

# FORESTRY NOTES SPECIAL REPORT



## WOMEN WOODLAND OWNERS LEARN THROUGH SHARING

**T**hroughout the United States, women are increasingly becoming responsible for the management of private working lands. Some women inherit forestland from their parents or spouses. Others are entrepreneurs that purchase and manage their own forestland as an investment. Too often though, women lack access to the technical resources they need to be highly successful working landowners.

Nicole Strong, Eli Sagor, Allyson Muth, Amanda Subjin, Angie Gupta, and Amy Grotta are extension and natural resource professionals who assist family woodland owners in identifying and implementing their long-term management goals. In 2013, they presented this essay on engaging female woodland owners at a conference on the Future Directions of Small-scale and Community-Based Forestry. The full article is available on the International Union of Forest Research Organizations website.

- ▶ A 2005 survey conducted in Oregon estimated women were the primary managers of 40 percent of the state's family forest ownerships, but only comprised 20 to 25 percent of forestry education participants and 10 percent of forest landowner association memberships.
- ▶ According to the 2007 USDA Agriculture Census, the number of women farmers and woodland owners increased 19 percent from 2002 to 2007. These women landowners tend to have smaller parcels, lower total sales receipts, and are less likely to attend educational events or be aware of assistance opportunities compared to their male counterparts.

These surveys show that women who manage forestland have higher personal economic risk than men who do the same. In effect, this risk translates to comparatively less effective management of natural resources, and a higher likelihood that working forests and farms are sold and



**Vicki Christiansen**  
USFS Deputy Chief,  
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Private Forestry

## An opportunity to make a difference

Families and individuals own and manage 36 percent of the nation's forests, more than the federal government (31 percent). They love their forests and are passionate about sustaining them. Yet, only 24 percent have a forest management plan, and even fewer seek advice or technical assistance, missing out on opportunities to conserve and profit from their working lands.

You play a vital role in engaging and assisting these landowners in meeting their goals. You connect them with financial and technical assistance that ensures their private forests are healthy and continue to provide numerous public benefits including clean water, natural beauty, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities.

The challenge we all face is engaging landowners, especially those who aren't actively seeking assistance. For some it may be uncertainty of where to begin or lack of knowledge that holds them back. This is often the case for women who inherit forests from their family or purchase forested land. These women cherish the land and want to create a legacy. Your guidance can start them on that path and pay dividends for future generations.

The articles and stories in this special edition seek to provide you with tools and insights to successfully assist female woodland owners. Many of the articles are written by natural resource professionals with an incredible wealth of knowledge and experience assisting women woodland owners. We hope you find these stories useful to your work, and we look forward to hearing from you about the unique approaches conservation districts are taking to speak to the needs and interests of women landowners.

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# WOW: An idea that needed to happen

Almost 20 years ago, natural resource professionals recognized a growing need to have forestry education programs for women. Women are increasingly inheriting family forests or purchasing land, but some lack the information and resources needed to make the best forest management decisions.

Rather than attending traditional forestry programs, women prefer peer learning opportunities where they can share success stories and challenges and build the necessary skills for effective decision making. To address this need, Maine, New Hampshire, and Oregon created programs where women

of all skill levels can share and learn from each other. Other states replicated their programs and a revolution was born.

In 2010, USDA hosted a “Women and Working Lands: Past, Present, Future” panel to discuss how to engage and mentor more women landowners. Nancy Baker, a woodland owner from Pennsylvania, was invited to be on that panel. Her handler for the day was Paula Randler with the Forest Service. In one of the many conversations about ways to support women landowners, a comparison was made between the levels of support provided to female farmers compared to female woodlot owners. An idea surfaced, too, to create an online clearinghouse of information to support women woodland owners.

The Forest Service partnered with the National Woodland Owners Association (NWOA) to host the creation of a website, separate from any partner sites that could operate as a resource for women, and ultimately all, woodland owners. Randler championed the idea and reached out to women resource professionals who were hosting or holding trainings and educational events targeted to women woodland owners to serve as regional



editors and content experts for the site. [www.womenowningwoodlands.net](http://www.womenowningwoodlands.net) was the result of that effort.

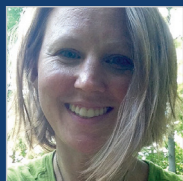
Today the site remains a strong partnership between the USFS, NWOA, state Extension programs, state forestry agencies, and woodland owners and stakeholders that provide forestry information on a variety of topics to help women hire a forester, identify and eliminate invasive plants, and share their wisdom with others. The state programs continue to provide hands-on forestry experience and help women build the skill sets they need to achieve their management goals.

## Tips to engage female forest landowners



**“Provide woodland courses specifically geared toward women landowners, for example, courses about using tools safely and generational planning for your woodlands.”**

**Renée E. D'Aoust**  
*Private landowner, writer-teacher*



**“Connect with the next generation. Provide women with opportunities and ideas on connecting their passion for their land to children and grandchildren.”**

**Amanda Subjin**  
*Conservation Programs Team Lead  
Delaware Highlands Conservancy  
Women and Their Woods*



**“I try to imagine what my grandmother would have been comfortable attending; a workshop where it wasn't about 'men's stuff' but focused on managing and protecting family resources.”**

**Heather M. Dowling**  
*Forester  
Virginia Department of Forestry  
Five Forks Work Area*



**“Ask women what educational opportunities they need most. Then tailor your outreach to those topics.”**

**Tiffany Fegel**  
*MWM/WOWnet Coordinator  
Oregon State University*

## Districts can make connections

In 2003, Linda Brownson and her husband relocated to New Hampshire from Texas, where for nine years she helped manage forestland and rangeland while her husband grew a family financial consulting business. The couple purchased a two-centuries-old New Hampshire farm that sits 1,500 feet above sea level in the western foothills of the White Mountains. Its 200 forested acres are an even mix of northern hardwoods (sugar and red maple, black cherry, birch, red oak) and conifers (balsam fir, white and red pine, eastern larch). It was a paradise for Brownson, but the property presented a series of management ideas and obstacles. She needed help.

"I wondered, 'How am I going to find enough resources to manage this beautiful land?'"

Brownson began by signing up for workshops through the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Extension, which introduced her to the Grafton

County Conservation District and local NRCS (the three organizations are co-located). Through that connection, she secured cost-share for five contracts that have addressed forest stand improvement, water crossings, culverts, and mast tree release. Annual tree harvests provide the Brownsons with enough firewood for the winter and lumber to

construct outbuildings and furniture. Every day for Linda is an adventure. "I never get tired of being out in the woods," she says. "I really love it."

Her primary management objective is wildlife habitat enhancement. Three years ago, Brownson clearcut 16.8 acres to create shrubland for wildlife. The harvest provided habitat benefits for more than 100 species, including moose, white tail deer, black bear, grouse, woodcock, and snowshoe hare. "Plus, I'm a hunter," she laughs, "so I like to have enough wildlife to keep the freezer full in the winter."

Brownson credits a three-way partnership with Grafton County Conservation District, NRCS, and UNH Extension for helping her realize her management goals. It also led her to a leadership role in conservation; she



is now the president of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts and an NACD board member, and also represents Grafton County on the Board of New Hampshire Timberland Owners.

Now the Brownsons' farm is a regular host to conservation district and UNH Extension workshops, demonstration projects, and logging classes. Brownson loves it. "I learn so much," she says.

Brownson's newest neighbors relocated to New Hampshire from Finland. In April, she recruited a local forester and spent a day in the woods with the couple, educating them about their management options. "It's satisfying that I'm in a position now where I can help others," Brownson says.

## Women4theLand provides resources

Since 2013, the Women, Food & Agriculture Network (WFAN), the American Farmland Trust, Indiana's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) and other conservation partners have been working together to reach out to women farmers and forest landowners in Indiana. This effort, called Women4theLand, aims to provide information, networking, education and resources. The objective is to empower them to make good science-based land use and land management decisions that lead to more viable communities and stronger farm enterprises while improving and sustaining the quality of natural resources.

Indiana's soil and water conservation districts organize project workshops (called

circles) and often provide follow up assistance to participants. Each circle includes a farm visit to showcase practices that are explained by local technical staff, providing participants a chance to see conservation in action and network with local resource professionals.

"The Women4theLand project gives the local soil and water conservation districts a new venue to share valuable conservation information directly with the women landowners and operators. In turn, these women learn about the resources and technical assistance that is locally available to them through the districts," said Jennifer Boyle Warner, executive director for the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Indiana's Women4theLand project is part of a seven-state group receiving funding from a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) that seeks to develop a pathway for reaching absentee owners.

The steering committee provides the meth-

odology for reaching women, templates for advertising, agendas, and outlines for the half-day training event. "The format of an all-women interactive learning circle creates an interesting dynamic," said Women4theLand Coordinator Heather Bacher. "The participants share their own experiences and challenges. In the context of these experiences, our trained facilitators guide the discussion, share information on soil health and best practices and make sure that the women are introduced to available resources."

The critical points of the project are in creating better gender specific ways to communicate with these women landowners and helping them understand their rights and responsibilities as landowners - a group who is usually very receptive to stewardship and a holistic approach to caring for their land.

"The underlying focus is to get them to adopt conservation practices," said Paula Baldwin, a member of the Women4theLand steering committee and Marion County SWCD associate board supervisor. "Because of this, it seems an excellent program to keep tied to our districts."

To learn more, visit <http://women4theland.org>.



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converted to non-working land uses, such as housing developments.

Future generations of landowners will include more women, who appear to have different objectives and educational needs than men. A 2005 study of forest landowner offspring conducted for the National Association of State Foresters showed that 83 percent of women sampled were interested in managing their family forestland when transfer occurred, but only 34 percent felt they had enough knowledge to make forest management decisions. This survey also found that women who will inherit forestlands and are beginning forest managers often had different land management objectives than men. The women noted having a greater interest in managing for non-timber forest values and products, enhancing wildlife habitat, and

maintaining the legacy of their family's land.

A 2010 study showed two major barriers to women's involvement with forestry organizations: (1) a feeling of not being welcome, and (2) because of a lack of basic vocabulary, feeling too intimidated to attend meetings and programs. This study and others demonstrate how many female woodland owners are disproportionately missing out on the education, technical and financial assistance, and/or mentoring available through traditional landowner organizations and service, educational, and assistance programs.

Another reason women may not be attending educational programs is they prefer hands-on experiences, identifying problems, brainstorming, imagining, leading, and getting work done with peers.

Women not only need to learn silvicultural science and chainsaw safety to be informed stewards; they also need to identify themselves

as capable forest stewards and as part of a broader community. As many of our traditional forestry programs focus heavily on transmitting content, they are missing other critical pieces of adult education, including community development and emotional empowerment, especially as it pertains to adult women entering a predominantly male community.

#### References

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### These resources offer additional information related to assisting female woodland owners:



**Women Owning Woodlands website:**  
[www.womenowningwoodlands.net](http://www.womenowningwoodlands.net)

**Regional WOW networks and contacts:**  
[www.womenowningwoodlands.net/content/contact-us](http://www.womenowningwoodlands.net/content/contact-us)

**WOW Facebook page:**  
[www.facebook.com/WomenOwningWoodlands/GrowingaPeerLearningNetwork](http://www.facebook.com/WomenOwningWoodlands/GrowingaPeerLearningNetwork)



#### Virginia Department of Forestry: Women and Land Series

The Women and Land workshop series is designed for women who own forest and/or agricultural land with their families, but who may or may not be the primary manager of the land. Our goal is to provide these women landowners with the information and contacts needed to make wise decisions for their family land. The emphasis is on building confidence in working with natural resource professionals to identify and accomplish her goals on her land.  
<http://www.dof.virginia.gov/>



#### The Women and Their Woods regional program

Women and Their Woods is a network of landowners and professionals working together to cultivate women's connections to and care of healthy forest lands. At the heart of the group are landowners from across the mid-Atlantic region who have been trained as mentors through an intensive educational retreat where participants acquire the skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of forestland ownership. In addition to the biennial educational retreats, field tours and workshops provide hands-on opportunities for landowners to learn from one another as well as from professionals in the field of forestry. Events and outreach to the group is coordinated by the Delaware Highlands Conservancy with support by the Center for Private Forests at Penn State and the U.S. Forest Service at Grey Towers National Historic Site. Learn more and join the mailing list at:  
[www.DelawareHighlands.org/watw](http://www.DelawareHighlands.org/watw)



#### Oregon's Women Owning Woodlands Network (WOWnet)

WOWnet supports and increases women's access to forestry-related resources and encourages communication among Oregon's women woodland managers through the development of statewide and local networks. Learn more at:  
<http://extensionweb.forestry.oregonstate.edu/WOWNet>

