Family woodland owners include the families, individuals, trusts, estates, family partnerships, and other unincorporated groups of individuals that own an acre or more of land with at least 10% tree cover. These groups constitute approximately 10 million ownerships and nearly 272 million acres.

Family woodland owners control 39% of the nation's woodlands.*

These forests provide countless benefits to the owners and society as a whole, ranging from clean water and timber supply to recreation and beauty. The National Woodland Owner Survey asks private woodland owners why they own their wooded land, what they do on their land, and what they plan to do with their land in the future.

Who owns America’s woodlands?*

- Families & Individuals: 271,909,000 acres
- Corporate & Other Private: 148,527,000 acres
- Tribal: 17,093,000 acres
- Public: 266,227,000 acres

*excluding interior Alaska

“...different goals and objectives, but the one thing we all have is pride of ownership.”
— FAMILY FOREST OWNER, WASHINGTON STATE

“RESULTS FROM THE 2018 USDA FOREST SERVICE”

Cover photos: (cabin in woods) iStockphoto/pniesen, (loggers) iStockphoto/ranta images, (family hiking) iStockphoto/solstock, (deer) iStockphoto/jevtic Shutterstock/gemenacom

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Family woodland ownerships come in many sizes!

The size of woodland holdings influences how the lands are used. Larger parcels are more likely to have timber management activities, while smaller ones are often associated with homes and passive activities, like enjoying nature.

62% of the 10 million family woodland ownerships are between 1 and 9 acres, while 40% of the nearly 272 million acres of family owned woodlands are between 100 and 999 acres.

Family woods are valuable resources that provide protection to our nation’s fresh water. They supply wildlife and fish habitat while giving us a place to get in touch with nature. They offer opportunities for outdoor recreation, solitude, and economic products.

Family forests at work

• 65% of ownerships harvested trees.
• Edible products have been collected on 24% of family owned acres.
• 21% of woodland acres are owned by people who harvested wood for sale, while 42% of family owned woodlands are owned by people who harvest for personal use.
• 15% of family woodland ownerships were treated to reduce fire hazard.
• 13% of family woodland ownerships were managed to improve wildlife habitat.

Participation in state and federal programs like the ones mentioned below can help ensure that woodlands stay intact, stay wooded for future generations, and help ensure the national timber supply.

American own their woodlands for a variety of reasons. Some owners choose to put their woodlands to work, and some use them mainly for recreation.

The future of family woodlands

14% of family woodland owners say they are likely to transfer their land in the next five years.

55% would pass it on to their children or another family member.

88% want to keep their land wooded.

Top reasons for owning woodlands:
• To enjoy the beauty and scenery
• For wildlife habitat
• For family legacy

Top concerns for woodland owners:
• High property taxes
• Keeping land intact for future generations
• Trespassing or poaching

Family woodland owner statistics

• 57% of wooded acres are owned by someone 65 or older.
• 21% of wooded acres have women as the primary decision maker.
• More than half of wooded acres are owned by people with a bachelor’s degree or higher.
• Only 25% of wooded acres are individually owned.

What are woodlands, and why do they matter?

Woodlands can be defined as woods, trees, or forests that are an acre in size and have at least 10% tree cover or areas where trees have been removed and will grow again, such as those where there has been harvesting or wildfire. These woodlands provide and protect most of the nation’s fresh water. They supply wildlife and fish habitat while giving us a place to get in touch with nature. They offer opportunities for outdoor recreation, solitude, and economic products.

Woodlands for recreation

Recreation is an important reason for owning land for 58% of ownerships, with hiking, hunting, and off-roading as the primary recreation activities. For 63% of the ownerships, owners and their spouses are the primary people recreating on the land.

The National Woodland Owner Survey is conducted by the Family Forest Research Center, a collaboration between the USDA Forest Service and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The Family Forest Research Center is involved in many different studies among varying populations, from rural and urban woodland owners to large corporate ownerships and the many groups in between. While the current version of the National Woodland Owner Survey differs greatly from the original efforts, research on landowners has been conducted by the USDA Forest Service since the 1950s. To find out more about our various research projects, who we are, and our recent publications and presentations, please visit our website at FamilyForestResearchCenter.org