

Survey describes values, challenges of largest shareholder in US forests

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New research by the USDA Forest Service reveals the motivations, management activities, future plans, and challenges faced by the nearly 11 million families, individuals, trusts, and estates, referred to as family forest owners. Collectively, family forest ownerships control 286 million acres of forestland, or 36 percent of the nation's forestland. The federal government is the nation's second largest forestland owner with 31 percent.

The study, "Family Forest Ownerships of the United States," is based on responses from over 8,000 randomly selected family forest owners from across the country. The study was recently [published](#) in the *Journal of Forestry*.

"If we are interested in the future of the forests of the United States, we must be interested in those who own the land and in particular this means family forest owners who own a plurality of this vital resource," said Tony Ferguson, Acting Director of the USDA Forest Service's Northern Research Station and the Forest Products Laboratory. "Forest Service research is demonstrating the importance of family forest owners to conservation and providing information that will make programs that serve family forest owners more effective."

Survey results show that the benefits family forest owners most value are related to the beauty and privacy the forests provide, along with wildlife and nature protection. Financial objectives, such as land investment and timber production, are dominant objectives for far fewer family forest

owners. This does not mean they are inactive on their land; nearly half of the timber harvested in the U.S. comes from family forest lands, but only 13 percent of family forest owners have written forest management plans and only 20 percent had received professional forestry advice at the time of the survey.

"Family forest owners have a great, great love of their land and almost all of them want to do what is right by the land," according to Brett Butler, a research forester with the Forest Service's Forest Inventory & Analysis Program and the study's lead author. "We hope this work will increase the public's awareness of the importance of family forest owners and be used to create educational materials and programs that allow landowners to make fully informed decisions to better meet their needs and the needs of future generations."

With 1 in 5 acres of family forest land owned by people who are at least 75 years or older, and even more acres owned by people who are between 65 and 74 years of age, the question of who will own forests and what they will do with those lands in the future is significant for forest owners as well as land managers and communities.

More information: , Family Forest Ownerships of the United States, 2013: Findings from the USDA Forest Service's National Woodland Owner Survey, *Journal of Forestry* (2016). [DOI: 10.5849/jof.15-099](https://doi.org/10.5849/jof.15-099)

Provided by USDA Forest Service

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