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Recommendations for Engaging Maine's Family Woodland Owners

Prepared by CNPS for FOR/Maine's Small Woodland Owner Committee
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Introduction

Forest Opportunity Roadmap/Maine (FOR/Maine) is a unique cross-sector collaboration of industry, communities, government, education, and nonprofits, all of which have come together to realize the next generation of Maine's forest economy. The coalition aims to grow Maine's forest products industry by 40% by 2025, and is pursuing a multi-pronged strategy to grow and diversify markets for wood products, cultivate needed human capacity, and develop a sustainable supply of wood in the state.

One-third of Maine's woodland is held by family landowners¹, who traditionally account for about a quarter of Maine's wood supply. FOR/Maine's Small Woodland Owners Committee is charged with improving and enhancing the supply of wood from family woodlots. Specifically, the goals of the Small Woodland Owner Committee are to:

1. Increase the percentage of Maine's woodland owners receiving assistance from forestry professionals in order to increase landowner activity or participation in forest management; and
2. Increase the timber being produced by these landowners to enhance the productivity of a diverse forest industry.

Focus on Woodland Retreat Owners

FOR/Maine's Small Woodland Owner Committee has decided to focus this effort on historically underserved landowners who own their woodland primarily for its beauty, conservation, and recreational value. These landowners are categorized as Woodland Retreat Owners by the Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE) project².

One reason for choosing this audience is that **Woodland Retreat owners are less likely to harvest their trees for sale**. Only 5% of US Woodland Retreat owners had harvested trees for sale within the past five years, vs. 16% of all woodland owners with 10+ acres of land. In Maine, only 18% of landowners who have ever had a commercial harvest are Woodland Retreat owners, even though this segment makes up 48% of the landowner population.³

We also know that Woodland Retreat owners are less likely to plan for harvests or to actively manage their woods to improve timber stands. They are also less aware of, and less engaged in, forestry programs and services. **These attributes may place them at higher risk for unplanned, opportunistic or financially driven harvests.**

¹ Butler, Brett J.; Butler, Sarah M. 2016. Family forest ownerships with 10+ acres in Maine, 2011-2013. Res. Note NRS-219. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. 2 p. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2737/NRS-RN-219>.

² www.engaginglandowners.org, Brett J. Butler, Mary Tyrrell, Geoff Feinberg, Scott VanManen, Larry Wiseman, and Scott Wallinger. 2007. Understanding and Reaching Family Forest Owners: Lessons From Social Marketing Research, *Journal of Forestry* 105(7):348-357.

³ National Woodland Owner Survey, 2011-2013 iteration.

These lower rates of planned commercial harvesting among Woodland Retreat owners present an economic and ecological challenge. First off, the reduced supply of timber from small woodlots affects the health and vibrancy of Maine's forest products industry. Furthermore, lack of planned harvests will eventually affect the quality of the timber supply—when landowners plan to conduct harvests, they are likely to harvest more wisely and invest in improving their timber stock.

From an ecological perspective, proceeds from timber sales can help offset costs of land ownership and maintenance, thereby ensuring that land stays forested. Harvests can also be used to create wildlife habitat and improve forest resilience. **By not participating in timber markets, Woodland Retreat owners may be forgoing opportunities to keep their land healthy, forested, and in the family.**

The National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS) shows that Woodland Retreat owners are a significant and growing segment of the population. According to NWOS data (2011-2013), **Woodland Retreat owners comprise about half of all Maine family landowners with 10-1000 acres of wooded land. Finding ways to reach and engage these landowners is therefore important for improving the quality and quantity of commercial harvesting in Maine.**

This document presents a strategy designed to bring more Woodland Retreat owners into contact with forestry professionals so they can look after their woods and harvest them sustainably.

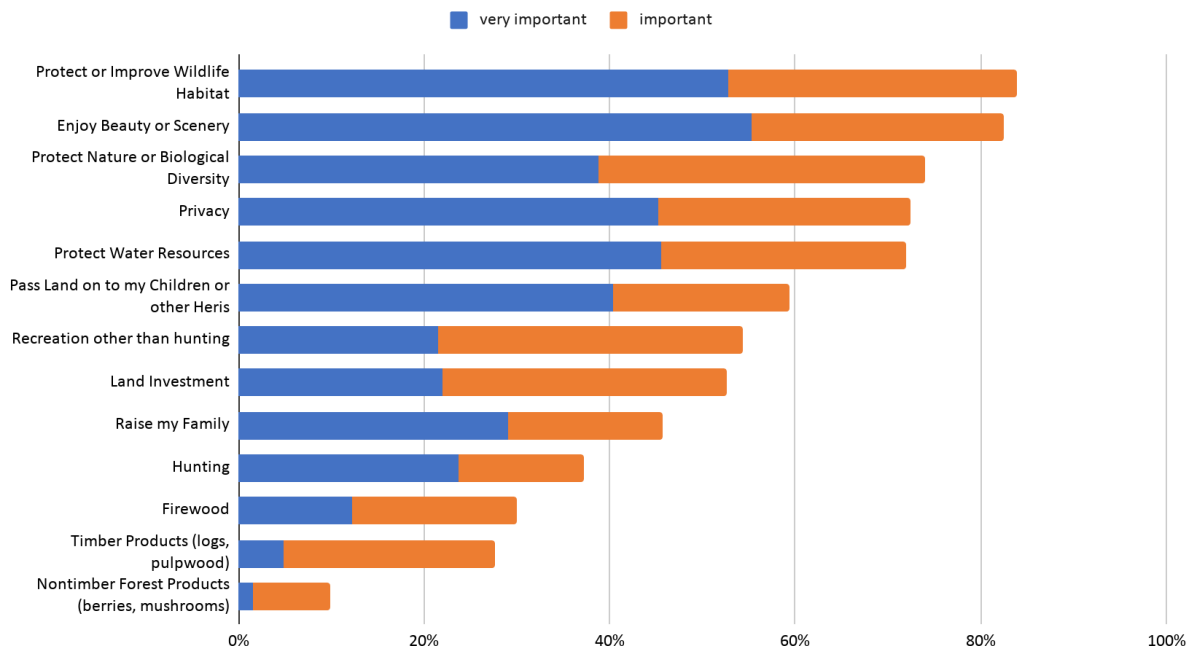
A Snapshot of Maine's Family Woodland Owners

In this section we offer a quick snapshot of Maine landowners. Unless otherwise noted, all reported figures are from the 2017-2018 iteration of the National Woodland Owner Survey.

Orientation to Woods

- **Owning wooded land is a lifestyle choice.** Four of every five Maine landowners have purchased some or all of their wooded land. Two-thirds of ME landowners (64%) have their primary residence on the land, and another quarter (23%) have a seasonal or vacation home on their wooded land. Fewer Maine woodland owners have farms attached to their woods (9%)
- Most wooded land is owned by family units, often married couples or siblings. While the survey data shows that men are the primary decision-makers for more than four of every five ownerships (84%), in practice, most decisions are made jointly by couples or families.
- **Most landowners (93%) own wooded land to enjoy and protect natural amenities.** This includes personal amenities (like enjoying beauty and maintaining privacy or recreational opportunities) and ecosystem amenities (like improving wildlife habitat or protecting water resources).

Landowners who cite these reasons for ownership as important or very important



- **Only about a quarter of landowners (28%) say that timber products are an important reason why they own their woods.** And only about a tenth of landowners (11%) rely on their woods for some portion of their household income. But landowners also recognize

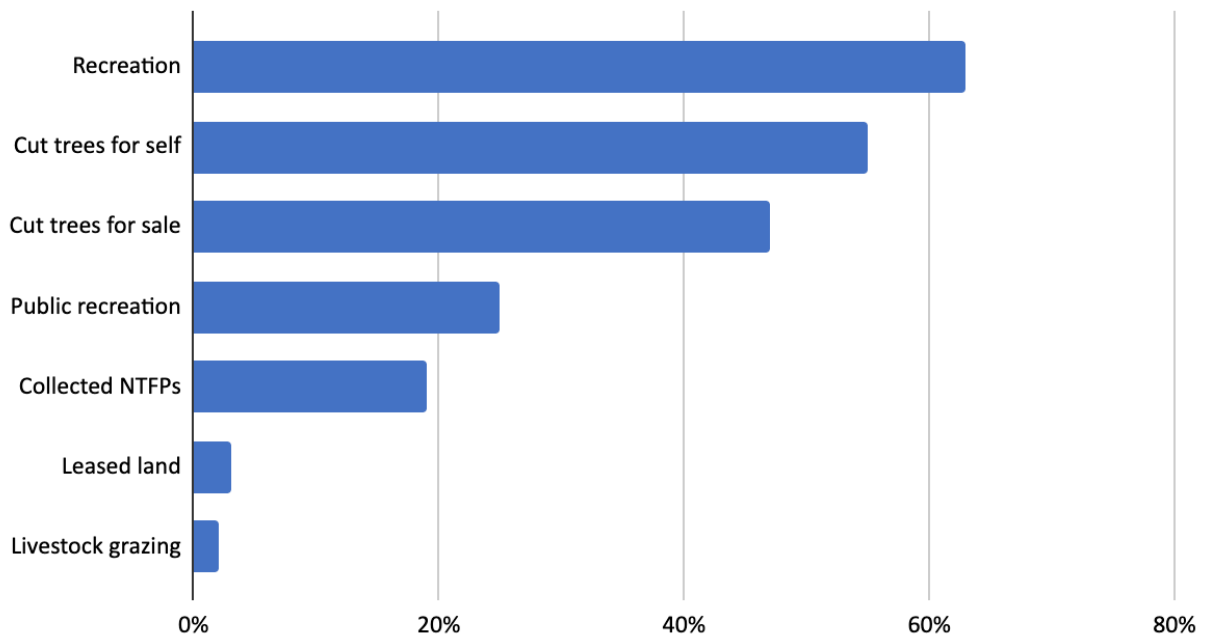
that their woods are a financial asset: **about half (53%) cite land investment as an important reason for owning wooded land.**

- **Most landowners (89%) want their wooded land to stay wooded.** Almost three-fourths (73%) say they are emotionally attached to their woods (73%) and more than half (60%) recognize that their wooded land benefits their community.
- **The majority of woodland owners want to keep their land intact and pass it to their heirs.** More than half of Maine's family landowners (59%) cite passing land to heirs as an important reason for owning woods. Family landowners tend to hold on to their wooded land for long periods of time—about half of the landowners in Maine with 10+ acres have owned their land for at least 25 years. On the other hand, almost one-third of landowners (30%) say they would sell their land if offered a good price.

Uses of Woodland

- **In keeping with these ownership objectives, the most important and widespread use of wooded land is simply outdoor recreation.** Almost two-thirds (63%) of landowners use their wooded land for hiking, hunting, animal-watching and other types of recreation. About half (51%) cut trees for personal use (e.g., firewood or fencing) and about a fifth (19%) collect non-timber forest products.
- **Although less than one-third of Maine's family landowners say they own their woods for timber production, close to one-half (49%) have harvested trees for sale at some point in their ownership.** Moreover, about one-fifth (19%) say they have harvested trees for sale in the past five years and about the same number plan a commercial harvest in the next five years. **These numbers, which are high relative to other states, reflect Maine's long tradition of forestry as well as the quality of its timber stands.**

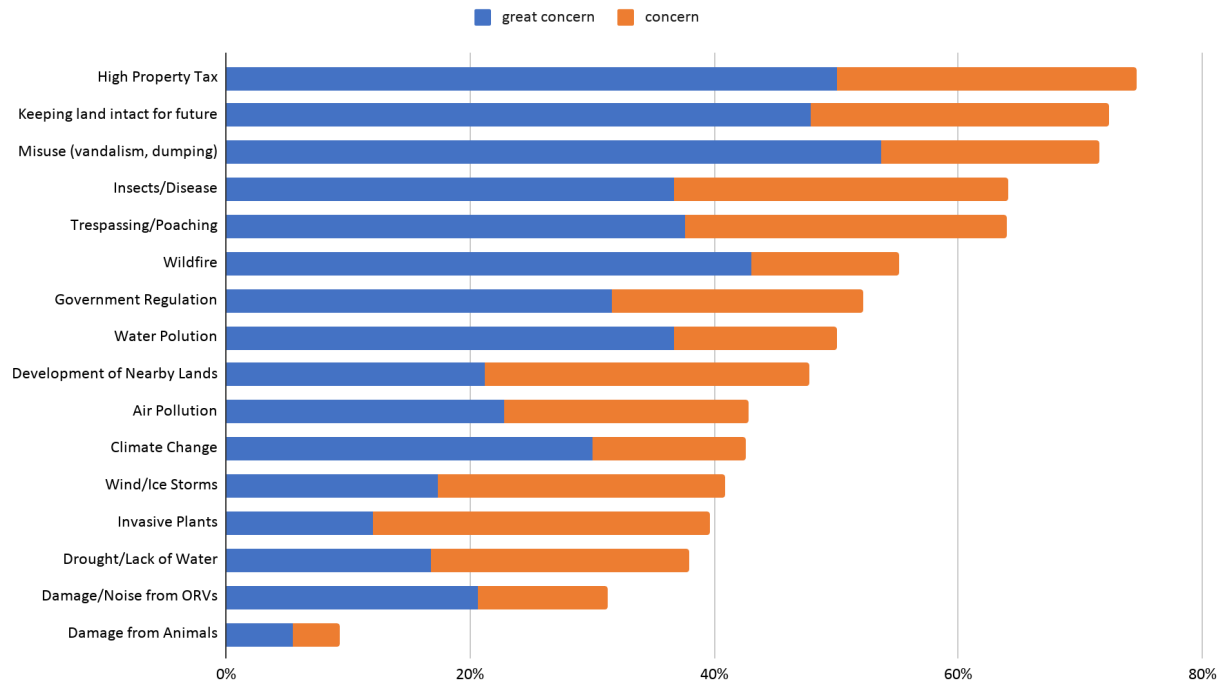
How Landowners Use their Wooded Land



Woodland Concerns

- **When asked about concerns regarding their woods, large numbers cite financial concerns such as high taxes (75%) and the ability to keep their land intact (72%).** Landowners also worry about protecting their land from direct human threats such as vandalism or dumping (72%) and trespassing or poaching (64%).
- **Almost two-thirds of landowners (64%) express concern over unwanted insects and diseases,** probably because these threats have such a dramatic and visible impact on the landscape. Fewer than half of landowners are concerned about other natural threats like pollution, invasive species and climate change.

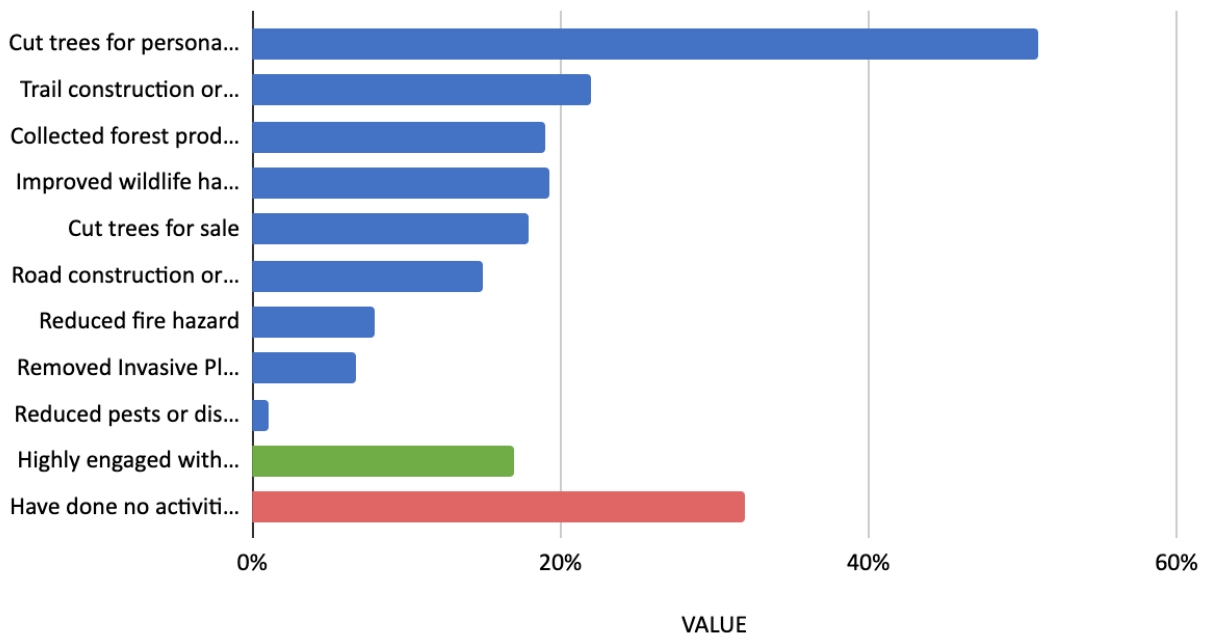
Landowner Concerns



Active Management of Woods

- **Although a quarter of Maine landowners have a management plan, NWOS data suggest that fewer than that are actively managing their land.** TELE classifies only 17% of Maine landowners as highly engaged with their land, which means that they have undertaken four or more management activities such as cutting trees, reducing invasives or building trails. About one-third (32%) of landowners have done no management activities on their land.
- Only about a fifth of Maine family landowners (19%) say they have received advice about the care, management or protection of their wooded land in the last five years, and only 7% report that they use a land manager or forester to help them make management decisions.

Land Management Activities in Past Five Years



Participation in Forestry Programs

- Awareness of most forestry programs is quite low, and participation rates are even lower.
 - About two-thirds of Maine landowners (64%) have some awareness of their state's tax program. However, only a quarter of landowners (26%) say they participate in this program.
 - About half of Maine landowners know about green certification and conservation easements, but only about 3 percent participate in these programs.
 - Only about a quarter (27%) have any knowledge at all of cost-share programs and only about 3 percent of landowners reported using this program in the last five years.

In summary: NWOS data show that Maine landowners own their woods primarily to enjoy woodland amenities, although many of them also use the land for firewood and timber. Passing land to their heirs and holding it as an investment are also important reasons for owning woods. Landowners are generally more concerned about human threats to their woods (such as taxes, regulation or trespassing) than natural threats, although nearly two-thirds are worried about insects and diseases in their woods. Finally, the data suggest that only about a fifth of landowners are highly active on their land, and that participation in state and federal incentive programs is quite low.

Understanding Woodland Retreat Owners

FOR/Maine's Small Woodland Owner committee has identified Woodland Retreat owners as the core audience for its work. This type of landowner is less likely to harvest trees for sale and less likely to plan for harvests and undertake forest management actions. They are also less likely to consult with foresters and participate in forestry programs. Woodland Retreat owners constitute nearly half of the family woodland owners in Maine, and are therefore an important audience for forestry programs and the forestry industry.

In this section we consider two important characteristics that define how Woodland Retreat owners make decisions about their woods. To bring these characteristics into sharper relief, we contrast Woodland Retreat owners with Working the Land type owners. These two segments of landowners share an appreciation for woodland amenities, but differ in how they think about the value of their woods and their role in preserving and improving their land.

Financial Considerations

One important variable that mediates landowners' decisions is the degree to which they think of their woods as a *productive* asset--i.e., as a means to generate income or build wealth. Landowners who think of their land as a productive asset are willing to invest time and effort to maximize woodland products and amenities, both for monetary gain and for the satisfaction of using their land well. This "working lands" philosophy is a defining characteristic of Working the Land type landowners.

In contrast, **Woodland Retreat owners are focused on enjoying and appreciating their woods, rather than generating income from them.** They believe that woodland amenities are intrinsically valuable, quite apart from human uses or valuation. Several studies have identified sub-categories of woodland retreat owners who prioritize different amenities.⁴ However, they are all similar in that they think of wooded land as an asset to be enjoyed and nurtured rather than a resource to be used for financial gain.

Even though Woodland Retreat owners are not seeking financial gain from their woods, their decisions are influenced by financial concerns in three important ways:

- *Resale Value of their Property:* Woodland Retreat owners own their woods to enjoy and protect natural amenities, but they also recognize that their land is a (nonproductive) financial asset that can be liquidated--i.e. sold--to yield a windfall when needed. Their decision to invest time or money in improving their land depends on how they think those improvements will impact future uses and the resale value of the land.
- *Cost of Improvements:* While woodland amenities are the primary motivator for many Woodland Retreat type owners, money can be a limiting factor in what they are able and

⁴ For example, some prioritize the needs of woodland flora and fauna while others want to maximize their own enjoyment of woodland amenities. Some have a strong sense of place and assess woodland amenities in the context of their community, while others have a more general stewardship ethic.

willing to do in their woods. Other things being equal, landowners will be more likely to undertake woodland improvements that are financially neutral or income-generating than those that draw upon their financial reserves.

- *Financial Need/Opportunity*: Decisions to harvest or sell wooded land are often driven by financial need and available options. Landowners who are uninformed about ways to generate income from their land or reduce ownership costs may feel that they have to sacrifice woodland amenities to make ends meet.

Stewardship Philosophy

Working the Land and Woodland Retreat types of landowners also tend to have different philosophies of stewardship.⁵ Working the Land type owners usually subscribe to the “Intensive Use/Intensive Care” philosophy of stewardship. To them, good stewardship means using the land judiciously; taking steps to improve the productivity of the land; and reducing the harmful impact of human and natural threats to the woods. **By contrast, many Woodland Retreat Owners adhere to a “Tread Lightly” philosophy. They believe that most natural processes are healthy for woods, and human use and impact are the main threats to woodland. For them, good stewardship is about minimizing human impact and letting the natural wood ecology flourish.** Many believe that doing nothing is the best way to manage woods.

The table on the next page summarizes some of these broad attitudinal differences among landowners. We have used the TELE terms for these two types of landowners but acknowledge that many other researchers have identified similar clusters.

⁵ Motivating Woodland Owners to Take Action: A focus group study of Woodland Retreat Owners and Working the Land Owners in North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Colorado. (Nov 2014). Available at: <https://www.engaginglandowners.org/sites/default/files/documents/resources/SFFI%20Focus%20Group%20Report%20November%202014.pdf>

Table 1: Key differences between Working the Land and Woodland Retreat type landowners.

	Working the Land Owners	Woodland Retreat Owners
Key Belief	Woods should be productive; woodland amenities and products have (or should have) monetary value	Woodland amenities are valuable in their own right, i.e. they have intrinsic value
Value woods for ...	Income generation and wealth creation Recreational amenities Natural amenities	Natural amenities and recreational opportunities
Stewardship philosophy	Woods need to be tended and managed judiciously to meet human needs	Minimize human interference—nature knows best and the less you mess with it, the better it is for your woods
Knowledge and capacity	Because these landowners anticipate financial returns from the land, they are willing to invest time and energy into learning how to maximize those returns. They tend to be well-connected to forestry professionals and government programs.	They don't see any compelling need for active management and are less likely to seek information and advice on this (unless there is a specific problem that demands their attention). They are less likely to use, or even be aware of, forestry programs and services.

Barriers to Commercial Harvesting

Research shows that commercial harvesting is influenced by many factors, some of which are characteristics of the land and others are related to the attitudes, beliefs and circumstances of the landowner. In this section we look at how these factors affect Woodland Retreat owners' decision to harvest trees for sale.

Silvicultural and Economic Factors

Characteristics of the land, availability of forestry infrastructure, and the vitality of timber markets are important determinants of commercial harvesting. Parcels of higher quality and larger size are more likely to be harvested, especially if they are easily accessible and close to mills. When markets are active, landowners are more likely to see harvests and be approached by loggers and foresters, which often influences their decision to harvest. Timber prices also affect harvests, but primarily by driving up market activity.⁶ Research shows that commercial harvesting is also correlated with financial need, and harvesting rates are higher in places with lower household income.⁷ In Maine, nearly two-thirds (64%) of landowners that harvest and complete the Harvest Satisfaction Survey indicate income as a harvesting goal.⁸

All these factors help to explain the low rates of harvesting by Woodland Retreat owners.

- **Smaller parcels.** Woodland Retreat owners tend to have smaller parcels which are less attractive to loggers, especially when timber prices are lower.
- **Less exposure to market activity.** Many Woodland Retreat owners live in exurban areas where logging activity is lower. They are therefore less likely to be approached by loggers or see harvesting operations on neighboring lands.
- **Less financial need.** On average, Woodland Retreat owners tend to be wealthier and better educated than the general landowner population, and are, therefore, less likely to need to cut their woods to meet urgent and unexpected expenses.

Landowner Attributes

While the importance of the economic and silvicultural factors that affect commercial harvesting should not be underestimated, Woodland Retreat owners' beliefs and attitudes to harvesting also play an important role.

⁶ David B. Kittredge and Jonathan R. Thompson. 2015. Timber Harvesting Behaviour in Massachusetts, USA: Does Price Matter to Private Landowners? *Small-scale Forestry* (2015) DOI 10.1007/s11842-015-9310-1.

⁷ Kittredge, D. B., J. R. Thompson, L. L. Morreale, A. G. Short Gianotti, and L. R. Hutyra. 2017. Three decades of forest harvesting along a suburban–rural continuum. *Ecosphere* 8(7):e01882. 10.1002/ecs2.1882

⁸ Maine Forest Service. 2016. Maine Harvest Satisfaction Survey - 2016 https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/projects/healthy_forests/downloads/pdfs/2016_hss_statewide_results_summary.pdf Accessed May 17, 2021.

- **Psychological distance from harvesting.** Huff, Leahy et al (2017) have used the concept of psychological distance to describe why some landowners simply don't think about harvesting or consider it relevant to their lives.⁹ They don't know the value of the timber on their land; they don't discuss harvesting with their family and friends; commercial harvests aren't part of their family tradition or their ownership goals and objectives; and they don't know how to go about arranging a commercial harvest. Many Woodland Retreat owners fall into this category--they simply don't think about harvesting as an option on their land.
- **Perceived negative impacts of harvesting.** Many Woodland Retreat Owners believe that commercial harvesting has a negative impact on the health of their woods. While they often cut trees for personal use, the scale of a commercial harvest makes it seem a lot more disruptive for plants and animals. Growing awareness of the value of mature woods as a carbon sink may further discourage landowners from harvesting timber.
- **Impact on aesthetic and recreational amenities.** Many Woodland Retreat owners have a home or vacation home on their land and may be opposed to management activities that affect their enjoyment of scenic beauty or recreational activities. Moreover they may conclude that a commercial harvest will affect the scenic beauty of their estate, and therefore its resale value.
- **Lack of knowledge and confidence.** Even when Woodland Retreat owners want to harvest, they may not have the knowledge and confidence to arrange a good harvest. They are not well-connected to forestry programs and services and may be intimidated by the complexity of planning a harvest; the opacity and volatility of timber markets; and by the variability and uncertainty of harvest outcomes.
- **Fear of harming their woods.** The trepidation with which most woodland owners approach a harvest is amplified for Woodland Retreat owners who have less familiarity with harvesting practices and with foresters and loggers. Negative messages about forestry professionals can exacerbate that fear. Stories about rogue or negligent loggers may dissuade some landowners from cutting their trees. Or, hearing that forester input is expensive and overrated can discourage them from using a forester to plan the harvest.

These characteristics of Woodland Retreat owners interact to make them less likely to plan for harvests on their land. This results in lost opportunities to generate income, and reduced resources for maintenance and upkeep of the land. It also puts them at higher risk for opportunistic or financially driven harvests. They may agree to a harvest just because they are approached by a buyer who makes an attractive offer. Or, under financial pressure, they may choose to clear-cut their land or sell it for other uses.

⁹ Emily S. Huff, Jessica E. Leahy, David B. Kittredge, Caroline L. Noblet, and Aaron R. Weiskittel. 2017. Psychological distance of timber harvesting for private woodland owners, *Forest Policy and Economics*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2017.04.007>

Fortunately, these attitudes are changeable. **The key to more and better harvests is connecting Woodland Retreat landowners to forestry professionals who can discuss forest management options in a way that is relevant and meaningful for them.** Engagement with forestry professionals is a highly effective action that addresses several landowner-related barriers to harvesting—it reduces psychological distance by making harvests more relevant for landowners; it addresses negative perceptions about harvesting; and it gives landowners the knowledge and confidence to plan and execute harvests that meet their goals. Not surprisingly, many research studies have found that landowners who actively manage their woods and are engaged with forestry programs and services are more likely to plan and execute a commercial harvest.¹⁰

In the next section, we look at what it will take to get more Woodland Retreat owners to seek advice from forestry professionals and become more engaged in managing their land.

¹⁰ Emily J. Silver, Jessica E. Leahy, Aaron R. Weiskittel, Carolina L. Noblet, and David B. Kittredge. 2015. An Evidence-Based Review of Timber Harvesting Behavior among Private Woodland Owners. *J. For.* 113 (5): 490-499. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5849/jof.14-089>

Barriers to Active Woodland Management

Engaging with a forestry professional can be the first step for landowners to become engaged in actively managing their woods. Yet, even though Woodland Retreat owners are curious about their woods, relatively few sign up for forester visits, and fewer still follow up with getting management plans, engaging consulting foresters, and undertaking forest management activities. In this section, we discuss the main barriers that prevent Woodland Retreat owners from seeking advice from forestry professionals, undertaking forestry projects, and participating in forestry programs.

1. Woodland Retreat landowners don't see a compelling reason to consult a forester.

Anecdotal evidence and qualitative research suggest that many landowners either don't know about foresters or believe that their primary role is to maximize returns from commercial harvests. Since Woodland Retreat landowners are not planning harvests, they see no need to pay a professional for woods-related advice. Even if they harvest trees for sale, confusion about the roles of different forestry professionals (e.g. consulting foresters, timber buyers, and loggers) makes it difficult for landowners to choose among them and be sure they are getting good advice.

Woodland Retreat landowners do understand that service and extension foresters play a different role than private consultants. They are likely to attend informational meetings or call extension services about problems in their woods. However, these interactions don't often lead to sustained and planned management of their woods for the reasons cited below.

To address this barrier, we need to rethink the role of foresters. In particular, we need to decouple forester services from timber sales and publicize a broader range of benefits and services that are more meaningful for Woodland Retreat owners, such as creating habitat, controlling invasives and pests, and improving recreational amenities.

2. Forestry projects are expensive.

The cost of management activities is an especially important barrier for Woodland Retreat owners. These landowners are less familiar with forestry activities and practices and are much less likely to be able to implement them without hiring contractors and laborers. Moreover, since they don't manage their woods for timber, they are unlikely to consider management activities as an "investment" and more likely to see it as an expense.

Woodland Retreat owners are also less likely to consider using incentive programs to fund land improvements. Many of them are simply not aware of these programs. Those that know about them may not be able or willing to sort through confusing information on various sites to ascertain which program is right for them. In addition, most cost-share programs assume a forest production mindset (with a timber harvesting goal),

which does not resonate with Woodland Retreat owners and reinforces their belief that these programs are not right for them.

Landowners are much more likely to undertake woodland improvement projects that are income-generating or revenue neutral. When commercial harvests are not feasible, government funding is one of the best tools for getting good management on the ground. In the Recommendations section, we offer ideas for using these funds more strategically to achieve desired impacts on the landscape.

3. Landowners don't get timely and relevant guidance to support management actions.

There are already many forestry publications and websites. But most of them are designed to “teach” landowners about forestry. While some landowners enjoy learning about forestry practices, the majority of them simply want to do what’s right for their land with minimum fuss and hassle. For these landowners, the deluge of information on landowner-facing websites can be overwhelming, confusing, and ultimately paralyzing. Moreover, they often have to sift through reports and brochures on different websites to find the information they need.

Woodland Retreat owners need well-curated and well-organized information from a credible, unbiased source. They should be able to access information in small, digestible chunks that fit their immediate needs and concerns. They also need personalized guidance and knowledgeable direction to help them make and implement decisions about their land.

4. Some types of land management and use are inconsistent with Woodland Retreat landowners' stewardship philosophy.

Woodland Retreat landowners are generally opposed to human interference in woodland ecosystems. They believe that natural processes are usually healthy for woods, and human use tends to harm their woods. This philosophy predisposes Woodland Retreat owners towards non-consumptive uses of woods and a minimalist, “tread lightly” approach to woodland stewardship.

However, this approach does not preclude actions to protect and improve woods. **To engage with these landowners, we do not need to challenge or contradict their stewardship values; rather we just need to tailor the conversation towards outcomes that they desire (e.g. improving fish habitat vs. preventing soil erosion) and techniques that are acceptable to them (e.g. taking appropriate measures to minimize damage to standing trees).**

Recommendations

As noted earlier in this report, the likelihood and intensity of commercial harvesting is significantly influenced by timber markets, forestry infrastructure and features of the land. More landowners will harvest their land if timber markets are healthy and well-organized; if logging is well-managed and regulated; and if their land's location, timber stock and physical features are conducive to a profitable harvest. Therefore, the work being done by other FOR/Maine to grow and professionalize the industry will have a strong impact on small woodland owners' ability and willingness to harvest trees for sale.

The goal of this project is to ensure that more Woodland Retreat owners are open to commercial harvests and have the information to make good choices for their woods. Research suggests that engagement with foresters and forestry programs is the best way to counter common barriers to harvesting and can both increase the amount of harvesting and improve the quality of the harvest. Therefore, our recommendations are geared towards achieving the two interrelated objectives:

1. Getting more Woodland Retreat owners to consult with a forestry professional and start taking a more active role in stewarding their woods; and
2. Encouraging Woodland Retreat owners to be open to commercial harvests *when financially feasible and ecologically advisable*. (We acknowledge that commercial harvests are not appropriate or cost-effective for all parcels and that landowners should consider harvests in the context of their goals and other management options.)

In this section we present three broad recommendations to accomplish these objectives along with practical program ideas to implement them.

Recommendation 1: Reframe the goals of landowner engagement

Traditional forestry services and programs are geared towards promoting sustainable use and judicious management of an economically valuable resource. In this context, woodland amenities (like wildlife habitat and trails) are often discussed as secondary benefits of managing woods for timber. This view of forests and forestry clashes with the world view of Woodland Retreat owners who own woods for recreational and environmental amenities and don't consider commercial harvests as a good option for their woods.¹¹

We need a fundamental shift in how forestry professionals market their programs and services to Woodland Retreat owners. This includes:

- Redefining the purpose of forestry practices as protecting and enhancing woodland amenities.

¹¹ In fact, this view of forests may no longer be valid for other types of landowners also. According to 2018 NWOS data, fewer than five percent of landowners rely on their woods for five percent or more of their income.

- Presenting commercial harvests as a tool to improve woodland health, either directly by creating healthier stands or improving wildlife habitat, or indirectly by generating income for improving woods and keeping the land intact.
- Promoting “active stewardship” instead of “active management”. The word management connotes commercially oriented control of woods and does not resonate with many Woodland Retreat owners.
- Positioning foresters as consultants that offer guidance and services for helping landowners keep, protect, and improve their wooded land.

Table 2: Reframing landowners’ engagement with woods.

	Active Management	Active Stewardship
Main goal	Maximizing future and current timber value	Keeping woods healthy for plants, animals and humans
Secondary benefits	Wildlife habitat and recreational amenities	Income to help landowners keep and improve their woods Enhancing resale value of land
Reason to consult with forestry professionals	Maximize timber income Manage timber sales Improve timber stands Improve soil or water quality	Improve wildlife habitat Improve resilience of woods Improve recreational amenities Access incentive programs and forestry resources

While some of this sounds simple and obvious, the low rates of Woodland Retreat owner engagement suggest that we haven’t done enough to engage Woodland Retreat owners, or that we haven’t done it right. Although some foresters and loggers have embraced the Woodland Retreat owners’ perspective, the field as a whole still sees a commercial harvest as a goal for most forestry operations and work to “educate” landowners to share their view.

Changing this orientation will not be easy. It is not simply a matter of using different outreach messages—it means changing in how we structure programs and services, how professionals interact with and support landowners, what kinds of landowner informational materials we create, and where we place these materials. On the next few pages we describe two ideas for initiating this shift—(1a) disseminating new messages that appeal to Woodland Retreat owners and (1b) following those up with a service tailored to their values, knowledge level and stewardship priorities.

1a. Disseminate messages that get more Woodland Retreat owners to engage with a forestry professional.

A conversation with a forester or other forestry professional is an important touch point for landowners, and it can be the first step on the path to active stewardship. To get more Woodland Retreat owners to consult forestry professionals, we need to offer them services that they find relevant, and promote benefits that they see as worth their time and trouble. Landowners will doubtless learn new things via these interactions; but the initial hooks to engage them need to be based on their current mental models about their land.

We recommend conducting a communication campaign specifically designed to get Woodland Retreat owners to consult a forestry professional. Sample messages for this campaign are shown on page 21.¹² These messages:

1. Focus on benefits that have broad appeal among Woodland Retreat owners, viz., protecting the woods from current and future threats and improving wildlife habitat.
2. Present forester visits as expert assessments. This is because these landowners are curious about their woodland resources; they love them but are unable to gauge their value in any objective way.
3. Offer initial consultations that are free of cost and entail no obligation on the landowner's part. This is essential because landowners are unaware of the value that forestry professionals can provide. Asking them to pay for a service or commit to an action of uncertain benefit is likely to be a huge barrier.

It will also be important to use a combination of traditional and non-traditional dissemination channels to get these messages to Woodland Retreat owners. Since these landowners are unlikely to be engaged in forestry programs, existing agency and extension newsletters are not adequate for reaching them. Newsletters of conservation and outdoor recreation organizations can be good channels. Direct mail is also useful, but one or two mailings are unlikely to do the trick. Messages are much more likely to yield action when landowners see or hear them 3-5 times and, preferably, from different sources (e.g. real estate agents, community Facebook pages, Homeowners Associations). While the right mix of channels will vary by region, *the important thing is to place these messages in community channels and locations that landowners frequent, rather than expect them to come to our preferred channels.*

Looking to the Future: Plan for growing interest in carbon sequestration

While there is little data on this, our interviews suggest that Maine landowners are also very curious about their woods' carbon sequestration capacity. We recommend keeping track of this trend and, when appropriate, building a forester service around carbon assessment.

¹² Please note that these messages are not finished materials. They are simply concepts to be developed for use in outreach campaigns.

Sample messages to get Woodland Retreat Owners to seek advice from a woodland consultant.

Message 1

If your woods were under stress, would you know?



Your woods may look perfectly fine right now, but they are under threat from insects, disease, and pollution.

A forester can help you spot signs of trouble and suggest simple actions to protect your woods and wildlife.

Call xxx-xxxx today to schedule a free “health check” for your woods and discuss ways to keep them healthy and beautiful.

Message 2

Want to see more wildlife in your woods?



Your woods provide shelter and food for many birds and animals.

A wildlife specialist can help you make your woods more inviting for wildlife and connect you with programs to help pay for these improvements.

Call xxx-xxxx today to schedule an assessment of your woods and discuss ways to support wildlife on your land.

1b. Create a cadre of “woodland consultants” who are trained to guide Woodland Retreat owners on the path to active stewardship.

Our messages to woodland retreat owners position foresters as “woodland consultants” who can help family woodland owners to protect and improve their land for their own enjoyment and for future generations. To deliver on this promise, we recommend developing a cadre of woodland consultants who are especially skilled in advising Woodland Retreat owners.

Woodland consultants will be trained in guiding landowners towards forestry actions that are right for them, based on the risks and opportunities on their land; their knowledge level and appetite for woodland projects; and what can be funded via incentive programs or timber harvests. Their conversations with landowners will be focused on:

- Assessing woodland threats and risks (based on the parcel conditions and region-wide conditions) and helping landowners to find funds to address any immediate and urgent concerns (like fuel reduction, or controlling pests).
- Giving landowners simple recommendations tailored to their interest and capacity. For some landowners, the best recommendation may be simply to schedule another woodland consultation in a few years. Others may be ready to get a management plan and start implementing some forestry practices. These recommendations could be presented as a simple checklist of 3-5 threats/opportunities for the landowner to consider.
- If appropriate, working with landowners to conceptualize forestry projects that make sense for their woods. This involves matching landowners’ interests with regional conservation needs and funding priorities, and connecting them to technical and financial assistance providers.
- Advising woodland owners about ways to reduce cost of ownership and fund any forestry projects.

These talking points are not new: many foresters are already pioneering this style of engagement. A collaboration like FOR/Maine is well-positioned to identify professionals who are ready and willing to specialize as woodland consultants. Some of them can be district foresters, but selected consulting foresters and loggers could also fill this role.

This first cohort could also be charged with developing field-tested tools and protocols for informing these consultations (e.g. list of questions to ask, a template for a one-page recommendation sheet, tools for follow-up, etc.) and training other foresters in successful landowner interactions. Eventually, this information could be consolidated to create a training program to grow the number of forestry professionals that are equipped to reach and engage Woodland Retreat owners.

Scaling Up the Program

In the long run, we hope that all public and private sector forestry professionals will be prepared to meet Woodland Retreat owners where they are and guide them on the path to active stewardship. This will require a change in forestry education and culture, which are still heavily geared towards timber production. Alternatively, this coalition could help institute a training program that instructs forestry professionals on engagement strategies and stewardship issues that are relevant for Woodland Retreat owners, and certifies professionals who have specialized in this kind of outreach.

Engaging Woodland Retreat owners effectively will also require a change in forestry's dominant business model, wherein most service providers get paid a cut of the timber sales and are, therefore, oriented towards that event. If consulting foresters or loggers are to serve as unbiased guides, we will need to find a different way to compensate them for their time and expertise. To start, grant funds may be needed to fill this gap. Eventually, we hope that landowners will grow to see the value of this unbiased expert consultation and will be willing to pay qualified private sector professionals for this service.

Recommendation 2: Support Action by High-Priority Landowners

One major failing of forestry programs is that they put the onus of initiating action on the landowner. We assume that once we have provided information to landowners, or written a management plan for them, they will take action when they are ready. Most landowners don't do that.

The failure to follow up with landowners is often attributed to the lack of time and resources. In actuality, however, this is a mistake that results in a lot of wasted effort—a little like transporting water in a leaky bucket. **The effectiveness and efficiency of landowner outreach efforts would be improved substantially if outreach agencies (1) focus their resources to support action by high-priority landowners and (2) institute simple systems to keep these landowners engaged, motivated and active.**

In this section, we recommend three things that the FOR/Maine coalition can do to support sustained engagement and appropriate action by high-priority landowners.

2a. Provide follow-up support and guidance to high-priority landowners.

Landowners in general, and Woodland Retreat owners in particular, need timely reminders for planned actions, and directly relevant information to make those actions seem more manageable and doable. It is both difficult and wasteful to provide this kind of detailed service to all landowners. Therefore, it is crucially important to identify high-priority parcels and landowners who will receive more systematic follow-up support.

Identifying High-Priority Parcels

This project has two goals: to have an impact on the landscape and on the timber supply. We want to engage landowners in active forestry so that we can improve Maine's woods and sustainably harvest more and better timber in the state. *To achieve these goals, our resources are best focused on landowners who have the opportunity and willingness to practice good forestry and participate in timber markets.*

Parcel size may be a good starting point for making this determination. Many forestry practices are implemented effectively on parcels of at least 40-50 acres. With some exceptions, similar parcel sizes are needed to make commercial harvests a viable option. Luckily, nearly three-quarters (74%) of the total family forest land in Maine is held in parcels of 50 acres or more. Given limited resources, it makes sense to focus outreach efforts to influence the behavior of these landowners whose decisions have an outsized impact on the landscape.

Other factors such as the interest and willingness of the landowner and the quality and location of the parcel can also be used to refine the definition of high-priority parcels. And, certainly, interested landowners with smaller parcels should not be discouraged or turned away if they want to practice good forestry. The main point is that we need to set some criteria to determine which landowners (and parcels) merit more proactive and intensive follow-up.

The most efficient and reliable way to organize ongoing support for high-priority landowners is to set up a centralized database. This can be used to track their interests and send them tailored, relevant and timely cues and information 2 to 3 times per year. For example, if a landowner expresses interest in habitat creation, they would be sent information about the New England Cottontail program when it becomes active in their area. Or, landowners who are planning pre-commercial improvement harvests would get information about EQIP program applications and deadlines. **The key thing is to tailor this communication to landowners' goals and interests, so that each landowner receives only a few emails that are directly and practically relevant for them.**

This automated alert system serves four important purposes:

1. It reduces "psychological distance" and helps keep woodland management more "front of mind" for landowners.
2. It provides landowners with clear and specific reminders and information to take planned actions.
3. It reduces the burden on individual foresters to stay in touch with landowners.
4. It greatly streamlines the process of finding qualified applicants for targeted incentive programs and grant funds (see recommendation 2c).

Getting Started, then Scaling Up

This landowner contact management system can start out as a small and simple Excel spreadsheet that contains basic information about landowners who request visits from woodland consultants. After each visit, woodland owners would ask landowners if they are interested in follow-up information and support. If the landowner agrees, they would enter basic information about the landowner into the database (such as the landowners' email address, parcel location and size, whether they have a management plan, and what activities or outcomes are of interest to them).

Over time, this database could be expanded to include all high-priority landowners in a particular area—e.g., landowners who participate in the Tree Growth program, those that have management plans, or those that have larger land parcels of high timber or conservation value. It could also be expanded to include more information about these landowners, such as their responses to different messages and programs.

The Maine Forest Service would be the most logical entity to house and maintain this expanded database. For example, the Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) has been using a custom database since 2000, in which all AFC staff record interactions with landowners, from sending a mailing, to conducting a site visit or supplying trees for a replanting project. The database allows AFC to track landowners' progress through their programs and reach out to specific cohorts of landowners based on their needs and interests. A database like this can be incredibly useful for ensuring follow-up with landowners and identifying the most eligible candidates for specific programs. Custom databases are not hard to design and implement, but any tracking system requires a level of dedication to ensure entries are updated with each interaction.

2b. Create a one-stop-shop of information to guide landowners' actions

Most landowner resources (websites, brochures, etc.) impart general information to help landowners to understand their management options. There are fewer free resources to help landowners address practical and logistical challenges of implementing stewardship projects.

We recommend establishing a resource (e.g., a website and/or a phone line) to answer landowners' questions about how to organize and implement management activities on their land.

This resource would combine relevant information from different sources to be a **“one-stop-shop” to support implementation**. It would seek to create a smooth, seamless experience for landowners so they can easily get information that they need. The content would be organized by what landowners want to do rather than by source or program. For example, the site would have specific sections on:

- Planning and executing sustainable harvests
- Controlling pests and invasives
- Creating wildlife habitat

The information would be carefully curated to help landowners make good decisions and implement projects successfully. For example, the section on harvesting would have information about:

Consideration stage

- Why landowners might want to harvest commercially and what they can expect for their timber
- What constitutes a sustainable and well-executed harvest
- How harvests affect woodland amenities (immediately after the harvest and in later years)
- The complementary roles of different forestry professionals (esp., loggers and foresters)
- How and when to schedule a consultation with a forestry professionals

Planning stage

- Common problems or concerns (and how to avoid them/address them)
- Consolidated information about grants and incentive programs to fund pre-commercial harvests and practices (so landowners can decide which is right for them)
- How to find and engage reliable vendors to implement the project (e.g., questions to ask potential vendors, getting estimates from multiple loggers, giving clear project parameters so you get accurate bids, key elements of a fair contract, etc.)

This resource can start small—for example, it might, at first, only include detailed guidance for planning and executing a good harvest. It could later grow to include information on other topics. In time, it could also develop into a platform for landowners to share their experiences or advise each other about implementing these projects.

2c. Re-purpose and streamline incentive programs

State and Federal incentive programs are intended to get landowners started on the path to stewardship. However, participation in these programs is very low. Landowners are confused and intimidated by the (seemingly) arbitrary requirements of different programs and have a hard time relating NRCS funding categories to what they want to do. Many see the partial cost-share as insufficient incentive to take action. As a result, cost-share programs tend to be tapped repeatedly by a small set of landowners who are already actively managing their lands and have learned to work the system.

Moreover, a scatter-shot approach to incentivizing landowner actions results in wasted resources that go to lower-priority actions and geographies, even as conservation and stewardship programs struggle to persuade more landowners to take actions that meaningfully address local risks and priorities. If the goal is to actually improve the state's forest resources, reimbursing landowners to take the highest priority action on highest priority lands is a far more cost-effective strategy than making partial payments for a wide variety of actions all across the landscape.

If used strategically, incentive programs can be a powerful tool to shape what landowners do on their land. These programs can have a greater impact if they are tailored towards promoting

needed forestry practices and streamlined to encourage widespread use. Specifically we recommend:

1. **Creating landscape-specific, time-bound funding “pots” that offer landowners full funding and comprehensive technical assistance to implement practices that are most needed in that area.** For example: the coastal areas could have targeted program funding to combat the hemlock woolly adelgid. Or, in overstocked areas with poor forestry infrastructure, a special fund could be set up to make harvests more feasible for small landholders.
2. **Improving awareness and understanding of available funds and program requirements.** Few landowners are aware of funding programs, and even forestry professionals are somewhat confused about the requirements of different programs. We recommend directing landowners to a one-stop-shop that integrates and simplifies program information from different sources (see recommendation 2b above).
3. **Simplifying and aligning the requirements for different funding programs** to reduce the application burden on landowners. For example, FOR/Maine could catalyze the creation of a standardized funding application and management plan template as a “basic” requirement, with different programs adding questions and information as needed. (This is akin to the Common Application, through which students can apply to many colleges, even though each college layers on additional questions or materials.)
4. **Aligning descriptions of these programs with woodland owners’ goals and interests.** To make these programs more appealing to Woodland Retreat owners, we suggest rewriting the program descriptions and promotional materials to de-emphasize the forest products industry and emphasize the value of land stewardship. Even small changes in the text can go a long way towards motivating more landowners to consider these programs as options for their woods. (See the Box below for an example.)

We recognize that these changes are not easy. However, even partial progress will yield big dividends. We therefore recommend that FOR/Maine convene a working group of representatives of NRCS, MFS, FWS and other grant-making agencies to consider these changes.

Recommendation 3: Disseminate messages that invite landowners to learn more about the benefits of sustainable harvesting

Many Woodland Retreat owners see harvesting as a necessary evil—an activity that reduces ecological and aesthetic amenities, but is necessary for generating income and supporting livelihoods. They believe that woods are often over-harvested to serve corporate interests. Concerns about climate change make it seem even more important to protect forest cover. Most importantly, they don't see planned harvests as part of the cycle of renewal in their own woods. They see this as something large companies do in large forests, or something that people do when they need money, often right before selling their land.

To address these negative perceptions, and to help clarify some of landowners' misconceptions about harvesting, we recommend disseminating messages that encourage landowners to seek our information about commercial harvests in their woods. **The next pages have three examples of messages that will convince Woodland Retreat owners to consider a commercial harvest in their woods.**¹³ These messages:

- Acknowledge the validity of their concerns by promoting wise and sustainable harvests. In other words, this campaign promotes *wiser and better* harvesting rather than *more* harvesting.
- Emphasize benefits of harvesting that matter to them—improving woodland health and wildlife habitat, building strong and sustainable local economies, and generating some income to be able to keep and improve their woods.
- Direct them to a resource to seek more information about harvesting sustainably. If planned well, the harvesting section of the “one-stop-shop” could be a good place for landowners to get basic information about planning a sustainable harvest. It could also direct landowners to service foresters when they have general questions; and connect them with consulting foresters or master loggers when they are ready to proceed.

The success of this campaign will hinge on disseminating these messages at the community level. Research shows that messages—particularly those that challenge existing ideas—have a greater impact when they gain currency in a community. Landowners will be far more likely to believe these messages and act on them if they hear them from a variety of locally trusted sources, including land trusts, planning boards and commissions, assessors, and managers of local parks and recreational facilities. Reaching and convincing these influencers is important, both for reaching woodland retreat owners and for influencing the management of public resources.

¹³ Please note that these messages are not finished materials. They are simply concepts to be developed for use in outreach campaigns.

Sample messages to get woodland retreat owners to explore commercial harvests on their land

Message 1

Did you know that harvests can be good for your woods?

Wise, well-planned harvests renew your woods and make them more resilient. Plus, the income can help you keep and improve your land.

Call XXX or visit goodstewardship.org/harvest to see what you can expect from a harvest.



Message 2

Sustaining Maine's Woods

The future of Maine's forests depends on landowners like you.

We need wise, well-planned harvests to keep the woods healthy and create needed habitat for native birds and animals.

Call XXX or visit goodstewardship.org/harvest to learn when and how you should harvest your woods.



Message 3

Wood: Renewable, Sustainable, and Local

Renewable materials are more important than ever, and here in Maine, we grow one of the best: trees.

With a well-planned harvest, you can support your local economy, while making sure your woods continue to thrive.

Call XXX or visit goodstewardship.org/harvest to see what a sustainable harvest means for your woods.



Concluding Thoughts

The decisions and actions of family landowners affect nearly a third of wooded land in the United States. Engaging them in good forestry and informed stewardship is important, both for the health of our forests and the forest products industry. Yet, recent trends in land ownerships, landowner characteristics, and forestry infrastructure have made it harder for forestry professionals to connect with family woodland owners. In particular, Woodland Retreat owners—a significant and growing segment of the landowner population—have proved to be an elusive audience for forestry services and programs.

We note this to affirm that the problem that the Small Woodland Owner committee has set out to solve is not unique to Maine. Moreover, the solutions proposed in our report are not brand new. They have been tested in many places and contexts, albeit in a piecemeal fashion and on a smaller scale. We know what needs to be done. What is needed is the will and courage to do it.

Our recommendations can be implemented statewide or via pilot projects in selected regions. What is crucial is that any communication campaign needs to be accompanied by programmatic changes. Better messages are part of the solution. When disseminated smartly, they will spark landowners' interest and initiate engagement. But taking landowners from "I am interested" to actual actions on the ground requires establishing systems and programs to sustain landowner engagement and support needed stewardship actions.

We recognize that making these changes will be difficult. But the stakes are too high to continue with business as usual. All the demographic, economic and land ownership trends are suggesting that forestry must reinvent itself to cater to a landowner population that looks at natural resources differently. Across the United States, the forestry community needs to find a new way to engage this audience. We hope that Maine will lead the way in this effort.