



Sustainable Woodlands Survey

2004-2005

Summary of Results

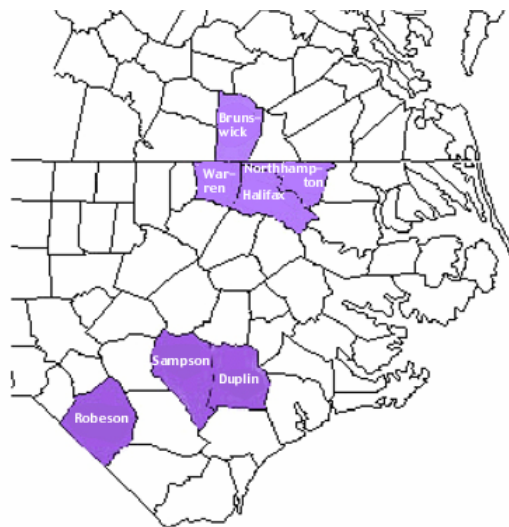
With the help of landowners, we were able to gather information on woodland ownership across eastern North Carolina and Virginia. This is a summary of the survey data collected.

Survey Methods

For this survey, landowners with at least 5 acres of woodland were contacted for personal interviews or mailed a survey booklet. Of those contacted, 389 responded. This includes 89 face-to-face interviews and 300 returned booklets.

The survey covered seven counties:

- Brunswick County, VA
- Duplin County, NC
- Halifax County, NC
- Northampton County, NC
- Robeson County, NC
- Sampson County, NC
- Warren County, NC



The results below use responses from the mail and in-person surveys. We also called some landowners who did not respond to the survey to find out if they are similar to the landowners who did respond. We found that the average age of respondents was about the same. However, the landowners we called on the phone tended to have somewhat larger acreages than the survey respondents. We also talked with a higher percentage of female landowners by phone than the percentage who responded to the survey. So the results reported below are generally representative of small woodland owners but may be biased towards men with smaller acreages of woodland.

Characteristics of woodland owners

The typical (median) woodland owner who responded to the survey has 30 acres of woodland in the seven counties. 90% of them own between 5 and 260 acres of woodland. Only 16% farm the land by themselves. About a third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of respondents live on their woodland property. Another third live more than 10 miles away.

The average age of survey respondents is 63 years old. 90% of them are between 40 and 85 years old. Many (83%) have lived most of their lives in NC or VA.

The *most important reasons* for owning woodland are (1) scenic beauty and protecting nature, (2) leaving land for the children, and (3) investment-related reasons, like real estate investments or timber income. The *least important reasons* are growing other (non-timber) products and use-value taxation.

Challenges of woodland management

The most common problem faced by woodland owners is forestry knowledge. Nearly 1 out of 3 respondents (31%) said that the hardest thing about managing their woodlands is that they don't know what to do. Some woodland owners also said "I don't have the time" (20%) or "I don't have the money" (15%). Distance is the biggest problem for 17% of our respondents.

Nearly half (47%) of the landowners visit their woods once a month. A few (13%) visit their woods every day. About 15% visit their woods less than once a year.

Health of woodlands

Most landowners feel confident in the health of their forest. More than a third of landowners said that 100% of their woods are "very healthy." Only a few woodland owners (13%) said that more than 20% of their woodland is "not healthy at all."

Assistance with woodland management

Only 10% of landowners have a written management or stewardship plan for their woods. These plans are an important guide to woodland management and are required for some types

of government assistance. In North Carolina, county foresters from the Division of Forest Resources can help landowners with these plans. Of the survey respondents, 19% had been visited by a county forester in the past five years. 15% had hired a consulting forester to manage a timber sale or other forestry activities. Many of these are the same people: 40% of those visited by a county forester had also hired consulting foresters.

The top three sources used by landowners to get information about forestry are (1) Family, friends or neighbors (49%), (2) Publications such as pamphlets, newsletters, brochures and booklets (40%), and (3) the County forester (39%). However, some of these methods work better than others. Many feel that getting forestry information from the county forester (23%) or publications (18%) works best for them. Others like getting information from family, friends, and neighbors (15%) or the county extension agent (15%). Media such as TV, radio or magazines is the least preferred method of getting forestry information.

Woodland income and uses

Most landowners (66%) did not make any money from their woods in the past five years. Only about 15% of landowners reported that they had made more than \$10,000.

35% of survey respondents have sold timber in the past 5 years, and 16% think they will sell in the next 5 years. Most (56%) are not planning to sell timber in the next 5 years or say that they will wait and see (28%). About half of the landowners say that they receive bids for timber a few times a year. The 14% of landowners who never receive any bids for timber typically own fewer acres (median of 14 acres).

Hunting is the most common non-timber use of the forest. 1 out of 3 landowners hunt or let others hunt on their land. Nearly 10% of survey respondents lease out hunting rights. It is not as common to sell or lease other forest products, such as pine straw, firewood, recreation and collecting fruits and flowers. However, about a quarter of the landowners making significant income from their woodland (more than \$25,000 in past 5 years) do sell non-timber products such as pine straw, firewood, berries, flowers and mushrooms and/or hunting leases.

Woodlands in the family

Just over half of the survey respondents (53%) inherited their woodlands. Among those who inherited woodlands, nearly 70% said their woods had been in the family since the 1950s. A little over half (53%) of our respondents have made a written will that says who will inherit their woodlands after they pass away. Ideally, 100% of landowners should have a written will, because this can prevent future legal and management problems for inheritors of the land.

Most landowners (77%) plan to pass their woodlands down to their children. We asked landowners what they expect their children to do with the woodlands. Many landowners (37%) do not know. For those who have an idea, more than half (56%) believe their children will keep the property in woodland instead of clearing or selling the land. 18% of landowners get input from their children on decisions regarding their woodlands. 42% believe that their children are aware of how their woodlands are managed, even though they do not actively participate. One third of landowners think that their children do not have any idea about how the woodland is managed.

For further information

Please see the Sustainable Woodlands Webpage:

www.ncsu.edu/woodlands