steps. Although we will take advantage of presentation opportunities as they arise (such as at conferences), we will also actively seek opportunities that would be strategic to moving the work forward.**

2. Develop a message and communication approach about "keeping forests as forests" and "good stewardship of private lands." This could be an incredibly unifying effort with stakeholders who have traditionally disagreed on many issues.

**Working with Fleishman-Hillard and Roper Public Affairs and Media, the management team is proposing to move forward with the next step. Using the social**

marketing research, we will develop a product, which consists of a message and communication approach about "keeping forests as forests" and "good stewardship" which can be used by all who are trying to reach this landowner population.

Here are the steps to achieve this product:

- Conduct focus groups in each region to validate the research and hone in on attitudes/values
  - Develop messages and identify communication techniques and venues that will be effective with each of the landowner segments
  - Test the messages
  - Produce a product for user groups on messaging, communication, venues
  - Hold information sessions for major user groups (extension, state foresters, consulting foresters, environmental groups, landowner associations, etc.)
3. Encourage the formation of a "Family Forests Coalition" to develop broader political support by articulating the compelling public interest in conserving *private* forest land. Ensuring that the policymakers and the public can clearly see the public conservation values gained from investments in private lands will be increasingly critical to justify public expenditures. Such a coalition has already taken root, initiated by AFF and TNC with Environmental Defense. Perhaps this group [along with the continuing work by the National Council on Private Forests] could provide the platform for the national movement. The policy thrust of the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative could conceivably be folded into this existing coalition.

**After much discussion, the management team decided that we would not try to directly engage in the formation of a "Family Forests Coalition" to develop broader political support for conserving private forestland. There are several such efforts underway and it was agreed that it would not be effective for the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative to try to undertake another such effort. We will support those efforts however it makes sense to do so, but as far as the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative goes, we will focus on completing the research (bringing it to action) and communicating our results.**

4. Support an enhanced National Woodlands Owners Survey that includes forestry as well as social marketing dimensions taking into consideration the broad array of research needs identified at the Wingspread meeting.

**It is understood that an enhanced National Woodlands Owners Survey is key to the long-term success of this work. We will work with the USDA Forest Service to incorporate questions into future surveys that will enable more specific social marketing analysis of the data. We will also support the allocation of adequate resources to the Family Forest Research Center so that the Forest Service can routinely provide this level of analysis.**

Note on more research: This note was sent in response to the draft summary of the meeting by participant Don Ferguson, Senior Vice-President and Partner, at the public relations firm of Fleishman-Hillard. Don's comments, which were a reaction to the long list of items under "enhancing and extending the research" (see page 18), were supported by many others.

*No organization ever believes it has enough research, and often questions the answers it receives — wrongly. While getting answers to many of the questions that were raised at the meeting may be important, you clearly could do research for another year and a half and then will want even more. And, from my perspective, will not have much more capability to launch a program than you do now. I have never known an organization that thought its research was ever complete.*

*With my 40 plus years in PR, in my opinion, you clearly have enough information on which to make decisions on how to more effectively manage a communications strategy aimed at affecting behaviors, and to base it on thoughtful messaging and delivery strategies. What is missing is the structure to do so, and of course, funding.*

*If you were to add up all the costs for what [various organizations] are now doing, you will be very surprised at the amount being spent. A key question is, can you do it more effectively and cost efficiently through [a different approach] than each of you essential going your own way. Multiple audiences asking for the same media, for example, will be counter productive. And many of you clearly know what doesn't work.*