

Sustainable Forestry and African American Retention Program - Baseline Research

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Sustainable Forestry And African American Retention Program

- ▶ **Funded by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities**
- ▶ **2012: 30-month pilot projects in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alabama**
- ▶ **2015 & 2016: Pilot projects continued and new projects funded in Georgia and Arkansas**
- ▶ **Baseline Research July – September 2014 in three pilot project states to learn more about African American landowners, heirs' property, and participation in forestry.**
- ▶ **Currently completing follow-up research on successful engagement with forestry and social networks.**

Baseline Research Methods

Rapid Appraisal Qualitative Sampling:

- ▶ 20 landowners each in SC, NC, and AL
- ▶ 10 Acres or more of land
- ▶ Half core program participants, Half less involved
- ▶ Purposive sample to represent diversity
- ▶ Introduction by project personnel
- ▶ Conducted at or near land when possible



Demographics



Demographic	Number	Percent
Age (in years)		
≤50 ^a	5	8.3
51–70	40	66.7
>70	15	25.0
Gender		
Male	21	3.05
Female	23	38.3
Couple	16	26.7
Education (primary interviewee)		
High school ^b	2	3.3
Some college	14	23.3
Bachelors	7	11.7
Post graduate	35	58.3
Nonresponse	2	3.3
Employment		
Part-time employed	3	5.0
Full-time employed	20	33.3
Retired	37	61.7
Income		
<\$25,000	8	13.3
\$25,000–\$50,000	8	13.3
\$50,000–\$100,000	13	21.7
\$100,000–\$250,000	5	8.3
>\$250,000	3	5.0
Nonresponse	23	38.3

^aFour additional young people (age < 20) attended interviews with family members.

^bThree parents in multi-generation interviews had less than a high school education.

Land



Land characteristics	Number	Percent
Acres held		
≤20	8	13.3
21–50	15	25.0
51–100	16	26.7
101–500	21	35.0
Tenure		
Title	36	60.0
Heirs' property	16	26.7
Both ^a	8	13.3
How land was obtained		
Purchase	11	18.3
Inherit	39	65.0
Combination	9	15.0
Nonresponse	1	1.7
Productivity		
Makes money	7	11.7
Costs money	32	53.3
About even	15	25.0
Nonresponse	6	10.0

^a Some families had parcels of both titled land and heirs' property.

History and meaning of the land

- ▶ **Long historical ties to the land**
 - ▶ Multi-generational
 - ▶ Residence on land or frequent visits since childhood
- ▶ **Stories of struggle to obtain and retain land**
- ▶ **Many stories of land loss**
 - ▶ 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**
 - ▶ Family and community
 - ▶ Identity
 - ▶ Family reunions
 - ▶ Hard work, struggle, responsibility
 - ▶ Autonomy
- ▶ **Opportunity**
- ▶ **Land's role in risk reduction** (place to stay, collateral)

Ownership and Taxes

- ▶ **Broad definition of heirs' property: all inherited land regardless of title**
 - ▶ Tradition versus legal status
- ▶ **Complexity of legal heirs property situations**
- ▶ **Taxes:** Single or shared payments?
- ▶ **Various ways of dealing with it:**
 - ▶ Divide and go your own way
 - ▶ Informal division/separate tax parcels
 - ▶ Divide and manage together
 - ▶ 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: fewer ties to the 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**



Desired uses of the land

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



Forestry



Activity/assistance program	Number	Percent
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Activities		
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Tree planting – Yes	16	26.7
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Tree planting – No	44	73.3
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Burning – Yes	8	13.3
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Burning – No	52	86.7
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Thin or harvest – Yes	31	51.7
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Thin or harvest – No	29	48.3
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Use of cost share		
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Yes (before program)	9	15.0
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Yes (recent)	9	15.0
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Applied (recent)	1	1.7
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No	41	68.3
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Forest management plan		
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Yes (before program)	7	11.7
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Yes (recent)	7	11.7
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In process	13	21.7
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No	33	55.0
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Experience with forestry activities, plans, and programs

▶ **People 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

Information exchange

- ▶ **Program personnel provided:**
 - ▶ 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.**

Role of the Sustainable Forestry program

- ▶ Initial source of information, advice, recommendations
- ▶ Connecting landowners with each other
- ▶ Integrated activities of the program are getting people's attention at different levels



Conclusions and Synergies

- ▶ **Family land is very important for cultural reasons.**
- ▶ **Heirs' property land holding is complex**
 - ▶ **Family members on and off the land**
 - ▶ **Informal divisions and tax parcels**
 - ▶ **Family agreement challenges**
 - ▶ **Returns from land rarely cover taxes**
- ▶ **Forestry compatible with demographics and can provide impetus to resolve heirs' property.**

Thank you!



Success Indicators

Landowners: **662**

Total Acres: **52,000**

Forest Management Plans: **247**

EQIP 2017: **\$2.5 million**

Forestry Practices: **205**

Wills and Estate Plans: **92**



Photo: Donar Reiskoffer

Photos: Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation