

Some landowners embrace sustainability, some don't—SSI examines why

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Why do some landowners embrace sustainability and conservation in their environs while others ignore these concepts altogether? This was one of the main questions Michael Quartuch explored in his doctoral research at UMaine's Sustainability Solutions Initiative (SSI).

It's a complex query. As part of SSI's People, Landscape and Communities team (PLACE), Quartuch, a recent Ph.D. graduate of SSI and UMaine's School of Forest Resources, wanted to know what lurked beneath the surface of land use decision-making.

"At a broad level, my research focused on understanding and predicting the ways in which humans interact with and shape the surrounding environment. I was very interested in identifying why people are motivated to act sustainably. Specifically, I wanted to explore whether and to what degree landowner stewardship ethics influence individual land use decisions. Similarly, I wanted to test the role landowner place attachment and sense of community play in terms of influencing behavior," Quartuch said.

Led by associate professors Kathleen Bell and Jessica Leahy, the PLACE team studied small landowners in Maine to develop solutions on key fronts. The team surveyed landowners in an effort to better understand their concerns, attitudes and behaviors. The responses are helping the team to identify outputs of interest to landowners and key stakeholders who frequently interact with them, including local businesses and local and state governments.

"The ability to tap into landowners' moral and ethical connections with their land, including sense of place and community, has the potential to influence attitudes and behavior. Research findings suggest that [landowners](#) feel real responsibility for their property, a sense of stewardship that is evident in both their environmental attitude and their perception of their ability to act on these beliefs," Quartuch said. "With this information in hand, we can deviate from traditional outreach and education efforts, concentrating on future [conservation](#) and sustainable development initiatives."

Quartuch, a native of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, has accepted a postdoctoral research associate position at Cornell University in the Department of Natural Resources, Human Dimensions Research Unit. Quartuch's research will focus on a variety of social aspects associated with wildlife management and conservation.

Provided by University of Maine

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