



Women on the Land

**A LANDOWNER'S GUIDE TO
STEWARDSHIP HER WOODLANDS**



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The authors would like to thank Skylar Roach for her contributions to the research that provided the groundwork for this publication.

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Women
on the Land

Landowner Stories

Throughout this guide, you will find real-life case studies focusing on the stories and stewardship of a handful of women across the eastern United States.

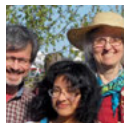
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Sarah Gworek

A new direction for the next generation

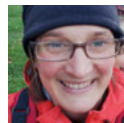
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Marie Wendt

A passive approach to recreation and connection

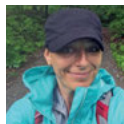
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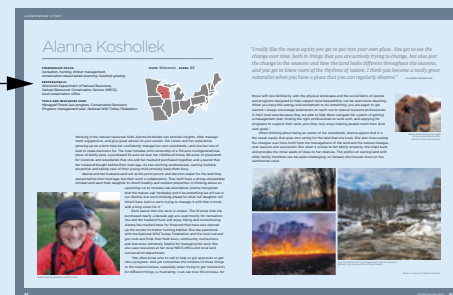
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Carla Porter

The perspective of a small woodland owner

Included in each landowner story are the professionals the women worked with and other tools and resources that have helped them reach their goals. The selected women showcase the variety in ownership, property types, and possibilities for stewardship. Their stories do not encompass all possible stewardship objectives and goals, so be sure to connect with women in your network to hear about stories closer to home.



STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

Highlights the active, passive, and combinations of approaches to stewardship.

PROFESSIONALS:

Highlights the chosen professionals that helped guide decision-making, if needed or applicable.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

Highlights the variety of tools and resources the women in the case studies used according to their goals, type of stewardship, and local availability.

“I feel that I’m supposed to be here and I have a responsibility to take care of these woods, to improve them, to make them more habitable for the animals.”

—SALLY HIGHTOWER

TO AID IN YOUR STEWARDSHIP, SEE PAGES 34–37 FOR THE RESOURCE DIRECTORY, WHICH INCLUDES FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND STATE-BY-STATE LISTINGS.

A woman's relationship with the natural world is often unique and meaningful. For women who own land, this connection can be rewarding as well as challenging.

Women landowners engage with their woods in various ways, including enjoying the beauty of their property, caring for wildlife and nature, and appreciating the privacy that owning land offers. No two landowners are the same, just as no two properties are the same. The variations are limitless, from living far away to having your woodland behind your home, from actively engaging in stewardship for wildlife habitat to simply enjoying it as it is. You and your circumstances determine the decisions you make for your woodland.



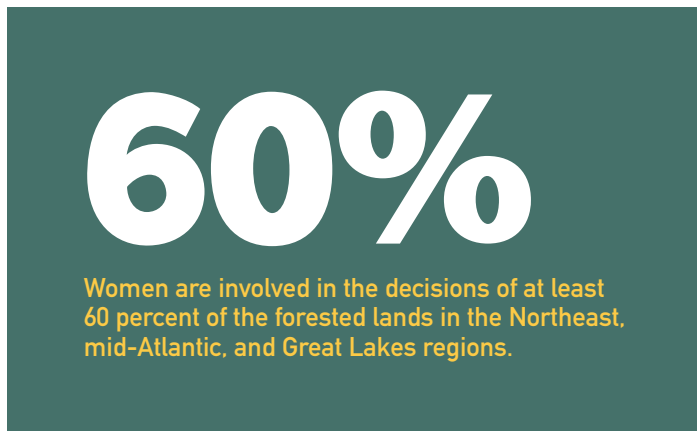
Wisconsin woodlands. Courtesy of Alanna Koshollek

By keeping your land wooded, you can enjoy the many aspects of your property while providing tremendous benefits to your community. Taking a passive approach to stewardship allows you to continue enjoying the current benefits your woods provide while maintaining your options in the future. Alternatively, you may choose to take a more active approach to stewarding your land. Active stewardship strategies can enhance and diversify your land's benefits by encouraging what you value most. Of course, you can combine approaches by setting some areas of your forest aside as reserves while actively stewarding the remainder.

As a landowner, the decisions you make about your land have a significant impact on broader ecosystems. According to the National Woodland Owner Survey (familyforestresearchcenter.org), women are the sole owners of 7 percent of the family forest ownerships in the eastern United States and co-owners of more than another 50 percent, often with a spouse. In total, women are involved in the decisions of at least 60 percent of the forested lands in the Northeast, mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes regions. Additionally, the number of women landowners will likely increase in the coming years, with the landowner population aging and women generally outliving men. During this time, many women will assume sole ownership of their land and transition from co-owners to primary decision-makers.

TO MEET YOUR GOALS AND MAINTAIN THE MANY BENEFITS YOUR LAND PROVIDES, YOU MUST CONFIDENTLY STEWARD YOUR WOODLANDS.

Some women may feel that they have less experience and knowledge of their land than do their male counterparts. Additionally, they may lack the know-how to engage in active stewardship strategies and conservation-based estate planning. There is a vast amount of information and resources available to landowners, so much so that it can feel overwhelming. Ecological and aesthetic impacts as well as personal time and financial constraints are important components to consider when making ownership decisions.



60%
Women are involved in the decisions of at least 60 percent of the forested lands in the Northeast, mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes regions.

THIS PUBLICATION AIMS TO HELP WOMEN LANDOWNERS LIKE YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR WOODLANDS AND MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS TO MEET THEIR GOALS.



Photos (left to right, top to bottom): Ready to work (courtesy of Sarah Gworek); enjoying the woods in winter (courtesy of Marie Wendt); Carla volunteering in her community (courtesy of Carla Porter); Sally and her wife, Linda, smiling big in front of their trees (courtesy of Sally Hightower)

To meet your goals and maintain the many benefits your land provides, you must confidently steward your woodlands. This includes having the right people and resources to support you when it is time to make decisions. This publication aims to help women landowners like you better understand their woodlands and make informed decisions to meet their goals. Based on interviews with women landowners and forestry professionals across the eastern United States, it aims to identify some of the most common questions, goals, and challenges of women landowners. Stories from these landowners provide examples of how women engage with their land in making decisions to the best of their abilities and circumstances. We hope that hearing the experiences of other “women on the land”—both here and from local women in your area—will help inform your decisions.

Learning about the ecology of your woodlands is an exciting and engaging way to interact with your property.

It also provides an excellent foundation from which to better understand your stewardship options. Taking the time to identify trees, spring wildflowers, and the tracks and signs of the animals who live there can be both fun and beneficial for the way you think about your woods. The more you learn, the more questions you may have. Many women talk about wanting to “do the right thing” for their woods and make sure their woods are “healthy.” The truth is that there is no one “right” way to be a good steward of your woods and to achieve perfect forest health. Instead, by understanding how your woods grow and change, the stewardship options available to you, and how these options relate to your goals, you can make decisions that are right for both you and your woods.

What you see on your property may look different from what you have seen in other forests you have visited. The type of forest growing on your land can be understood in terms of two essential gradients and how tree species have evolved to be competitive. The first gradient is the amount of water in the soil. Some trees have

BY UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR WOODS GROW AND CHANGE, YOU CAN MAKE STEWARDSHIP DECISIONS THAT ARE RIGHT FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR WOODS.



A view into a Michigan forest. Courtesy of Karen Serfass

evolved to be highly competitive in dry soils, others in wet soils, and still others in a whole range of moderate soil moistures. The amount of water in your soil will favor those species that are best adapted to your site.

The second gradient is time since the last major **disturbance** to the forest (e.g., wind, ice, human activity, forest pests, and pathogens). Some tree species have evolved to be most competitive through rapid growth in direct sunlight. Their strategy is to grow fast and become the dominant trees within a young forest. We call these trees **shade intolerant** because they need a lot of energy from the sun to grow quickly and cannot grow in the shade. **Pioneer species**



DISTURBANCE: An event in time that significantly affects forest ecosystem composition, structure, and function. Disturbances can be from natural causes (wind, ice, insects) or human activity (timber harvest, clearing for agriculture).

SHADE INTOLERANT: Species that have the capacity to compete for survival under direct sunlight conditions.



PIONEER SPECIES: The first species to colonize a barren site, such as after a large disturbance. These species are shade intolerant and represent the first stage of succession.

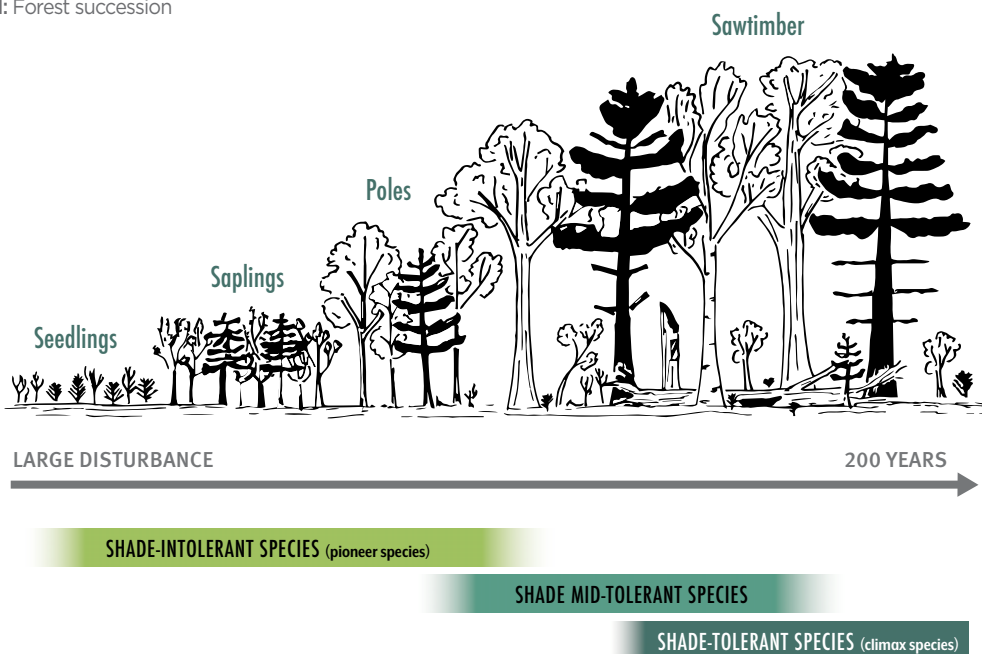
such as aspen and paper birch are shade intolerant and do well in exposed areas, such as those resulting from a disturbance. Some trees are most competitive in medium or dappled amounts of light. These **shade mid-tolerant** trees, such as red oak and white pine, do well in gaps (1/4–1/2 acre) created when several trees die at once. Other trees are **shade tolerant** and grow slower. Their strategy is to wait in the shady **understory** until an opening is made in the forest **canopy**. When an opening occurs, such as after a natural disturbance or a responsibly planned timber harvest, they take over that space. **Climax species**, such as red spruce, hemlock, American beech, and sugar maple, do well in shade.

Differences in species competitiveness based on available sunlight result in predictable changes in species over time. Immediately following a large disturbance (like a hurricane or an intensive timber harvest), shade-intolerant species are most competitive and generally colonize the site—thus, the name “pioneer” species, because they are the first species to grow in an area after a disturbance large enough to create open, sunny conditions. If you have these pioneer species in your woods, you can be confident that there was a large disturbance in the recent past. These fast-growing trees do not generally live long. After several decades they begin to die off, creating gaps in the forest canopy in which shade mid-tolerant trees can grow and dominate the forest. Over time, these shade mid-tolerant trees succumb to insects, disease, or weather events. Eventually, the shade-tolerant trees established in the understory become the main canopy of the forest. Forests with a lot of shade-tolerant species indicate that a lot of time has passed since the last significant disturbance. These sites are often found in protected areas of the landscape where they are less vulnerable to wind and ice, such as in coves or at the bottom of slopes.

In this way, your woods are a record of the length of time between major disturbances within your forest. The more time between large disturbances, the more shade-tolerant trees will be growing in your woods. The process of change in vegetation on a piece of land over time is called **succession** (see Figure 1).

Understanding succession gives you a sense of how old your woods are and the benefits they can provide. All forests offer benefits for wildlife habitat, climate change mitigation, clean water, and so on. But the amount and type depend on the species **composition** (i.e., types of trees) and the forest **structure** (i.e., the size of the trees). Some benefits are present only at certain times in forest development. For example, only young forests of **seedlings** (<1" in diameter), **saplings** (1"–4.9" in diameter), and **poles** (5"–11.9" in diameter) provide habitat for **early successional** species like chestnut-sided warblers, New England cottontail, American woodcock, and ruffed grouse. Old forests with **sawtimber** trees (12"+ in diameter) provide the highest amount of carbon storage. Be mindful that the size of a tree does not necessarily relate to its age. Additionally, some forest benefits, such as aesthetics, are in the eye of the beholder and should be considered when deciding how to steward your land.

Figure 1: Forest succession



The process of change in vegetation on a piece of land over time is called succession. Your woods are a record of the length of time between major disturbances within your forest.

Illustration by Olivia Lukacic

KEY TERMS

SHADE MID-TOLERANT: Species that have the capacity to compete for survival in dappled or mid-level light.



SHADE TOLERANT: Species that have the capacity to compete for survival under shaded conditions.

UNDERSTORY: The layer of vegetation that is beneath the main canopy in a forest



CANOPY: The overhead canopy layer of branches and leaves in the forest.

CLIMAX SPECIES: A species that dominates in the culminating stage of natural forest succession.

SUCCESSION: The process of change in the structure and species composition in an ecological community over time.

COMPOSITION: The assemblage of different tree species within a forest stand.

STRUCTURE: The horizontal and vertical distribution of forest



components, including height and diameter, of trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants, and snags.

SEEDLING: A young tree, smaller than a sapling, that has grown from seed.

SAPLING: A (usually) young tree larger than a seedling but smaller than a pole.

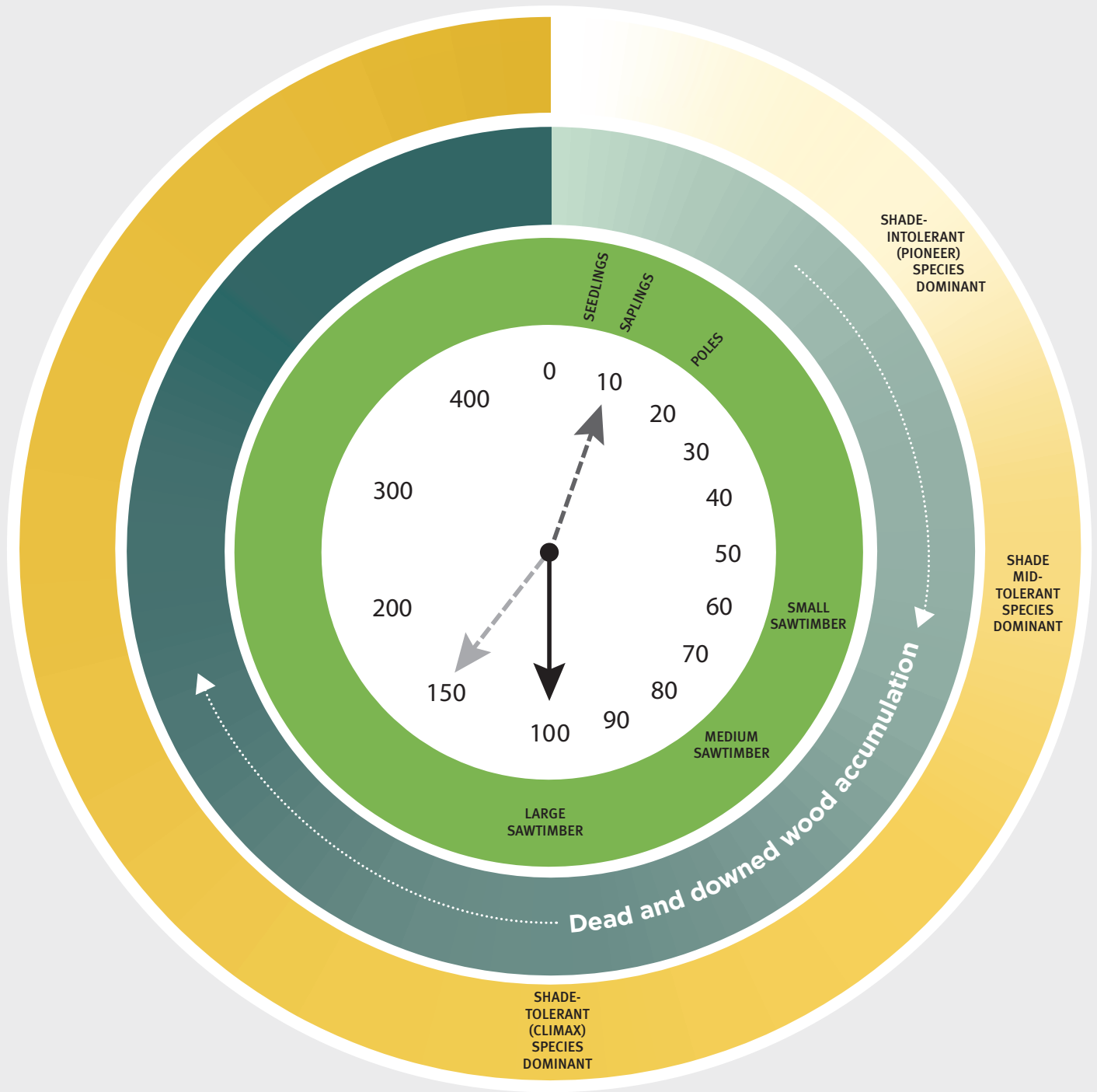
POLE: A tree between the size of a sapling and a mature tree.

EARLY SUCCESSIONAL: A stage in succession with rapid growth and often dense vegetation, where shade-intolerant pioneer species dominate. Occurs as an initial stage in vegetation growth after a disturbance.

SAWTIMBER: A tree or log that meets the minimum diameter and length suitable for conversion to lumber.



Figure 2: Forest succession clock



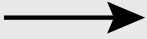
LEGEND

0-400 Age of the forest in years	Change in forest structure over time	Accumulation of dead and downed wood over time	Change in forest composition over time
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UNDERSTANDING THE

Forest Succession Clock

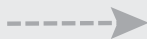
The succession clock illustrates the changes in forest composition and structure over time.



The clock hand in the diagram indicates the approximate age of many of our current woodlands (i.e., 100 years old) and the corresponding stage of forest succession and development.



The composition and structure of your woodland can be moved back to an earlier time of forest development (e.g., 10 years old) through natural disturbances or active stewardship that involves changing the light levels of a forest to favor shade-intolerant species and simplifying the forest structure.

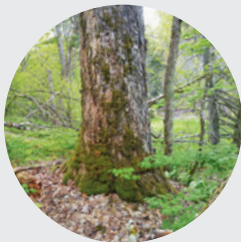


The composition and structure of your woodland can also be moved forward to a later stage (e.g., 150 years old) through time, natural disturbances, and active stewardship that involves releasing shade-tolerant species and increasing structural complexity through the addition of deadwood and the growth of large-diameter trees.



◀ **SAPLINGS** | 1"-4.9" diameter
POLES | 5"-11.9" diameter

SAWTIMBER | 12"+ diameter ▶



◀ **LARGE SAWTIMBER** | >18" diameter

Your Woodland over Time

Even if you do nothing to your woodland except enjoy it, your land will look different in the future than it does today as the woods continue to grow and change in species composition and structure. If you have owned your property for a long time, you may have noticed these changes since you first acquired it. Disturbances often move the hands of the succession clock back to an earlier time in stand development by increasing the amount of light in the forest. However, some disturbances can actually move the hands of the succession clock forward. For example, a disturbance that kills shade mid-tolerant trees in the overstory will release shade-tolerant trees to take over. These disturbance events are typically patchy, affecting some parts of the forest and not others. It is very rare for a disturbance to kill all the trees in a forest. Although it is common for landowners to be concerned when some trees die, it is these disturbances, both large and small, that shape our forests. It is also important to note that natural woods look messy! Dead standing trees, called **snags**, and dead downed logs are a critical part of forests that are often lacking due to eastern forests' relatively young age. This deadwood provides tremendous habitat value for certain birds, small mammals, insects, and amphibians and can store carbon for decades. Although many landowners like a more groomed or parklike look, the messiness allows a forest to continue to evolve and provide the maximum benefits to you and the natural world.

KEY TERM

SNAG: A standing section of a dead tree.



Courtesy of Adella Catanzaro

So, which stage of forest development is best? Much of this depends on what your goals are for your woodlands.



Courtesy of Janet Sredy

As previously described, different stages of forest development bring different benefits. Defining your goals for your land and assessing the current state of your woods can help guide how you work with them. Owning land is only one component of who landowners are as individuals. How often you use your land or even think about land ownership is different for every woman. For some, it is a significant focus; for others, it is a wonderful backdrop for the rest of their lives. Either way, women's lives are busy, and circumstances can change quickly.

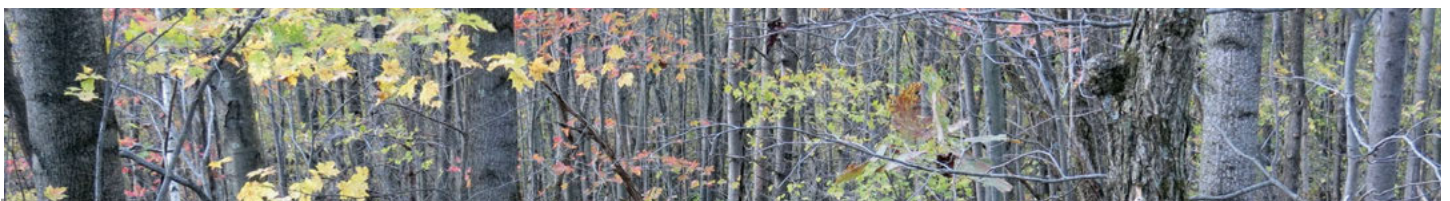
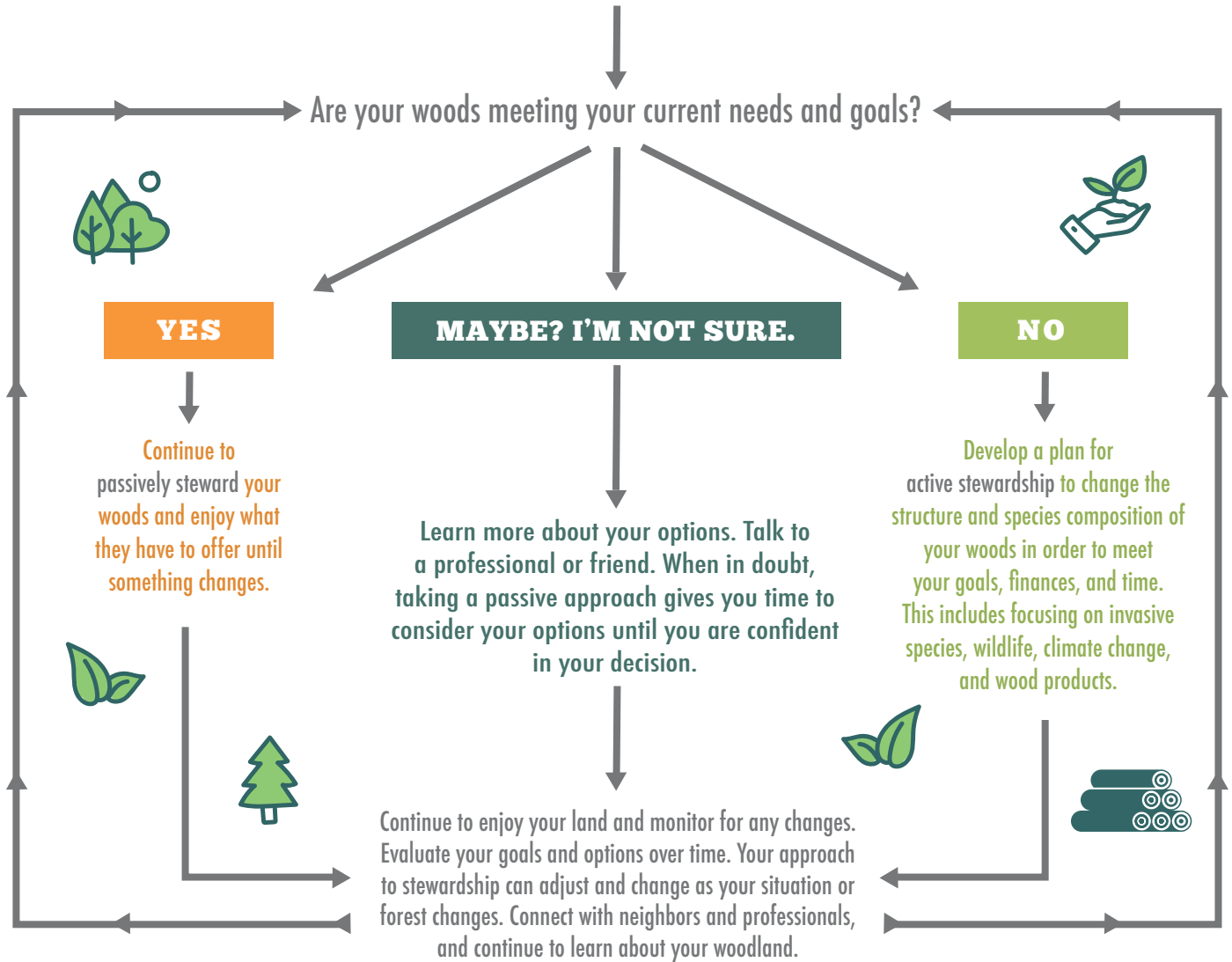
Reflect on what you enjoy about your land, your relationship to owning it, and any challenges or concerns you may have about caring for it. It may take some time for your thoughts and feelings to evolve into more concrete ideas, but starting here can help shape your goals for your property. The next step is to identify what stage of succession your woods are in and what types of benefits your land provides to you and your community. You can do this on your own or with the help of a forester. Ask yourself if the benefits your woods are providing are meeting your needs. If the answer is no, how can they be stewarded to do so? It may help to connect with other landowners, friends, family members, or foresters to hear their thoughts and experiences. Once you have formulated your goals, you can decide whether passive stewardship, active stewardship, or some combination of the two will be the best for you and your property.

**DEFINING YOUR GOALS FOR YOUR LAND AND
ASSESSING THE CURRENT STATE OF YOUR WOODS
CAN HELP GUIDE HOW YOU WORK WITH THEM.
OWNING LAND IS ONLY ONE COMPONENT OF WHO
LANDOWNERS ARE AS INDIVIDUALS.**

Figure 3: Active vs. passive stewardship

CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS
Active vs. Passive Stewardship

Gather information about your woodland, and determine what stage of succession it is in and what benefits it currently provides. Try to articulate your goals for the property based on your use and needs.



Courtesy of Janet Sredy

Marie Wendt

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

recreation, ecological landscape, social landscape, wildlife

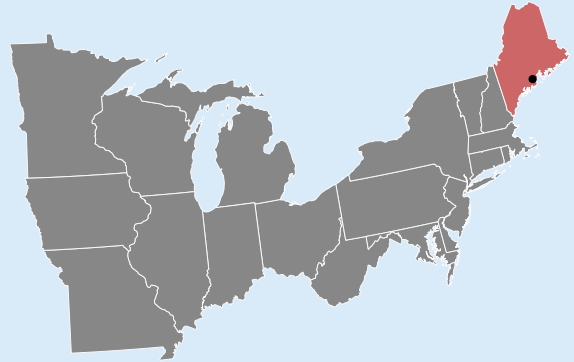
PROFESSIONALS:

service forester

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

newsletters and books, trail easement

STATE: *Maine* **ACRES:** *40*



Many women love their woodlands as a space to enjoy the natural world, be outdoors, and enjoy the plants and wildlife that share the space. And whether the land was purchased or inherited, landowners often feel a strong connection to their land. Marie Wendt had gone to college in Maine and encouraged her husband to move back there years later. They knew they wanted land and hoped to find a place suitable for wildlife viewing and berry foraging, and with enough solitude for her husband to practice his many instruments without bothering the neighbors.

It has now been 20 years since they bought a 40-acre parcel in the greater Portland area. The person who owned the land before them had high-graded some of the large timber off the property, but the machinery's resulting skid trails enabled Marie and her family to cross-country ski right out the back door and explore the property. She was inspired to create some of her own foot trails by following some of the deer paths to access more of the property and link the house to the trails on surrounding properties. Several years ago, the couple was approached by Pownal Land Trust, which requested access for a trail easement along the back edge of the property to continue an extensive trail network in the area. It has been rewarding for Marie to contribute to the broader ecological and social landscape around their property.

Marie considers herself the land manager and has often thought about starting more active stewardship on the property, but maintaining the yard and the house fills her time. She shared, "There are other big projects, so it feels like taking care of the buildings is more important in certain ways than managing the woods. I mean the woods will be there on their own, and so

there is part of me that just says we don't really need to manage them at all. . . . It's a challenge to not feel guilty for not actually getting to more of it. And to just try to do what I can do." She reads woodland magazines but so far has not begun collecting more information. She is concerned about development of neighboring properties and the increasing town taxes. For both reasons, she is considering a conservation easement on the property, but she still needs time to decide what to do. By allowing the yard and the woods to continue to grow, Marie keeps her options open for the future. This type of passive stewardship is an excellent way to take care of the land you enjoy.



Marie with her husband and daughter. Courtesy of Marie Wendt

If your woods already meet your goals, then there is no reason to change what you have been doing.



The next generation out for an adventure. Courtesy of Karen Serfass

Building a positive connection with your land and enjoying it is more important than feeling the pressure to actively steward your woods. A recent survey of women landowners highlighted that beauty, wildlife, nature, privacy, and water were the top five reasons for owning woodlands. If this sounds like you, then you are not alone! Your woods already encompass those benefits. Women landowners often state that they want to be good stewards of their land but do not have the time or the know-how to follow through. Such a sentiment should not leave you feeling guilty. Simply keeping your woodland as a forest provides immense benefits to you through its privacy, beauty, and recreational opportunities, and to your community through its **ecosystem services**. Forests provide clean air and clean water, sequester and store carbon, provide wildlife habitat, and benefit human health and well-being. And by passively stewarding your woods, you maintain a suite of options for the future.

A passive approach does not mean “do nothing.” Even if you are not working to change your woodland’s structure or species composition, you can still engage with your property. Learning more about your woods as an ecosystem, keeping an eye out for invasive species and pests, foraging mushrooms, taking a hike, or joining a network of other landowners are all ways to enjoy your woods. Additionally, planning your woodland’s future through **conservation-based estate planning** is critical for maintaining its benefits over time by ensuring it will remain a forest. See “The Future of Your Woodlands” section (page 25) for more details on ensuring that the legacy for you and your land is a positive one.

KEY TERMS



PASSIVE STEWARDSHIP: Stewarding your land by allowing only natural forest processes to change it over time.



ECOSYSTEM SERVICES: Conditions or processes of natural environments that directly or indirectly benefit humans. Examples include water filtration, carbon sequestration, and the support of biodiversity.

CONSERVATION-BASED ESTATE PLANNING: The elements of estate planning that deal directly with the goal of keeping some or all of your land in its natural, undeveloped state.



Kelly Poland

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

forest resilience, recreation

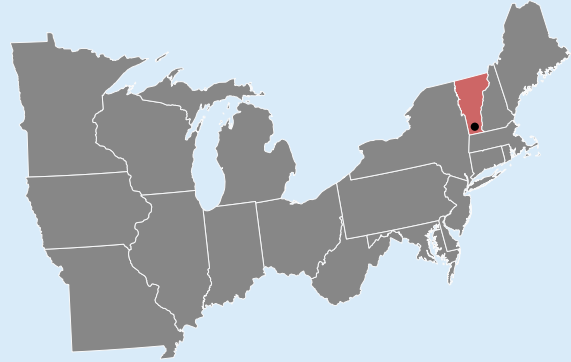
PROFESSIONALS:

none

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

field guides

STATE: *Vermont* **ACRES:** *12*



Owning a woodland takes time, energy, resources, knowledge, and willpower. Sometimes life moves quickly, and the woods are lower on the list out of necessity. Sometimes even with excitement and a vision of what a property could be, barriers can get in the way.

Kelly Poland grew up going to the off-the-grid camp that her grandparents built on a small woodlot in Vermont. Her grandparents' death and her mother's lack of interest made Kelly a co-owner, but the camp and surrounding property had deteriorated over time. Kelly and her husband started to do general cleanup in and around the camp, but her husband soon lost interest in the property, and as a mom of three, Kelly never seems to find the time or financial resources to focus on the land.



Kelly and her dog out on a hike.
Courtesy of Kelly Poland

A strong connection to her family through the property makes Kelly want to care for the land. Additionally, she loves the diversity of mature forests, younger forests, a spring, and all the plants and wildlife of the 12 acres. Kelly uses the woods as a classroom for her daughter and generally loves the challenge of being a woodland owner, but she struggles with the financial burden of paying the taxes on the land, let alone the costs to improve it. In brainstorming what she could do with the property, she often runs into red tape with the town.

With a smaller amount of acreage, Kelly struggles to attract professionals or programs that might reduce her financial burden. She wishes there were a community of women and other woodland owners that could support one another, swap ideas and advice, and help one another with some of the labor. For those who seek these kinds of connections, woodland owner associations and woman-specific programming are often available. If that is not the case in your area, consider reaching out to friends

or neighbors and building connections on your own. Although Kelly would like to work with her land, it is important to recognize that the land does not need us. By Kelly getting out and enjoying her property, keeping family memories alive, and using it to inspire her children, she serves as a wonderful steward of the land.

"I love it because I grew up there. It is where I grew up going. I could foresee that it would be a great place to share." —KELLY POLAND

If your woods are not currently meeting your goals or you want to diversify their benefits, active stewardship offers that opportunity.

Taking the step to begin active stewardship is a great way to be involved with your woods and shape the benefits they provide. When making decisions on your own, with family, or while working with professionals, be sure to understand the variety of stewardship options and the implications of each. You are ultimately the one in control of your land. It is essential that you feel comfortable with your decisions' ecological, financial, and aesthetic outcomes before you move forward. Planning for active stewardship can be flexible, too. It is possible to combine multiple goals and objectives, such as managing for wood products, developing trails for recreation, removing invasive plants, and creating specific habitat types.

Active Stewardship Options

The options for active stewardship depend on your woods' current conditions and should align with your established goals. Removing invasive plant species or creating recreational trails are both forms of active stewardship but are non-extractive, so they will likely have a minimal visual impact on your woodlands. On the opposite end of the spectrum, creating early successional forests to provide habitat for wildlife species in decline or regenerating tree species that need a lot of light will require large patches of forest to be removed and will have a more significant impact on the aesthetics of your woods. In short, there are many types of active stewardship strategies, and when they involve cutting and removing trees, they are often referred to as **silvicultural systems** by foresters. Some silvicultural systems, such as **selection systems**, are less intensive and promote shade-tolerant trees and late successional habitats. Others are more intensive, such as **seed tree treatments** and clear-cuts, and promote shade-intolerant trees and early successional habitats. Some, like the **shelterwood method**, are somewhere in the middle and encourage shade mid-tolerant species. Working with a professional forester to match one of these strategies to your ecological, financial, and aesthetic goals is important. If you are planning to remove trees, there are various types of **harvesting systems** composed of different kinds of machines. Your forester can help select an appropriate **logger** and harvesting system that fit your goals and property. Be sure you understand your options and the likely outcomes. Remember, this is your land.

KEY TERMS

ACTIVE STEWARDSHIP: Engaging in planning and purposely altering the species composition and structure of the forest to meet your established goals for your woodland.

SILVICULTURAL SYSTEM: A planned series of actions (treatments) for tending and regenerating a section (stand) of forest.

SELECTION SYSTEM: A silvicultural approach that removes individual or small groups of trees to create or perpetuate a forest with varying ages of trees.

SEED TREE: A tree left standing after a harvest for the purpose of providing seed as a natural regeneration method.

SHELTERWOOD METHOD: An even-aged silvicultural system that allows for regeneration to maintain a single age class. Most trees are removed, leaving only those needed to produce sufficient shade to produce the new age class.



HARVESTING SYSTEM: The combination of equipment used for felling and removing timber and other wood products from the forest.

LOGGER: A private contractor who specializes in harvesting, processing, and transporting trees from the woodland.

For more information about the difference between foresters and loggers, see pages 20-21.



Invasive Plant and Insect Species

One way to actively engage with your forest and increase its resilience is to control invasive plants. Many invasive plants are **non-native**. Their presence and ability to take over an area can cause ecological harm, as they outcompete native plants and provide inferior food and habitat for native wildlife species. Learn to identify the most common invasive forest plants in your region and then walk your woods to determine if you have any on your property. Being vigilant and identifying small infestations makes control far more manageable and cost-effective. For some species, manual control—like pulling, cutting, and removing individual stems—will be sufficient. For others, removal might require the use of chemical herbicides. Many women are wary of the environmental effects of using chemicals on their land, yet there are relatively safe options and application methods. Talk with other landowners and professionals in your area to learn about their experiences.

Increases in global trade have led to the movement of insects and diseases around the world. Some of these invasive insects (e.g., the emerald ash borer, the Asian long-horned beetle, and the hemlock woolly adelgid) have resulted in significant tree mortality. Although dead logs and snags are a healthy part of all forests, insects without natural predators result in tree mortality out of balance with natural forest development. Keeping up to date on what species are of concern in your area will allow you to keep an eye out for early signs. If you find invasive pests or diseases on your property, contact your state's natural resources department.

Wildlife

Many women want their woodlands to benefit wildlife. All forests provide wildlife habitat in some way. Wildlife responds primarily to forest structure, so the kind of habitat your forest provides depends mostly on its age. Any change in your forest structure, whether through succession from a passive approach or a more active approach, will benefit some wildlife species and discourage others. As described in the section on forest ecology, some wildlife species require certain habitat types to live, breed, or assist in migration and movement. Many of our forests are mid-successional due to historical land use and are already providing habitat for one set of species. This means that the habitats that are often lacking in a landscape are very young forests (0–15 years old) and very old forests (>200 years old). Throughout the eastern United States, there is an effort to promote early successional habitat that is particularly important for certain species (e.g., migrating bird species, the eastern cottontail, butterflies, and bees). If providing for wildlife is important to you, it will be



Emerald ash borer. Courtesy of USDA APHIS



Japanese Barberry. Courtesy of National Invasive Species Information Center

necessary to identify the types of habitats or species you would like to support. This will dictate what kind of stewardship you will pursue and what your woods will look like with that approach. In general, a passive approach and less intensive active stewardship (e.g., **thinning**) will allow your forest to develop into an older forest. Active approaches that are more intensive (e.g., **clear-cuts**) will move your forest back to an earlier stage of succession and will provide a young forest habitat.

If your property includes fields in addition to woodlands and you are interested in focusing on wildlife such as grassland birds or pollinators, the areas can be maintained as open space with a mowing schedule. If the fields are in hay production, a delayed mowing schedule can accommodate wildlife species and allow for a productive haying season. There are additional programs that help landowners with field management; contact your state's Natural Resources Conservation Service office to learn more.

Climate Change

Forests are an essential natural tool for mitigating climate change. Trees can remove carbon from the atmosphere (**carbon sequestration**) and store it in their wood, roots, leaves, and soil (**carbon storage**). Maintaining woodlands allows both to continue and enables longer-term storage and carbon cycling throughout the forest ecosystem. The stage of forest succession determines the rate of sequestration and the total amount of carbon stored. Younger, fast-growing forests will have higher rates of sequestration than will older or more mature forests. Mature forests can store a greater amount of carbon, but their rate of sequestration is lower. In addition, stewarding your land to produce wood products is complementary to **climate change mitigation**. Wood products can store carbon and often have a lower carbon impact than do other building materials.

KEY TERMS

NON-NATIVE: A plant introduced by humans, both intentional and unintentional, to a new place or new type of habitat where it was not previously found. Not all non-native plants are invasive.



THINNING: An action (treatment) that reduces the density and crowding of trees to allow for more vigorous and productive growth in the remaining trees.

CLEAR-CUT: A regeneration or harvest method in which most or all trees are cut down uniformly; can be used to promote growth of shade-intolerant species in regeneration or to grow large and even-aged stands. It can also be used to attract certain wildlife that prefer new-growth stages of forests, such as the New England cottontail and the woodcock.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION: The process of removing carbon from the atmosphere for use in photosynthesis, resulting in the maintenance and growth of plants and trees.

CARBON STORAGE: The amount of carbon that is retained in a carbon pool (e.g., trees, roots, leaves, and soils) within a forest.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION: Actions or processes that reduce the sources of or enhance the carbon sinks of greenhouse gases.



If your property contains active or abandoned fields and you are not interested in maintaining the open space, you may allow them to grow back into forests. This is an excellent opportunity to increase carbon sequestration and storage on your land. Returning fields back to forest is the one action a landowner can undertake that will have the greatest gain in carbon benefit, and it is currently gaining momentum among landowners across the country. If you choose this route, make sure to balance it with your other landowner goals.

Both passive and active stewardship contribute to climate strategies. Therefore, we need both approaches to the landscape. Whichever strategy you choose, planning the future ownership and use of your land through conservation-based estate planning is key to maintaining its role in climate mitigation by keeping your land wooded.



Building a relationship with the foresters and loggers you work with is a valuable investment in time. Courtesy of UMass Amherst

Wood Products

Producing wood products is of interest to some women landowners. Local wood products—such as furniture, flooring, trim, and exposed beams—are often a highly valued part of someone’s home, and there can be real pride in producing logs used for these products. In addition to contributing to the local economy, stewarding your forests for wood products increases the financial value of your woods, and selling wood products can help offset landownership costs, such as property taxes or money spent on other stewardship activities you are interested in implementing. Integrating goals might involve combining commercial harvests with other tasks, such as removing invasives, creating recreational trails, installing a gate, or managing for particular wildlife species (see the “Financials” section). Producing wood products is accomplished through timber harvesting, but it should not be thought of as an end unto itself. Timber harvesting is a tool used to create conditions within your woods that will promote the establishment and growth of trees to further your goals. There are many important considerations involved in having a successful timber harvest. See the “Having a Successful Timber Harvest” sidebar for more information, and be sure to talk to your forester about your options.

Having a Successful Timber Harvest

Timber harvesting can be a tool of forest stewardship and should be thought of as part of a long-term, multi-decade plan for your woods. The practice removes trees to alter the light levels necessary to establish and grow the kinds of trees that will help meet your goals. Timber harvests vary in their intensity (i.e., how many trees are removed) and spatial pattern (trees are removed to leave uniformly or irregularly spaced **crop trees**). Size, species, and quality determine the financial value of a tree. High-value species in the



eastern United States include sugar maple, red and white oak, black cherry, black walnut, and white pine. High-quality trees are typically straight and without defects, such as knots,

branches, cracks, or old wounds. Regenerating high-value trees and tending them to increase their growth rates and quality will result in higher-value trees over time. Focusing timber harvests on removing poor-quality trees first will improve the quality of your trees later. Removing the best and leaving the rest, also known as “**high-grading**,” will reduce the financial value of your forest and your future stewardship options. If you are talking to someone who views timber harvesting as simply removing the big trees, consider other options for information or contracting. When selling timber, it is critical to work with a consulting forester who represents your interests, ensures fair compensation for your trees, and can set up a timber harvest that meets your goals. A consulting forester will also identify responsible loggers who have equipment that matches your goals and property. The forester can then help develop a strong contract that will protect your interests, guarantee that you will receive full payment on time, and ensure that your woods will be left in good condition.



See the “Working with Professionals” section for more information about the different types of foresters and the difference between foresters and loggers.

KEY TERMS

CROP TREE: Any tree selected to become a component of a future commercial harvest.

HIGH-GRADING: The practice of removing the most commercially valuable trees (high-grade trees), often leaving a forest with poor tree conditions or species composition. Sometimes referred to as “cutting the best and leaving the rest.”



Janet Sredy

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

conservation-based estate planning, wildlife, climate change, invasive plant control, recreation

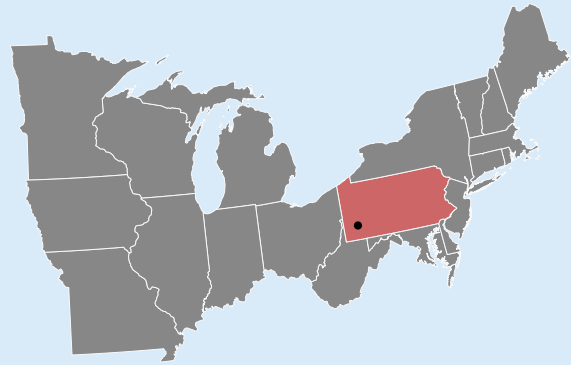
PROFESSIONALS:

service forester, consulting forester

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

management plan, limited liability company (LLC), federal grants, current use tax program, Game of Logging course, hunting lease, tree farm

STATE: *Pennsylvania* ACRES: *110*



Family land is often passed down through generations as part of a family's legacy. Sometimes this is intentional and well planned, but other times landowners inherit the land and are unsure what to do with it.

For Janet Sredy, her brother, and their respective spouses, the family property was important to them, but they were new to ownership. The 110-acre property, located near Pittsburgh, had been in the family for almost a hundred years. After her great-grandfather's death, the land was divided among many relatives, and her father had been slowly repurchasing deeds from other family members. By the time Janet and her brother inherited the land

in 2000, they had five-sevenths of the original property. Yet the remaining sections, now owned by people outside the family, were crucial for accessing their land. By negotiating with the neighboring landowners and starting a legal process, Janet and her brother obtained the last two parts of the original property by 2007.

Although piecing the original property back together was a success, the land was in rough shape, and Janet did not know what to do next. Issues with trespassing, illegal dumping, abandoned hunting stands, and a tangle of invasives led her to start searching the Internet. She eventually found Pennsylvania's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. They encouraged her to contact her local state service forester, and she arranged for him to visit and walk the property. The forester encouraged Janet and her brother to get a management plan so that they could outline their goals. At first, there was some hesitation, but they decided to move forward and have been on a roll ever since.

Since the first plan in 2010, the property has seen tremendous improvements. Janet and her husband are the primary managers but have formed an LLC in ownership with Janet's brother and his wife, who live across the country. Janet and her husband joined the local woodland owners association, participated in a Game of



Janet and her husband, Raul Chiesa, working together.



Janet out in her woodlands.

“I think we’ve done a lot as owners. So it’s been a good sense of accomplishment and now we’re looking to see what else we can do. It’s sort of like it’s a challenge. It doesn’t always work out. And that is okay.” —JANET SREDY

Logging chainsaw safety course, enrolled their property in Tree Farm, and have pursued and reached out to any program that could help improve the property. Through the NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a wildlife-focused Conservation Stewardship Program, and enrollment in the PA Clean and Green tax assessment program, they have removed large amounts of invasives, built a trail network, restored native plants and tree species, and improved wildlife habitat. The state and federal programs as well as income from leasing their land for hunting have helped finance their work.

Using a combination of contracted labor and the couple’s own time and energy has been a good balance for Janet and her husband. They also negotiated with a gas company to pay for native species planting and invasive removals along a pipeline corridor located at the edge of their property. In cleaning up their woods, they identified various rare plant species, and the property is now designated as a wild plant sanctuary. Amid all this effort, Janet and her husband enjoy the solitude, the wildlife, and the challenge of the work itself. Seeing the improvement of the land makes it all worthwhile, but they will be trying to take their own advice and sit back and enjoy the property even more.



Janet and PA DCNR service forester Jessica Salter out on her property.

Photos courtesy of Janet Sredy

Sarah Gworek

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

conservation-based estate planning, wildlife, recreation

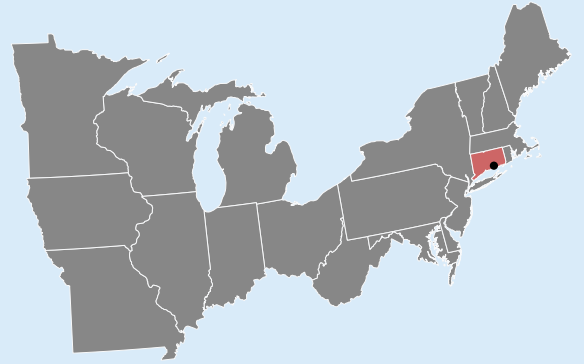
PROFESSIONALS:

service forester, consulting forester, Audubon ecologist

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

management plan, conservation easement, Coverts landowner program

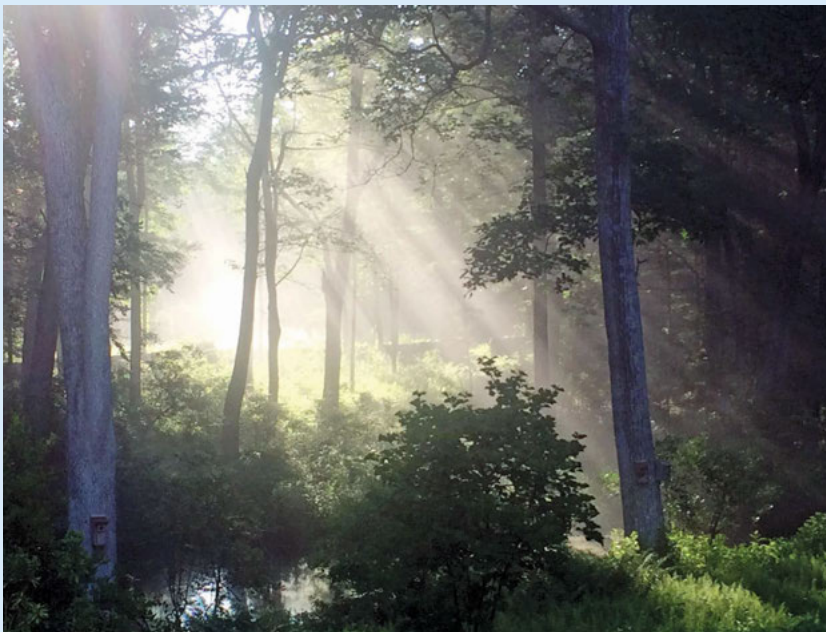
STATE: *Connecticut* ACRES: *40*



Finding the right avenues of support and information can make a huge difference, especially for new landowners. Sarah Gworek returned to the land she had grown up on and built a house on the far end of the property to help care for her aging parents. When her father was too sick to go out with an inspector to his old Christmas tree farm, Sarah took his place. The Christmas trees were old and in disarray. Knowing almost nothing, she was intrigued by what the forester had to say.

When she eventually inherited the 40-acre property, she was given two suggestions: remove the Christmas trees and attend Coverts, an education program for Connecticut landowners. Sarah and her husband already loved the property for the privacy, solitude, wildlife, and family connection, but participating in Coverts opened their eyes to a whole new way of looking at their woods.

The couple had a forest stewardship plan written in 2005. The primary goals were to remove the Christmas trees, watch for invasives, and generally keep the property maintained and the trails open. They did consider harvesting for timber, but the property was too small, with not enough valuable wood to make it worthwhile. The couple did most of the work themselves, taking out the conifers and grinding the stumps. When Sarah's husband died in 2009, she was left to continue taking care of the property but had to hire help for some of the chainsaw work. Sarah's new consort is a novice to woodland management but has followed her lead and become a wonderful new partner in taking care of the land.



View from the back deck.

“I love the privacy. I love the wildlife. I love the solitude. I’ve loved it since I was a kid. So that didn’t change with age, just morphed as life gets in the way. But now I’m back to where I started.” —SARAH GWOREK



Sarah ready to get to work.

The property has definitely seen its challenges. Years of drought, gypsy moth infestations, and emerald ash borer devastated some of the stands, but Sarah keeps her eyes on the future. Recently she had a state service forester and an Audubon Society professional come out to give her recommendations on the six fields scattered throughout her woods. She will keep one open but is allowing the others to start growing trees again. Every few years, the young stands will be brush-hogged to maintain early successional habitat for a greater variety of birds and other wildlife. She wants to see the land remain in its natural state and is concerned with development pressures in her area. Because of this, Sarah is working with a local land trust to put an easement on the property. With no other cost-share programs or forest tax breaks, the easement could help with the costs of what she refers to as her “expensive hobby.” The challenge used to be having enough time to work on the property, but these days it is the physical limitations of her body. Sarah reminds herself and others that it is just fine to slow down and appreciate the land for what it is.



(above) In the process of removing the old Christmas tree stand.

(left) The field after the Christmas trees were removed.

Photos courtesy of Sarah Gworek

If you want to learn more about your woodlands or engage in active stewardship, there are a few natural resource professionals who can help.

A great first step is to contact a **service** or **district forester** who works for your state. These professionals are available to provide information *free of charge*. In some cases, they may be able to visit your property and walk your land with you, which is a great way for you to get better acquainted with your woods and to learn about the resources available to you. These professionals can offer a variety of information, from species identification to stewardship suggestions to additional groups or professionals in your area.

If you are interested in active stewardship, particularly when it involves a timber harvest, it is recommended that you find a **consulting forester**. A consulting forester generally works independently or in a small firm, is paid directly by the landowner, and thus represents the landowner's interest in all forest activities. Individual states usually maintain a list of consulting foresters who are in good standing. In some states, **foresters** must hold a license to practice. Foresters may also have accreditation through the

KEY TERMS

FORESTER: A professional with a college-level education and experience in a broad range of forest-related areas, including forest and wildlife ecology, economics, legal issues, and the growing and harvesting of forest products.

DISTRICT/SERVICE FORESTER: A trained professional forester who is hired by the state to provide education and technical assistance to landowners. They typically work in specific regions/counties and can help with providing individualized information and appropriate resources.

CONSULTING FORESTER: A trained professional forester who operates or works for a private business and assists clients (landowners) in providing information and plans for their woodlands. They are paid directly by the landowner and represent the landowner's interest in forest-related activities.



Society of American Foresters, the largest professional organization of foresters. Tapping your social network and asking friends or other landowners what forester they use and their experience with that person is an excellent way to identify a consulting forester. Pursuing this type of active stewardship takes time. Finding a consulting forester who can be a trusted advisor and representative for you will pay off in the long run.

This person can help guide you through stewardship decisions and possibly business negotiations if you sell timber. Consider meeting with or talking to more than one forester until you're satisfied that you've found "a good fit"—a forester with whom you communicate well and can have a productive working relationship. Here is some advice from a landowner in Maine who wanted to make sure she understood what was happening on her property:



"So the first few trees we had cut down in my forest, I told my forester and my logger, 'Okay, we're gonna go out, and we're going to have lunch in your truck, and you are going to show me. . . .' And they said, 'Honestly, we've never done this. . . .' So we went out. And one of them said, 'Oh, we're gonna have this many feet and everything.' I said, 'No, show me. Walk over there, because if I don't understand what you're saying, I'm not going to see it.'"

—PAM WELLS

It is common for people to confuse the roles of foresters and loggers. Though both are critical to the success of a good timber harvest, foresters and loggers play very different roles. Foresters are trained in understanding forest ecology and working with landowners to develop plans that match their goals. Loggers are in the business of cutting down trees, cutting them into logs, removing the logs from the woods to the roadside, and transporting those logs to a sawmill. They are private entities who work for themselves, a company, or a sawmill. If you plan to harvest timber, always work with a forester first to create your plan, then contract a logger to follow that plan. Sometimes loggers will independently approach landowners offering a sale, but this can often lead to disappointment ecologically, financially, and aesthetically, as most landowners sell their timber only once or twice in their lifetime and therefore do not have a good sense of the value of their trees and the appropriate standards of a timber harvest. Putting your energy into finding a good forester who understands your goals and is easy to communicate with is the most important step. A good forester representing your interests can help you identify reputable loggers.

PUTTING YOUR ENERGY INTO FINDING A GOOD FORESTER WHO UNDERSTANDS YOUR GOALS AND IS EASY TO COMMUNICATE WITH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP.

When considering your active stewardship options, recognize that the methods used can vary in intensity and visual impact. Forests change slowly, so intensive activity might look shocking at first. But remember: the forest will recover over time. In fact, within the first couple of growing seasons, there will be dramatic regrowth of your forest. Just as the woods recover from a natural disturbance, they will recover from human activity. However, if a

KEY TERMS

MANAGEMENT PLAN: A long-term written document that outlines proposed forest stewardship activities and includes the vision for a particular woodland and current forest conditions. Also called forest management plans or stewardship plans.

COST-SHARE: Incentive programs that aim to help landowners improve their land. Landowners agree to pay part of the stewardship costs, and the government pays the other portion. Federal programs include the Forest Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

CURRENT USE TAX PROGRAM: A state-specific property tax break used to relieve economic pressures on landowners with large parcels of forest or agricultural land. Land enrolled in the program is assessed at its undeveloped or “current” use rather than its development potential.



primary objective for you is aesthetics, it might not make sense to remove a large number of trees or engage with a higher intensity of active stewardship on the property. Any combination of passive and active stewardship can happen across your property. You may choose to leave some areas alone while engaging in active approaches elsewhere. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to working with your woods. No matter what you do, the key to success is making informed decisions—and professionals can help.

Remember, the person who ultimately decides what will happen with your land is YOU. Spend some time compiling your questions to get as much out of your time with a professional as you can. Landowners can sometimes get confused with all the different terms used by professionals. Do not be shy about asking what they mean; no question is silly or elementary. Most professionals are excited when a landowner has things to ask! You are the one who needs to be happy with the outcomes of your decisions. To do that, you must have a clear understanding of the options and impacts, beginning with having your questions answered.

Forest Management Plans

Foresters often suggest that landowners get a **management plan** as one of their first steps in active stewardship. Additionally, many state and federal **cost-share** and **current use tax programs** require a management plan to be eligible to participate. The purpose of a forest management plan is to document your goals, describe your forest resources, and provide a road map of the activities that will happen over several years. The plan may include background information about your woodland and a recommended schedule of stewardship activities. A benefit to having a written plan is that it is a document that can be referred to periodically to make sure you are on track to meet your woodland management goals. For some landowners, having a formal management plan helps create a relationship with a forester and put their goals and strategies into writing. For others, it is not essential. Consider your situation, your goals, and what you want or need from your land when deciding whether to get one.



Liz Brewer (forester for the American Bird Conservancy), Amy Cimarolli (consulting forester and WV Land Trust forester), Rosey Santerre (WV service forester), Tiffany Beachy (WV Division of Natural Resources and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service joint position GWW biologist), and Barb Farris (landowner) on a field walk to discuss a habitat improvement project. Courtesy of Rosey Santerre

Alanna Koshollek

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

recreation, hunting, timber management, conservation-based estate planning, livestock grazing

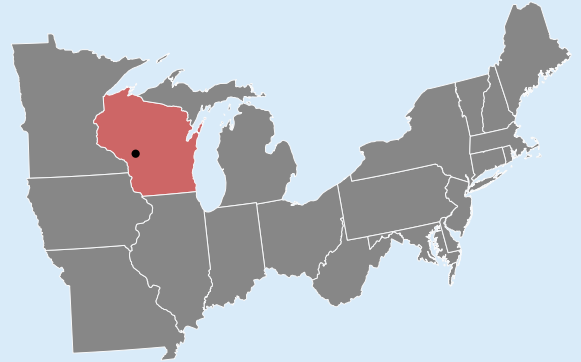
PROFESSIONALS:

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), local conservation office

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

Managed Forest Law program, Conservation Resource Program, management plan, National Wild Turkey Federation

STATE: *Wisconsin* ACRES: *85*



Working in the natural resources field, Alanna Koshollek can provide insights, offer management suggestions, and give great advice on your woods. Her career and her experience growing up on a farm help her confidently manage her own woodlands—and she has lots of land to make decisions for. The total includes joint ownership of a 110-acre multigenerational piece of family land, a purchased 10-acre lot near her childhood home, 60 acres of grasslands for livestock and woodlands that she and her husband purchased together, and a parcel that her husband bought before their marriage. As two working professionals, owning multiple properties and taking care of their young child certainly keep them busy.

Alanna and her husband each act as the point person and decision-maker for the land they owned before their marriage, but their work is collaborative. They both have a strong stewardship mindset and want their daughter to inherit healthy and resilient properties. In thinking about an upcoming cut to increase oak abundance, Alanna recognizes that the mature oak “probably won’t be something we will see in our lifetime, but we’re thinking ahead for what our daughter will inherit here. And so we’re trying to manage it with that in mind, with a long vision for it.”

Each parcel that she owns is unique. The 10 acres that she purchased nearly a decade ago are used mostly for recreation; she and her husband hunt and enjoy hiking and snowshoeing. Alanna has marked trees for firewood that have also opened up the woods for better hunting habitat. She has partnered with the National Wild Turkey Federation and the local rod and gun club and finds their field tours, community connections, and resources extremely helpful for managing her land. She also uses resources at her local NRCS office and local land conservation department.

“We often know who to call to help or get approvals or get into a program. And yet sometimes the timeline of those things or the responsiveness, especially when trying to get contractors for different things, is frustrating. I can see how this process, for



Alanna and her daughter out for a hike.

“I really like the sweat equity you get to put into your own place. You get to see the change over time, both in things that you are actively trying to change, but also just the change in the seasons and how the land looks different throughout the seasons, and you get to know more of the rhythms of nature. I think you become a really great naturalist when you have a place that you can regularly observe.” —ALANNA KOSHOLLEK

those with less familiarity with the physical landscape and the social fabric of people and programs designed to help support land stewardship, can be even more daunting. When you have this energy and excitement to do something, you are eager to get started. I always encourage landowners to reach out to natural resource professionals in their local area because they are able to help them navigate the system of getting a management plan, finding the right professionals to work with, and applying for programs to support their work, plus they truly enjoy helping people reach their land care goals.”

When thinking about being an owner of her woodlands, Alanna agrees that it is the sweat equity that goes into caring for the land that she loves. She also loves seeing the changes over time, both from her management of the land and the natural changes over seasons and succession. But when it comes to her family property, she steps back and provides the initial seeds of ideas to her relatives. The politics of owning land with other family members can be quite challenging, so instead, she focuses more on the sentimental value.



Alanna and her family have a herd of cows as well as some other animals on their main property.



(top and bottom left) A controlled burn from the property.
(above) Logs piled up after a timber harvest.

Photos courtesy of Alanna Koshollek

The financials of owning and managing your woodland can be daunting.

Many women find property taxes and the costs of stewardship activities, such as invasive plant control and wildlife habitat creation, to be barriers to maintaining their land and reaching their goals. Particularly for women who inherit their land from their spouse or other family members, ownership costs can be surprising. If you find yourself in this struggle, consider ways for your woods to either make money or save money. Find out what local, state, and federal programs line up with your ownership goals and your property's characteristics and might reduce the financial burden. Cost-share programs, current use tax programs, and conservation easements all enable landowners to save money. Using your woods for wood products and other products (such as maple syrup), leasing the land for others' use, and selling **conservation easements** are all ways your woods could make money for you. Following is information about some of these options.

Current Use Tax Programs

As described, your land provides tremendous public benefits. In recognition of the many benefits it provides, most states have a property tax program that reduces taxes if a property is classified as forest or agricultural land. There are varying requirements regarding minimum acreage and what management activities need to occur on the property to be eligible for the program. Most programs require landowners to have a management plan. Contact your state's natural resources or forestry department to learn more.

KEY TERMS

CONSERVATION EASEMENT: A legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization that permanently protects the land by limiting agreed upon uses of the land, such as residential development and mining, while allowing other uses such as forest management, agriculture, and recreation; also known as a conservation restriction.



LAND TRUST: A nonprofit organization that can help landowners reach their conservation goals of keeping some or all of their land in its natural state forever.



Courtesy of Sarah Gworek

Conservation Easements

Women are often very interested in keeping their land forested and undeveloped to benefit future generations. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements on a specified piece of land designed to conserve its ecological value in perpetuity. Permanently protecting your woodland through a conservation easement results in lower property taxes, since the developmental rights (and often the mineral rights) are removed. If your land has exceptional ecological value, there may be opportunities to sell the conservation easement. There are also federal income and estate tax breaks for landowners donating their conservation easements to a qualified conservation organization. If you are interested in seeing your woods stay as woods permanently and not divided, contact a local **land trust** to find out more about this option for your property.

Leasing Your Land

Some landowners lease their land to help with ownership costs and bring in a small amount of money. Options for leasing include allowing others to hunt on your land, providing land on which livestock can graze, or granting access to electric and gas companies. Talk with other landowners in your area to learn about different ways leasing your land could be incorporated into your stewardship.

Your land is part of your legacy.

Planning for what happens when you are gone is critical to maintaining all the good work you have put in thus far. This might be the most important decision you make for your land. Deciding the future ownership and use of your land will benefit you, your family, and your community.

Estate planning tools, such as wills and trusts, can have a conservation-based focus. An estate planning attorney can help lay out options and the legal tools necessary to work in unison to achieve your goals. If you want your land to be permanently protected once you are no longer the owner, work with a local land trust to discuss options for donating or selling a conservation easement on the land, which can often result in financial compensation through a sale or tax break for your family.

Sally Hightower

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

wood products, recreation, conservation-based estate planning, wildlife

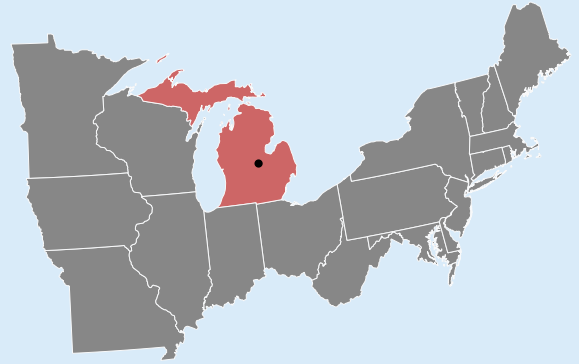
PROFESSIONALS:

consulting forester

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

management plan, American Tree Farm System, conservation easement

STATE: Michigan **ACRES:** 40



Growing up in the city, Sally Hightower was eager to stop renting and purchase land for herself when she moved to rural Michigan for a teaching position. Through connections at the school, she was able to get a deal on a 40-acre piece of property outside of town. Sally and her wife put in a 600-foot driveway, brought in electricity and phone lines, and built their house on the

beautiful banks of the Tittabawassee River. A forester connected them with the Dow Corning Corporation, which was interested in their timber and would pay for a management plan as well as wood removal from the property. The forester also pointed them in the direction of the American Tree Farm System, which he thought would be a great fit for their land.

In the years since she purchased the property, the surrounding parcels have been split up into smaller acreages, many of which are vacation spots for people coming up from the cities. Sally works with her neighbors to help inform them and try to get them engaged with their woods. She would love to see the green signs of the American Tree Farm System all up and down the road. Fostering community and connection might be valuable for her management, too. She has a 10-acre stand ready to be harvested but struggles to find a logger to do that small of a job.



View down to the river.

Instead, she is contacting neighboring landowners to come together for a joint harvest. She also communicates with the anglers who use her land and works hard to control erosion and manage trout habitat.

With a drive to improve the land, Sally has put in a lot of effort over the years. She cares deeply for her woodlands and is saddened when trees are harvested or removed. The property has had multiple harvests for pulp and pallet wood, timber stand improvement, and wildlife-specific management. She even convinced a couple of college kids to plant 1,200 red pine seedlings for her over the course of one summer. In the future, she wants to maintain the forest's healthy condition but see it mostly unchanged, so she donated a conservation easement to the Little Forks Conservancy.

Even as winner of the 2018 Michigan Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year, Sally still feels there is much to learn about her forest, but her love for her land keeps her going. During our interview, she shared: "I would have never imagined this city kid living in the woods and owning a tree farm and doing management practices, would have never thought it possible in my wildest dreams, but I am so thankful that I live here. And the first time I stood on this ridge where my house is and looked down at the river, I just had a peace come over me. I just felt total contentment and peace. I said, this is where I'm supposed to be, and I have never looked back. I love it out here."

Sally works with her neighbors to help inform them and try to get them engaged with their woods. She would love to see the green signs of the American Tree Farm System all up and down the road.



"The first time I stood on this ridge where my house is and looked down at the river, I just had a peace come over me. I just felt total contentment and peace."

—SALLY HIGHTOWER

(left) Sally and her wife, Linda, love the land and want to do what they can to take care of it. (right) Relaxing on the back porch.

Photos courtesy of Sally Hightower

By owning land, you are part of something larger.

The Ecological Landscape

Maintaining your woodlands to provide ecosystem services requires a scale more extensive than just your property. Most wildlife species depend on habitat larger than one piece of land for survival. Your woods likely represent only a portion of a watershed. Even recreational trails are often more fun when they are part of a larger network of trails on abutting properties. In maximizing your land's benefits, it is important to see its role within the surrounding properties and the landscape context.

Like a puzzle piece, your land fits among the ownerships around you. What role does it play at the landscape scale? What types of habitats does it provide? Are there stewardship activities that you can implement that will enhance the landscape value? Considering how your property interacts with the landscape is an important step in deciding how you will work with your woods. A forester or another natural resource professional can help define your landscape context and help you better understand the unique role your land plays.



Two generations together on a field walk. Courtesy of MassWoods

The Social Landscape

Not only does your land fit into the surrounding properties ecologically, but you also fit into the social network of your neighbors and your community. There is much to be learned from the knowledge and experience in this network. What type of stewardship have other women like you implemented? How did they make their decisions? What professionals and resources did they use? Were they satisfied with the outcomes? What would they do the same, and importantly, what would they do differently to avoid any mistakes? Meeting other landowners and sharing stories is an excellent way to become more informed.

As your experience grows, share your knowledge and expertise to benefit others. Speaking to your direct neighbors provides opportunities to explore ways to help one another reach your mutual goals. For example, controlling invasive plants on your land is a great way to engage with it and increase its health and resiliency. Still, suppose your neighbors do not control their invasive plants. In that case, you will be in a never-ending battle, as invasives often spread back over property boundaries. Working together will increase your likelihood of success. Even just sharing what you know about your land or the history of your area can be helpful. It all starts with something as simple as a walk or a neighborhood potluck. There may already be a network of women landowners in your area.



Courtesy of MassWoods



Photos top and middle: Courtesy of MassWoods; photo bottom: Courtesy of Rosey Santerre



Women Owning Woodlands (WOW) is a national program that brings together women woodland owners and enthusiasts in supportive learning environments, providing resources and information for women to become confident stewards of their land. There are local WOW groups in regions throughout the eastern United States; to learn more about WOW and find professionals and like-minded landowners near you, visit womenowningwoodlands.net. If there is not a network in your area, consider starting one. Connections, both online and in person, are valuable to everyone involved.

Carla Porter

STEWARDSHIP FOCUS:

invasive plant control, ecological landscape, social landscape

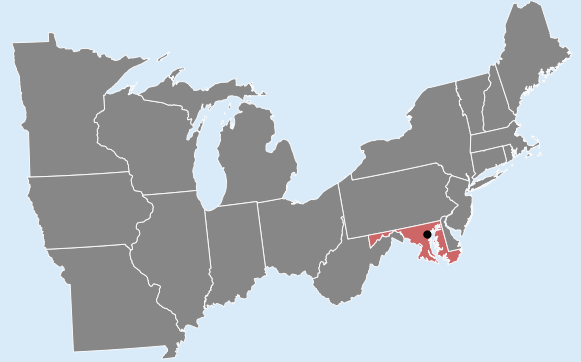
PROFESSIONALS:

university extension

TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED:

Master Gardener program, Maryland Woodland stewards, pesticide applicator license

STATE: *Maryland* **ACRES:** *1.5*



Small woodland owners often know their land down to every last tree and shrub. Caring for smaller properties is important for maintaining ecosystem services in the broader landscape. But finding resources for parcels that may be only a few acres in size can be challenging. If you are a small woodland owner (<10 acres), connecting with neighbors and adjacent woodland owners can help increase the impact of your stewardship activities.

Carla Porter moved to Maryland in 2001 and bought property in a newly developed community of small wooded plots. The 1.5 acres offer privacy and enable her to admire the natural world outside her windows. Even in her suburban neighborhood, there is always something going on to catch her eye. As a lifelong nature lover, Carla's goal for her property is to increase biodiversity, make it as resilient as possible against climate change, and help native and migrating wildlife.



A sense of curiosity about the plants and animals she saw out her windows inspired her to start learning more and focus on her property. One of her first steps was to join Maryland's Master Gardener program. Carla wanted to be well informed when making decisions that would affect her land now and in the future. The more she learned, the more she wanted to know! As a result, Carla pursued informal training with University of Maryland Extension. She took a forestry class, which helped her do an inventory of her woods. She also went through the process of getting her pesticide applicator's license to help manage the invasives she discovered.

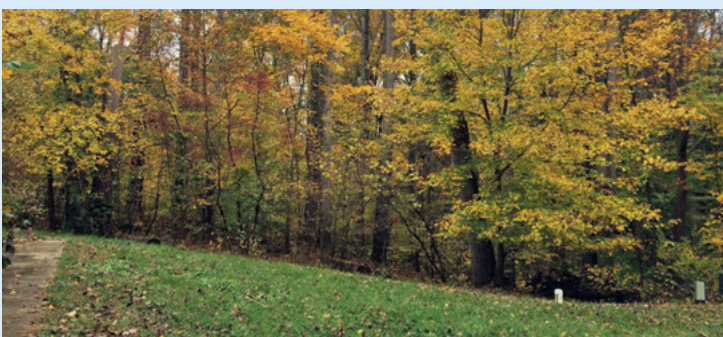
The small plot has been a battle site for invasive plants, like Japanese stiltgrass and chickweed, and Carla spends a lot of time manually removing them. Looking forward, she sees the need to learn how to use string trimmers, chainsaws, and other equipment but has not done so yet. Although she knows how to apply and use pesticides safely, she does not like using them on her property unless it is as a last resort.

Photos courtesy of Carla Porter

If you are a small woodland owner (<10 acres), connecting with neighbors and adjacent woodland owners can help increase the impact of your stewardship activities.

Another struggle is getting her neighbors to care about and be involved with their properties. Carla tried to use a grant opportunity that would have helped the neighborhood's homeowners' association receive funds to work on their collectively owned open space, but she could not get the small number of volunteers needed to complete the application. She hopes to continue to engage her neighbors and learn more herself.

Although challenging, this type of community organizing can help broaden the impact of healthy, diverse, and resilient forests on your land. Continuing to be creative with solutions, from neighborhood outreach to putting up fencing to prevent deer browse, is an important component of achieving the goals you have for your land.



(top left and above) Carla volunteers with Maryland's Master Gardener program for both classroom sessions and field walks. (bottom left) Carla's property in the fall.

CONTINUING TO BE CREATIVE WITH SOLUTIONS, FROM NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH TO PUTTING UP FENCING TO PREVENT DEER BROWSE, IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF ACHIEVING THE GOALS YOU HAVE FOR YOUR LAND.

CONCLUSION

Your land is a part of *you* are.

Deciding what to do with your woodlands can be overwhelming, but you have the ability to be an excellent steward of your land and all that lives on it. Small steps—such as defining your goals, learning more about your woods, talking to other landowners and professionals, having conversations with those who may inherit the land, and simply appreciating the land—will all contribute to successful ownership. No matter what direction you want to take for your land, there are people and resources to help you, including other women landowners, foresters, and natural resource professionals. Find what works for you and your learning style. Talk with professionals, read resources, attend webinars, or engage in field walks to inform your thinking.

If you are not sure what to do or have any hesitations, remember that you can always take a passive approach. In doing so, you maintain your options while still enjoying your land and providing tremendous public benefits.

A scenic landscape featuring a vibrant green field in the foreground, a winding dirt road, and a dense forest of trees in the background under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. Several cows are grazing in the field. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and rural.

There is no one “right” way
to achieve your goals.
Do not forget to enjoy your
woods and your role as a
woman on the land.

Resource Directory

GENERAL RESOURCES

- **Women Owning Woodlands Network**
womenowningwoodlands.net
- **Master Naturalist Programs**
(Alliance of Natural Resource Outreach and Service Programs)
anrosp.wildapricot.org
- **Master Gardener Programs**
mastergardener.extension.org
- **Call Before You Cut Programs**
callb4ucut.com
- **Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW)**
State-level programs in DE, IL, IN, IA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, NH, NJ, NY, OH, WV, WI

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- **Forest Stewardship Program (FSP)**
This US Forest Service program helps owners of forest land where good stewardship, including agroforestry practices, will enhance and sustain multiple forest resources and contribute to healthy and resilient landscapes. The program offers resources for landowners interested in active stewardship to develop a management plan.
- **Forest Legacy Program (FLP)**
This US Forest Service program encourages privately owned forests through perpetual conservation easements or land purchases. This program looks to encourage sustainable forest management through forest land protection.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**
This Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program provides financial and technical assistance to address concerns regarding environmental and natural resources. The program is funded through the Farm Bill. Contact your local NRCS office to learn more.
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**
This Farm Service Agency program focuses on land conservation. In exchange for a yearly payment, farmers/landowners agree to remove land of environmental interest from production and instead plant native species to improve the environmental health and quality of the area. Contracts are 10–15 years, and the long-term goals are to improve water quality, prevent erosion of soils, and preserve wildlife habitat.

STATE BY STATE

Connecticut

- **CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Forestry**
portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry
Service foresters for Connecticut landowners
portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry/Landowner-Assistance/Service-Forestry-Program-for-Connecticut-Landowners
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry/Forest-Practitioner-Certification/Forest-Practitioner-Certification
- **UConn Extension**
ctforestry.uconn.edu
- **Find a Land Trust**
ctconservation.org/findalandtrust

Delaware

- **Delaware Department of Agriculture, Forest Service**
agriculture.delaware.gov/forest-service
Service foresters for Delaware landowners
agriculture.delaware.gov/forest-service
- **Find a Consulting Forester and Landowner Assistance**
agriculture.delaware.gov/forest-service/conservation
- **University of Delaware Cooperative Extension**
udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/forestry
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/delaware10

Illinois

- **Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Forestry Resources**
District foresters for Illinois landowners
Directory of consulting foresters
www2.illinois.gov/dnr/conservation/Forestry/Pages/default.aspx
- **University of Illinois Extension Service**
extension.illinois.edu/global/agriculture-and-natural-resources
- **Find a Land Trust**
prairiestateconservation.org/pscc/directory-land-trusts-illinois

Indiana

- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry**
in.gov/dnr/forestry
District foresters for Indiana landowners
in.gov/dnr/forestry/4750.htm
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
findindianaforester.org
- **Purdue University Extension**
extension.purdue.edu/subcategory/17
- **Indiana Women 4 the Land**
women4theland.iaswcd.org
- **Find a Land Trust**
protectindianaland.org/indiana-land-trusts

Iowa

- **Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Forestry**
iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry
District foresters for Iowa landowners
iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Forestry-Landowner-Assistance
- **Iowa State Extension Office**
naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/forestry
- **Find a Land Trust**
iowalandoptions.org/resources/conservation-partners

Maine

- **Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Maine Forest Service**
maine.gov/dacf/mfs
District foresters for Maine landowners
maine.gov/dacf/mfs/policy_management/district_foresters.html
Woodland owners resources page
maine.gov/dacf/mfs/woodland_owners.html
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
maine.gov/dacf/mfs/policy_management/selecting_a_consulting_forester.html
- **University of Maine Extension Service**
extension.umaine.edu/woodland
- **Find a Land Trust**
mltn.org/trusts

Maryland

- **Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service**
dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/default.aspx
Service foresters for Maryland landowners
dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/contacts.aspx
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
extension.umd.edu/woodland/your-woodland/find-forester
- **University of Maryland Extension, Woodland Stewardship Education**
extension.umd.edu/woodland
- **Find a Land Trust**
dnr.maryland.gov/met/Pages/landtrusts.aspx

Massachusetts

- **Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Bureau of Forestry**
mass.gov/orgs/bureau-of-forest-fire-control-and-forestry
Service foresters for Massachusetts landowners
mass.gov/service-details/service-forestry
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
masswoods.org/professionals
- **UMass Extension, MassWoods**
masswoods.org
- **Find a Land Trust**
masswoods.org/professionals

Michigan

- **Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Forestry**
michigan.gov/forestry
- **Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Private Forestlands Initiative**
michigan.gov/pfi
Conservation district foresters for Michigan landowners
michigan.gov/mifap
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
michigan.gov/registeredforester
- **Michigan State University Extension Forestry**
canr.msu.edu/forestry/index
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/michigan26

Minnesota

- **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry**
dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/index.html

DNR stewardship foresters for Minnesota landowners
dnr.state.mn.us/woodlands/cfm-map.html
- **Find a Consulting Forester, MN Association of Consulting Foresters**
mnacf.org
- **University of Minnesota Extension**
extension.umn.edu/natural-resources/my-minnesota-woods
- **Minnesota Women's Woodland Network**
mnwwn.org
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/minnesota27

Missouri

- **Missouri Department of Conservation, Trees and Plants**
mdc.mo.gov/trees-plants

Regional foresters for Missouri landowners
mdc.mo.gov/regional-contacts
- **Find a Consulting Forester, Missouri Consulting Foresters Association**
missouriforesters.com/searchMCFA.php
- **University of Missouri Extension**
extension.missouri.edu/programs/woodland-steward
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/missouri29

New Hampshire

- **New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands**
nh.gov/hhdf

County foresters for New Hampshire landowners (UNH Extension): extension
unh.edu/countyforesters
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
extension.unh.edu/resource/directory-licensed-foresters
- **UNH Extension Service**
extension.unh.edu/topics/natural-resources
- **Find a Land Trust**
nhlfc.org/find-land-trust

New Jersey

- **New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Forest Service**
state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest

Regional service foresters for New Jersey landowners
state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest/njfs_regional_offices.html
- **Find a Consulting Forester, NJ Board of Tree Experts**
njtreeexperts.org
- **Rutgers Extension, Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources**
njaes.rutgers.edu/anr
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/newjersey34

New York

- **New York Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Lands and Forests**
dec.ny.gov/lands/309.html

DEC stewardship foresters for New York landowners
dec.ny.gov/lands/97398.html
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
dec.ny.gov/lands/5230.html
- **Cornell Extension, ForestConnect**
blogs.cornell.edu/cceforestconnect
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/newyork36

Ohio

- **Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Division of Forestry**
ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/about-odnr/forestry/forestry

Service foresters for Ohio landowners
ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/about-ODNR/forestry/landowner-assistance/aab-service-foresters
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/woodland-management/find-consulting-forester
- **Ohio State University Extension, Woodland Stewards Program**
woodlandstewards.osu.edu
- **Find a Land Trust**
ohiolandtrusts.org/find-a-land-trust

Pennsylvania

- **Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Bureau of Forestry**
dcnr.pa.gov/about/Pages/Forestry.aspx

Service foresters for Pennsylvania landowners
dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/ForestsAndTrees/ManagingYourWoods/Pages/default.aspx
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/ForestsAndTrees/ManagingYourWoods/Pages/default.aspx
- **Penn State Extension, Forests and Wildlife**
extension.psu.edu/forests-and-wildlife
- **Women and Their Woods, Delaware Highlands Conservancy**
delawarehighlands.org/watw
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/pennsylvania42

Rhode Island

- **Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), Forest Environment**
dem.ri.gov/programs/forestry

Service foresters for Rhode Island landowners
dem.ri.gov/programs/forestry/stewardship/index.php
- **University of Rhode Island Extension, Rhode Island Woods**
rhodeislandwoods.uri.edu
- **Find a Land Trust**
rilandtrusts.org/landTrusts.htm

Vermont

- **Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation**
fpr.vermont.gov/forests

County foresters for Vermont landowners
fpr.vermont.gov/forest/list-vermont-county-foresters
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
fpr.vermont.gov/forest/managing-your-woodlands/working-professional
- **University of Vermont Extension, Our Vermont Woods**
ourvermontwoods.org
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/vermont50

West Virginia

- **West Virginia Division of Forestry**
wvforestry.com

Service foresters for West Virginia landowners
wvforestry.com/forestry-consultants
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
wvforestry.com/forestry-consultants
- **West Virginia University Extension Service**
extension.wvu.edu/natural-resources/forestry
- **Find a Land Trust**
findalandtrust.org/states/westvirginia54

Wisconsin

- **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Forestry Division**
dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/forestry

DNR service foresters for Wisconsin landowners
dnr.wi.gov/fal
- **Find a Consulting Forester**
dnr.wi.gov/fal
- **University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension**
erc.cals.wisc.edu/programs/regional-natural-resources-education-program
- **Women of Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association**
wisconsinwoodlands.org/women-of-wwoa
- **Find a Land Trust**
gatheringwaters.org/find-land-trust-near-you



Courtesy of Alanna Koshollek

Your land is a part of who you are.



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