



## Rapid Appraisal Research on Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention

2:00 PM (Eastern Time)

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## Rapid Appraisal Research on Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention

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### Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Project

- Designed and funded by U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, in partnership with NRCS and the USDA Forest Service.
- Planned as a 6-year program (beginning 2012), with two-year pilot projects in three states (AL, NC, & SC).
- Build and coordinate systems of support for African American landowners.
- Test the potential of sustainable forestry practices to
  - help stabilize African American land ownership,
  - increase forest health, and

## Pilot Program Goals

1. Move African American forestland owners to a position of secure ownership and high probability of profitable long-term forest management;
2. Model effective and flexible systems of support for African American forestland owners;
3. Document in detail: (a) the attitudes of African American landowners about the use and management of their forests; (b) the conditions of those forests; and (c) the potential for sustainable forest management to increase profitability and land asset value.

## Field Sites and Community Organizations

- Rural northeastern North Carolina: Roanoke Rural Electric Cooperative
- Five coastal counties of South Carolina: The Center for Heirs Property Preservation
- West central Alabama: LRLEAN (Limited Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network) and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives



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<http://www.roanokeelectric.com>



<http://www.heirsproperty.org>



<http://www.federationsoutherncoop.com>

## U.S. Endowment Goals for Baseline Research



- Establish baseline conditions, understand current issues, and measure progress
- Provide information for pilot sites to strengthen planning and management
- Provide data to guide future of program
- Add to scholarship and knowledge on African Americans, land, and forests

## Forest Landowners

Previous research on forest owners show they are diverse:

- Diversity of landownerships: tract sizes, ownership status, forest conditions and histories
- Demographics: age, income, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.
- Diverse reasons for owning forest land and plans for it
- Different levels of engagement with forestry



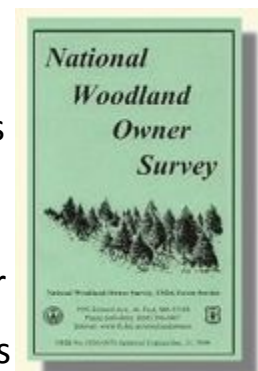
## African American Forest Owners



- Limited research on African American forest owners shows they are diverse, like forest owners in general:
  - But tend to have less land, use less financial and technical assistance and fewer forest management techniques, and are more likely to have heirs' property due to historical discrimination and structural patterns
  - Highly value land and intergenerational transfer of land
  - May have less focus on forests than land in general and agriculture specifically

## Research Techniques: Surveys

- National Woodland Owner Survey data is sampled to provide only state-level results
- Response to mail and phone surveys is declining
- African American response to forestry surveys appears to be lower
- Surveys may be of limited usefulness for designing local programs



## Research Techniques: Capturing Complexity

We need to understand the complexity of forest ownership and go beyond previous research to learn:

- Nuances of ownership status: ownership within families, legal status, etc.
- Decision-making processes: who decides, how, on what basis?
- Values, practices, use of assistance, social relationships
- Forest histories and present conditions



## Rapid Appraisal



- Established technique in international development as a basis for project planning and developing future research
- Provides good overview data in relatively short period of time
- But also has sampling and data depth limitations

## Specific Research Objectives

- Learn about the diversity of landowners
- Collect baseline conditions for a set of landowners
- Provide detailed information about landowner outlooks, practices, resource limitations, opportunities, etc.
- Serve as a focal point for discussions about development and improvement of the program

## Research Team

Research team introduced by local project representative or neighbor.

### Core Research Team:

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## Research Process

- Fieldwork: July – September 2014
- Work with pilot projects to select diverse sample of landowners
- 3 weeks in each site, 20 forest owners per site, half program participants, half not
- Forester assesses forest conditions
- 2- 3 hour site visit: interview and discussion and walk

## Landowner benefits

- Each interviewee will receive:
  - Written summary of interview responses
  - Written rapid assessment of forest land by forester
- Report mailed to the landowner soon after field research concludes for planning, sharing, or historical record
- Each interviewee establishes contact with program

## Demographics

- Interviewed one or more family members
- Age: 50+ (like most forest owners)
- Nearly all had Bachelor's or advanced degrees
- Professional employment common, particularly in education
- Income varied
- Gender diversity



## History and meaning of the land

- Long historical ties to the land
  - Multi-generational
  - On land or frequent visits since childhood
- Stories of struggle to obtain and retain land
- A number of stories of land loss among family and neighbors
  - Details include economic hardship and theft
- Some had more recent land purchases
- Most early memories of land related to farming, subsistence and cash cropping

## Value of land to the **family**

- Land as tie to family heritage and history of primary importance
  - Hard work, struggle, responsibility
  - Identity
- Land as an economic asset
  - About 50% say that it costs money to have land
- Land's role in risk reduction (place to stay, collateral)
- Cultural value of land ownership
- Family reunions on land bring family back
- Minority communities/ethnic enclaves

## Heirs property

- Broad definition to include all inherited land regardless of title
  - Tradition versus legal status
- Complexity of legal heirs property situations
- Taxes: Shared payments versus paid by economic beneficiary (sense of entitlement?)
- Ways of dealing with it
  - Divide and go your own way
  - Informal division (separate tax parcels)
  - Divide and manage together (existing or goal)
  - One or more designated heirs
  - Buy out other heirs
  - Joint ownership, LLC, or trust

## Future generations

- Very strong desire to retain land in family
  - Often one or several family members engaged with land and history
  - Both for heritage and economic reasons
  - “Each generation must carry the torch”
  - Desire to sort out now for next generation
- Upcoming generations have fewer ties to the land
  - Concern about future generations and land
  - Current generation is last that worked the land
  - Forces pulling people away: age and life cycle, distance, urbanization, technology, familiarity
- “Never sell the land”
  - Strong message to upcoming generations



## About the land

- Some farm or pasture land (usually leased)
- Natural regrowth of forest
- Old houses, cemeteries, memory places



## Forest Assessment

- Forester does rapid assessment:
  - Describe forest conditions (site, species, understory, disease or other issues)
  - Suggest preliminary management recommendations
- Results
  - Low value, naturally regenerated mixed stands common
  - Many stands needing thinning and/or fire
  - Some stands ready to harvest and replant
- Conservation Fund doing growth and yield models for 60 properties, projected for 35 years



## Desired uses of the land

- Forestry (new, related to program)
- Family gathering place
- Educational and recreational center
- Hunting (family/friends or leased)
- Wildlife preservation



## Experience with forestry activities, plans, and programs

- Many had sold timber—contacted by buyer or due to financial need
  - Often suspected they were underpaid
  - A few had contacts to learn prices
- Very few had planted trees
- Very few had done prescribed burning
- Only a few had prior involvement with government programs



## Experience (2)

- People had observed and admired managed forests
  - Recognized that earlier management would have improved current outcomes
  - We're happy to be getting involved
  - Wish the program had been around years ago
    - "We're behind other landowners"
    - "We never had access to this information"
- Trust
  - Distrust of government, foresters, loggers, etc.
  - Reluctance to sign papers

## Constraints

- Information--amount, appropriate, timely
- Labor and technical skill
- Finances
- Family agreement
- Time



## Information exchange

- Heavy reliance on program personnel for:
  - Information and advice
  - Contractor recommendations
  - Reminders to meet deadlines
- Several people had contacts in industry, government, extension
  - Fragile networks
- Several people routinely talked with others about forestry, usually the most involved
- Many talked about people they met through the program

## Watershed protection, bioenergy, and certification

- Very little awareness, except:
  - Through profession or public service
  - Through program
- Interest in learning more



## Other goals and objectives, including buying or selling land

- Many people just trying to get a handle on what they had
- Some actively acquiring more land
  - “The Lord is not making any more of it.”
- Buying and selling from other family members
- Few interested in selling, and never family land



## Role of the Sustainable Forestry program

- Primary source of information, advice, recommendations
  - “I just call [Sam, Alton, Hodges, Andrew, Alex]”
- Connecting landowners and forestry professionals
- Integrated activities of the program are getting people’s attention at different levels

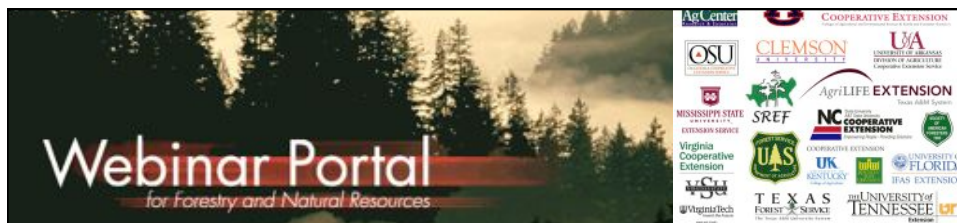


## Linking Research and Practice

- Values
- Decision-making
- History
- Social structure
- Forestry experience
- Social networks
- Community-based approaches



## Questions?



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