

## Survey highlights importance of U.S. Family Woodland Owners

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Forests provide benefits at local, regional, and global scales. Families and individuals own more wooded land than any other group in the U.S., and their decisions about how to manage and care for their land have broad impacts. Understanding these woodland owners in the U.S., including what they do with their land and why, and what their challenges and needs are, is important to help support healthy forests and vibrant communities now and into the future.

Here, we use “woodland” as a broad term to include woods, woodlots, timberlands, and forests – any patch of trees that’s more than one acre in size. Families and individuals who own wooded land – collectively, “family woodland owners,” can be one person, a joint ownership of spouses or other individuals, family partnerships, family LLCs or LLPs, and family trusts or estates. We use “ownerships” to refer to all the owners of a piece of woodland.

To better understand family woodland owners, the USDA Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, through the Family Forest Research Center, conducts the [National Woodland Owner Survey](#) (NWOS). The survey asks landowners about who they are, why they own their wooded land, what they have done with it in the past, and what do they intend to do with it in the future. Below we present results from 9,518 randomly selected U.S. woodland ownerships with 1+ acres who responded to the survey in 2017 and 2018.

### Family Woodland Owners Count!

An estimated 272 million acres of wooded land in the U.S. are owned by an estimated 9.6 million family ownerships. Family ownerships control 39% of America’s wooded land, more than any other ownership group, including the federal government or forest industry.

### Size of Holdings Makes a Big Difference

The average wooded land ownership in the U.S. has 28 acres of wooded land. The majority (62%) of ownerships have relatively small holdings between 1-9 acres, but 58% of the *area* of wooded land is owned by ownerships with 100 acres or more. This is important because size of holdings limits what an ownership can do with their land, such as timber harvesting, wildfire protection, or control of invasive species, and often impacts what programs they are eligible for. Because of the increased management options, program involvement, and other dynamics of larger ownerships, all following results are for family woodland owners with **10 or more acres**.

### Beauty, Wildlife, and Nature are What Matter

The most commonly cited reasons for owning woodland are related to the beauty and privacy the wooded land provides as well as wildlife and nature protection. The goal of passing land onto future generations is also important to many owners. Financial objectives, such as land investment and timber production, are important to some owners, but they are not as common as other objectives.

### They Love Their Land

Most family woodland owners in the U.S. have a deep love of their land. The vast majority of owners, 88%, agree or strongly agree with the statement “I want my wooded land to stay wooded.” 66% of

owners agree or strongly that they have a strong emotional tie to their wooded land, and 78% say they know their wooded land well.

### **Management**

In the past five years, around one in twelve (8%) family woodland owners have cut or removed trees for sale, and one in three (34%) have cut trees for their own use. 13% have improved wildlife habitat, and 21% have reduced invasive plants. Only 5% have a written management plan, and 11% have received woodland management advice in the previous five years.

### **They are Older**

The average age of primary decision makers for family-owned woodland in the U.S. is 63 years. 19% of acres are owned by people who plan to transfer some or all of their wooded land in the next five years, and a majority of ownerships (69%) are worried about keeping the land intact for future generations. 72% of primary decision makers are male.

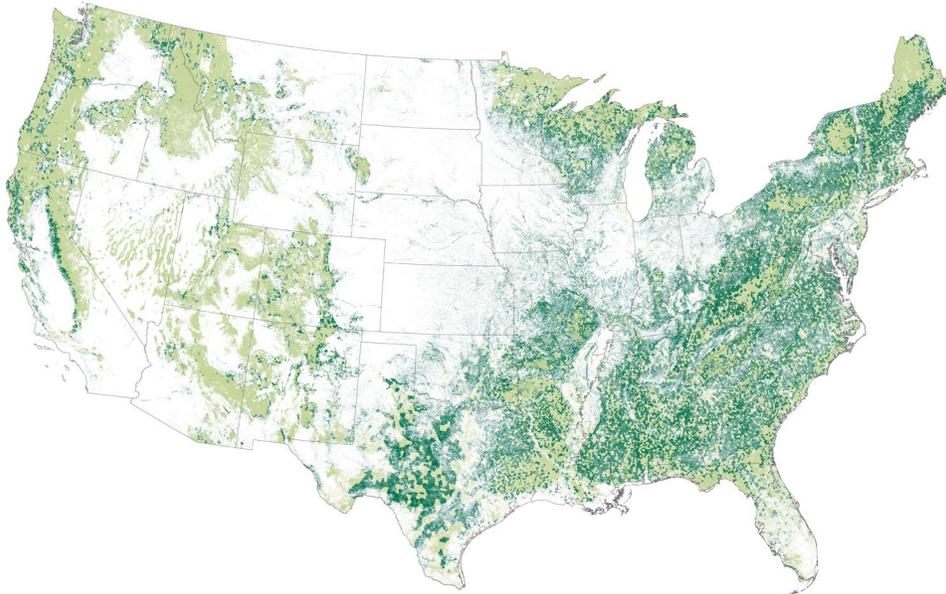
### **Conclusions**

Woodland conservation and management depend on the people who own it – in the U.S., many of these acres are held by individuals and families. Owners care about and manage their wooded land, but often the traditional forms of engagement, such as having a management plan or working with a professional, are not widely used. Understanding the threats to the land – including the loss of forest through development, parcelization, invasive plants, disease, and insects, and other issues – is critical for conservation efforts. Using a common language and designing policies and programs that meet the needs of landowners and professionals will have a major impact on the current and future owners and the vital lands that they own.

For more results, visit the USDA Forest Service's National Woodland Owner Survey website at [www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos](http://www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos). To learn more about the services and resources available to woodland owners in your state, contact your local forestry agency or association.

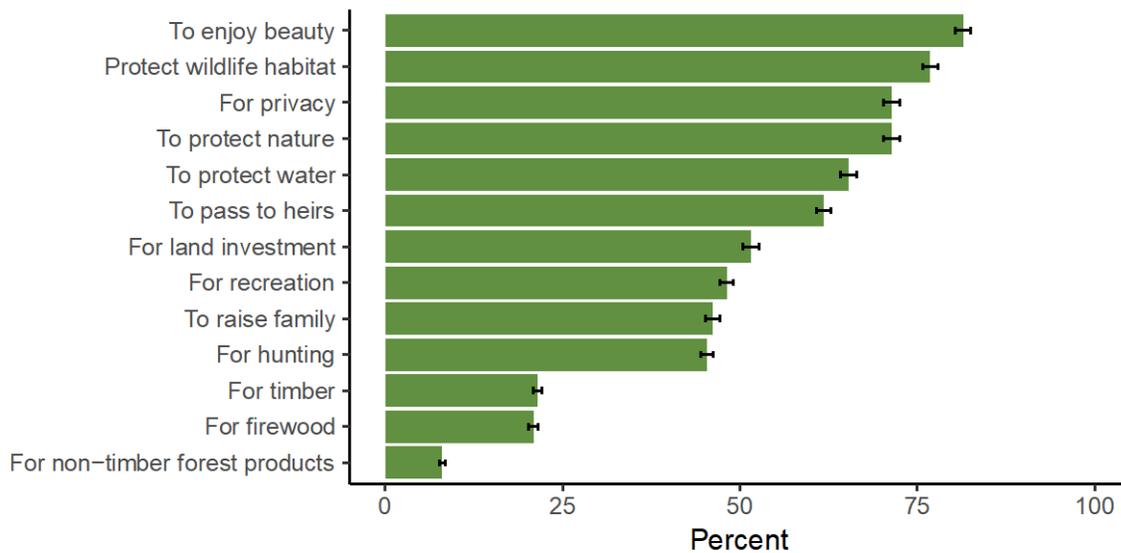
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## Map of woodland ownership



Family woodland (■), other woodland (■), and non-woodland (□) in the U.S. Data source: [USDA Forest Service](#).

## Reasons for owning wooded land



The percent of family woodland owners (with 10+ acres) in the U.S. for whom each objective is “Important” or “Very important.” Error bars represent 68% confidence interval. Data source: [USDA Forest Service, National Woodland Owner Survey](#).

## Sidebar with key facts

- Families and individuals own 39% of wooded land in the U.S.
- Most own their wooded land for beauty, privacy, and nature

- 88% of family woodland owners want their wooded land to stay wooded
- A third of landowners have cut trees for their own use, and 8% have cut trees for sale in the past five years
- 5% have a management plan and 11% have received advice about their wooded land in the past five years