



United States Department of Agriculture

# *“Sunshine, Sweat, and Tears”*

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN TIES TO LAND AND FORESTS IN THE SOUTH**



Forest Service  
Southern Research Station

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**Authors:**

**John Schelhas** is a Research Forester, Forestry Sciences Laboratory, USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Athens, GA 30602; **Sarah Hitchner** is an Assistant Research Scientist, Center for Integrative Conservation Research, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602; **Cassandra Johnson Gaither** is a Research Social Scientist, Forestry Sciences Laboratory, USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Athens, GA 30602; and **Viniece Jennings** is a Biological Scientist, Forestry Sciences Laboratory, USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Athens, GA 30602.

**Editorial Note:**

The views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the United States Government. The quotations presented in this document are taken directly from the interview transcriptions. Our goal is to give readers access to the voices and perspectives of African-American land and forest owners. While we have edited lightly for clarity, we have left vernacular usage and grammar intact while endeavoring not to change any interviewee's words or their meaning. We have removed names of specific people, places, and companies for the sake of confidentiality.

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Southern Research Station  
200 W.T. Weaver Blvd.  
Asheville, NC 28804  
[www.srs.fs.usda.gov](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov)

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John **Schelhas**

Sarah **Hitchner**

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Viniece **Jennings**

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## ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program is a comprehensive effort to address the long-standing problem of under-participation of African Americans in forest management. This report describes the results of rapid appraisal baseline research for pilot projects in this program in three Southern States. The research used a carefully selected purposive sample and was designed to enhance our understanding of minority land ownership and forest management. African-American landowners interviewed valued land highly for its connections to earlier generations and were nearly unanimous in wanting future generations to retain their land. However, heirs' property status often results in insecure property ownership, and most families received little or no economic return from their land. Forest stands tend to be naturally regenerated pine forests that require thinning, burning, or even complete harvest and replanting if owners are to benefit economically from forestry. Limited experience with forestry in the African-American community and a history of inequities and distrust create a challenging situation. Many forests have been unmanaged and require family landowners to both implement forestry practices that are unfamiliar and engage forestry professionals for the first time. Sustainable forest management can facilitate land retention, but landowners often require time and assistance to engage family members, consider options, and resolve ownership issues.

**Keywords:** African-American forest owners, family forestry, heirs' property.

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*“We need to save it for our family. Also for  
African-American families and culture. [Our family]  
bought the land in 1890.... I don’t have any  
financial gain, but I have an interest in the legacy....  
All the *sunshine, sweat, and tears.*  
That’s why I’m hanging in there.”*

—Female forest landowner in South Carolina

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# INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, launched a 6-year program in 2012 to test the potential of sustainable forestry practices to help stabilize African-American land ownership, increase forest health, and build economic assets in the southern Black Belt. The program began with 30-month pilot projects initiated with partner organizations working in three multi-county regions: (1) Roanoke Rural Electric Cooperative and partners in northeastern North Carolina, (2) Center for Heirs' Property Preservation and partners in five coastal counties of South Carolina, and (3) Limited Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network (LRLEAN) and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in the Black Belt of west-central Alabama.

The goals of the 30-month pilot program were:

- 1 Move at least 20 African-American forest landowners per pilot project to a position of secure ownership and high probability of profitable, long-term forest management;
- 2 Model effective and flexible systems of support for African-American forest landowners using a mix of private and governmental service providers to help landowners gain clear title and estate plans, access high-quality forestry services, and access traditional and emerging markets for forest products;
- 3 Document in detail (a) the attitudes of African-American landowners about the use and management of their forests, (b) the conditions of those forests, and (c) the potential of sustainable forest management to increase profitability and land asset value.

The pilot projects were designed to build and coordinate systems of support for African-American landowners involving non-profits, academic institutions, for-profit service companies, and government agencies. The goal was to increase the economic value (i.e., generate added income and land asset value) of land through increased use of sustainable forest management. This initiative was intended to help stem land loss among African Americans in the identified regions by addressing issues such as heirs' property and estate planning, assistance with loan and grant applications, financial management and business education, the identification of markets for timber and non-timber forest products, and access to forestry services and forestry education.

The program also included a research component to: (1) establish baseline conditions for the pilot regions in order to understand current issues and measure progress, (2) provide pilot sites with information to strengthen project planning and management, (3) provide data to guide future expansion of the program, and (4) add to scholarship and general knowledge



of the relationships among African Americans, land, and forests. While family forest owners in general have been extensively studied, there have been very few systematic studies of African-American forest owners. To meet these research objectives, a semi-structured interview guide was developed covering a range of topics about landowners and land and forest management, including: (1) land and forest ownership characteristics (e.g., acreage held, uses, forest conditions), (2) land and forest owner characteristics (e.g., demographics), (3) present and past land and forest management practices and forest conditions, (4) values and attitudes related to land and forests, (5) forms of ownership and heirs' property, (6) social relationships and forms of organization, (7) future plans related to land and forests, and (8) potential for increased income and asset value.

“ *The pilot projects were designed to build and coordinate systems of support for African-American landowners.* ”

This report presents the literature review that served as the basis for developing the rapid appraisal, as well as a summary of the qualitative data collected for the three pilot projects. The latter is primarily an organized presentation of quotes from interviews and field notes, with some explanatory text. These quotes provide important insight into African-American landowner perspectives in their own words at an extent that cannot be provided in journal articles (e.g., Hitchner and others 2017, Schelhas and others 2016).

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Private Forest Owners

There are an estimated 11 million private forest landowners in the United States who collectively hold 55 percent of the Nation's forest land (Butler 2008). In the 13 Southern States, there are 4.96 million private forest owners holding 86.6 percent of the forest land; family forest owners constitute 4.45 million of the private forest owners, and they hold 59 percent of the forest land (Butler 2008).

Studies of nonindustrial private forest landowners have described their social and economic characteristics (Birch 1996, Hartsell and Brown 2002, Somberg 1971), attitudes and values (Bliss and others 1994, Bourke and Luloff 1994, Erickson and De Young 1994, Johnson and others 1997), forest management practices (Brockett and Gebhard 1999, Zobrist and Lippke 2003), and use of assistance (Zhang and others 1998). As a result of these studies, we know that private forest landowners are diverse in characteristics, ownership objectives, and amount and type of forest owned (Best and Wayburn 2001, Jones and others 1995).

In the South, forest owners tend to be older (and often retired) and more highly educated and wealthier than the general population (Wicker 2002). The percentage of forest owners who are farmers is low nationwide, and in the South, farmers currently represent less than 10 percent of the private forest owners, compared to more than half in the 1950s in some States (Somberg 1971). People in the South own forests for many reasons, including aesthetics, scenery, and open space; wildlife, recreation, income and investment; and timber (an important objective for one quarter to one half of the landowners) (Wicker 2002).

“ *People in the South own forests for many reasons, including aesthetics, scenery, and open space; wildlife, recreation, income and investment; and timber.* ”

Nationwide, forest owners apply professional forest management techniques to varying degrees. Only a small percentage make use of forestry assistance and have management plans; most landowners have limited knowledge of professional forestry, and many forest landholdings receive little systematic management (Birch 1996, Bliss 1993, Erickson and others 2002, Jones and others 1995). In the South, a review of forest landowner studies (Wicker 2002) came to the following conclusions:

- 1 Owners generally have a low awareness of forest management opportunities, laws that affect forest management, and financial incentives.
- 2 Many owners are not actively managing their forests, especially those with less than 100 acres.
- 3 The reasons for lack of management include lack of interest in timber, aesthetics, lack of capital or time, and lack of knowledge about management and marketing.



- 4 A great majority of owners do not seek professional forestry assistance; however, a much higher percentage do sell trees, with little correlation with size of landholding.
- 5 Less than 5 percent have professionally prepared forest management plans, and these are particularly uncommon for those with small and mid-sized tracts.
- 6 The majority have not participated in educational programs, and small landowners are less likely than large ones to have used cost-share programs.

These findings indicate that forest ownership can, in economic terms, be a factor of both production (e.g., for timber) and consumer goods purchased for amenity value (Zhang and others 2005).

There have been a number of efforts to further explore forest landowner types and relationships between characteristics, values, and practices as a way to better tailor assistance and extension programs to forest owners in order to reach more of them and have a greater influence on their management practices. One way of understanding landowners is through typologies, which can segment landowners based on criteria such as innovation-adoption behavior, land management practices, and values (Emtage and others 2007, Kurtz and Lewis 1981). Typologies in the South often show distinct clusters related to residential patterns, forest values, income, and interest in timber harvesting (e.g., Kluender and Walkingstick 2000). To give some idea of the distribution of these interests, clustering of National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS) data from Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina grouped forest owners into three attitudinal types: multi-objective (49.1 percent of owners), timber (29.4 percent, only interested in timber and land investment), and non-timber (21.5 percent, valuing non-consumptive uses such as aesthetic values, biodiversity, recreation, and privacy) (Majumdar and others 2008). Segmentation has been used to examine information-seeking behavior related to forest pests (Surendra and others 2009); sources of forestry information (Salmon and others 2006); communication strategies, management services, and assistance programs for new forest owners (Kendra and Hull 2005); and willingness to harvest woody biomass (Aguilar and others 2013). In an effort

to use clustering to tailor outreach approaches, Butler and others (2007) used a social marketing perspective to separate landowners into groups based on their attitudes toward the land; for example, some see their forest(s) as a woodland retreat, while others see it as a source of primary or supplementary income. They also analyzed engagement and interest in land management in order to more specifically tailor outreach efforts.

Other studies have looked for determinants of forest management practices [see, for example, Beach and others (2005) and Hyberg and Holthausen (1989) for reviews] and use of assistance such as program participation behavior (Bell and others 1994, Kluender and others 1999, Nagubadi and others 1996, Onianwa and others 1999a). Landowners most likely to participate in forestry cost-share programs are those with larger tracts, residence in close proximity of their woodland, fewer years of ownership, and commercial interests (Nagubadi and others 1996). Attitudes and experience with forestry can be a more important predictor of participation in forestry programs than monetary incentives (Bell and others 1994). Similarly, Nagubadi and others (1996) found that close contact with public and private forestry agencies is a key indicator of participation, and they suggest that forestry organizations can be critical links between landowners and public agencies in making owners aware of benefits. Nationwide, only 4 percent of forest owners, who own 17 percent of the family forest land, report having a written forest management plan, and 14 percent of family forest owners, owning 37 percent of the family forest land, receive advice about their forest (State agencies, private consultants, and Federal agencies are the top three sources of advice) (Butler 2008). In Alabama, Zhang and others (1998) found differences in the service provided by these foresters, with consulting foresters providing the most assistance, public foresters serving only a small percentage of landowners but being most likely to have small and low-income landowners as their clients, and industry foresters focusing more on medium and large landowners due to economies of scale.

“ *Forestry organizations can be critical links between landowners and public agencies in making owners aware of benefits.* ”

Most of the literature reviewed thus far used questionnaires with closed-ended questions. And while it is true that this type of research accounts for much of what we know about forest owners, a few studies have shown the value of other types of methods. Studies using qualitative methods provide another avenue for understanding forest owners' values and motivations. By providing greater depth, detail, and context about motivations and practices, qualitative analyses may be particularly helpful to those working with forest owners (Bengston and others 2011, Bliss and Martin 1989). Tikkanen and others (2006) found that an analysis using cognitive mapping techniques provided different results than questionnaire studies, in particular, by revealing identity motivation and providing more nuanced understanding of forest values and management objectives. Using a two-person team to interview and 'walk the land' with a random sample of forest owners from one county in Indiana, Koontz (2001) found that motivation for land use activities varied among landowners, with non-monetary motivations more commonly associated with owners who had smaller total landholdings, had higher household income, had higher education, were of younger age, and did not rely on the parcel income for their economic livelihood.

Social network analysis (SNA), a more recent development in the social sciences, looks at relationships among forest owners and forestry professionals rather than owner characteristics or motivations. Rickenbach (2009) used SNA to study a landowner cooperative and found that landowner associations and peer-to-peer learning approaches can build trust, with resources for landowners most often being provided through a combination of strong ties to forestry professionals and weak ties with other landowners. Knoot and Rickenbach (2011) found that landowners that were a part of diverse social networks that included forestry experts were more likely to use Best Management Practices, although this network participation made harvesting decisions more difficult for landowners at the same time.

Finally, intergenerational transfer of forest land has been widely discussed as a key issue in family forestry due to concerns that generational value change or interest in forest management could affect timber supply, outdoor recreation opportunities, and watershed protection (Butler and Leatherberry 2004). Research on generational transfer has been limited but is perhaps increasing. Amacher and others (2002) studied bequest intentions in Virginia, finding that higher timber prices reduce timber bequests while higher amenity valuation increases them, and that absentee owners are more likely to make bequests than those who reside on the property permanently. Mater (2005) interviewed family forest owners and their adult children, finding that their children had limited experience and knowledge of forest lands but also can be expected to bring new values and motivations to land management.

In summary, we know that forest owners have diverse demographic characteristics, that they own forests for many reasons, and that relatively few landowners have management plans or use professional or financial assistance in managing their forests. Yet many forest owners sell trees at some point. Forest owner typologies have clustered forest landowners into groups in different ways. Two examples of typologies are: (1) multi-objective, timber, and non-consumptive; and (2) woodland retreat, working the land, supplemental income, and ready to sell. Landowners that have management plans and are involved in landowner groups are more likely to undertake many forest management activities. Qualitative research, including face-to-face interviews, cognitive mapping, and 'walking the land' have been used to provide different and often more nuanced data than questionnaires typically provide. There has been relatively little research on cross-generational differences in forest management and transfer of forest land, although this is a topic of current interest.

## **African-American Forest Owners**

Forest landowners in the United States are racially and ethnically diverse (table 1), and African Americans account for a significant share of the population of the rural South (Frey 1998). Decline in African-American farmers and farm land ownership over the past century has been well-documented (Wood and Gilbert 2000, Zabawa 1991). We have limited knowledge of how African-American forest owners and ownerships differ from majority forest owners and ownerships. The few regional surveys that have reported race and ethnicity data have found them to represent only a small percentage of forest owners and to own an even smaller percentage of forest land, although response rates to forest owner surveys may be lower for African Americans than for majority owners. Birch and others (1982) found that in 1978, African Americans made up 8.5 percent of family forest landowners and held 4.7 percent of the family forest lands. Recent data from the Forest

Service's National Woodland Owner Survey (Butler 2008) found that African Americans made up 4.2 percent of the family forest landowners and held 1.4 percent of the family forest land (table 2). Although these surveys are related, methodological changes over time limit comparability. Furthermore, the relatively small percentage of African-American forest landowners in these surveys has made it difficult to statistically examine differences among forest landowner values and behaviors by race. Yet we know that race and ethnicity influence the way that people interact with, use, and value forests, and that this can be due to both cultural differences (values) and to structural factors (e.g., differences in economic status and education, or marginalization in access to services and assistance) (Bliss 1992, Schelhas 2002).

**Table 1—Area of forest and number of owners by ethnicity and race of family forest owners in the United States<sup>a</sup>**

Ethnicity and race	Area	Number
	<i>thousand acres</i>	<i>thousands</i>
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Hispanic or Latino	3,333	110
Non-Hispanic or Latino	220,343	9,116
No answer	28,298	998
<b>Race</b>		
People reporting a single race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,203	56
Asian	429	17
Black or African American	1,731	163
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	209	32
White	224,885	9,116
Two or more races	4,494	217
No answer	19,024	623

<sup>a</sup>Excluding interior Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, western Oklahoma, and western Texas.  
Source: Butler (2008).

**Table 2—Estimated area and number of private family forests by race for 12 Southern States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma (eastern), South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (eastern), and Virginia**

Forest holding size	Total		White		Black or African American	
	Area	Owners	Area	Owners	Area	Owners
<i>acres</i>	<i>thousand acres</i>	<i>thousand</i>	<i>thousand acres</i>	<i>thousand</i>	<i>thousand acres</i>	<i>thousand</i>
Total	116,174	3,326	103,191	3,326	1,609	140
1–9	6,141	2,097	5,347	1,734	253	93
10–49	21,234	1,182	18,612	1,043	694	38
50–99	16,086	295	14,419	261	249	5
100–499	39,151	176	35,768	255	383	3
500–999	11,593	25	10,365	22	30	0
1000–4999	15,872	13	14,301	12	0	0
5000+	6,096	1	4,379	1	0	0

Source: Butler (2008).

The issues associated with stemming Black land loss and encouraging forest management among Black landowners are not new. Hilliard-Clark and Chesney (1985) addressed these issues in a *Journal of Forestry* article over 30 years ago. They note factors such as primary exposure to the labor-intensive side of forestry and the lack of natural resource educational opportunities as contributing to low participation of Black landowners in forest management; moreover, none of the forest owners they talked to had received forestry technical assistance. They also noted that owners experience bias in programs and that heirs' property often prevented full engagement in forest management.

Most of what we know about African-American forest landowners has come from several studies that used purposive, rather than random, samples (Gan and Kolison 1999, Gan and others 2003, Guffey and others 2009). These studies have found African-American forest landowners to be similar to the broader population of family forest owners in having diverse objectives and occupations, and they tend not to be farmers (Gan and others 2003). However, they have also been found to have smaller tracts and to either not engage in forest management or to manage land less intensively than the broader forest owner population. Furthermore, they were generally not aware of or using assistance programs, and they faced more constraints than their majority counterparts (Gan and others 2003, Guffey and others 2009). Recommended strategies to address these concerns include creating awareness of the benefits of forest management, overcoming obstacles (such as distrust and inability to afford cost sharing) to participation in financial assistance programs, increasing technical assistance in forest management, and selling timber (Gan and Kolison 1999, Gan and others 2003, Guffey and others 2009). Gan and others (2003) note that African-American forest owners who are relatively well-off and educated can play a role in diffusing forestry knowledge and promoting rural development.

“ *African-American forest landowners placed a higher value on passing the land to the next generation than their White counterparts.* ”

Schelhas and others (2012) explored differences among Black and White family forest landowners in Macon County, AL, with a survey mailed to a random sample of forest owners. All family forest landowners shared many characteristics, goals, and practices, including higher age, some college education, similar average household income, and diversified ownership objectives. However, African Americans were less aware of the cost-share programs and had lower levels of program participation. Whites visited their forest land more frequently than African Americans and more frequently planted trees, reduced fire hazards, and protected wildlife habitat. African Americans tended to be very broad in terms of their desires for sources of forest land management information, perhaps because they had greater overall information needs and less experience with forest management, while White landowners tended to rely on forestry professionals. African-American forest landowners placed a higher value on passing the land to the next generation than their White counterparts, but were generally more open to future generations making land use changes and were not managing forest land as actively as White landowners—likely reflecting the historical importance to them of the goal of land ownership (Zabawa 1991) and their limited experience with forestry.



Several studies have examined land and forest management behaviors. A consent decree in 1999 settled the Pigford case, a class action lawsuit by Black farmers that alleged discrimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the form of loans and assistance (Schelhas 2002). Gordon and others (2013) discuss African-American landowner relationships and distrust with forestry assistance providers, including USDA and county forestry committees. Gan and others (2005) analyzed participation in the conservation program and found that neither White nor minority landowners had high participation rates in conservation programs and were equally likely to participate in programs overall. White landowners were more likely to participate in some programs (e.g., CRP, or Conservation Reserve Program) and enrolled more acres in the CRP and Forestry Incentives Program (FIP). Minorities were more likely to be dissatisfied with program participation and less likely to be able to afford the cost share. Analyzing the same data set, Onianwa and others (2004) found that membership in a conservation organization was a significant indicator of participation in agricultural cost-share programs. Onianwa and others (1999b) also found that minorities had fewer acres enrolled in the CRP, but there was no significant difference among White and minority landowners in plans to retain trees after the contract period. Studying timber harvesting and use of assistance, Gan and Kebede (2005) found that African Americans with large tracts, like White owners with large tracts, were more likely to harvest timber. However, African-American farmers were less likely to harvest timber than their White counterparts. The existence of management plans was an important predictor of African-American owners seeking technical and financial assistance. Johnson Gaither and others (2011) found that African-American landowners were more aware of wildland fire mitigation programs than White landowners, but were less likely to use them.

“ *Heirs’ property, due to partition sales and tax sales, is a leading cause of African-American land loss.* ”

Structural factors are also important in understanding forest and land management practices of African-American forest owners. Concentration of forest land in the hands of a few, low taxes, and minimal government services, which are often associated with the regions around forest products mills, can inhibit development and limit social mobility (Bliss and others 1998, Bliss and Bailey 2005, Joshi and others 2000). While Bliss and others (1998) showed



this across two Alabama counties, Fraser and others (2005) find differences and geographic segmentation within an Alabama county. Further research by Gaywali and others (2009) shows that, within a county, initial well-being and race conditions are better predictors of local well-being than changing land cover, emphasizing the importance of social structure. Gordon and others (2013) discussed the fears of African-American landowners that agency staff, private lenders, and other elements of White society in Mississippi communities would conspire to force them off their land.

Land loss by African Americans in the rural South has long been a concern (Gilbert and others 2002, Wood and Gilbert 2000, Zabawa 1991, Zabawa and others 1990). African-American landowners often engage in off-farm employment, and many rent out their farm land (Gilbert and others 2002, Wood and Gilbert 2000). Many are older, and land has often been passed on without wills (Wood and Gilbert 2000, Zabawa and others 1990). Heirs' property (also called "heir property"), or land passed on without wills, is common because of distrust of the legal system, lack of knowledge or superstition, a desire to keep land as a common family resource, and to avoid anticipated conflict related to land division. However, heirs' property, due to partition sales and tax sales, is a leading cause of African-American land loss (Dyer and Bailey 2008, Gordon and others 2013, Zabawa and others 1990). Dyer and others (2009) found heirs' property to be widespread and diverse, with many of those paying property tax bills living out of state. Gordon and others (2013) note that the multiple owners of heirs' property make forest management practices such as thinning, harvesting, and prescribed burning difficult because these activities require proof of ownership and a contract signed by each owner. A more positive trend is return migration of African Americans to the South, with many return migrants being educated, skilled, and seeking engagement with the land (Falk and others 2004, Stack 1996).

There have been a number of efforts to develop extension and outreach program for underserved and minority forest landowners. Hughes and Monaghan (2001) conducted 29 county-level workshops in Mississippi aimed at minority, female, and underserved landowners through county extension programs. The workshops addressed basic ownership, marketing, economic, and environmental issues rather than technical forestry issues, and county agents estimated that 50–70 percent of the participants were new contacts. Hughes and others (2005) expanded these workshops to Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee, and reported that 90 percent of the participants planned to use a professional forester in the

future compared to 45 percent who had used one in the past. In another related project, Measells and others (2006) used focus groups and a mail questionnaire to learn about topics of interest for future educational programs, with top responses being wildlife management, insects/diseases, marketing, harvesting, and Best Management Practices.

There are also examples of community-based landowner outreach programs that operate outside the Cooperative Extension systems. Diop and Fraser (2009) reported on the Federation of Southern Cooperatives community-based forestry approach, which goes beyond technical assistance for individual landowner needs to also include networking, coalition-building, and cooperative development with the goals of increasing land retention, improving access to public and private services, and implementing land-based income-earning strategies. Hamilton and others (2007) report on community-based workshops developed by Alabama A&M University with USDA Forest Service funding. The workshops were designed to build community capacity and networks, stimulate land management, and build connections among landowners and technical personnel. Christian and others (2013) discuss how the Limited Resource Landowners Education and Assistance Network (LRLEAN) in Alabama facilitated access of minority landowners to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) cost-share programs, helping to overcome a long-standing disconnect.

“ *While African-American forest owners, like forest owners in general, have diverse objectives, income levels, and occupations, they are often in positions of structural disadvantage by having less land, using less technical and financial assistance, and undertaking fewer forest management activities.* ”

In summary, declining minority land ownership has been well documented, and while more research has been done in relation to farming, there has been some research done related to forestry. While African-American forest owners, like forest owners in general, have diverse objectives, income levels, and occupations, they are often in positions of structural disadvantage by having less land, using less technical and financial assistance, and undertaking fewer forest management activities. There is also evidence of different cultural values, including greatly valuing land ownership and greater interest in farming than forestry. Heirs' property remains a significant issue, with cultural, legal, and economic implications. Separating structural and cultural factors is difficult, as they are often intertwined. There are a number of published descriptions of innovative outreach programs for minority forest owners that can provide guidance on needed topics for outreach as well as comprehensive methods for landowner engagement.

## METHODS

### A Modified Rapid Appraisal Technique for Collecting Qualitative Data

In the late 1970s, a variety of interdisciplinary rapid appraisal techniques began to be developed in association with international agriculture and agroforestry development programs (Beebe 1995, Russell and Harshbarger 2003). While these grew out of a number of traditions (Chambers 1992), they shared an interest in getting a broad understanding of complex social and ecological systems in a short period of time, often by deploying interdisciplinary teams, to set the stage for project planning and future research (Chambers 1992, Collinson 1981, Conway 1985, Hildebrand 1981, Schelhas 1991). Attention in international development later shifted to participatory and community-based approaches in which project personnel focused on catalyzing community action and local empowerment. However, many of the general principles are similar, and in practice a rapid appraisal can draw on a range of named techniques (rapid rural appraisal, participatory rural appraisal, etc.) to be tailored to specific objectives and conditions (Beebe 1995, Chambers 1992, Russell and Harshbarger 2003).

Hildebrand's (1981) "sondeo" technique uses interdisciplinary teams of social scientists (e.g., anthropologists, sociologists, and economists) and technical personnel (e.g., agronomists, foresters, or plant breeders). Interviewing and observation are done in pairs (one social scientist and one technical person), with each pair visiting a landholder, observing their land, and conducting a semi-structured interview. Following the interview, the team members engage in discussions among themselves to share thoughts on the interview and observations made during the site visit to generate a shared cross-disciplinary understanding. While there are many versions of rapid appraisal, Beebe (1995) suggests that they all endeavor to: (1) understand the social and environmental system from both



insider (landowner) and outsider (research scientists) perspectives, (2) promote triangulation across different information sources and disciplines to develop a more comprehensive understanding, and (3) be a part of flexible iterative processes where research and action are continually informed by and build on earlier efforts.

Rapid appraisals are valuable for understanding different points of view and quickly learning about patterns and variability, and they are often used to inform baseline or other formal surveys and to begin planning (Russell and Harshbarger 2003). At the same time, great care must be taken in their use because sampling is not adequate for generalization of quantitative data, they generally lack sufficient depth for understanding underlying behaviors in the ways achievable through ethnography, and they risk biased sampling or raising expectations among community members (Russell and Harshbarger 2003). When used carefully, however, rapid appraisal can provide a meaningful introduction to a broad and integrated understanding of complex social and ecological systems and lay a solid foundation for later research and practice.

“ *Rapid appraisals are valuable for understanding different points of view and quickly learning about patterns and variability.* ”

Data in this report were collected using a modified rapid appraisal technique. Our rapid appraisal approach was designed to enable a broad, purposive sampling<sup>1</sup> of landowners in the study area to: (1) collect baseline conditions for a diverse set of selected landowners; (2) enhance our knowledge of landowner outlooks, practices, and resources and limitations for project development and further research; and (3) provide a focal point for discussions among project personnel and outside advisors for development and improvement of the program. We developed an interview guide (see appendix) that covered the desired topics, but questions were asked conversationally. Interview data were collected by a team of social scientists, and forest condition data were collected by a forester. Fieldwork was carried out from July to September 2014. Interviews were conducted in: (1) South Carolina, where the Sustainable Forestry Program of the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation (CHPP) was working in Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, and Georgetown Counties; (2) Alabama, where LRLEAN and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives were working in Marengo, Hale, Greene, Wilcox, Sumter, and Dallas Counties; and (3) North Carolina, where the Roanoke Rural Electric Cooperative was working with landowners in several counties in northeastern North Carolina, including Halifax, Northampton, Bertie, Hertford, Perquimans, Gates, and Wake Counties.

In each pilot project site, the project forester, in collaboration with the research team, selected a purposive sample designed to include a diversity of forest landowners in the study

<sup>1</sup>In a purposive sample, interviewees are selected based on specific characteristics, in this case to represent the diversity among a population of landowners. This type of purposive sample helps illuminate the range present in the populations and ensures that results do not only reflect a subset of the populations, e.g., male forest owners or those most interested in forestry. A purposive sample is also useful when, as in this case, we do not have a list of the entire population, e.g., all African-American forest owners in a particular geographic area, from which to draw a random sample, or, even if we did, they would be unlikely to participate in the study. Unlike a random sample, results cannot be used to infer characteristics of the larger population. For example, if 10 percent of our sample has a certain attribute, we cannot use this statistic to infer that 10 percent of the larger population of African-American forest owners has that same characteristic.

area. The sample for each State included 20 landowners—10 that were involved as active participants in the pilot project and 10 that were not involved or had only recently been in touch with the pilot project and therefore had limited experience with it. To be included, landowners needed to have at least 10 acres of land. The sample was selected to represent the diversity that is present among landowners, including diversity in: (1) landownership sizes and forest conditions and (2) landowner gender, income or class, employment and occupations (e.g., retired and working, farming and off-farm employment, job and profession diversity, etc.), management objectives (e.g., timber, wildlife, aesthetics), and experience with forestry (e.g., none, some, extensive).

The research team consisted of social scientists and foresters to facilitate simultaneous engagement with the social and forest conditions within which African-American landowners operate. We chose the family land ownership as the unit of analysis because heirs' property land is often owned at the family level. Relationships among individuals, households, and families in rural settings are complex and often ambiguous, and they show considerable variation across cultures; anthropological research must therefore be open and attentive to both morphology and function of land-owning and economic groups (Netting and others 1984). Accordingly, our research revealed complex formal and informal land divisions among families, complicated multi-generational and multi-household ownership patterns, multiple tax parcel divisions within a single ownership, and a variety of arrangements in designating management authority. Interviews were arranged with one member of each family landowning group, and that member was asked to invite other members to be present including those residing in other households and of different generations. In some cases, family members living outside the locality were brought into the interview via telephone.

Landowner visits ranged in length from 2 to 4 hours and were conducted in families' homes, on their land, or in nearby community centers. When possible, the visit included a ride or walk around the property to see forest conditions. All but 8 of the 60 interviews were audio recorded with permission of interviewees. About half the interviews were with groups of two or more family members (the largest being eight—two parents and six children). Generally, one or two individuals did most of the talking in any given interview (often corresponding with land management responsibility). Although we sought opinions from additional members present and noted differences, we were careful not to foster or exacerbate discord among family members. Internal household or family research on this topic requires a long-term ethnographic presence. A written summary of each interview (with areas of family disagreement softened) and a copy of each forestry assessment were given to each interviewee as a record of the interview and for potential use in forest planning. Foresters made a separate visit to access forest conditions. A summary of the interview notes and the forest conditions assessment were given to each landowner by the pilot project foresters after fieldwork was completed.

# RESULTS

**A Summary of African-American  
Landowner Perspectives**

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA

Nearly two-thirds of the primary interviewees were between 51 and 70 years old, and only 5 were under 50 (table 3). Interviewees tended to be highly educated (nearly 60 percent had advanced college degrees, compared to 23 percent of forest owners, southwide).<sup>1</sup> Many were or had been employed in professional occupations (particularly teaching and educational administration), although >60 percent of the interviewees were retired (table 3). However, incomes were generally modest, perhaps because many interviewees were retired public school employees. All interviewees were African American, and the gender split was nearly equal. In sum, interviewees tended to be older, more highly educated, slightly less wealthy, and more likely to be retired than the larger population of family forest owners in the U.S. South (Butler and others 2013). Landholding sizes were modest but appropriate for forestry, with the majority between 21 and 100 acres (table 4). About 40 percent of families faced heirs' property issues on some or all of their land, while 60 percent reported having a title to their land (sometimes jointly with other family members). More than two-thirds of the respondents had inherited land, and about one-fifth had purchased all or some of their land. A number of retirees had lived and worked in other parts of the country (typically New York for South Carolina interviewees, Washington, DC for North Carolina interviewees, and often Chicago and Detroit for Alabama interviewees). Several had been born in northern cities but maintained ties to family land. Many interviewees were now living on family land that they had some association with when growing up, either living there or visiting as children. Notably, only 12 percent reported making a profit from their land, while the remainder incurred net costs (generally taxes) to maintain their land holdings (>50 percent) or were just breaking even (25 percent) (table 4).



Interviews were conducted with groups of forest-owning family members at or near their property. (Photo by Eleanor Cooper Brown)

<sup>1</sup>African-American and White landowners in the Southern United States are very similar in education levels (Butler and others 2013).

**Table 3—Demographic characteristics of principal interviewee of African-American families owning 10 or more acres of land (n=60)**

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

<sup>a</sup>Four additional young people (age < 20) attended interviews with family members.

<sup>b</sup>Three parents in multi-generation interviews had less than a high school education.

**Table 4—Characteristics, ownership, and productivity of family land ownerships greater than 10 acres (n=60)**

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

<sup>a</sup>Some families had parcels of both titled land and heirs' property.



# THE LAND

## Heirs' Property

### Defining heirs' property

While all respondents were aware of whether or not they had clear title to the land, some respondents expressed more clear distinctions between the legal definitions of land that is owned as heirs' property and land with clear title. The interviews indicated that most people defined "heirs' property" as land passed down from one generation to the next, regardless of whether clear title has been legally obtained. One respondent clearly stated that although he and his siblings have clear title to the land that his parents owned, he still considers it heirs' property because it is now owned by the heirs of the original owners (SC18). When asked to explain what the term "heirs' property" means to them, most people began tracing the history of the land through the generations of their family that have inherited it: "For us, heirs' property is ownership of property being shared by heirs, within the same family" (SC5). One person stated that heirs' property is "land that's passed down through generations" (AL20), and another said, "I understand it to mean something in the family which is passed from one generation to the next" (AL15). One respondent clearly stated that although she and her siblings do not yet have clear title to the land that his parents owned, they do not consider it heirs' property:

We have clear title. We're in the process of organizing an LLC. The land is still in my father's name. It's been probated, but we haven't had the deeds changed. We all inherited the land together, but it hasn't been partitioned yet ... You can call it heirs' property (NC12).

The respondents described who the current heirs are, usually along the lines of one of the children of the original owners. They also described the current management structure of the land: who pays the property taxes, who currently makes decisions about how the land is managed, and potential involvement of the younger generations in land management decisions. When asked to define heirs' property, one woman simply stated, "It's a privilege, and it's a challenge" (SC19).

Land that's passed down through generations—it gets more complicated the further you get from the original owners (AL20).

If it's heirs' property, someone could buy my share and go to a lawyer, and make the whole family sell that whole piece of heirs' property. This program has been a real eye-opener (NC5).

The property belongs to the heirs of [name]. I'm not sure whose name is on the title. It is heirs' property, but I'm not sure what the record reads (NC20).

You can't sell until the last person dies. That's hard. Some do it intentionally, so that everyone has a place to stay. All it leads to is fighting. If I were to sell, I wouldn't get that much (NC16).

History of the land: back in the 1800s, we became involved.... As I understand it, it was purchased by our father. It has been in the family for I don't know how many years. I'm not sure who the land was purchased from, but the land has been in the family a long time ... I don't have the records in front of me. When we had the land



Center for Heirs' Property Preservation forester, Sam Cook, shows longleaf pine on family forest land in South Carolina. (Photos by Sarah Hitchner)

surveyed, it was 168 acres or 160+. Our names, [names], are on the deed in [county name] County. There's another little 11 acres somewhere that is truly not completely clear (NC20).

Though a few respondents felt that lack of clear title had not been a problem for them, many others told stories that demonstrate the legal ramifications of not having clear title: limitations on economic activities such as harvesting timber, the inability to apply for government funding for cost-share programs, or the possibility of losing the land through forced partition sales as a result of one or more heirs selling their shares to an outside party. Especially for the interviewees struggling to manage the land without the cooperation of all heirs involved, information about the legal processes, and information about financial resources to obtain legal services, is paramount.

There was a total of 10 heirs, but grandmother clearly divided the land before she passed. My mother is the only surviving sibling—the others left wills, but they didn't do a good job of making sure it was understood how the property was to be divided (AL16).

#### **How would having clear title change or influence what you do with the land?**

One way is that I would know what I can do and can't do without asking others. That would help make it better for my son and his kids and the next four or five generations (AL19).

We inherited this land from our parents— four girls and five boys. It was in three brothers' names: [names]. The problem is that the older people buy land and leave it to their children, and it becomes heirs' property. After a certain length of time, it gets complicated. You have six or seven siblings and they all have four or five children, and then there's 40 different owners. I decided to divide it up and give each child their portion of land before my mother died. I have the power of attorney. She passed in 2002 —she's buried in Milwaukee.... My mom put the land in the boys' names. I wanted to divide it up, so that everyone had their shares. I divided it up into nine

portions— everyone has their own deed, so it won't get to be heirs' property ... We all got between 13 and 14 acres. It's all under one umbrella, the [name] Estate. It's incorporated, and I have power of attorney. It's an agreement, not LLC (AL8).

“ *Land that's passed down through generations—it gets more complicated the further you get from the original owners.* ”

It's family land, but we bought it from our relatives. In the 70s, we came here and built a home. It was a farm. When I was growing up, this was part of my farm land ... [Name] is also co-owner of 80–100 acres, with about 200 other heirs (AL12).

I understand it to mean something in the family which is passed from one generation to the next. Everyone that came in could live here and pay the taxes. The person who lives here pays the taxes. They don't want to stay here— they say it's too quiet, there's nothing to do. I'm the only one that stays here (AL15).

### Managing heirs' property

While we did ask directly about who makes management decisions about the land (either the interviewee alone or collaboratively with other family members, usually spouses or relatives that live nearby), the issue of who paid taxes, and how they were paid, revealed much about the decision-making structure regarding land management decisions for heirs' property or co-owned land. In some cases, different family lines of heirs (often with one representative for that line of descendants) each contributed an equal amount to the taxes, while in other cases, one person paid the taxes (usually a person living on the land or benefiting financially from some activity on the land, such as rent for a house or farm land). In cases where people had clear title to the land, tax payments were more straightforward—the people who bought the land or inherited land already deeded paid the taxes, or tax payments were managed through a more formal institutional structure such as a trust or LLC.

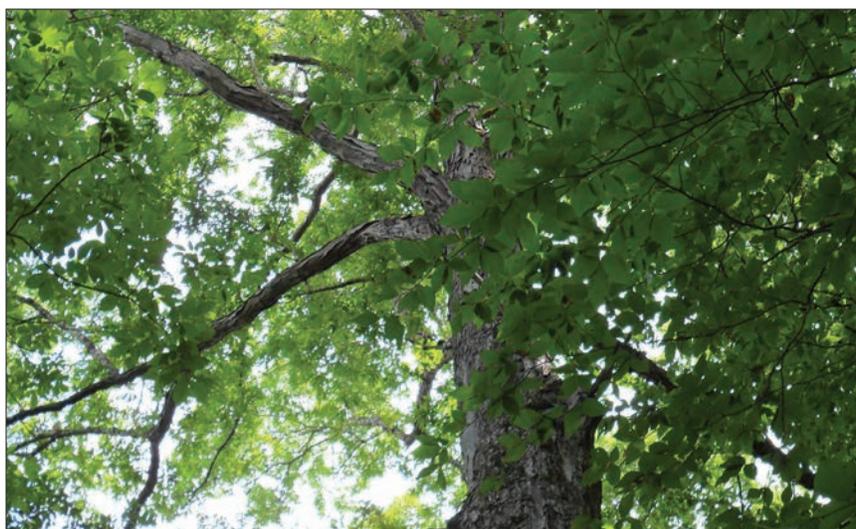
In several cases, land that was still held in common (i.e., legally in heirs' property status) had been divided into separate tax parcels. This sort of informal division allows family members to pay taxes and manage “their” portion of the land on their own. On the other hand, this may create a false sense of security. While the divisions are recognized by family members, the entire portion of land is still legally held in common and in all likelihood subject to all of the disadvantages, such as forced partition, of any other piece of heirs' property. This highlights the importance of education about the legal issues of heirs' property and assistance with resolving these issues, even when landowners do not feel a sense of urgency. As one interviewee stated:

It's not true that the person who pays taxes owns land. People think they own it, but they don't. Education is the key (SC17).

**How important is clearing title to you?** That's the thing—you may think you know things that you don't. You may think you have clear title, but you don't. Clear title is important (AL19).

Sometimes, there was confusion about heirs' property, but many were trying to resolve these issues:

[Name] had nine children—the property was divided among the nine children. I don't know if there was an actual document saying the land was divided. She had nine children, and they had children. Some of the children would sell their share to other



heirs. One set of heirs might have three shares, one might have four, and one might have one. What I found in my research is that there were quit claim deeds, where one heir sold their share to another heir. I would like to follow up with the Federation on this... (AL20).

I want to pass on the knowledge to other people. People with heirs' property, maybe they think it's a lost cause. Maybe 10 people can buy out the hundreds. Better to have 10 than many who don't pay the taxes (NC5).

The same is true when a family member has informal management authority, either by default or through agreement with other involved family members.

It's not divided yet, but the surveyors are working on that now. Even if it's divided, we'll manage as one piece of land... I'm the closest person to it. I want it to stay in the family, never get sold. But you can't control that unless you have your own piece. That's the reason for the division. [We] want to make sure that one person can't force a sale—that happened to one of our neighbors. The people living on it had to move off it because they couldn't compete with the price. [Timber company name] has it now. They lost the whole piece of land (AL5).

“ *[We] want to make sure that one person can't force a sale—that happened to one of our neighbors. The people living on it had to move off it because they couldn't compete with the price.*

Grandfather died in 2011, and that's when the whole drama began with the land. Lots of medical bills, and we were concerned about losing it. Family said, 'Who would be the best person in the family to get the land?' It was me—they trusted me. This is the drama part—I was chosen because I was not married. I started going to workshops about heirs' property. They didn't want the family property to go to another person's family. My uncles said very specifically, 'You're not married, right? You got your divorce?' I didn't understand that. I said, 'Yeah I'm free.' Here I was with this 110 acres of land, I was in the process of literally trying to save the family farm. We did save it, and it was a very nerve-wracking time for me. I didn't have a lot of money, but I had a networking system to help me... The land is now in my name. They thought it was safest with me, that no one could get to it. I said, 'Thanks, I appreciate you giving me this short amount of time to get it together.' (NC4).

[Name]'s sister who lives in Texas, and she has left it to [Name] to manage. [Name] said, 'She knows it's an obligation for me. I do share with her what's going on. She doesn't want anything to do with it. [If I wanted to sell] she would go either way.' (NC19).

Several interviewees expressed the difficulty of organizing the cooperation of all the heirs in paying the taxes. One man described the stress this caused him:

We got to pay it, and that's it. But people get funny when you ask them for money. It's got where some of them hate to see me. Boy, I sure am glad we don't have 300 or 400 acres—I'd probably be dead (SC12).

Momma had chopped pieces of it out and mortgaged it. I don't know how she did that. That is why I'm trying to get this 30 acres that I own secure, so that my kids don't go through what I went through. My momma never shared it all with me. As she got sicker, she told me more and more, but it was too late then. Had she told me 3 years earlier, I could have done things. I'm not an idiot—I could have helped her, and we wouldn't be here today. She wouldn't have been so upset as she died. I'm trying to do some things to prevent my kids going through the same things. Get the farm in line, get a will, get some money in the bank. My mother had no will. If she had a will, that would have helped. I fought with my nieces and nephews for 2 years—I fought with them, and fought with the lawyers, and fought with everyone. I about had a nervous breakdown (NC11).

Another landowner, who had informal management authority, indicated that he had no problem selling timber; he said, "To be honest with you, I have no problems [with heirs' property land]. I just pay the taxes (SC8)." However, when asked if there had been any intra-family conflict, the same individual also said, "Not really. But you wave a few dollar signs ..." (SC8). Several interviewees in North Carolina and Alabama also mentioned potential conflicts:

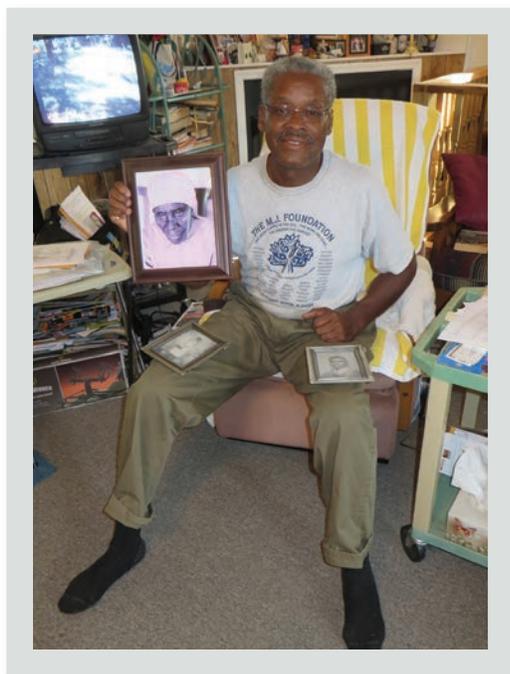
**Have there been conflicts regarding your heirs' property (inside family or with others outside your family)?** Anything that involves money can cause conflict [laughs]. I consult with the others, and it's okay. Like when we got timber cut 4 or 5 years ago. They made a check out to each family, each of the 6 siblings. They did a clearcut (NC10).

There's a lot of timber around here, but it's heirs' property. You can't buy it. It just sits there. You can't get families to come to agreement, and it's just going downhill. They're losing money, and they don't even know it. I showed some people, kinfolks, their land, and I told them they got beetles, and their trees are starting to fall, and I told them they're losing money. That whole time that could have been cut and replanted, and in 20 years, he could have more money. He didn't know. I tried to tell him, that's all you can do (AL8).

A lot of people believe that if you pay the taxes, eventually you get the land. I have purposefully never paid the taxes. I let the aunts pay it, so that no one could say I was trying to bilk the land. Sometimes things happen, and you don't know why, but they happen for a reason. This came about, and then the Black farmers' money, it ended up in one person's hands. Someone has to be accountable, and I don't want to be involved in something that I know won't be productive in the end (AL18).

### Dealing with heirs' property

It should be noted that the interviewees most likely to differentiate between the legal definition of heirs' property and land with clear title were participants in the Sustainable Forestry Program pilot projects. They had been exposed to more information and have



Alabama forest landowner, Grover Robinson, holding a photo of his grandmother, in whose name the family land is still deeded. He and his family are working to obtain clear title to the land. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

had access to the attorney there. Some had already begun the process of clearing title, or knew what they needed to do to get started. The ones that were most overwhelmed by the prospect of the process had not yet met with attorneys and had only vague ideas about how to proceed. The most commonly cited constraints to pursuing clear title to the land were lack of information on the process, the lack of money to hire legal assistance, and a lack of family agreement and cooperation. One interviewee also expressed a reluctance to deal with the heirs' property issue:

People have a natural fear when it comes to land. They'd rather sit on it, because at least they have it. Since we've held onto it since 1883, there may be people who say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" (SC15).

Similarly, another interviewee noted that the number of heirs to deal with can complicate matters:

Easier not to deal with it. I haven't really looked into this—there are so many heirs. There's a 20-acre plot with over 100 heirs. It's easier to just step away (AL13).

Another complicated situation was described:

My grandfather left the property to my grandmother. When my grandfather passed, the others were supposed to finish paying it off, but they didn't. That's how my father acquired it. That's where a little of the rumbling came about. That's where we say we won't pass a problem on (AL14).

In another case, there was confusion about how heirs' property could be lost through outsider intervention; the interviewee (who was not yet part of the program) mistakenly believed that an outside party could buy a share of the land and place a house on any part of the land (SC17).



The processes of dealing with heirs' property and working to obtain clear title to the land both reveal and influence internal family dynamics, and these processes can illuminate and exacerbate conflicts between family members. We witnessed and heard about many different family situations. Some close-knit families have come together to manage the land collectively and equitably, through formal structures such as an LLC or partnership or through informal agreements in which each person fulfills their obligations without pressure from other parties:

We have a close-knit family. We've not had much discussion with other family members. If others have distress, housing problems, we'll discuss (SC2).

We don't have a problem—we're all in agreement. There will not be any disagreements. We're going to have a formal legal agreement. We have already agreed that we will not leave a mess for our children and our children's children. We're working with the Federation to formalize the arrangements (AL14).

The names of all siblings are on the deed, but it was hard to manage the land and meet deadlines with everyone—so they gave me power of attorney. When something is coming up, we communicate by phone and come to an agreement, and I put things in motion (AL10).

We're trying to get an LLC formed. I was working with a firm in [town]. I called the Sustainable Forestry Program lawyer, and he said to get a lawyer and try to get it changed [into the names of current owners]. I'm not sure if we can go ahead and do it before we get the LLC. Maybe the lawyer was from the Land Loss Prevention [looking for documents], in [city]. We've been speaking with [program forester] about this issue (NC12).

I mentioned to my family that I've been going to the Sustainable Forestry meetings, and I share the information with them. We might set up a trust to keep the land in trust as a family (NC17).

Other families are not in agreement about how the land should be managed; these families might have one or more people that are not willing to cooperate with others who would like to move forward on the process of clearing title. In one case, one family member had consulted a lawyer on pursuing title to heirs' property, but another family member refused to cooperate with that lawyer, insisting on getting her own lawyer (SC3). In another case, several heirs only recently found out that they were heirs and that one other heir had been

profiting from the land while not paying taxes on it; these heirs stepped in to make sure the land was not lost for failure to pay taxes, and they are now in the process of trying to clear title. One man described this situation:

It was through those conversations when [name] disclosed that the land was about to be lost because of taxes. I came back and shared that with the family. For us, it was an experience. For me, it was a very moving experience. It was like something was compelling me—we have to save this land. This is where my great-grandfather ... to see those gravestones, and all that property. I was determined. We gotta save this property. It wasn't about whether we were heirs or not, it was just 'we have to save this property' (SC5).

In other cases, families were in the process of simply trying to determine who the heirs are and where to find them. In cases where families had been successful in obtaining title to inherited land, interviewees noted that the task of tracking down all the heirs was a very difficult, or even the most difficult, part of the process.

We began by locating the heirs—as many as I possibly could. Some have passed on. My great-aunt just passed—she was the oldest heir. Through her, I was able to contact some heirs. The goal is to bring knowledge of the property to some of the younger generations. We have a total of nine heirs that we've located thus far. The oldest living heir now is probably me. There's one other, but she's an heir through marriage—she acquired her share through marriage—she is 85. Her children are heirs, and they'll assume her share. I'm not sure what she knows or doesn't know about the land (AL20).

We have to draw up a petition to take to the court and get each heir to sign to have their land divided. Each lawyer I've talked to has stated that's the way you go about it. As of now, I'm needing some legal papers in my hand to take to the individuals I've been talking about to get them to sign. They're in Mobile, Michigan, Ohio ... [Name] is assisting me with the legal papers. I met with one cousin in Montgomery on Monday—he's on board. It's a tedious process. I've been successful in my career and my marriage, but this is different (AL18).

A friend of mine was an administrator. It took 5 years to [get] it straightened out. Tracking people down is the hardest part (NC16).

One interviewee, currently experiencing great distress about the situation with his heirs' property, is determined to obtain clear title; he said:

I'm investing in something that will take care of itself. I'm at an age where I can't do bad investments or leave bad investments to my sons. You have to have patience and a strong will to do things ... that will benefit. You can't say, the heck with this. I don't want to pass this [situation] on to my sons. I want to take care of it. It's the right thing to do. This here is complicated.... Are the kids interested? Yes, because I've drilled it in their heads, like it was drilled in mine. You can tell them this, but it has to show itself. I tell them, but they look at me [like I'm crazy]. I want to straighten it out, so they're motivated. They look at it as a problem. If I can't fix it, what makes you think they can (SC12)?

The same person expressed frustration over the bureaucratic red tape that he has encountered while trying to clear title to heirs' property, as did others:

This here is heirs', and I have problems.... I check with courthouse, and they tell me it's in order. Go to tax assessor, and it doesn't all add up. I have headaches out of this world dealing with them (SC12).

**How important is clearing title to you?** Important. I can't even get insurance for the house because it's not in my name. It's insured in my sister's name—I want to change insurance companies, but I can't do that. The Power of Attorney was not passed on with execution of the mother's will (AL15).

Landowners described a variety of complications and restrictions caused by heirs' property:

My mother and I have attorney to the land. My sister [name] and I are heirs to the property, but currently it's owned by my mother—the title is in her name. Tracts of land were owned by [name]—my grandmother's father. She was born in 1893. She was one of three children— she was the middle of the three. So the land has been in the family over 100 years. It's been in the family at least four generations. Aunt [name], grandfather's aunt, was born in slavery, so it's been there for quite a while. The land was purchased in the 1800s. There was a total of 10 heirs, but grandmother clearly divided the land before she passed. My mother is the only surviving sibling—the others left wills, but they didn't do a good job of making sure it was understood how the property was to be divided. My sister and I will inherit the land, plus another section, between us. That section belongs to Aunt [name]—she passed in March, but we haven't probated the will yet. My name is in the will, but not yet on the deed. This one is a second marriage issue—in her second marriage, she clearly willed the land to my sister and I, but in her will—we can't cut timber on that property yet because in her will any funds that are there would be divided between her second husband's children and us. The property is ours, but if we don't make it liquid until after that, then it becomes ours. Probation of will is only based on liquid assets. The will doesn't force us to liquidate—it just says any liquid assets will be divided. The other relatives would like to make it liquid now (AL16).

“ *It's very important to clear the title to me. I can't even get insurance for the house because it's not in my name.* ”

Yes, I'm trying to petition the probate judge. Get the details about how to get the land divided. You have to get all the heirs' signatures or consent. We're being advised by [project attorney]. This process, this phase of it, has just started. I'm initiating the process of having the land divided (AL16).

I have a couple of aunts who are not on board—two of my mother's sisters. They seem to believe that land and heirs' status secures the land or gives them power to... Two of them (the three surviving siblings) think that they have the say-so and that no one else does. They don't really understand it. Four of the siblings are deceased—they had children. Now there are 3 siblings and 12 second-generation heirs living. Two of the three surviving siblings want to exert authority over the property (AL16).

There are certain things that you have to get permission to do, such as the forestry program. I can't just go ahead and have things done to enhance the land or increase the value of it. I have to get signatures ... that's another story.... You can't keep this, heirs' status (AL16).

No one person has the right to change anything without the permission of everyone. If you want to sell, you can't sell because it's not yours to sell. You have to get permission to cut timber or do anything else on the land... Right now, all 8 are alive. So far there haven't been problems. There are lessons to be learned (AL19).

I have other timberland—this land is co-owned with other heirs. Sometimes that doesn't matter, if your part is the same as everyone else's. The other heirs want someone to manage it, and they don't want to pay (AL3).

Another reason to get it out of heirs' status—[Name] has been upkeeping it, but other family members think he wants to take it over. It's enhancing the value of the property. When you have a clear title, you can do whatever on your property. Right now, there's only so much he can do (AL18).

I talked to a friend of mine that's doing Tree Farm. When the crops die, they start planting trees. My 11 acres is solely owned by one person. A lot of people inherit property and it got split up between several people. Sometimes family isn't the best to work with. I had one meeting, I couldn't believe it. They were trying to do something with the property, and they didn't even know where the brother and sister live. Working with DOT, when we needed the land and we couldn't find family, we'd put it in escrow and keep moving. You can do that working with the government (NC2).

If it's heirs' property, someone could buy my share and go to a lawyer, and make the whole family sell that whole piece of heirs' property. This program has been a real eye-opener (NC5).

**While dealing with heirs' property can generate conflict within a family, it can also provide an incentive for the family to come together. One interviewee noted:**

That [dealing with heirs' property] helped move things forward in the best interest of everyone to work together as a team rather than work against each other. Otherwise, everyone loses. When it's presented that way, everyone is more likely to work together (SC5).

**However, one interviewee thought that heirs' property is always framed as intra-family conflict, regardless of the true situation:**

I'm skeptical of lawyers—it's always written up as a conflict among families (NC6).

**Other interviewees provided background that illustrated the complications that can be involved:**

My great-grandfather purchased the land quite a while ago. It's been in the family over a century now. We didn't have the knowledge to make the land work for us. Obviously we should have done it some time ago. But no one in the family could lay out a path for us. With all the people involved, there were conflicts and it was difficult



Forest Service researcher, John Schelhas, and a South Carolina landowner discuss coastal property. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)



to make progress, because it had to be unanimous. This program now—everyone realizes that it's positive for everyone involved. It will certainly sustain us and our families for years to come (SC7).

Other families near there are hanging onto their land too. That's one reason why we're trying to do what we can to keep them encouraged and pass on opportunities for different things. At some point, we might be able to get other family members interested in doing something. You've got to have a carrot out there for them to get involved. If we get through the process and are able to generate some income, we might be able to draw in other family members. Right now, we're just hanging out there (AL10).

Land and intra-family conflict: some people are trying to claim some of the land, and that's why we have to get the survey. My cousins, my best buddy—they're the ones that do that. They are saying you can't cut that because it's not yours. I just do what I want, though. I'm not afraid of them. My uncle died (father's brother), and his land was here at this hill—he died, and they put his land up for auction. My brother wanted it. He bought it. Then all the cousins said he can't buy heir property, and they took it from him. He had the deed. My brother was so stupid—he didn't say anything, but they cut all the timber from his land and gave him the money to get the land back. All the bills be paid on this land, and then they cut the timber and pay him back because he can't buy heir property (AL15).

“ *My great-grandfather purchased the land quite a while ago. It's been in the family over a century now. We didn't have the knowledge to make the land work for us.*

Everyone was on the same page, no one disagreed. No one wanted to sell. ... There was a time when my uncle wanted to sell a few acres—the only conflict ... Once you've been doing the family business for so long. There's still this impression [among men] that I'm still the head of household, the patriarch. I'm not that kind of person. Once it's my dime, I have no problems accepting your advice, but I make the final decisions. That, at times, there is a clash. But I am as honest as I can possibly be. I tell my family members sometimes that we will not always get along, but I will always promise to listen and make decisions in the best interests of our ancestors. For those patriarchs and matriarchs that came before us. My grandmother's father as well, not

just grandparents. I would love to go find some archives to find out who are listed on these tracts. Who are all these people? I would love to do that (NC4).

There are 10 one-tenths percent, plus their heirs. It becomes like 1/44th when you look at the deed. What we had to do was go to the county clerk to constantly update the records, to keep all the names on the deed. The generation before us did an excellent job of starting us off right—they set things up right. People can fabricate, make stuff up. That's one problem we don't have. We know who we're dealing with and how authentic they are (NC6).

### Most landowners were interested in receiving help in dealing with heirs' property:

[We had] eight tracts in 1969—[my] dad inherited one share. This last piece with Aunt [name] ... through wills and different things ... One of the sisters left her 13 acres to her living brothers. I had to find all that. Went to Register of Deeds and told them they were deceased. One in DC gifted me her interest. It's all cleared now. I hired an attorney and presented them the deeds. [Shows us gifted deed from June 2014]. I have power of attorney for mom. I've gotten good assistance from the county office. They worked with me to get farm commodities and farm tax numbers. I got an agreement with NRCS (NC1).

The deed is in my name, assuming there are no liens on it. I want to find out for sure that the title is good. According to the tax papers, it's all in my name (NC19).

I want it to stay in the family, keep it from becoming heirs' property. I'd like to keep it—I need to get that in my will. This pilot program—it's important for me to learn. Could also get it incorporated in an LLC—I'm still learning (NC5).

### But others did not feel a sense of urgency:

**How important is clearing title to you?** I'd prefer to have title. It's something we need to do. But there's no immediate need. It's probably a few years down the road (NC18).



Forest Service researcher, John Schelhas, and landowner, Eleanor Cooper Brown, discuss her family's land and forests. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

## THE LAND

### Land Loss

The people we interviewed were all very aware of the problem of land loss among African Americans. We heard many stories about how land has been lost, either within their own families or by other families:

Some lost it the same way my father lost it—they had to borrow money from other people.... My grandfather, he had a lot of land—273 acres. We had a field for a garden. He used to plant everything he needed. That was my father’s father. My father and his sisters lost that. There were 270 acres; we lost most of that. Now there’s just 47.3 acres (SC13).

We need assistance with getting the survey. We always need legal advice. I have business experience, but nothing about clearing title and restoring land values. I’ve worked with Black families that have had their land taken—it’s not just a local thing. It happens all over the country, because they’ve had a great deal of minerals and other resources on the land. There are some heirs that live near the land and an adopted cousin lives on the land (AL20).

“ *I’ve worked with Black families that have had their land taken—it’s not just a local thing. It happens all over the country, because they’ve had a great deal of minerals and other resources on the land.*

Family history important—you can go to land that you used to have, and it’s lost. This area up the street. We call it [name]—it’s just miles of fields and land. When you go back there to walk, it’s very peaceful. My mother will go walk with us sometimes, and she’ll tell us stories about tracts of land. She would play in the shade while her mother picked cotton or chopped tobacco or beans. She would tell stories—a snake came towards baby, and I didn’t know Momma could run that fast through the field. I love to hear her tell those stories. She said, we had all of this. I said, I want my stuff back. I may never get it back, but I’m not going to lose what I have now (NC4).

I had a sense of hating to see the family property get away (NC13).

In some cases, interviewees described land loss as due to ignorance of the value of the land:

It was a very productive farm. The farmer was happy to be there. Some of the initial lots that we sold we were from the richest soil.... In terms of identifying lots, those were road-front lots. We didn’t have much choice. We sold one to a close friend, others went to neighbors. We gave one lot to [name]’s adopted daughter, but she didn’t have it 6 months—she practically gave it away. That happens a lot—people don’t realize the value of the land, the long-term value (NC9).

When I started seeing the inner workings of this business, land really is gold. There was an article that said, “Land, the New Black Gold.” This is what occurs. These big landowners—it’s a business to see what African-American farmers and landowners are losing. A lot of African-American landowners are seeing this money and saying, okay you can have it. You still don’t know the value of it. They don’t want to lose it, but they’re in these dire straits. African-American landowners are not aware of what can help them because they don’t trust the past, because of what’s happened in the past. Some may trust the system. Socioeconomic constraints, lack of education—they



don't understand. You bring them paperwork, they check out. Their reading levels are not there, or they think you're going to trick them (NC4).

I would like to see it be kept as family land. There was a lot of sacrifice and struggle to get and keep this land. It was passed on without any liens or loans—I don't want to be part of the generation that loses it, because of the sacrifices that were given to keep it (NC6).

In some cases, family land was lost because of a failure to pay property taxes. As discussed earlier, there are many problems and misconceptions involving legal rights and responsibilities associated with paying taxes on heirs' property land, and many families have had trouble getting the money from heirs to pay them or in trusting one person to make the actual payment. One man, a local political leader, said:

Being on council and seeing on a day-to-day basis what goes down, how property is lost to African Americans, it's saddening. These parents who worked hard to own property or a house, and then a couple years after they're gone, it's almost like they had nothing. They didn't think paying taxes was important or whatever. It's sickening. I want to encourage people to own their land (SC10).

We're making decisions now among the six siblings, along with a few of the grandchildren. Two taboo subjects—money and where babies come from. The biggest problem now is having babies before you're supposed to be having babies and not knowing how to handle money. Some families are like sweet potatoes—the best part of that family is in the ground. Those who are still here are squandering what's been inherited (AL14).

There have also been bureaucratic struggles in maintaining family land. These have taken multiple forms, and interviewees expressed distrust of the government, both in terms of directly taking land or in withholding information from African-American landowners. Referring to land that used to belong to his family and is now in a national forest, one man explained that:

[There] has been a change to all land owned by the government. It used to be great. We could use it, but now we can't. All our fishing holes ... no more. We used to could walk through the woods. You could see through this place. Now the government don't want you on it—they closed the road so you couldn't get on it (SC13).

In Alabama, a private hunting community came in and took land:

[*Community name*] is a conservation area. People that live here should be able to go there and hunt, but you can't go unless you're a member of [*name of hunting club*]. It's for wealthy legislators. It's private—they made it private. The State paid for it, but only a few people have rights to go there. Doctors, lawyers, legislators. On tax-exempt land—the county doesn't receive any taxes from it. My property adjoins the property (AL8).

Land was lost in other ways as well:

**How would having clear title change or influence what you do with the land?**

We could bring the land back into production. There are resources there that we could put to use. I don't want the land to be idle. I want a productive forest, some agriculture. There may be some mineral resources in the area too. That's why the White families are trying to take the land (AL20).

They took 3 acres of the 33.5 acres of land from us to put the road in. Now people live out there—before, no one lived out there. That was the old wagon road—those old wagon roads become access roads to people living behind your land. So they took land from us on several occasions (AL8).

Twenty acres have been flooded, compensated by Army Corps of Engineers, returned if water level drops below the level of land. There were 180 acres, now there are 160 (AL19).

Another interviewee stated that is was through bureaucratic processes—and possible intentional deceit—that her family lost land. She said:

Father's great-great grandfather ... at first they had 180 acres. They were doing county transfers. Their daughter [*name*]—someone told her don't put so much in one county. She was living there, but filed only 68 acres. She was claiming it, but only paying taxes through [*county name*]. She's only claiming this, so a lot of property just got lost (SC12).

Several interviewees also mentioned development pressure and rising land prices along the South Carolina coast that are tempting people to sell family land:

As far back as I know, the [*family name*] owned that land. God willing, we'll always have it. This is supposed to stay in the [*family name*] clan. There is no more clan ... the East Coast is ruined. This is the 2nd or 3rd fastest growing county in the State. Boeing is coming to Charleston. There will be more traffic this way. Land will get more expensive (SC10).

There are certain things you want to do to keep the land solvent and productive. My grandparents did that by paying off the land. This is a growing area. I've had contractors come by and look at the land. We have a quarter acre of waterfront. I've been told that if I don't improve it, there are laws that they can come in, eminent domain, so many ways that they could utilize the system to get the land.... It happened to a cousin. His mom left land, and he lived in California. She came back and petitioned the court and threw the land in court, even though she had access to the money and he had access to the land. They sold that land on the courthouse steps (AL18).

Some families are also losing land to other people who may or may not be heirs; in some cases, these are essentially squatters on the land who can eventually gain title through the law of adverse possession:



I've been going through this land thing all my life. My father was dealing with it. We have people on the property—they know they're not heirs, but they were there for a certain length of time. They had a trailer and then built a brand new house there. It's complicated. There are 3 different people doing that.... Other people around here have land, but they don't know where it came from. Just by adverse possession—they just live on land. It's real funny, but there's nothing you can do (SC12).

Other families have had land stolen from them by other people who intentionally move the physical boundary markers and then have the land surveyed using the new markers. Several respondents mentioned the necessity of walking the land regularly and paying attention to boundaries and nearby activities to prevent being cheated out of land. One person said:

I've learned at workshops that if you don't have recent markers, whoever surveys the land first can put markers wherever they want. Then if you get your land surveyed, you have to work from their marks. That's what someone has done. Someone has markers over there.... I visually remember a different plat, with an iron stake. My mom is right, the plat has shifted. I remember a plat that showed 175 acres—I don't ever remember seeing one that showed 200. When they started doing it with machines, it came up with less. There were two surveys, and we can't find the original 1939. My aunt in New York has this one, and we're trying to get it from her. I'm going to New York to get it, the one from 1939. There is a question about how much land we had. We're down to 158, but all the siblings agree there was more land (SC15).

Several interviewees described examples of land that had been stolen, and in some cases recovered:

They initially had 600 acres by the time it got through the 2nd generation, which was [name]. [Name] died of a stroke. The folks the town is named after were bankers, farmers.... They said that [name] owed them \$30K. We have copies of the court case where my great-grandmother said she doesn't know that man. So almost 600 acres were essentially stolen from us. My great-grandmother got back 122 acres of the 600 acres.... What really impressed us was ... when you look at the fact at how thorough [name] was, and she was able to get back 122 acres. The lawyers now are in awe that she could do that. And to pay it off.... A [name] won the case. As part of the settlement, he allowed my great-grandmother 20 acres for her homestead, and she was able to buy back 100 acres of her own land, at 8-percent interest. In 1924 (SC5).



I love that land. I know the history of it, the acquisition and retention of my grandmother. I know of the loss through the process of—you produce for a while, and you need money. Some of my foreparents were not educated, and some was lost to Whites in the community. There was some “chicanery” [interviewer’s word]. There were some debts. My grandmother went to school and knew how to read and write. They were trying to take the remainder, but she was able to let them know, no, you aren’t going to take this. Of the original 400 acres, there are about 170 acres left (AL16).

“ *One mile of that road is Black-owned in the front and White-owned in the back—usually it’s the reverse.*

Whenever someone would go to pull the title at the courthouse, they couldn’t get it. A White family had filed a will at the [county name] courthouse ... I don’t know how they were able to do that, but her will would come up, and it would say that she owned 100 acres of the property. One of my cousins went to court, and we have the ruling where it was proven that the land these people were trying to claim was not part of the [name] estate. Their claim wasn’t legal. That was in 1983. Her will was in 2006 (AL20).

This is heirs’ property—it came into the family in 1872. The original owner—it came out of the [Name] plantation. My great-great grandfather purchased some land out of that estate. My great-great grandmother is [name]. It was originally 350 acres—that’s what I remember hearing. Now it’s down to about 116 acres. The land is in the name of [name]. The will states that it will be passed down to her heirs (AL20).

My grandfather acquired land ... I can only go back as far as my granddad. Our family came from England—he [grandfather?] came on a ship at age 8 or 9 with a blind uncle and a White man after slavery. He was fond of my grandfather and arranged for him to buy a lot of land. My grandfather died in 1936. He settled around here in [community name] in 1903. The White landowner let him purchase land—that was nearly unheard of then. The White neighbors got mad, and said that was too much land for a Black man to own. He was going to get more. But my grandfather wanted to keep the peace, so he sold some land to a White individual. He never paid him. But he had to do it. This was the early 1900s, and a Black man had to do what he had to do. [Name of landowner]—one mile of that road is Black-owned in the front and White-owned in the back—usually it’s the reverse (NC17).

Sometimes, land was lost (or almost lost) due to debts and other financial problems:

Why important to pass on? It's part of the heritage. It's been hard to keep it, it's been in the family so long. We had a grandpa, we are told, who was right much Indian, I don't know how much. He would stay in the woods with the animals rather than be a slave. That's the story that's been passed on. Dad always taught us to invest in the land and keep the land. Momma says the same. She said, 'Nothing will take the land.' History of discrimination against African Americans. The land was about to be taken because they had a store debt. The land was about to be taken. They took all 90 acres—It's in the write-up. That happened several times. It was sold and put in my uncle's name, then he gave it back to mother. Discrimination—it was hard to buy land. My uncle paid more for land than others would have. Some land was auctioned off. He had the determination to get it and keep it. Before he passed, Daddy said, 'Keep the land, and take care of Momma' (NC1).

Because we have this land and because it's so dear to me, and there are so many stories, I want her to develop that same love for this property. As a family, we used to have 500 acres. Now through poor budgeting and poor financial planning, there has been loss of land because of major things happening in the family where we had to sell. We didn't lose a lot due to poor planning—it was more rob Peter to pay Paul. I don't want any more of it lost. Now have about 100 acres (NC4).

My mother and them lost land—acres and acres, not knowing what to do. They educated me on all the land that African Americans used to own—they borrowed money or couldn't borrow money. They [parents] educated me not to let this happen (NC5).

“ *This land has a long history. It came into the family back in the 40s. This story is part of the history of moving to the north.*

This land has a long history. It came into the family back in the 40s. This story is part of the history of moving to the north. This was a large family—we're third generation. I had an aunt, my mother's sister, [name]—large family, about five girls and seven boys. Originally, they owned a lot of land, over 100 acres. Their father had been a fairly wealthy butcher and they had agriculture. As the family matured, most went north. Two daughters stayed here, and three sons. Typical family—there were full heirs and partial heirs. One of the last daughters who remained was a partial heir. She ended up taking care of the father, so things were transferred to her. She ended up taking care of things. When she died, things were willed to her brothers and sisters, and other heirs lost it. There was a lot of hurt. That property ended up slipping away, with people not being there to supervise. Black landowners borrow money to pay taxes.... They have to borrow money, and then land is lost. It was not lost to other Blacks—it went straight to those who had the money at that time, in the 40s. That left a situation where family realized that that's gone. If anything is to remain in [county name] County, we have to get it on our own (NC9).

Daddy died in '96, which was 4 years after we moved here. Momma died much later than that. We lost the property because of crazy lawyers—that included my house that was in my momma's name and in all the heirs' names. My momma got that Pigford \$50,000. She borrowed money from [bank name], which was a predatory lender with monstrous interest. It was horrendous. When my mother died, I had her mortgage and my mortgage, and I couldn't afford it (NC11).



Catherine Braxton, Lloyd Fields, and Rebecca Campbell (L to R) manage family land in South Carolina. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

Mostly African Americans? It's both. I'll be honest—civilly, but I'll say it. I'm writing a play about this. You have African-American land, but there's a lot of usurpation by some White landowners. I am not a victim, but a witness to African-American landowners getting into serious financial problems. White landowners offer very little money for their land because they know they're in serious financial trouble. This is good for the stage—it's a small rural community; everyone knows everyone and is related. If you're a farmer, there's a good chance your sister works at the bank. You may say, look into so and so's account. Is that land in jeopardy? People find out. This isn't something by chance—this is a strategy. It's so incredibly subtle, that's why I call it usurping. It's a manipulative way to find out. You may be renting their land, and you say, I know you're having problems, that piece I'm renting, I'll give you \$5,000 for it. You sell 20 acres when you know it's worth \$80,000 (NC4).

That's how the farm got into the original problem. They had to borrow money. You have to make sure your lines are clear. When my aunt sold the timber, her brother said he knew where the lines were, but he didn't. She cut timber off someone else's land, and she had to borrow money to pay that back. It was an awakening experience for us. We had the whole property surveyed (NC9).

One particularly interesting discussion ensued between a mother and her two daughters in South Carolina about how family land was lost. One of the daughters stated:

He [speaker's grandfather] bought it in 1932 ... it was platted in 1939. Now it's been divided and titled to each sibling. We're trying to find out what happened to other land. There was more land than what we see now. Through the years of surveying, some land was lost. Mother is trying to capture the illegal loss (SC17).

This led to debate among the family members during the interview about whether to discuss the mother's ideas about how the land was lost. The mother told the following story, despite the protests of her daughter that it be struck from the record because there is no proof of its veracity:

[Name] tried to take the land. My sister tried to put all the land in her name. The courts forced a partition, when someone made an issue of it. The lady in the court, her boyfriend was [name]—he was White. He was trying to get hold of the whole piece. He started a tobacco farm. My daddy would let the oldest ones work on the

tobacco farm. I met the [name] boys when they were young, about 6. When they grew up, they tried to take the land. The court deeded 54 acres to them (SC17).

A similar story was told in North Carolina:

We're not looking to purchase any more, unless it's adjoining ours. I tell you the truth—I think we lost some [please don't get into that] to [paper company]. Don't get into that—it's being recorded (NC20).

Many interviewees were well aware of the possibility of losing family land if they are not able to clear up title issues and emphasize the need for assistance in learning how to do so:

It's heirs' property, my grandfather's [mother's father] land. The land was left to eight brothers and sisters, so it's quite a large family. It's not only my land... Before, my sister was trying to get the land cut out, but she talked to someone that works in heirs' property. She was trying to get it done. But she died, so she didn't get it done, and none of us took it up. The rest of the cousins want it to stay as it is. I've tried to talk to them and get it done before it goes any further. Or we're going to lose it (SC13).

“ *Reaching out to the family is the first thing. In reaching out, we need help in demonstrating what others have done.* ”

Reaching out to the family is the first thing. In reaching out, we need help in demonstrating what others have done. Examples of what has happened in terms of other people. Some sense of what to expect, not just my saying this is possible. That's what I like about being part of this. The heirs' property project has helped people move to a situation where they can actually manage with some surety that this is going to be okay (SC15).

People are losing their property left and right. I attended a tax sale once, and you never want to get one of these [holds up a notice that land is going to be sold because of unpaid taxes]. I'll never forget. My dad took me. It was held in a big gym. If they knew about this program that [program forester] has, it might not have happened (SC7).

Many have lost their holdings, because in the shifting of responsibility from one generation to the other some have lost their sense of values. Once property is in lien/mortgage it is difficult for our people to get it out. One family had 380 acres 20 years ago, and now it is all gone (AL12).





We're close—now that 100 acres is owned by about 25 people, scattered in different States. Some have no interest and no thoughts of it at all, and it's important for others to keep it. Some members might have to buy out others' shares, or the whole family could lose it (AL1).

The previous generation worked so hard to get it. They toiled for his land. To have a place to go when you're kicked out and have no other place to go. It allows you to be your own man. If you're renting, you have no say-so. When you have land, you have everything you need. They don't make any more land. I can't believe how much land we've lost. I was appalled when [project attorney] read me that number. People just don't know (AL18).

To get more landowners on the bandwagon, they have to see someone who looks like them who's been engaged and successful. You have to build rapport and keep it simple, take them one step at a time. Have to meet people where they are and build from there, slowly. There are opportunities out there. If you don't use it, you'll lose it (NC4).

Yes. There was just a workshop on heirs' property. I was so thankful that there is only one name on this deed. It gets so precarious when you consider spouses who remarry. It was just ... phew. I'm actually now in the process of speaking with some attorneys—there's an entity of this project—Land Loss Prevention Project—about some concerns I have. In regards to some family members who would like some of the property. They think they have a right to it. I want to make sure everything is solid, that they can't take it. There's a situation where if I do marry my significant other, how can I keep it safe? He's going through an equitable distribution case with his ex-wife. We can get a pre-nup, but I want to make sure that's enough. Judges can change the law. And I want to make sure a pre-nup is solid enough. I will not do this until it's cleared. He's been in court for this for 6 or 7 years. It could go on forever. My stuff has to be safe (NC4).

Many families have also lost land through voluntary sales of land by various family members, although for many interviewees, selling family land now is not an option, or at best, a last resort. We discuss this more in the following section.

## THE LAND

# Importance of the Land

### Family and community

In all the interviews with people who have inherited (or will inherit) land from their family members, family legacy was cited as a central reason for keeping the land and caring for it. Many interviewees noted that previous generations (often referred to as “our ancestors”) worked hard to obtain the land, and they felt that it was their responsibility to honor their hard work and their memory by continuing to care for the land:

My ancestor probably struggled hard to get it. They say if you have land, you’re rich, and that’s true. Land that was promised to African Americans, and it is long overdue (SC7).

Other generations maintained it, and it’s in our hands now (SC2).

I see it as our responsibility. They [grandparents] did well with just a little education, but they made it possible for my mother and now me to be educated. How do I take my smarts and increase what they’ve done (SC18)?

I want to make my dad and granddad proud about me carrying on the legacy (AL6).

My dad’s property is special to me. I bought other property—that’s not special to me. I bought it to invest. My dad’s property, I want to keep it cleaned up (AL8).

What connects me to the land is I saw how hard my daddy worked. This piece of land here, my daddy paid for twice. He bought it from [name], and later went to get a clearance letter, and the judge told him he hadn’t paid nothing. He made him pay it over again. [Name] was the sheriff. [Name] and my daddy were good friends. My daddy was fixing to raise a thousand dollars’ worth of hell, and [name] put his arm around him and led him away. He said, ‘It’s not worth it.’ Made him pay for it over again. And he did. I was about 5 or 6 years ago. That connects me—I know what my dad went through to get this land (AL8).

Yes, it’s important to just keep it in the family. My parents, neither of them had a college education, but they could still buy land. They saw value in it. Even though we’re more technologically inclined, we shouldn’t just throw it away and not see the value in it (AL9).

Parents got land through their parents. The sad part is that when you’re younger, you feel like you should have been paying better attention and taking notes. I don’t have the documentation on how long it’s been in the family. I’m 68, and as far back as I’ve been alive, it’s been our land. I’m almost sure it was my grandparents’ land (AL10).

It’s important because my dad was so passionate about it. It meant a lot to him. When my dad passed away, when we realized he was passing, the day before he passed away, he requested, bring me some water from the house. He really loved that place. We have to acknowledge his appreciation for the land. My parents worked so hard for the land (AL14).

**What did your daddy’s daddy do?** Kill people, I don’t know [laughs]. I have no idea. He was a rolling stone. He was a farmer too, I guess. I don’t know. Maybe he came from South Carolina. He left everybody about 40 or 50 acres. We got more because my father had more children. I don’t know how many acres he had. I’ve tried to look up the history, but I couldn’t find it. That’s why I said he must have killed people. Because in that day, Black people didn’t have property like that (AL15).

I loved it [on the property]. We raised hogs, children—grew cotton, corn, peanuts. We milked cows, churned butter, had pecans, pears. It was a self-sustaining property. There was a grits mill and a syrup mill. At that time, it was farmland—there wasn't much forestry work. There was some forest land across the road, but it was all volunteer—there's never been a forest management process (AL16).

It's important because of the legacy. Because I know the history, and I'm passing it on to my children. I want it to be understood that it was important to their great-great grandmother. To be able to hold onto it as part of the legacy that came out of slavery (AL16).

I know the value of it, but I take pride in the fact that my father's name is attached, and I'm very proud of that. I know it has potential, and that's one of the things that he and I agree on, seeking the potential. Otherwise, we'll just be content that we have some trees and leaves and dirt that actually belongs to us (AL17).

**Do you expect to sell land or acquire more land or forest? Why?** Sell no, acquire yes. I'd like to buy more in [county name]. In my own mind, my grandmother and my grandfather were valuable to [county name] for many years. Just the mention of their name among older individuals, it brings a smile to people's faces. The fact that they meant so much to the community, [county name] will be a place of home to our family. Not residence, but home. To purchase more property—I'd like to do anything to enhance and beautify their image because it started with them (AL17).

“ *It's important because of the legacy. Because I know the history, and I'm passing it on to my children.... To be able to hold onto it as part of the legacy that came out of slavery.*

My great-grandfather was a farmworker and a businessman. He purchased the land in 1854—that is when the transactions began for purchasing varying pieces of property. From what I see, for years he worked as a sharecropper, harvesting cotton. This is where I believe that he obtained knowledge about purchasing land. And being a slave, he was in a position to hear where various sales of land were taking place, and he knew how to make land produce food and resources. Working in the fields as a slave—he took that knowledge from being around slave owners and learning about how to purchase land—he took those two items and began to ... he was an entrepreneur. It's very dear to my heart. My grandmother was very proud of it, because her parents worked hard to obtain it. They made great sacrifices for it. To sum it up, I'll die for it if need be. Whatever I need to do to ensure that it's carried on through the [family name] legacy. I know they made great sacrifices, and I hold it very high in my order of things that are very precious (AL17).

Land as embodiment of family history: 1934—the land was acquired through the Federal Government decree: 140 acres to each sharecropper. My granddaddy [name], was sold this land. He had long black hair—he was half Indian. His nickname was [nickname]—he used to carry a long ... knife. He was a big man—he was probably 6'3 or 6'4. They used to tell stories about him ... I was Papa's Gnat—I never was very big. He could shoot a quail with a .22 rifle. He had the prettiest bird dogs. They would run up the quail, and I have all these scopes, and I can't even hit a deer sometimes. You have to be a good shot to survive. He used to catch these catfish with nets that he made.... When I was a kid, we farmed (AL18).

It was very important that it was family land. The 80 acres—my great-great grandparents ... it's important to keep it in the family. We could have lost it (AL1).



The [name] estate was established in 1874 or 1875. He was my great-great-great grandfather. Originally over 700 acres. He was a farmer and a cattle farmer. He raised swines and chickens. He purchased this property through selling his product. It's been separated into separate tracts. My family has inherited part of it. I'm proud to have been able to have part of this land that was acquired right after slavery and to pass it on to my children (AL4).

Lots of Black land here. Forty acres and a mule. Some generals and colonels got land and gave some away or sold it. Through those processes, a lot of Blacks came to own land. Sometimes in history, it might have been some uncleared land that Blacks could buy—given forested land or wetland that they had to clear themselves. Now it's become the most valuable (NC1).

[We have] about 109 acres. It's been in the family—I've followed history back to the 1880s. My uncle was born in house there in 1917. I was also born there.... It was purchased by my granddad [name] ... it's known as [name] estate.... That house burned down, and another was built. I would like to restore that one. Grandmother got the land in 1935. The land almost got away from her. She passed in 1969. Then some brothers in DC contested the land. The court divided it between eight children. They didn't want the land. My dad began to purchase the land back.... I have a total appreciation. You want to get off the farm, but I always missed it. I loved the openness.... I was born in that house. It's always home. I tell my grandkids—come in and see a whole new world. On a hot day, it's nice and cool in that forest. It's a safe haven. I love going there and hearing all the sounds of the animals. I go down to see the sun come up. It's the only place on Earth that's an actual Eden. [Shows us a picture of the sunrise.] I just love it (NC1).

**Is ownership of your forest land across generations and over time important to you (forest legacy)? Why?** Because of the years that father put into it and scrambled to pay for it. It's home. It is home, and we have memories, and why not keep it in the family? The cemetery is there too. From a historical point of view, the next generation, there is no way that we would let it go. It's historical, and it's ancestral land as well. Whatever plan we devise, we would definitely be keeping the land in the family. There are families that have had land for over 100 years (NC20).

I tell my family members sometimes that we will not always get along, but I will always promise to listen and make decisions in the best interests of our ancestors. For those patriarchs and matriarchs that came before us. My grandmother's father



Historic cemeteries are often located on family land. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

as well, not just grandparents. It would love to go find some archives to find out who are listed on these tracts. Who are all these people? I would love to do that (NC4).

I just want them to keep it and sustain it and conserve it. The first thing is, I want them to understand its value. It's the blood, sweat, and tears of your family—they worked hard for you to have it. Don't think you don't owe anything to the people who came before (NC4).

I would like to see it be kept as family land. There was a lot of sacrifice and struggle to get and keep this land. It was passed on without any liens or loans—I don't want to be part of the generation that loses it, because of the sacrifices that were given to keep it (NC6).

“ *I would like to see it be kept as family land. There was a lot of sacrifice and struggle to get and keep this land.*

Sometimes I felt sorry for my uncle and his wife, always working on that farm. It was dear to him. He had turned the land over to his nieces and nephews before he died. It was special to him. It was all he ever really had. That's why it was special to me. For someone who got that much land during Jim Crow who couldn't even read and write (NC8).

This is land we want to keep in the family because of what it means. The [name] family was very strong in [county name] County, and this is something we want to hold onto (NC9).

I look at it as a bridge between the past and the future. I feel a sense of responsibility to maintain it well, because that's always how it was done. The idea of—I know it won't be sold during our lifetime. It's a comfort to know that it's there. The memories just flood. It's almost like sacred ground. There is a cemetery there. Not of our family, but we've been respectful of it. It's symbolic. The cemetery where my grandparents are buried was lost. So you think of this as—this is not our ancestors but someone else's relatives that we're going to care for (NC9).

It's very important, knowing how they worked to acquire it. Momma's mother died, and she had some property. I don't know the full connection, but Momma said that when she died, she had 30-some acres, which she sold. She told Daddy to put that money with their money to buy this land. She sold the land to her uncle, Grandmom's brother, so it's still in this family. . . . This land—we can't go back further than [name]—he acquired about 3000 acres—no children. He was fond of his niece—she married a [name]. When he committed suicide in 1934, the land was left to her, and my parents bought it from her (NC14).

I spent a few years there, until 1984. During the summers, this place was grandchildren headquarters. The older sisters took care of the younger kids. The women would do the fieldwork. Three were chickens, grapevines, and fruit trees. It was a happy time (NC18).

She showed us some of the land—recently cleared areas, forested areas, and farm land in soybeans. She showed us the spot where the old house was where her mother was born. She also showed us three pecan trees that were planted by her grandparents for their three daughters. Her mother's tree is the one in the middle. She said that the personalities of the trees represented the personalities of the daughters. One was mean and always getting into trouble, and her tree didn't produce many pecans. Her mother was very hard-working and good, and her tree always produced a lot of pecans (NC4).

In at least one case, land had been in the family for over 150 years (SC7); this land could have been deeded to slaves or freedmen in the time of slavery or just following emancipation. It could also have been purchased. At a time when many African Americans had very few financial resources, such a purchase of land would have been a marker of status and wealth, as well as relative freedom from an oppressive political and financial system in which they had few opportunities. Owning land presented the opportunity to provide food (through farming, livestock, hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods) and shelter (housing and house sites) for immediate and extended family.

We asked all interviewees to recall some of their early memories of the land. Most descriptions of early life on family lands invoked farming and working in the fields. Interviewees talked about family work on the farm, cultivating fruits and vegetables (such as potatoes, watermelon, cantaloupes, squash, cucumbers, string beans, collards, tomatoes), and raising farm animals (such as chickens, pigs, and cows) for sale or home consumption. These stories included families working together for events such as canning or slaughtering a pig, and the subsequent distribution and sale of the resulting products. Interviewees recalled fond memories of the subsistence lifestyle and remembered the usefulness of the overall farm landscape, including crops, trees, pastures, and fields:

Daddy grew everything we ate—he would grow and sell cucumbers, tomatoes, collards (SC16).

Sweet potatoes, peanuts, sugar cane, cows; Daddy used to have a big garden (SC14).

Gardens, fruit trees, natural springs—grapes, pears, peaches, plum, mulberry trees, black walnut, hickory trees (SC1).

Farming has always been a big part of our lives—we had pigs, chickens, cows. I always used to joke with people that my parents don't plant a garden, they plant a field. Different garden plots. Dig potatoes, grow watermelon, cantaloupes, squash. When we dug potatoes, it was really fun. My aunt would come over. My dad would



drive the tractor. We'd finish ours, then dig up my great-aunt's potatoes, then my aunt's. It was a big family thing. People shared what they got. It went beyond the immediate family, to family members in Maryland and other places. My mom would can, and she would distribute those cans to others. She would tell them, I'll give you more next year, but you better give me back my jars (SC4).

“ *Farming has always been a big part of our lives—we had pigs, chickens, cows. I always used to joke with people that my parents don't plant a garden, they plant a field.* ”

We had cows and milk and butter and chickens. Got everything off the land, all the food. There was the smokehouse. Sold, no? They gave it away. We traded, bartered. We got tomatoes; you got potatoes? Oh, yeah, they'd sell the cotton. But you'd take it to [town in west Alabama], and they'd say, you don't get any money because of that fertilizer you got. They were mean as snakes—it made me sick. All that cotton chopping and hoeing and picking and picking and picking, and then you get there and they tell you that we owed them. It wasn't enough to make any money. Other people got rich off that stuff. It didn't make sense to me. But I ate good. I've never been hungry (AL15).

I loved it [on the property]. We raised hogs, children—grew cotton, corn, peanuts. We milked cows, churned butter, had pecans, pears. It was a self-sustaining property. There was a grits mill and a syrup mill. At that time, it was farmland—there wasn't much forestry work. There was some forest land across the road, but it was all volunteer—there's never been a forest management process (AL16).

As long as I can remember, until I was a teenager, we spent summers in [place name] at my grandmother's house. Probably as early as 7 or 8, they never were farmers. My grandmother had some livestock—chickens, pigs, dogs, goats. She was an educator in the Alabama school system—she often had visitors that would stop by, her previous students. She always wanted to have something to give them. They planted corn to give away and to support the livestock. Small garden with okra, watermelon, cantaloupe. Not acreage, just something for them to do. Greens, and a few peach and plum trees. It was always just as it is now. My great-grandfather was a farmer and he owned a general store on the property. My grandmothers wanted it to be what it was. She leased it to hunters, but other than that, she was content for the property to be hers and something that we could call ours (AL17).

We lived in [town], and my parents moved from [town] and bought this land. I was 3 years old when we moved over here. My father became a farmer and raised cotton, okra, peas, cucumbers, and squash—he would sell them in [town]. He bought the land from one of the sharecroppers. He raised cows, chickens, turkeys. He hunted and fished. He taught all us kids how to hunt and fish. I know how to shoot a 12-gauge, and I have a permit to carry my weapon. The only thing we bought was sugar. He raised sugarcane for syrup, but he didn't make sugar. He would have if he knew how (AL19).

They had pigs, cows, and agriculture. It was productive land. There was a family grocery store near the cemetery, and a mill. Over the last 40 or 50 years, about three families have lived on the land. My great-aunt just passed last year. When I go over there, I always run into a cousin (AL20).

There were very few acres of forest. Most of the land was in row crops—cotton, cane, peanuts, okra, and cattle. Most of it for the family, but some was sold. Cotton and corn and peanuts we sold, potatoes sometimes. But most of it was for eating. There were 10 boys. We farmed 50 acres. We had pastureland for cattle, and very few acres of trees. My father was a logger and a shortwood buyer/harvester—bought tracts of timber, harvested, and sold to local mills. The boys had to work alongside him. A lot of very hard work—sunup to sundown. In 1968, I bought 3 acres and then left for college. Got married to a [town] girl, came back (she stayed because there was a church, a car, and some street lights) and bought 40 acres which came available in 1975. Stayed on since (AL12).

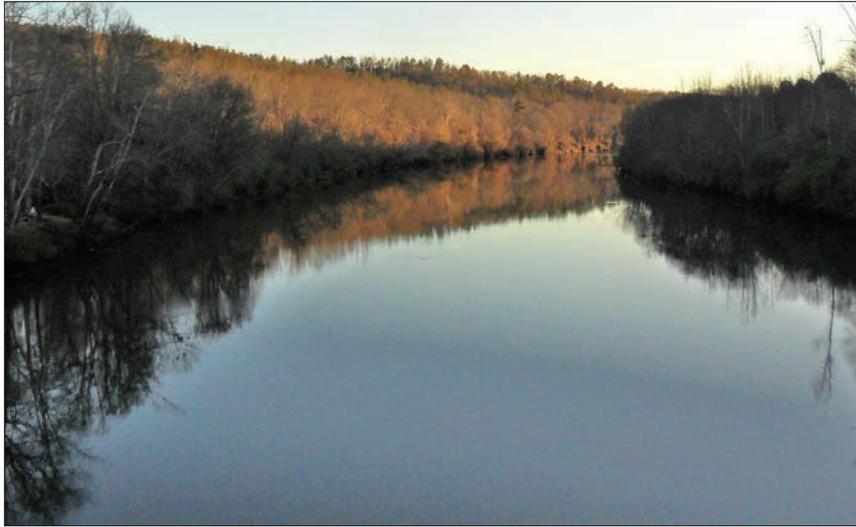
“ *There were very few acres of forest. Most of the land was in row crops—cotton, cane, peanuts, okra, and cattle. Most of it for the family ... most of it for eating.*

In my case, I was born on the place when it was my grandparents' place. I grew up there. We farmed it when we were coming up. We did everything that could be harvested and taken off to market—corn, cotton, soybeans, cucumbers, you name it ... Approximately 60 percent of the land was farm land, and the rest was forestry and pastureland ... The land changed around 1985, beginning in 1980. Changes caused by my dad getting older. Every couple of years, one of us moved away. That's when we moved from crops requiring labor to crops using machines. The last production on it was soybeans. The agriculture on the land stopped in the late 1980s—I wasn't in Alabama at that time. My dad had a tenant on it, and he did watermelons on 5 or 10 acres—that's about it. Other than that, there's been no production, except grazing land for cows. Since the late 80s, it's been mostly pastureland. There are about 25-30 cows there now (AL14).

I remember working the land and living on some of the land. It was in cotton and peanuts. There was also corn. Food that would produce a living. We have some cows and two mules. The mule we hooked to the wagon—it was our means of transportation. My daddy and granddaddy would plow with the mules. I had to pick cotton. I rode on the wagon and helped pull the sacks on the wagon to be weighed. I had to keep up with how much cotton each one had picked. We were barely able to make it. But it's a good memory (AL2).

Peanuts, tobacco, corn—those were the major crops. My mom was a teacher. The farm was a big part of the way they earned a living (NC11).

We, my brothers and sisters, worked the land, and I remember the old-time thing of having mules—mule carts. And pulling fodder—when you'd harvest leaves from



corn stalks to feed the team in the winter. I remember the pea carts and taking the peas to the pickers. Remember the fall when we had so many apple trees, and apple orchard? It would start in June and go all the way to the wine-sap in the fall. There were different varieties from June to the fall. We had a long grape arbor, about 25 feet long—white grapes. We just enjoyed the place tremendously. We really did enjoy it. In the fall, we'd take harvests into the house—pecans and walnuts (NC20).

I'm the oldest granddaughter. I missed that part. I heard them talk about those memories—mom has vivid memories, and she loves to talk about them. I would go to visit my grandparents when I was very young. I remember going on the back porch—my grandmother would do a lot of things on the back porch. We'd snap the string beans and the peas and harvest the vegetables. They didn't have running water—they had a pump. I was taught to get water. Being a city girl, I didn't know about that. That water was cold and crystal clear. There's no taste like that water. They still had apple and peach trees in the time that I remember. I didn't have a sense of how large the property was until I saw a screen shot of it. I'm interested in preserving the history of the land. It has fond memories for me as well. I'd ride on the tractor with my uncle and go see the animals and feed them, with my brothers and my cousins (NC20).

**Please describe some of your memories of the land.** Cows. Mowing that grass. Picking turnip greens and collard greens. As a young girl, standing by a bowl and saying, girl, you are huge. Barbed wire fences. The scary thing about living here—I grew up the first 12 years of my life in New York—that barbed wire fence, I didn't know if it was on or off. Once my sister would use the field as a shortcut to get to my aunt's house. She would always give the cows a little space. But one day, the bull got after her. You talk about a girl flying through that field. I remember that, and I remember big rattlesnakes. I don't remember a lot of working in the farm. I remember picking pecans. I remember the house that my mother was born in, right across the street. I thought, how did six people live in here? It was small but very airy—it was a cool spot. We didn't do a lot of work. Granddaddy had the pig farm. I remember piglets. Chickens. I remember watching my mom pop their necks. And cleaning the chickens. She would say, whenever you have a hen ruling the rooster, it's time for her to go on the table. I remember things like that. I worked other people's farms, but not necessarily my own (NC4).

My dad lived in the house here. He farmed that land. He was a sharecropper, so he didn't own it. You would just get half of the profits (NC7).

There were also memories of roaming the land, including the freedom and sense of belonging in the community. The forests beyond the fields, typically referred to as “woods,” were places where children and adults hunted, fished, collected medicinal plants, and simply spent free time outdoors.

I grew up on the farm. We would walk the paths on the land. Kids then had a lot of independence to roam. They don't have that freedom now. We could go visit our relatives alone... I remember climbing trees... I used to hunt the woods. My father knew the land (SC20).

Once I got older, I realized I needed a fishing or hunting license. Before, I just had to walk out of the house and hunt anywhere (SC18).

There were ponds for fish. We would go mudding. Stir up the water, make the fish drunk, go pop! We don't do much of that now (SC10).

My mother was good about going into the woods and getting herbs. She knew every tree. She could go into the woods and get herbs that make you feel better (SC15).

I know where every spot is, every corner is. My dad always took us with him (AL8).

I'd love to have a pond out there. It might take too much to put a pond out there now. There was a pond there. I caught my first fish out there, with a straight pin and piece of fatback (AL11).

We were both born here, and we went around barefoot and picked up fruits that were everywhere. It would be raining with the sun shining, and they'd say the devil was beating his wife. I could hear it. All the baseball playing—this was the gathering point. Our mother was a sweet person. Play basketball. Apple trees everywhere and gave them to the mule. He loved them. My father had to shoot a mule because he would fight (AL15).

Growing up as a kid, my dad took us out there to hunt there. He said his dad took him out there. You want to take your son out there and tell him the same story. And the pride of ownership of something. That gives you that long-term feeling of ownership. I bought a 4-wheeler so I can ride around and see it (AL1).

“ *You could walk under the pine trees.... If I could draw a picture of my memories, I'd have a marvelous book.* ”

There was some forest land. We didn't do anything with the forest. We remember people—my father would let people hunt the land because they'd been his friends for a number of years. We used to have hickory nuts and persimmon trees. The fruits and nuts were agreeable with the environment that we had. We now have a pear apple tree. It was just fond memories. Around the fields there were lowbush and highbush huckleberries. We now understand that they are called blueberries. They were blue and huckled. Everyone would come to pick blueberries. It was a paradise. People loved to hunt. You could walk under the pine trees. They were close together, and bushes didn't grow under them. You could go sit under the pine trees above the hog pasture. I have very fond memories. If I could draw a picture of my memories, I'd have a marvelous book (NC20).

Daddy would plow the land in early spring. He went hunting. We girls didn't hunt, but he taught us how to shoot. He came home one day with this animal and we cried. Why did you kill that dog? It was a raccoon. We couldn't eat anything we knew—we played with them like it was pets. Cows, pigs. When it came time to kill them, we couldn't eat them. We couldn't drink Minnie's milk—Momma didn't understand it.



We went fishing, mostly at [name] Creek. My dad said there was one place that was 50 feet deep. It never was dry. There were rocks we'd jump off into the creek. We'd eat those persimmons. Swing along the vines through the woods. Lots of grapevines in the woods now (NC1).

There was a spring back there in the '30s to the '50s—you could get a drink from it. The spring is gone now—it dried up. It was logged, and it got filled up. The neighbors used to depend on that spring—to drink, cook, clean. There were pecans and fruit trees. A lot of those have been lost in hurricanes. 100-year-old pear trees out there (NC5).

We didn't live on property until 1973—I was about 16 then. I remember as a young boy, my father bringing us here. Someone else was farming it, and we were living on someone else's land. Getting firewood. Hunting. Moved here in '73. Raising hogs on it. Family garden. Again, hog killings—those are fun memories. Just walking through the woods. I remember fishing there. When they started logging, they blocked the streams (NC5).

I was born here and moved to Washington, DC, at 6 months. I spent summers on the land. My parents are both from here. I would visit my father's family. This is my mom's family property. They used to have animals. Watching the chickens, pigs, mules. That was fascinating to me. Also the fruit trees. I used to play in these ditches before this road was paved. They're fond memories (NC6).

I grew up near there. In the summer, my uncle let us use it as a baseball field. I would run out there and go get peanuts. We played out there when I was young (NC8).

It wasn't forestry—it was a thriving farm. I do think about the forest. I remember coming down for vacations, and running freely to the back of the land where we grew his watermelons. We would smash one and scoop it out, and it was pure enjoyment. Coming from the city and coming down and just being able to run that land freely. It was like an adventure. I grew up in Philadelphia. We didn't have the trees like that in the city. To be able to commune with nature was a pleasure. I liked to find a spot to read in the shade, to get away from them and have my private time. The shade of the trees. We would come down when they were taking down tobacco. I remember the shade of the trees as such a comfort for the workers. Just to see people relaxing under the trees and hear stories of the past being shared there (NC9).



There was a stream. We did play there a little, if you were down there—we wouldn't go there just to play, though. There were some crayfish. Eels—might have been snakes (NC14).

These childhood experiences were reflected in the ways people thought about the land they had returned to as adults:

My brother dug a pond, not a big pond. The ditch runs through the land, and he put a pond in there. It's a trap for me. I deer hunt, so it's good for that—everything wants a drink (SC12).

Seeing certain trees that I remember were small when I was a boy and seeing them grown. There is a sadness not being conservation smart. Having some mistakes happen. One thing I miss in this yard.... In this yard, I don't have any shade trees (SC18).

It's a sacred place. We all have fond memories of it. **(Was it sacred then?)** No, that's why I went into the military (AL14).

My attitude toward the land hasn't changed—I still enjoy it. You can walk across it and see nature at its best (AL14).

I was born on the property. Every summer, my vacation was to go back to the land and visit my great-grandparents and visit with my cousins. There's an old family cemetery where my whole lineage is buried. There are many memories that tie me to that land. We have family reunions there. Now the number has dwindled quite a bit—at the last one, there were about 40 people (AL20).

I have an appreciation for it. Being in the business world now and traveling. My daughters always visited the land. I have a connection with it. My children and grandchildren visit in the summer, and they have fond memories of it. I have a different appreciation now—as you get older ... I have a different perspective on it now (AL6).

I want to make my dad and granddad proud about me carrying on the legacy (AL6).

Growing up, I wanted to get away from the farm. Now we have the vision to have the younger generations get invested in the land (NC11).

I still love the place and the land and the memories. Remembering walking to school. We enjoyed it so much (NC20).

Land ownership provided not only the economic security that comes from the ability to be self-sufficient and to generate wealth from resources on the land, but also the physical and emotional security resulting from being surrounded by family. Several interviewees spoke directly about the land as a place embodying security and community:

So there are memories of security and safety, family, that nothing can bother you. That was in the 60s and 70s. There was still segregation. Society was segregated, but there was a sense of security. The area was all family (SC20).

It felt good back then. Everyone in the community knew everybody. If one person didn't have, someone else did. It's not like that now (SC8).

[When I was young] we had the freedom to just walk. We'd walk around anywhere in this community. We were safe. No one ever locked their doors. I know it's cliché, but it's true. We didn't (SC15).

This community goes back 40-50 years ago. It was all owned by Blacks, all of it. As they died out, some of the heirs sold some property. Highway [number] to [number] area, 50 years ago, you wouldn't have seen a White person, now they own it. Not to be prejudiced against everyone, but I'd like to keep it that way. It's nice to have a place to feel like home, like you're not being invaded by anybody (SC8).

The land, not just we benefited from it, but the community. My daddy would tell people to go collect vegetables from the land (SC8).

“ *The land belongs to the family, and if you work it, you will benefit.* ”

I feel like I became more stable, part of what my grandmother knew was good. The land belongs to the family, and if you work it, you will benefit. This year was our lowest year, because of the rainfall—we grow most of our own food and lots of different crops. My neighbors, White and Black, we work close together. We watch each other's places if we go away. It looks like a separate community, but we look out for each other... There were not any Whites living here before—this was all Black-owned. [Place name] was all Black, but now it's mixed. It's going to get more diverse. People sell land ... we have a very unique area. We're surrounded by water, and people want to live around water. They can't live on the coast—those storms and that insurance is killing them. That's why we need to get this sorted out now. [Company name], a developer, came here and said, they're going to find a way to get it in their hands (AL18).

We've never lived on the land, but it's been in the family for 30 years. My father purchased it. He's been deceased for 30 years, so it's been in the family longer than that. As a child, I remember they used to use a portion of it as a softball field. We used to have a lot of community leagues—none of them exist now, but back then, it was recreation for a lot of adults. That's one place they used to play ball (AL9).

We grew up on the land. It was a home place. Our father bought it years back. The family was there. I have pleasant memories of it, and I'm committed to retaining it. The things that children enjoy—playing, going to school, being part of a community. Certain areas remind you of certain things you'd like to remember for the rest of your life. Some of it was farmed. We worked in the field. At that time, we were an agricultural nation. We worked the fields and enjoyed being there (NC20).

Family land, regardless of its current legal status (as heirs' property, a legal partnership or LLC, or clear individual or co-owned title), is often seen as a landscape where the past, present, and future generations literally, figuratively, and even spiritually mingle. Family members feel a sense of obligation to honor their ancestors by protecting the land and its resources, preserving the structures built on the land by previous generations, maintaining family cemeteries on the land, and honoring the wishes of the previous generations to keep the land in the family. Even more recent acquisitions of land, within the past generation or two, represent wealth and independence, and family members that inherit this land also recognize and appreciate the sacrifice and foresight of the previous generations.

Keeping land in the family is seen as an important part of the African-American experience, to preserve both particular family legacies as well as African-American culture and history:

We need to save it for our family. Also for African-American families and culture. I won't be but so many years, but who will be the next frontrunner to carry the torch for this property? Bought in 1890. I picked up the torch. Who will follow me? I don't have any financial gain, but I have an interest in the legacy. [A] woman purchased land in 1800s.... All the sunshine, sweat, and tears. That's why I'm hanging in there (SC2).

Yes, I've thought about selling it. But when you're Black, African American, the idea that the land came through slavery ... it has sentimental value (NC10).

But it's a real distinction between how Black farmers' farms look and how White farmers' farms look. If you look at the history, Black farmers are almost extinct. I don't want to *farm* farm, but I want to be able to own some land, but it's almost impossible (NC11).

**Are there land use or forest changes that you think would make better use of your forest land than forestry (e.g., development, agriculture)?** No. Not unless there's gold or oil there. I don't want to sell it. It's been in the family for over 100 years. African-American owned since the 18th century. I'd like to keep it that way and keep it in the family.... If my parents could have gotten this information back in the '40s and '50s, I would know a lot more about it now. As African Americans, we've been in the dark for so long. I'm hoping that for my family [we can learn] and I want to reach out to others. I want to give back also (NC5).





Many interviewees noted that they were taught by their parents and grandparents that selling family land was simply not an option. The following list of quotes from various interviewees suggests that they do not plan to ever sell their family land:

It was drilled into our heads, ‘Don’t you ever sell your land. Never sell the land.’ ... He kept this land for them—otherwise, they wouldn’t have any land. He kept the taxes paid and told his children, ‘This is your land.’ They told us, ‘Don’t ever sell the land.’ But you get bad seeds in families (SC17).

Sell? It’s been in my family all these years. Uh-uh. If I tell my father the word ‘sell,’ he’d just go right now, ... ‘We don’t sell on this property.’ It’s been here since the 1800s. Uh-uh.... But it’s hard to manage—selling, that’s ... no. That’s a word we can’t use around here. There’s so much history out there—the family history is out here. We are the original family in [*name of community*] (SC12).

It’s really about inheritance. Our father left that property. We want to keep it. It was given to us. Some may want to sell it, but I don’t. Once I’m gone, and the wife is gone, someone like him [nephew] will take over (SC8).

There is pressure to sell the land. Even to the point where folks are calling wanting to buy it. Not just the acreages, but the whole tract. This guy from California called in ... he was trying to get land using lots of tactics, using other people’s names.... It’s a quickly developing area, and they’re expanding with highways. Many people want to buy tracts for developments. We’re not in a position where we really want to do that yet. It’s basically farm land and timberland, and a little wetland piece.... No, I’m not going to buy or sell anything right now (SC16).

Now we don’t even consider selling. A lot of times you have gaps between generations, but we don’t have that. We all have an appreciation of the land (SC14).

Sell? No way. My ancestors purchased it for the heirs. Someone had a plan. I’m just glad that we’re able to keep it (SC7).

The only thing about selling it, there are so many heirs. If you divide it up, nobody would get anything. It would be awful and no one would get much out of it anyway (SC8).

There won’t be no selling. That’s out (SC9).

I won’t sell the family estate, but other places, it’s a different story. It’s all for sale for a price—except my daddy’s land (AL8).

It would be nice to acquire more land if I were able to sell it. The family land is not for sale. People have approached us for selling it, but we're not interested (AL11).

We believe in ownership on both sides of the family. Her family also [wants to] have and hold onto land. We hold by the saying "Momma may have, Daddy may have, but God bless the child with their own" (AL12).

We have not considered selling it because of the memories—we want to keep it family property. We're willing to do what we have to do to formalize it. There's no financial need for selling it at this point, and we don't foresee a need to sell (AL14).

I would like to buy more. I asked a neighbor if he would sell his 99 acres. Now my land is being sandwiched in between other tracts. It's like having half an apple. That would give me a whole apple—the thing is, I could get that 99 (he has another 46 acres too)—he paid about \$9,000. I wish I could have bought that. He said, 'I put too much into it.' It was tied up in heirs. He said, 'I'll sell it to you for a million.' He wanted to buy my land, and I said, 'Not for a million.' It's been in our family at least since the 1880s (NC1).

Daughter: Don't sell the land. Parent: I try not to be pushy, but I want her to be aware of that part of our lives—our rich history. She will tell her children, 'Don't sell the land' (NC4).

I don't want to sell it. It's been in the family for over 100 years. African-American owned since the 18th century. I'd like to keep it that way and keep it in the family (NC5).

Yes, I've thought about selling it. But when you're Black, African American, the idea that the land came through slavery ... it has sentimental value (NC10).

From a historical point of view, the next generation, there is no way that we would let it go. It's historical, and it's ancestral land as well. Whatever plan we devise, we would definitely be keeping the land in the family (NC20).

However, as noted in the previous section, several interviewees expressed concern that other family members may not value the land as highly as they do, and that they might decide to sell if given the opportunity:

In order to save a family's history, you got to instill it in the children from babies up. When they get up, and they're now heirs. They don't understand. It's not about money. If my cousins knew the real value of this land, it would be gone tomorrow (SC17).

I didn't want to say anything to the other heirs until we have our plans. One year ago, we agreed the land wouldn't be for sale. One heir wanted to sell, but we said it wouldn't be sold (NC18).

They themselves might sell family land one day; I would buy more. I wouldn't sell at this point. But to be realistic, at some point, I'm going to want to bring some gold home (NC2).

In keeping with the intergenerational importance of family land, it is important to note the various ways that people have endeavored to keep land in their families. Several people had purchased or been given land that belonged to other family members who were no longer interested in continuing to own the land. Others had actually purchased land that had belonged to their family at tax sales. Many reported being willing to buy any family land from other family members who needed or wanted to sell it, and that it was considered proper to first offer land to other family members before trying to sell it outside of the family.



We're all in agreement that if any of us want to sell, we'll sell it to each other. I don't foresee us selling, but if we do, it's family first (SC14).

If they're given instructions to only sell to family, there's a good chance it will stay in the family. We want to be in a position to purchase if a cousin needs to sell. It is family property, even if not directly through my dad (SC14).

[It] was heirs' property. I felt like I had to pay taxes, I wanted to buy it from them. Some gave it to me—they didn't want anything to do with it (SC4).

There were heirs in New York, but they didn't pay taxes. People were stealing timber from the trees. I had my eye on it, and I asked how to buy the land. I knew trees were selling for about \$2,000/truck. We knew family affiliated with land, but that they weren't there keeping an eye on it. I watched people steal trees (SC1).

A great-grandfather of mine cut the timber and just let it go. I bought it back in a county auction. If someone doesn't live here, they couldn't care less. I know what the ancestors went through to get it. To me, it's disrespectful to just let it go (SC2).

“ *In the early days, most of the land around here belonged to family. Before you sell out to strangers, you have to check with the family first.*

In the early days, most of the land around here belonged to family. Before you sell out to strangers, you have to check with the family first. The land that I bought, I bought from first cousins. My uncle died ... most of the children grew up somewhere else, and wanted to sell, so I bought. My father bought land from some of his friends. Over time, he decided to get rid of it. So my sister and I bought it—he sold it to us for little or nothing (SC14).

If anyone's looking to sell their share, I'll buy it (SC5).

I learned from my uncles, through oral history: they had no problem with selling the land but always sell to family first. It's okay to sell the land to get something else—a home. Nothing frivolous. To get more land. Or to finance education (SC18).

It was 140 acres.... Other tracts are owned by cousins—it's all still in the family. They worked very, very hard to acquire the land, and they wanted it to stay in the family. They wrote documents saying that [it was] my great-grandfather's wish that land be sold to family members in the bloodline, not to in-laws (AL6).

**Have you ever considered selling heirs' property land?** No. [Name] explained to us if it was possible to divide the land, and whoever wanted to keep their shares, that's fine. We just have to determine who gets what where. I am not interested in selling. I would be interested in buying from the others if they wanted to sell. That would be determined by the overall agreement. I would like to keep it in the family if they don't want to come back. I've mentioned that to a number of them (AL18).

**Do you expect to sell land or acquire more land or forest?** Sell, no. I would like to acquire more land. It's a good investment. I would be willing to buy from family members to keep this property in the family (AL18).

One of the heirs wants to sell his share. I want to help my son buy it. We don't know what the other people are going to do. I would prefer to purchase all the ones who would sell. Let's say he bought half. Then I'd get a surveyor to get his part separated. It can be complicated, but it's worth it. I have some extra time now—my son doesn't have it (AL1).

My other brothers and sisters don't feel the same way about the land—most of them don't even care. We have some clauses in the agreement that if someone wants to sell, they have to sell to a family member first (AL8).

I bought some land from the other heirs (NC1).

Some of the land has been sold out. They must sell within the family first. It's important for the family to keep the land (NC17).

**Is ownership of your forest land across generations and over time important to you (forest legacy)? Why?** Yes, definitely—we want to extend that 103 years (NC18).

**Have there been conflicts regarding your heirs' property (inside family or with others outside your family)?** There are different levels of interest. The majority are on the same page. They're waiting for the last of my grandmother's heirs to pass and then deal with it. Some people might buy out some others. The way it was put to us—buy out the ones that are not interested and the ones that buy will manage. If there could be a meeting where professionals come in to educate the ones that are not interested to hopefully change their minds to see the potential value of the land. I'd like to see it stay family land (NC6).

## Geographic dispersal and reunions

In most of the families we interviewed, there is much geographic dispersal of family members, which reflects general patterns of rural to urban migration, especially among African Americans. Many African Americans have left the Southeastern United States for more economic opportunities in the North, or have been raised “up North” by parents or grandparents who have left the South. For example, one person said:

[I] moved here from New York—moved back here in 1978. From here, but went to New York, then came back. If you didn't go to college or military, you just went to the North to work. There were no opportunities in the South for African Americans. Nothing to offer here, except work at Myrtle Beach or do domestic work (SC1).

This geographic separation from the family land has often resulted in less attachment to the family land:

Family members who live on the land or in the area place a higher value on the land. Family that is out of town or who do not intend to return value the land less (SC10).

If someone doesn't live here, they couldn't care less. She knows what the ancestors went through to get it. To me, it's disrespectful to just let it go (SC2).

As in many cases of out-migration from rural to urban areas around the world, there are a number of people who wish to return to their home towns upon retirement and who maintain an attachment to “the home place” through the stories they have been told by their older relatives, even if they have had little or no direct interaction with the family land. One interviewee stated:

What brought me back to [town name] was not the social life. I came back for two reasons—to care for my mother and to care for the land. My uncles always had us working on the land, and they said, ‘Don’t forget about home and taking care of the land’ (SC18).

An absentee landowner described the difficulty of land management from afar:

There is water on the land, according to what I was told. We’re not doing anything in particular to take care of the water. I had a conversation with my brother about what could be done because of the water on the land, but we haven’t gotten into any details about it. Having land and not being there is like having a big elephant and taking one bite at a time. We decided that the first thing that we would do is deal with the timber. If you get too many irons in the fire, before you know it, everything is cold. Parents got land through their parents. The sad part is that when you’re younger, you feel like you should have been paying better attention and taking notes. I don’t have the documentation on how long it’s been in the family. I’m 68, and as far back as I’ve been alive, it’s been our land. I’m almost sure it was my grandparents’ land (AL10).

The return of retirees who have out-migrated or who have never lived on family land before can sometimes lead to clashes with family members who have never left and feel they have been looking after the land their entire lives. As noted by one man who could only guess at the intentions of his relatives who grew up in the North:

Some people pay the taxes and live on the land. Others may not live on the land, and they don’t see the value of keeping it. We need some mechanism for holding onto the land. Some people live in the North, and they have no intentions of coming back.... You can’t never tell what a family member might do. You can pay all the taxes for years, and then it only takes one who wants to sell. It’s important to keep



that thought in mind. Some do intend to come back. Others wouldn't mind if it went away (SC9).

Other people described different choices of other heirs who grew up away from the land:

The others are not thinking of relocating here. The youngest is 54, they're getting up in age. Once it gets later in life, it costs a lot to move. I'm trying to situate it. I want a place for all the children to come—they'll always have a place to stay. My daddy's buried up there. He died in 1983. I kind of took my dad's spot (AL8).

Forest land is priceless. Relatives have come back from Michigan and built their homes on the family's land (AL12).

My mom's sister [*name*] ... the family would come twice a year for hog killings—that was a big to-do. I wasn't here to be part of that, but people talked about it tremendously. When they came back to visit, people brought families from the North. They all stayed with [*name*], who had no land. They were sharecropping and had no land. Family came back and didn't want to deal with certain situations—people on your land. It became necessary to free their sister from having to answer to someone else. But she was in no condition to purchase land. So her two sisters, [*names*], purchased the farm for her. But the deed was in her name. The responsibility for maintaining it fell to [*names*] (NC9).

Despite the geographic dispersal of family members, many interviewees often use (or want to use) the family land as a place to hold family reunions, which are often grand and highly orchestrated events in the African-American community. Reunions are events in which introductions are made among family members that may have never met. They are also often sites of decision-making, where family leaders who currently live in different parts of the country gather to discuss the status of and future plans for the family land or to exchange information about possibilities for future land management. Reunions which include several (usually three or more) generations are often places where the younger family members are taught about the legacy of the family land and about how to manage it. Several interviewees described the cultural and sentimental value of family reunions, particularly those held on family land:

The purpose of family reunions—fun, fellowship, and to share legacy and history. We have very successful reunions—we're able to share the history of the land and show pictures of the land to the 6th generation of the land, so they'll be good stewards of the land. We're educating them to take care of it. We also have a website. We're educating them through the website, at family reunions, and making sure that we're preparing for them for the transition. We've developed a mission statement spelling out how we're going to manage it (SC5).

At a reunion in Alabama, discussion of the land turned into a conflict, so was avoided at subsequent reunions. Family reunions every other year. This year, about 120 or 130 people attended. This year, we did not discuss the land, but we have in the past. It's been a sore issue in the past. The issue is, 'How or why did my dad own it, when it was my parents?' (AL14).

We have had reunions but few people show up. Nobody lives in this house—maybe when they start getting old and get sick of living in the city, then they might want to come back. My son might want to make a ranch. They would have a fit. They're not interested in it until somebody makes it pretty (AL15).

Family reunions every two years. We just had one this year. We put together a booklet. Eight of the 12 grandchildren and the three aunts involved in the land all



Eleanor Cooper Brown and Yvonne Knight Carter on their family's land. (Photo by Eleanor Cooper Brown)

attended the last reunion. One of the three aunts lives in Detroit, and her daughter brought her down (AL16).

As a generation, we haven't had enough communication. The previous generation, all they did was work the land. This generation, we have to get the education so that we can leave it to the next generations.... At reunion, there was discussion about this. I had a session with my nephews. I specifically told them, 'We don't want to leave you guys with this albatross around your neck, something you can't take care of.' If we can't take care of it ... this is the last chance. There's too many people involved now. An attorney said if we don't get it taken care of in this generation, it may be too late. I put this on their mind, and I got the feeling from them that they were interested. We're going to get together—I initiated the meeting, and hopefully they will try to convince others. I'm trying to reach out. Maybe I started too late. It's just sad that I was busy with my career. I was a technician with some big companies. I wasn't able to deal with the people on the level that some people would. I just know that if you don't put in an effort, you don't get things done. My sisters and the three aunts weren't involved in that session. One of the aunts figures she owns everything and took all of the money from the Black Farmers' Lawsuit. I talked to the judge about how it was to be distributed, she was not entitled to all. I didn't care about that, but she thinks she's the sole owner. She doesn't understand heirs' property (AL16).

We do, as a family, meet at Thanksgiving and go over the family history. I'm trying to encourage the next generation to take over. We do ask people to donate to keep up the family cemetery (NC17).

We also own a small home on that property. Periodically get there for family reunions—trying to keep connection to the land (NC9).

We attended one annual meeting of a family LLC, held during an annual reunion on the family land. In this meeting, the history of the family land was told, and the LLC managers/steering committee discussed and made decisions about an impending timber sale on the land, with input from several generations (SC20).

## THE LAND

### Cultural Values of Land

Family land is often seen as both a physical and metaphorical landscape for instilling cultural values in the next generation. As mentioned, many interviewees felt a responsibility to both honor the memories and wishes of their ancestors and to instill values and a love of the land in their descendants. Here we discuss six main cultural values associated with family land that were recurring themes in our interviews: (1) importance of family, (2) the idea of hard work and the link between land and a strong work ethic, (3) land ownership as a means to and a symbol of autonomy, (4) land as both symbolic of and a concrete source of opportunity, (5) the value of religion and the links between land and God, and (6) love for the land and a responsibility to care for the environment.

#### Family

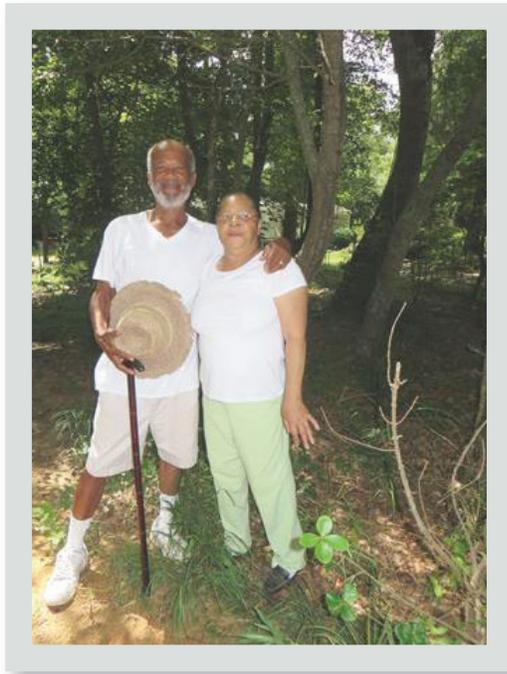
As discussed previously, the importance of family is a central cultural value; maintaining the cohesion of the family and carrying on of the family legacy are two goals of keeping family land. The process of managing inherited land requires cooperation, and this cooperation is often seen as a central reason for parents to leave land to children collectively (as opposed to dividing the land). Keeping the land intact, as a whole cohesive unit, is representative of an intact family unit, and the importance of family was noted by many interviewees:

Family is everything. The grandkids are still taught that today. We all get together at one house. So many families don't associate with their cousins. They don't even get invited to their weddings. I don't understand that. People in Massachusetts say they wish they had what I have (SC20).

Responsibility to family—I want to leave it my kids. A man has to leave inheritance to his children. I want to be able to do that (AL7).



South Carolina forest owners with the family's historic house. (Photo by Eleanor Cooper Brown)



North Carolina forest landowners, Thomas and Lola Newkirk, on family land deeded to Thomas from his grandmother. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

Responsibility to family—my wife isn't as involved in it as I am. She thinks I try to do too much, but I do what I feel. I know what I got to do as a man, what's going to mean something at the end of the day. Sometimes I have to put my foot down. She grew up in the country, more than me. Her mom gardens every year—but she's not trying to plant a garden. That ain't her thing. She'll ride on the 4-wheeler too, but it's mainly me, to tell you the truth. I'm just trying to do a lot now so that I can breathe easier now (AL7).

My daddy gave me something. This is the hand I was dealt, so I gotta play it. I might not get nothing out of this deal, but the family will (AL8).

Sentimental attachment—I've always had an emotional attachment to living here, period. I always knew I would have to come home. My brother died young, at 36 years old. I knew I'd have to come back and take care of my parents. It was my parents, my brother, and me. I was always making plans to move back here. I didn't know when, but I knew. I came home in 1992 to visit—my parents were telling me a story—they thought it was funny that Momma had fallen in the yard. They lived on a farm about two houses from here. This is very secluded. Daddy was trying to get her up—he was 7 years older than her, he was 70. I could imagine both of them lying in the yard. People don't visit like they used to. They could have been out there 24 hours and nobody coming to visit. It was August—I called my girlfriend and I told her if I find a job I'm not coming back. I found a job right away. I went back and packed my things and moved back here. I felt like they were more important (NC11).

### Hard work

A second cultural value embodied in the legacy of the land is that of hard work. Many interviewees discussed how hard their ancestors worked to acquire the land, how much labor was involved in farming on the land, and how they as children worked hard on the land and grew up to appreciate that experience. While subsistence cropping often



invoked fond memories of family and community, cash cropping of cotton and tobacco invoked memories of hard work. Hard work was often done collectively, as a family; several interviewees talked about the extended family working together to harvest one nuclear family's fields and then moving on to the next. A number of interviewees noted that, while farm work was hard and they once dreamed of leaving it behind, they now appreciated both the experiences and the lessons they had learned from it. Several interviewees discussed the land being the links between farming, hard work, and family togetherness:

... them cotton fields. [Laughs]... When I was small, I hated it, but I enjoy doing some of that now. I grow it in my garden now. It was my father's cotton—everyone's cotton. We had tobacco too. It was hard work—you'd get up at 4 in the morning, go back out in the afternoon, every week... They plant that cotton—you got to hoe it and then pick it. Tobacco, you got to set it out, then pick that, then go back in the cotton field. Do tobacco, then cotton, then corn. Finish one, then go to the next thing. Keep going. The whole family helped. When everyone else went to school, we had to gather that farm first, then go to school (SC11).

Planting and harvesting sweet potatoes and peanuts was a family affair. Sweet potatoes were fun. Peanuts were horrible... I would say it gave us our work ethic—and it was done together as a family... There's a new appreciation for the land. The things we've gone through and done. We hear today about people not being able to do things, but we've been able to accomplish it. I'm grateful for the experience, though at the time I wasn't. It's given us a wonderful work ethic and teamwork ethic... As you get older, you appreciate more. Our successes are tied [to that] (SC14).

It was family land, very rural. They [parents] had vegetables, their own animals. People would call it clean living; keep their children out of trouble. We were busy all the time... I remember the chores ... but it was fun, it was decent, and I learned a lot. I thought during that time that once I leave here, I'm never coming back. Later I found out, it's not so bad after all (SC16).

Both our parents talked about wanting our lives to be better, to have better opportunities. My mom would often say, 'I want your life to be better than my life.' I see students who lack a work ethic. I wouldn't want to work on a farm, but I think I could. I might not be particularly happy, but I could. I didn't realize they sold collard greens in grocery stores until I was in college. We just always had that (SC14).

We always worked the land. I was out there picking cotton. Whatever was grown, we picked. We didn't pick the tobacco, but we got it ready to go to market. Those are fond memories, the family togetherness. My children don't see that (SC10).

You may think you're beyond these things [farming] as a family, but you don't know. Farming is a good character-building thing. Teaches you to work hard. It's good to impart that to the next generation (SC20).

My granddad has a third grade education, but he was hard-working. There's something about having your own [land]. Father would take us up and down the road picking up trash. He'd tell us, it's not the State's job to do this. There was a sense of community and family ownership. We learned lessons of citizenship tied back to the land. My brothers and cousins—on Memorial Day and 4th of July—put up a fence around the cemetery. What are we doing to take care of things? We still meet in the homestead. All that stuff ties to the land (SC18).

My grandfather was a farmer—we raised cotton, corn, all types of vegetables on 120 acres—peas, peas, potatoes. The livelihood was from cotton and corn. We had a fruit orchard. It was a very diverse farm. He also raised cows. All my life, that was my life until I went away. I picked cotton, and when I got older, I kept the books. . . . I worked just like a farmer's daughter. It was hard work . . . I have very fond memories of the farm. And I have memories of how hot it was and how much work we had to do. Now that I'm an adult, I see that there were more better times than hard times (AL6).

“ *We always worked the land. . . . Those are fond memories, the family togetherness. My children don't see that.*

He worked us real hard—jeez. Looking back, it's a good thing. Right now, I have work afraid of me. I work all the time. I enjoy it. I really do. That's what keeps me looking young (AL8).

It was hard work. The way things are set up now, it's a lot less labor-intensive. We used to plow with mules. I worked on the farm—I chopped and harvested the crops. Okra is very sticky. . . . I think that it was good times. It made us better people—we're not afraid of hard work. You think about the farming they did, it gave us an opportunity for further education. Three of us finished college. I think it makes us better people, because you can appreciate the things that you have now. You realize that hard work and values pay off (AL10).

**Have your feelings about your land changed over time? How?** It has changed to a degree. As you get older, you look from the aspect that people worked hard to get it. The only thing that cannot be reinvented is land. So we must hold onto it and try to bring it into some kind of productive status (AL10).

It was farmed—tobacco, peanuts, corn. It was hard work—all the people who grew up on a farm know this. As you get older, you realize how beneficial it was, working and caring for things. We had mules and cows. The young people took care of them and the land. We knew what we had to do. Not like kids today. They wouldn't make it. We weren't rich, but we weren't poor either (NC10).

I grew up in a house right behind this one. They built this later. I grew up on this property. Worked on the land—tobacco, cotton, peanuts. It was hard work. I don't know what ages, but what I remember was Momma and Daddy would let the younger ones stay at the house, and then let you go into the field when you're older. There were farms all around, and their children also worked on the field. My older brother would tell you they worked him to death, but he's still living. I don't see it as

hard work. It's just what we had to do. . . . It was hard work, but it needed to be done, and we did it. No questions asked (NC14).

Momma would always say, 'Hard work, sacrifice.' They made a lot of sacrifices for us, sun up to sun down and then some. Whatever it took to get the job done with manual labor (NC14).

Momma believed in hard work. She was very proud of the fact that up to her dying day, she would always mention, 'This is what me and your daddy did, you leave stuff just like it is.' She refused to modernize it. She was in charge all the way until she said, this is it (NC14).

It was about knowing what would grow, I knew the clay, the wet, all conditions. I was the only son, and my father farmed. I didn't have a bicycle—I had a tractor instead. There was not much playing. We worked. In our free time, there were chores. I was pushing a mower at 6 years old. I was on the tractor at 6. They left me there—but he was watching. That would be called abuse now. But you learn to do things early—you have to. All the families were agricultural. We rotated with other families on their farms (NC17).

### Autonomy

A third cultural value discussed by many interviewees is the importance and symbolism of the autonomy that land ownership represents. One man said:

We worked the land. We hunted on this land. . . . We were self-contained. That brought on a love and adoration for the land (SC18).

As mentioned, land ownership provided a buffer from the political and economic system which expressively excluded and oppressed African Americans, allowing independence from market forces. Land as an economic asset also allows greater opportunity to apply for loans, to sell resources in times of need or to live temporarily or permanently. But just as important as economic benefits, land ownership led to respect from others. Several people mentioned the fact that land ownership meant not having to ask for permission to go somewhere, or even being asked for permission by others:

Growing up in South Carolina, there were racial tensions. But as I child, I understood having White people come to the house and ask permission [to go on the land]. It's a symbol of respect, having land (SC4).





I always did hunt. Me and Dad always went on someone else's place, and I wanted a place we could go without asking for permission (AL7).

Several people also mentioned that owning land gave them the opportunity to “just be alone” or “not be harassed.” The ability to “be left alone” was often viewed as a reward for hard work and an escape from society in which they were marginalized and discriminated against.

Owning the property is important to me, owning property. You own your house, you have something that you own. You're not renting. You wake up and you own some property that's been left by your parents, that means a whole lot. No one can make you leave (SC9).

We used to make fun of a lot of things.... As soon as he [her father] got home he went out in the field. He was so anxious to get in the field, he sometimes would forget take off his suit before he got on the tractor, much to my uncle's bewilderment. He just wanted to be alone, nobody to bother him (SC8).

I always liked the country and the woods. I like to be by myself a lot (SC11).

[Land is] something good to have, not having somebody to hinder you all the time (SC8).

“ *All this is new to me. I left when I was so young, and now I'm back in the country. I just love it.* ”

The Civil Rights movement was going on, but we were insulated from that here (SC18).

It's exciting to me. I'm like a baby with a brand new toy. I like to talk to people. I'm learning a lot. I feel great. I'm excited. All this is new to me. I left when I was so young, and now I'm back in the country. I just love it. I wake up every morning at 5 am just looking for something to do. I love it. I can come down here and not be bothered by my wife [laughs]. I can come out here and just read, and go out and bush hog. It's great (AL8).

I love the fresh air, being out in the country.... There's peace and privacy for me. I'm the last house on this road. I could go streaking at midnight if I wanted to. I hope they don't ever pave this road (NC7).

Coming from the city and coming down and just being able to run that land freely. It was like an adventure. I grew up in Philadelphia. We didn't have the trees like that in the city. To be able to commune with nature was a pleasure. I liked to find a spot to read in the shade, to get away from them and have my private time. The shade of the trees (NC9).

I make all the decisions. I paid for it all. When you work like I do, you get to make all the decisions (NC13).

They [his children that live here] like the outdoors, and they like to hunt and the guns, and target practice. And they like to ride around on it. And you've got something of your own (NC13).

## Opportunity

For several interviewees, land represented opportunity—to make money, to acquire more knowledge, and to foster new relationships. Several interviewees spoke of land as providing direct financial opportunities, if one is aware of how to make money from it. They also spoke of land ownership as emblematic of something that could “even the playing field” if people are willing to work hard, work together, take the initiative to learn new skills, and take risks:

I always wanted some land. I saw people had land, they had something, wanted some land. I always wanted to buy some. Everyone that was profiting in life had land... I always knew—I wanted to own it because I know there's money in it, because people that have money have it. I'm a businessman, so I wanted some. I wanted to own my own, and I always knew it would be a business proposition too (AL7).

I wanted to set myself up for retirement, so that when I get older, I'll have something. And I can leave it to my children, and then they can do the same thing. I watch people that are doing things in life, and I try to do the same things. I know that after you pay for it, it'll pay for itself. I know it's an investment. I always said, 'Land and money' and I believe that. Every dollar you put in, you get out. Ain't no up and down, it's one way. And the good Lord ain't making no more (AL7).

“ *Land will always be worth something. They ain't making no more of it.* ”

The world is open for everyone. You just have to get out there and do it. You can't contain yourself. As a businessman, you have to get out there and take a chance. Somebody took a chance with me, and at 24, I know I made him plenty of money. You have to think outside the box... College is great, but if you ain't got common sense, you ain't got nothing. I just had my 25-year class reunion, and I never left here, but I guarantee you I got more than what most of them have. You can be anything you want to be right here. Don't let no degree define you—you've got to have common sense. At the end of the day, a man's got to get something in life—just pick something and stick to it and nail something down. Land will always be worth something. They ain't making no more of it (AL7).

I'm a basketball coach [at the YMCA]. If I had something back here to teach them how to garden, how to sow a seed and reap a harvest. Take a dollar and make ten. You gotta get your hands dirty, or you won't make no money (NC3).

Sixty-seven acres of loblolly planted. I'd like to have a wildlife refuge out there. I'd love to plant some truffles. I don't know if it's possible. They yield nice money. That's not going on in the African-American community. I wouldn't have known about that if I hadn't been going to all the workshops (NC4).

## Religion

A fifth cultural value is the value of religion, and the notions that land is a gift from God and that families are entrusted by God to be good stewards of the land. Several of our interviews included prayers, and some interviewees spoke directly about the links between land and religion:

Everyone shared. No one was hungry. Everyone contributed. I was a girl, but I'd be with my dad, riding around in the truck. It was a big thing when I was old enough to ride in the back of the truck. You could see his love of the land.... He saw the land not only as an asset, but as a gift from God (SC10).

[Our] heritage ... —we're God-fearing people. We study the Bible, and we have a reverential fear of God. You watch how you walk and how you talk. Our sinful nature is subject to the almighty God. You respect your elders. In the nucleus of the family, that's something respectful, reverential. When we cooked food, we all ate from the same pot. There was a sense of all things in common, a sense of respect because we fear and respect God.... There's a fragrance and a smell of the land ... The way they kept it—they had manicured land. We kept the property well. It's amazing how well they preserved the property over all those years. It was tied by something intangible. It was their faith, their spiritual vitality. We may be related by blood, but remember that we answer to God. We have to impart this to the kids of the world. You will not take it with you (SC20).

Always put God first. In the older days, you can still be with family and be taken care of. They kept up the property. They had to—it was the way of feeding your family. You have fields but you don't need them for food now. They needed food before, so they did more for it. Now it doesn't matter so much. That shows us how far God has brought us. Never forget where we stand (SC20).

Yes, but we're all rushing to get things done. You have to realize that God is in control, and for many years, we didn't do anything except pay taxes. It'll take a while for things to fall into place (AL10).

We want to be good stewards of the land. I love the trees. In Harrisburg, there are no trees. I don't care too much for the city. I love the animals. I love the turkeys and the squirrels. The Lord gave us this land, so we want to take care of it (AL13).

It was part of God's plan. We heard it was for sale, and we were retirement age (AL13).

I have organized through my ministry—my ministerial calling in 1997 connected with developing the farm. 501C3. I was set up as Christian community economic development corporation in 1999. I'm now bringing it to fruition (NC1).

I started writing my own forest management plan. [Name] gave me the papers and showed me the format. Started that process 8 or 9 months ago (before the Sustainable Forestry Program). I didn't get started right away. My objectives I wrote down—obtain periodic revenue from timber while providing for wildlife. Safe place for wildlife. Long-term productivity and diversity of resources. We have ponds, a creek, and swampland. 'Stewards for all of God's creation' is our slogan. Health and nutrition training to combat obesity through agrotourism. Manage forest land for quality deer and turkeys (try to make objectives measurable)—large antlers and heavy weight—not to be shot. Abundant plant food for wildlife. [Name] said I didn't have to plant a thing. Raise awareness about preserving natural resources and teach stewardship (NC1).



Everyone has their own relationship with Jesus Christ. Some people say you can't drink wine or whatever, but they have their own relationship with Jesus, and I have mine. It don't mean you don't have bumps. But you overcome them (NC2).

**Why do you own land and forest (or why is your forest land important to you)?**

As an African American, it means a great deal. To have a roof over your head. I always had a roof over my head—there was always a box, and it was too confining in New York. As a young man, I'd like to be outside. My wife too, she likes to be outside. We would think about our future and plan. Coming down here, it was so spacious. In New York, we would go on outings, and we'd have to come home to a concrete jungle. I had a backyard, and it was like a jungle. I like to watch things grow, and the neighbors.... I was raised around Jewish people, and they had all kinds of fruit trees. I was always watching the seasons (NC3).

I try to give them about 10 percent of what I earn. From the Bible, I try to give them [a tithe] ... it depends on their age. My parents always gave my brother and me money when the crops came in. She would give me cash or gifts for my house. I want to do the same for my kids (NC11).

“ *We want to be good stewards of the land.... The Lord gave us this land, so we want to take care of it.* ”

It's just time to do it. We wanted to get more structure to the ownership of the property. We're not currently pursuing title, but we want to get it organized. We want to own property to have a City of Refuge, a Christian-based therapeutic ranch to rehabilitate the homeless and sick. We want to set people on a great path.... It's even more important now, how God has allowed us this heritage, and a place for people to get a fresh start and get counseling. Depending on age, career development. Eventually we want to be producing something, even vegetables and fruit—those are transferable skills (NC18).

Also, in almost every interview, we heard a variation of the phrase: “God isn't making any more land.” That speaks, of course, to the finiteness of land as a resource, but also to God as the provider of land and resources for people. For example, one woman said:

I remember Oprah saying, ‘God isn't making any more land, so you better hold onto it’ (NC20).



## Environment

Finally, a sixth cultural value that emerged from our interviews was a love of and responsibility for family land specifically and the environment in general:

**Why do you own land and forest (or why is your forest land important to you)?**

It's important. It means giving back to the environment. Also wildlife. I love to walk out and see the wildlife. Air and water quality, erosion of property. Also monetary—use it as a means of income for the future family members. And just productivity of the forest. Best management practices, how to manage it properly (NC5).

Since it's been cut, there's nothing else I do out there other than walk through the woods and sightsee. I keep the paths in good condition. I'm going to get some fire breaks out there (NC5).

If I could do something else, I would. I would love to leave them and have that environmental benefit.... I really hate to see the trees cut down. You drive along and you see the deer looking for the forest, that's a pitiful sight (NC11).

“ *We need to save our land so that we can still have some oxygen in the air. When we start stripping the land of all the natural resources, we run into some serious problems.*

I like money just like the next person. At the same time, I'm a humanitarian. We need to save our land so that we can still have some oxygen in the air. When we start stripping the land of all the natural resources, we run into some serious problems. People forget they have to breathe, and got to have somewhere to live in the future. I want to make money, but also sustain and conserve the land. It's important for me to sustain it, for my child, and my child's children. I think that my forest land is more important. It won't make money anytime soon. I have 50 acres of farm land. About 70 acres ... I think I like my forest land better. Farm land, what are you going to do except put a crop on it? When it comes to forest land, you have to use your mind a little bit more (NC4).

If you own land, you own a piece of the Earth. You buy a car, it's gone in 5 years. But the land holds you there (NC10).

## THE LAND

### Future Generations and the Land

As noted above, long-term family ownership of land was highly important to most interviewees, yet a number expressed concerns about a possible disconnect between the upcoming generation and the family land. The reasons for this disconnect range from the younger generations not growing up on the land or farming the land, to not having the time, energy, knowledge, or motivation to properly maintain the land, to simply not understanding the cultural and economic value of the land.

They don't value it as much. There are a few [that do]. They look at the expense of upkeep—they don't want to pay the taxes. They don't care. The tax don't have to be that much, but they still don't want to pay the taxes. They don't come out to the land. There's no place to meet on the land. They wouldn't go over there. There are snakes over there (SC8).

The younger generation doesn't value property like our generation does. Many don't like rural areas (SC1).

It would be nice if everyone had an interest. You want them to want to preserve what you have. But that's not going to happen. I've tried with my family. We're in the process of having divided ours up, and it's a battle. Paying the attorney fees, paying the survey, we've done it all, and 3 years later, we're still paying taxes. Because the younger generation doesn't think the way the older one does. They want something for nothing. Once it's divided, it'll be gone. They're fighting for it (SC8).

The younger generation is not so aware—the may know it's there, but they don't want to necessarily carry it forward. I'm the one ... I'm a visionary. I see what can be, rather than what it is. They don't think that way. They see it as an inheritance, but that's all (SC3).

Next generation—that's an issue that we're concerned about. I've been concerned about it from a very young age. I developed an interest when I had my own family, when I was well into my 30s. I have a daughter that has an interest, and she will pick up and go forward. She has no children, my son has some children, and she will be involved with them.... The next generation ... is in their 40s and early 50s, they can pick up when we elders go the other way. But it is a challenge to convince the younger people that this is an opportunity. Our ancestors sacrificed to get that land, and I don't want it to leave this family, and [I want it to] produce something for this family (SC7).

**What do you think the next generation may do with your forest?** I can say sincerely that they probably could care less what I do up there because they realize that they will benefit from it. This generation is not in tune with the struggle that our forefathers have had to get through (AL17).

I would hope they would keep it. But the way this community is going, they would probably develop it. My sons said if they ever leave the city, they would like to build homes here (AL18).

**What do you think the next generation may do with your forest land?** That's a good question. If they don't understand the forest, I don't have too much faith in them doing too much with it (AL19).

I have no idea what the next generation will do. We have cookouts here, and we try to induce them into coming back. Nobody's here forever—we won't be around, and we want to leave it. I wish people before me were a little astute. But Grandma knew best (AL18).

I have a real attachment to it. I knew where every little stump was, I walked every step of it. I had to hoe it all—there were no herbicides then. I knew that land like the back of my hand. I instinctively knew it, had that attachment. My grandkids have no attachment to it (NC17).

Nobody but me cares—maybe a few nephews. The rest are old, older than me. I'm the baby. The nephews come out to the land sometimes. They say they're interested, but it's just talk. But you never know (NC10).

It might be important to them. But no one has time to do anything with it. My daughter in Atlanta is more responsible. She handles decisions about our affairs. She and maybe my son, but he's in Jersey City now (NC10).

No plans to purchase any more land. My kids may sell it. I'm too old. I don't plan to sell the land, but the kids might (NC16).

After my generation, there's no attachment to the land. They won't move there. They don't know what to do with it. I have a son in the military and a daughter in Charlotte. I can maybe attract my daughter up here. My son is too laid back. They didn't spend much time on the land. Now it's mechanical and there are chemicals—there's no need for so much labor now (NC17).

They have no real attachment. It's hard for them to see the value in it. I've walked every inch of that 67-acre tract. I would like them to keep it in the family. The cousins are also involved. They own property too. But the cousins have the same problems—there's nothing to keep them here. It's the same all over the county. The population is declining. This year, there were less than 200 high school seniors graduating. My class had 340 (NC17).

“ *After my generation, there's no attachment to the land. They won't move there. They don't know what to do with it.* ”

Not sure if the next generation would have interest in the land. They're not here—they're all away. Our two nephews never mention it. We'll sign over our rights someday.... Some in the family don't even know it exists (NC18).

The importance of teaching the younger generations about the land and convincing them to keep and care for it was a central concern to many interviewees. Current owners recognized that younger generations had often not spent much time on the land and therefore may not have strong connections to it; they also recognized that it is their responsibility to instill value for the land (and knowledge about how to manage it) in the younger generations. In some cases, interviewees felt confident that the members of the next generation are knowledgeable and ready to “carry the torch,” and that they share the same values and want to carry on the family legacy. In other cases, interviewees expressed concern that the younger generation does not share the attachment to the land.

We have three kids. They're all grown now. They live in New York. They come down to visit—they're here for a week, and they can't want to get out of here. People like that wouldn't be interested—if someone made them an offer, they'd probably take it.... The younger ones, they don't care. Especially the young women, the girls....



Next generation might sell. It's scary. I hope so. But it's a choice. They might decide to sell it. You keep that in the back of your mind. I pray they never let it go, but you never know after you're gone. The real side of life is that they might never want to come into the country, and they might come and put up a sign and sell this property. It won't be best for them if they don't have anywhere to go. If you have property, you always have somewhere to go. This is value. So far their head's on right (SC8).

I hope they keep it. It's been in the family so long, so I hope they would. We have talked about it. And like I said, I tried to drill into them that it's always good to have some land. But the younger generation, they're just not interested. They're definitely not into farming. I don't think none of them even have a garden. They stay in the city (SC12).

[This family has] not many boys—there's one, but I think he's going to be a city boy. We have to get him some love for the land. He was out there the other day helping his mom pick some butterbeans (SC10).

I've learned that it's best not to give somebody something without an instruction manual, or they will make mistakes or lose it from ignorance. . . . When there's a mission and a purpose, that helps to sustain something. A management plan is part of creating a mission. If there's some kind of water conservation for wildlife, and also pond for the next generation to fish, they'll learn to love the land (SC18).

Land is not going to fall from the sky. It's hard to come by. Since we have this, we have to hold onto it. They may not see the vision now, but later in life, they'll understand (SC7).

We're working on the next generation. They've been worked on since birth. They know the importance of the land. My girls have said, 'I don't know if I could live in a subdivision.' . . . We're not going to discourage them from the city. It's important for them to test the water, so they know what life has to offer. She said, 'I want to come back home.' She understands the importance of what her family has done. I tell her 'If it could be held onto over time, this is still yours. It's like a marriage, to have and to hold' . . . . If kids want to sell—they might have to use some of it for their survival, but at least they'll know the value of it (SC8).

We're teaching the seventh generation to care for it. [We had] a congregation to go to South Carolina [to the Minority Landowner Magazine Conference]—it was great. The next generation—they're going to be the guardians. We're doing all this for not our generation, but for future generations (SC5).



The others are not thinking of relocating here. The youngest is 54; they're getting up in age. Once it gets later in life, it costs a lot to move. I'm trying to situate it. I want a place for all the children to come—they'll always have a place to stay. My daddy's buried up there. He died in 1983. I kind of took my dad's spot (AL8).

You look among yourselves and pick one that's truly qualified. I look at my family and see which one is qualified to take over—all the time it's not the oldest one and it's not all the time the boy. If I had to choose between my girl and my boy, I would choose my girl, because she'll do exactly what I tell her. No man can lead my daughter down another road, but a woman can lead my son down another road—I see it in them, because I raised them. My son, he's what you call a mama's boy (AL8).

“ *Land is not going to fall from the sky. It's hard to come by. Since we have this, we have to hold onto it. They may not see the vision now, but later in life, they'll understand.* ”

We're trying to get things set up for the grands and the great-grands. We want them to know of all the blood, sweat, and tears that went into it. You have to come up with some plans to make it feasible and interested enough to stay involved. So they'll want to be part of what their great-grandparents worked hard for. You almost need a cheat sheet because people don't have the time, and when you're not in the State, it makes it hard. We wanted to make it easier for after retirement, to manage something 800 miles away (AL10).

We're not interested in getting rid of it. Most my kids don't even know we have land. My youngest son is interested because he's been hanging out with [name] a little bit. He came to a program at the school. I don't know his take on it, but he's interested in owning stuff, so it'll be in the family (AL11).

My brother has some children—a couple just graduated from high school. They want to be on their own for a while. They're different in that we were college bound, and they're not necessarily college bound. They haven't shown any interest in that. They're more interested in work. They're interested in the land. They've purchased their own little spots for trailers and stuff. They grew up in the rural... They haven't yet shown any interest in it, at least not the kind that we'd like to see. We don't have children, but we're writing a will that says the land will stay in the family. To me, I just feel like it's important for the family to leave a legacy—that's the only way African Americans will

move up. Those of us who can should pass it on and instill it in the next generation. It's something that [name] and I have worked hard for, and we don't want to see it lost. If it goes to family members, it will still be part of us.... When we turn it over to the next generation, we'll make sure the stipulations make sure that it stays within the family, to some family members. Some of them would sell it. We know who they are, and we'll have it fixed in the will that it stays in the family. And that what we have started continues. Continue to keep it in forestry and the focus on wildlife ... The next generation most likely would want to sell it, so they will stipulate in the will that the land has to be kept in the family as a forest and wildlife preserve (AL13).

I have some nephews in North Carolina. I ask them if they'd be interested, and they say yes. But saying yes and showing interest are two different things. But we've spoken to them about it (AL13).

**Do different family members or co-owners of your land think about the land and forests differently from you? In what ways? Why?** I don't care whether they do or not. I don't consult them about this stuff. They think differently but are not willing to do anything. My son wants ranch, but it is just talk—he ain't going to do nothing either ... I have one sister in Connecticut, and she said she's never come down here. Her daughter said they dug a hole and stuck y'all in it. My sister that lived here wanted her grandbaby to have it. That girl wouldn't come this way (AL15).

When I said I'd divide it up among the 10, I stipulated that they couldn't sell it. But you know the younger generation. If my father came back, he would die all over again, to see these trees cut like this. I want the land to remain in the family until nobody's able to have no more babies (AL15).

“ *I have a sense that among African Americans, the younger generation doesn't see the value of the land.*

They don't really know anything about it. My youngest daughter and oldest nephew are the ones that would know the most about it and have any sort of ties to it. They are the ones that have gone up there with us to harvest corn and pick peas and things of that nature.... They value it in the same manner as we do it, in terms of history and legacy. They haven't really expressed interest in management of the land. Right now, it all falls to me, the management (AL16).

That's important to me, but oftentimes, at my age, I think about my kids. I think about my nephews and my younger brother. I'm putting a lot into the property, and I'll probably leave it to my younger brother as of now. My other property, I'll leave it to my wife. But the family property, it stays in the [name] family. I have a nephew that my daddy raised until he was 15 years old. He has ties to it. He's a nice young man. I'll probably leave it to him. I probably won't leave it to my son—he doesn't care about it. He might sell it and go back to Milwaukee. I want it to remain in the [name] family from now on. I don't know if it'll work (AL8).

I have a sense that among African Americans, the younger generation doesn't see the value of the land (AL20).

In 2010, had a true survey done. I want to show my kids where the lines are. I go out periodically and check the boundary lines.... I want to get my kids involved—at least one of my sons. I want them to come to some meetings with me (NC5).

**Have your feelings about your land changed over time? How?** I began to value it more as an adult. It's something I want to pass on to my offspring—I want to instill in them what I have (NC6).

**How similar or different do you think the next generations of your family's values are to yours?** My next generation—they see the land the same way. And my siblings' next generation. But my cousins' next generation don't want to move down south. It's boring, and there's not work. It's a struggle to instill those values in them (NC6).

We hope and we pray that they will take the ball and run with it. Now the next generation doesn't seem to be that interested. But education is an ongoing process (NC6).

I want to pass it on to my nieces—tell them, 'You learn how to be businesswomen.' My mom doesn't know. I'm trying to learn. Where do we go? A lot of African Americans don't know—their parents never owned land. A lot of men, they don't know anything either—they didn't even farm. At least I farmed (NC8).

They're not showing an interest in it right now. They're college age now, more interested in fashion, weddings, boyfriends. That's only natural. I was the same way. But once you're older ... (NC8).

The real threat is if you don't have kids who fall in love with property—ownership and management to turn a profit somewhere down the line. If kids don't want to bother, they'll sell it—that's the major threat. I like dealing with property and having the responsibility and caring for it and keeping it attractive with the meager resources that we have now (NC9).

Our daughter—they want to know—they don't know the history. Tell me how this works for us. We're trying to create a management plan for them. If we can make it simple and streamline it for them.... I try to clearly identify property lines so it will be easy to explain it to them. I've had people cut real close to property lines so you can see the lines. Have not walked them through the land yet. I need to follow through. If I feel myself getting sick, that will be the first thing on the agenda.... We've grabbed the heart of the grandchildren. The 10 year old talks about 'my trees'—we tell her about the economics about them. These trees can get you this. She's developing a love for what she has. You won't have to sell it to her. It will come along as she ages (NC9).

“ *A lot of African Americans don't know—their parents never owned land. A lot of men, they don't know anything either—they didn't even farm.*

My son—but I don't pay him any attention. He wants to farm, but he doesn't know enough about farming. I would like to send him to school for farming, but I can't afford to send him to school. Because his granddaddy farmed, he thinks he should farm, but he doesn't know anything and it's expensive. If he learns to farm, I'm willing to let him farm. But I'm not going to invest a lot of money into farming if he doesn't know what to do. He wants to cut the timber down because he wants the money. But he hasn't expressed any interest in the conservation part of it ... Children have different ideas—if they knew more ... if my son knew more about forestry, he might do something. He just doesn't know. He works in a factory now (NC11).

She [his wife] has 12 siblings; 2 are deceased. They and their kids grew up on this farm. I've been trying to get some attachment to the land on the part of the grandchildren. There are seven girls. I took them camping for a few days here, to give them a sense of what the farm has, as far as values and memories.... That white post at the street, we did a lane dedication in honor of my wife's parents. The whole

idea was to involve the family in an activity related to farm life and instill the values of the land to the younger generation (NC15).

There used to be a hog pasture back there. The forestry men looked at it for drainage issues. There are 7 acres of pretty pine there now. It's ideal for camping. We probably need to get it resurveyed. I'd like to get out there and paint the stakes with the kids, so they know where they are. I didn't know there was so much acreage until I saw the stakes (NC15).

Interviewees spoke specifically about how land ownership and forest management were strongly tied to financial security and to providing future generations with a source of income—both as a means of providing for them and as an incentive to keep land in the family. Land ownership provided economic security, and, sometimes in the past but more often with the coming of the Sustainable Forestry Program, people saw trees as a way to retain the land and generate cash to cover expenses and perhaps meet other needs. As one landowner said, his goals are “preserving for future generations and income from growing timber” (SC5).

Several interviewees said that they are certain that their children will keep the land and that they see the value in it:

My son is interested, and my grandson—he's 8, and he's very excited about the land. My son knows to keep the land—it's been instilled in him since he was a boy. He and my dad were very close. So that's already been passed on (NC1).

My children have similar values. My daughter, she's tight. Every year for Christmas, I deed a property, a house, to my kids. One lady called wanting to buy, and my daughter got hot. She don't take sh-- (NC2).

My son is interested. The land will be divided up among the heirs. They love it as much as we do. When she [*name of granddaughter*] was one, she would crawl to the garden. They'll keep the land. It's important to keep it in the family (NC2).

Several interviewees expressed that they don't know what the next generation will do, but that they hope they will keep the land, benefit financially from it, and carry on the family legacy:

Some will probably want to do what the current and previous generation want to do—sell it and move on. We hope they will see it as a tremendous asset that will protect them (AL14).

When I make a will, we'll split it up. My sister and I decided to—whichever child is going to be here and able to manage it, that's the child that it'll go to. Our intent is to allow it to stay intact as much as possible, all 51 acres. I'm in the process with my cousins [*name*] and [*name*] to acquire the rest of it (AL16).

I have two girls, 18 and 25. I talk to them about the property. They go out there riding their 4-wheelers, but they're not going to go cut down trees or hunt or anything else. They like going out there. I try to instill in them, to explain to them what it's worth, how beneficial it can be in life. They just need to stick with it. They're receptive to it—one anyway. I talk about the value of it—to have something of your own (AL7).

I want it to stay in the family. I do have nieces and nephews. Over the holidays, my brother and sisters are at home, and we talk about educating the younger generation about property ownership and land values. We want to keep it in the family and pass it along. We need to start now educating them on the value of it. Back then, I thought you could only build a house on the land. I want them to see that there are other options. The children have not yet been out on the land (AL9).

Our only daughter came back and built her house on the property and we are helping to raise the four kids who just love the land (AL12).

My descendants and sister's descendants will have the same values that we do. We're going to help them to acquire a love as well as an understanding of why it's important to maintain it as it is (AL16).

I have two daughters that think about it very much. They all go. They know how I feel about it. My third one too.... They all have gone and they enjoy going down. These are my children's husbands—one grew up on a farm in North Carolina. They all have an interest. One I've walked with her. They have an understanding of it. I give them hands-on experience with it (AL6).

The next generation will keep and improve the land (AL12).

Right now we're spoon-feeding them information about things the land has produced before. We've talked a little bit about technology, energy.... We're hoping that they will come back to us with some ideas about what they think the land could be used for. We're in a highly technical society now.... To get the next generation involved, you have to have a plan to generate income from the land (AL10).

**Will they keep it?** It's a hard pill to swallow. If it were developed, they probably would. I would hope that they would always maintain it. My daughter would probably be the one to manage it more than my son. It's give or go. They may come around it the years to come (AL17).

There's a plan of succession. The reality with younger generations, if they don't see money, they won't follow through. With the plan that I have, the revenue will be generated. That should be enough to get the others involved. That's why it's important to have a structure in place. We don't see any of our children stepping up to the plate as we have. We hope they will utilize the plan that we set in place (AL20).

Sometimes I felt sorry for my uncle and his wife, always working on that farm. It was dear to him. He had turned the land over to his nieces and nephews before he died. It was special to him. It was all he ever really had. That's why it was special to me. For someone who got that much land during Jim Crow who couldn't even read and write. That's why I tell my nieces and nephews to keep it in the family. Make money off it, but don't sell. Maybe use it as a cemetery, but name it after their great uncle (NC8).

“ *The first thing is, I want them to understand its value. It's the blood, sweat, and tears of your family—they worked hard for you to have it.* ”

I just want them to keep it and sustain it and conserve it. The first thing is, I want them to understand its value. It's the blood, sweat, and tears of your family—they worked hard for you to have it. Don't think you don't owe anything to the people who came before (NC4).

Maybe farming it myself one day. Hopefully one day my son will take over and do some farming (NC5).

The kids will be interested in the land. My son is starting to hunt now. I want the kids to go to the training also (NC5).

Mother: We want to set it up so that later on the next generation can have some money and incentive to keep the land in the family. Daughter: Our goals are keeping it in the family and earn some income. Show me and my young cousins how they can make some money from the land (NC12).



**Do you talk with children about the land?** Yeah. I have three—one has no interest, two do have interest. We talk about what the he-- is going to happen when my eyes are closed. Who's going to get what and who's going to sell what (NC13).

In one case, we spoke with a father who thought his children might sell the land (SC4). He said:

I purchased it for financial reasons. I feel like my two children will be able to use it for financial reasons. They may not be able to pay all the taxes. They might sell a tract to help them along the way. I don't think they'll keep it all—I realize they live somewhere else and may not want to pay high taxes if they live somewhere else. It will be a financial asset for them instead of trying to save a dollar. They might not blow it all at once, but they could sell it if they need it (SC4).

While the father discussed the land in terms of a financial legacy for his children, his daughter had absorbed his love of and approach to land and forests even more than he had realized and valued the land as much more than an economic asset. When we spoke with her separately, she said she did not plan to ever sell. She said:

My father has taught me about the land. He's always valued the land. He bought out his siblings who were living in the city. He bought land from people outside the family, too. I remember going around with a notary to purchase land. I saw him doing all that, and it was really important. My dad's always cut timber off the land. He said you can always cut timber, and make money to pay the taxes... I'm a daddy's girl. Whatever his wishes are, I'll do. He says that we can sell it, but that's not my goal. I think it should stay in the family (SC4).

It is important to note that although most of the older (age 50+) interviewees expressed concern that the next generation does not feel a strong sense of connection to the land and worry that they may sell the land, many younger interviewees reported that they are engaged in decision-making processes and share the goal of keeping the land in the family. Younger respondents are also more likely to be comfortable with technologies that make finding information easier, and have been less likely to experience the discrimination that excluded previous generations from government programs and other land management opportunities.

## FORESTRY

### Experience with Forestry

The landowners interviewed generally had very limited experience with forestry. The only forestry activities that were widely engaged in were cutting firewood and selling timber. Several landowners harvested firewood from their land to heat their homes, and many had sold timber at some point. The most common strategy for managing forest lands in the past was allowing them to naturally regenerate, investing little or nothing in management, and then harvesting opportunistically when approached by a buyer, by approaching a timber buyer working in the area, or by seeking out a buyer when cash was needed to pay taxes or for other family needs. Many landowners had little involvement with forestry or land management. As one landowner said, “No, I didn’t know anything about that” (AL9). Another landowner described how they had never really thought about managing the land, but rather were just holding on to the land in hopes that someday it would increase in value in the future:

We live on these little rural roads, and we had high hopes that a big highway would come through here and then the land would be worth a lot. They said, don’t sell it, it might be worth a lot one day. So we were just waiting for the interstate highway to come through (AL9).

#### Timber sales

With forestry experience and engagement generally limited to occasional timber sales (more than half of the interviewees, see table 5), people often expressed concerns about this lack of knowledge resulting in them not getting enough money when selling timber. Several interviewees discussed a history of themselves or their parents being taken advantage of by unscrupulous loggers who did not pay them fair prices for their timber. Capitalizing on their ignorance, these “fly-by-night” logging crews would offer sums of money that seemed fair, but in reality were not. Concerns about past shortfalls and the need to do better in the future were endemic, although people hoped with experience and knowledge they could do better in the future.



**Table 5—Experience of family landowners (≥10 acres) with forest management activities and assistance programs (n=60)**

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

In the last 14 years, I've seen some heirs' property—they just cut and haul for 2 weeks and you get next to nothing. I asked one of them, 'I don't want to get personal, but how much did you get? You could have gotten twice that. If you'd waited, could have gotten more' (SC2).

My concern is the small landowners around—these fly-by-night people come by and make offers. It would be beneficial for people to know, if people made an offer and the timber is worth a lot more (SC14).

I know nothing about how to value timber. It's just not my thing. He [timber buyer] goes over and gives you a price, you don't know whether it's good, bad, or indifferent. You want to get the most you can out of it. Heirs' property doesn't matter to the buyer. He's cut some tracts already, and he's going to cut more, including ours (SC8).

[Selling timber] would be something new for me. I know for a fact when you're a new person, you're going to pay your dues. I can't afford to pay dues (SC12).

How to decide who to sell to? You go to someone else who was selling. Go to see two or three people to see who will give you the highest prices. But we're still not sure we got the best price.... I think we ran short. They didn't give us enough (SC11).

If I know a logger, I allowed him to cut my timber, that's all. There are some good, and some bad. I've got some good deals and some bad deals.... I now know more about how to negotiate with a timber buyer than in previous years (SC4).

When people knock on your door and offer you money for your timber. [People] don't want to hassle with it anymore, so they just say go ahead. Especially women, whose husbands have died. Or the older generation that doesn't know how to use computers (NC8).

I get things in the mail sometimes, saying, 'I'm cutting timber in your area.' I've never followed up on that (NC16).



We sold some timber, and we don't feel good about that sale.... We've learned that you have to talk to people who don't have an interest in it (NC7).

[Name] left for 20 years, came back, and cut the land and took the money and left. That's the way families do (NC19).

On this property, the previous owners didn't reseed. There were pockets of decent pines, but not very many. Mostly small trees, briars, bushes.... You have to make sure your lines are clear. When my aunt sold the timber, her brother said he knew where the lines were, but he didn't. She cut timber off someone else's land, and she had to borrow money to pay that back. That's how the farm got into the original problem. They had to borrow money.... It was an awakening experience for us. We had the whole property surveyed (NC9).

“ *... we don't feel good about that sale.... We've learned that you have to talk to people who don't have an interest in it.*

At one point, timber was cut. I don't remember when. We were approached by a company to purchase the land. His land adjoined ours. My husband said no. The buyer wanted both the timber and the land (NC19).

I have 11 acres wooded. The general consensus is to cut that wood. A guy wanted to buy it [the land], with what the timber was worth, he would have gotten the land for free. There's a house on 4 acres.... My grandfather was a logger, and all his boys logged. Uncle, the baby, and another uncle. We went to do the property. [Logger name] estimated the timber on 52 acres of logs. Uncle made a deal under the table. Everyone got 1/10th of the proceeds from the sale. It must have been \$40K, and each family got \$4K. [Relative's name] cousin was the sheriff, and he said, 'Stop him.' I got paid, and everyone here got paid, but some uncles didn't.... People keep soliciting us to buy the timber. We have another 25 acres. That property is silty and still needs attention. We just got another letter—we really need to get rid of it.... It's in heirs, and the heirs are dying out (NC19).

Had the whole property cut in May (2014), and it was a mess. They would leave one tree standing, and it looks so nasty. Someone from church asked if I wanted timber cut. Thought I would have enough money (\$6,000) to pay for a survey. Got about \$5,000, not enough for survey. Did we get ripped off? ... [I didn't] know the prices and did not know anybody to ask.... They just tell you what they pay. I didn't have

anyone to ask and didn't know who to ask. He was one of the church members, but that didn't stop him from being a snake (AL15).

In spite of bad experiences and distrust, a number of landowners felt that they had sold timber for a fair price. Several reported positive stories from recent work with consulting foresters.

Thinned in 2003. No harvest/clearcut. Dad said don't let nobody totally clear it. We've had trouble finding people to manage it this way—maintain trees for wildlife.... I want to continue the oaks and hardwoods for the animals. Planting trees. I don't want harvest to interrupt the wildlife, so want to keep trees there (NC20).

At the meeting, one man spoke, and some buyers made an offer. He went to [*name, program forester*], and come to find out they were offered so much less than what it was worth.... I heard two businessmen talking at lunch one day. I heard one say, 'I got that timber for \$10,000, and I got \$40,000—man, I did good on that one....' I had a tract that a very reputable man in the community was in the timber business. I called him, and he gave me a lowball figure—so finally it was sold for four times the amount I was initially offered. People now go out and actually count the trees and know what the profit should be. They get a percentage of the profit (NC14).

I had a lot of independent loggers coming in and make offers—they were low. I went to a consultant. He took charge of it. He was going to deal with the contracts. He said there would be 27 bidders or so. My wife and I got there, and no one was there. What he did, he wrote down low offers, and one of his buddies offered me a slightly higher price, enough to drive me in. I didn't take it, and he got mad and said, 'sell it yourself.' This was in 2004. I went to another consultant, and he did it right. My dad was telling me about people driving up on the property making offers. This guy did it the right way. It's been a long road and a learning process (NC5).

Some big trees were sold off our land. It probably went for timber and pulp. They took it all, the sweetgum and everything.... The guy that bought the timber, he was cutting timber near ours. He got in touch with me. I got this feeling that loggers are out to get you. You're not there to count every load. I was there every day when they were cutting. He brought me a list of what he sold, where he sold it. It seemed fair, but you can't outdo the man in his own business. But I felt that he was pretty honest (NC10).

I sold timber to a fellow who wanted to log some land adjacent to this. He wanted to have access through my property to the road. So he gave me a decent price to get to the road. He was a swamp logger, and the other land was in the swamp.... He made me an offer, and he said he would give me a good offer. And he did. I was surprised. I had the only way that he could get in. He came out the waterway, and it worked out good for him. Then he put it back like it was when he was finished. I was satisfied with him (NC13).

I talked with a consultant. I haven't sold it yet, because it's a buyer's market, not a seller's market. Now they're on the lower end, of \$10,000 to \$17,000. I'm trying to get to the higher end. [*Name, program forester*] said I had some good stuff out there, but I'm willing to hold out. I'm broke now, so I might as well stay broke until the price gets better. It was so wet last spring, it wouldn't be a good time to cut. Still have to wait 4 months—I trust that consultant. If he tells me to wait another 6 months, I will. The more I get, the more he gets, so I trust his advice (NC11).

We sold it by truckload. It was mostly hardwoods. After a tornado destroyed some timberland in the area, I knew we had an old stand of timber, and I just decided that we need to harvest it now. We harvested a couple of years after the tornado. I missed the largest price—that was around 2008, maybe 2007. But at that time ...



I've been paying attention to the prices. I look at the prices of a whole lot of things. To arrange the sale, I got in touch with a gentleman I know who does small tracts. It's hard to find someone who will move in and do small tracts. He sold to the sawmill and paid me (AL16).

“ *We sold it by truckload. It was mostly hardwoods. After a tornado destroyed some timberland in the area.... I just decided that we need to harvest it now.*

A lot of pine trees were dying—the weevils got in. We sold it [timber from about 20 acres] to the timber contractor, and the money was used to rebuild the house. This was about 10 years ago. We were paid by the truckload (AL19).

A guy from the neighborhood did our timber. He had a logging crew. We needed some money to get out of some debts. After his [father's] death, it was rough. We sold some timber in 2010 and some last year. The first time, we cut just enough to stay afloat—about 20 acres. I feel like we got a good price. Second cut was a little bit more. I know some of the trees were too young, so they left that and just cut the front part.... The land was clearcut before we bought it. It wasn't planted—it just grew back. It was probably cut in 1999 (AL3).

I cut timber the first of last year.... We decided it needs cutting, so we asked somebody to come cut it. I don't think what we got was enough. But I checked around, and that was about the going price, so we didn't get robbed.... They cut most all of it—pines and hardwoods, too.... Before I cut timber, I didn't know about this program (AL11).

My husband talked to forestry companies. He sold to the highest bidder. I was satisfied with it. We got some money. Maybe not the most we could have, but he knew a little something about that. He worked in forest industry. I don't recall where else he got information.... He worked at [name of timber company]. He knew which trees were good for what.... We sold some oak and some pine (AL2).

I didn't sell the land as a clearcut. I sold it by the logs. That way you can manage the sale much better (AL20).

A few landowners had considerable experience with managing the sale of timber:

The first cut had all the products, except poles. Hopefully this time we'll have some poles—we took out the less desirable on the first thin. The poles will be the last thing

to take out. They're second generation loblolly. No pine straw or firewood. On the last thin, the logger chipped the trash, and took it to the mill. It paid about \$4/ton—not much, but it was worth my while (AL4).

I cut it myself—I learned that from my daddy. I knew what my timber was worth before it was cut. I knew exactly how many loads I was getting—3.5 loads an acre. The guy was quoting me, I knew he was undercutting me. I said let's do it by stumpage. I watched all the loads and got all the tickets—there was an \$18K difference. I don't hold that against him, it's just business (AL8).

One landowner who was very experienced in forestry and forest management also had some experience buying and selling timber and a particular interest in smaller tracts of timber and the potential for small-scale harvesting systems.

You buy low and sell high. I follow it a little bit. I'm finding that it's best to sell your timber now in lots. I'm looking for—the small timber harvester to work the same way—10 or 20 loads at a time. Every week, they put out bids on different loads. Just keep on bidding—a lot of times the big timber companies back out when price gets too low—opens the door for small companies to make a little money.... There's so much timber lost because big operations can't afford to come in and do 3, 4, 5 acres. I'd like to be involved in the harvesting of that. At one time, I was a timber dealer. You can't work 9–5 and then be able to do your harvesting at the same time—it's not feasible. I'd go online and bid online. When I couldn't make any money, I'd quit. Every once in a while, I'd win a bid and make some money.... The biggest issue is insurance—workers comp. If anything can be done to help small harvesters to overcome that obstacle, you'd see them come back. It's outrageous.... Small landowners want someone with smaller equipment that won't tear up their land. Small landowners welcome it (AL4).

### Tree planting

Although more than half of the landowning families reported having sold timber at some point, only about one quarter had planted trees (table 5). In nearly all cases, timber stands were allowed to regenerate naturally and were not replanted:

I saw pine trees. They just grew up. Where did they come from? They just grow up (SC8).

The forest just grew up on its own (SC16).

It's not forest per se. It's a mixture of woods that grew up by itself (SC9).

My father cut it a couple of times, and after he died, my sister cut it. There wasn't a lot of timber the first time. It grew up, and he cut it again. Then sister cut it a few years ago. So right now, it's small (SC13).

“ *The forest just grew up on its own.... It's not forest per se. It's a mixture of woods that grew up by itself.*

Cut timber 4 years ago. Haven't replanted. The conversation came up—conversation about getting help to replant land that had been cut, and I didn't hear more about it. There were some meetings, but it never went anywhere (NC12).

All land in forests—all volunteer stuff. It might have been cut 20 years ago.... I want to get some unification, reseed, let it grow. The only thing that disturbs me is when people cut, you need to reseed (NC2).

On the 30 acres, timber was cut about 4 years ago. The other 60—it just came back naturally, and it's about 20 feet tall—it had been cut before I bought it. . . . Pines were planted in rows on the 30 acres (NC13).

Our neighbor was a forester. He was selling timber on his land, and they took some from the back of our land. We replanted. That was 15 years ago. . . . My husband did that (NC16).

We did have some trees cut—it was necessary, because the trees were very mature. It was either cut it or lose it. It's been about 12 or 14 years. It's been reforested (NC20).

A few landowners indicated that trees had been planted on their land. One whose parents had planted trees noted that this was exceptional:

Our parents planted trees a couple times. They bought trees every year. Bought trees, got some free trees from USDA. He hired guys to help them. My father would sit on the back of the truck and watch the guys plant the trees. Tell them what to do. He was thinking ahead. He knew what it took to upkeep the land. That's the connection to the land. No one else did that. He planted the whole property—they never divided it (SC17).

The land has trees on it. My mother participated in a program that allowed pine trees to be planted on the land. The trees are mature now and ready for harvest. They've never been thinned. Prescribed burning is scheduled for this year—supposed to be last year, but based on the weather and issues with equipment, it didn't happen (AL9).

Many landowners now saw this lack of tree planting and forest management as a missed opportunity:

It's really sad—that would have been a good area to [plant timber]. On the other side [of the road] is a managed piece. No one was willing [to help us] (SC16).

Replanting pine—that's where we as landowners miss the boat (SC19).

I'm 50 now—in my teen years, my mother and uncles talked about working with forestry to plant trees. They didn't know how. We thought you had a pay a lot of money to plant, and then you had restrictions for 30 or 40 years. So it never took off. Those trees could have been growing decade after decade. So my thing is, get it started now (SC18).

While only a few landowners had planted trees in the past, many were currently planning to plant trees in association with the Sustainable Forestry Program:

I have cut trees. I have not planted trees on either property. My uncle sprayed to kill the weeds. He hired a company to do that (AL6).

Working to plant, but haven't started yet. We were supposed to have started this week—with burning. Management plan: burn 47 and 18 acres. Plant 65 acres in loblolly. Fire breaks: 8,890 feet. [Uncertain from the business cards she has who she needs to contact] (AL3).

We did prescribed burning before we planted back. We planted the whole 80 acres in trees this year—second generation loblolly pine in February or March (AL7).

My trees were planted by a group of Mexicans that planted for big landowners every day (AL7).

A lot of the younger people were quiet when the older ones were in charge. . . . We want to do some replanting when we complete the harvesting. I realized that there

was a lot of cedar there—the older people called it Cedar Hill. I put a halt to cutting the cedar trees. I want to plant pine trees, but I want to have a forest that has cedar and walnut trees. There may be a lot of things going on in that forest, but I want it to represent all that (AL20).

Given the legacy of farming that is typical of many African-American families, we found evidence that older generations often resist returning land to forest that they had worked hard to clear years ago:

Dad wanted to keep it in field. It was too much work to make it like that to then come back and plant trees (NC5).

My grandparents would pull up trees, dynamite the stumps. They would say, now you want to put trees back on the land? That's crazy. But that was 100 years ago. Things have changed.... I mentioned it to a cousin of mine. He has land, some in heirs. They're involved with farming sweet potatoes. It's tough for him to think about planting trees, too (NC7).

### Prescribed burning

Very few landowners interviewed had formally engaged in prescribed burning (13 percent, table 5), although several indicated that they used to burn but had stopped because the informal, traditional way individuals burned was now discouraged or illegal.

Sometimes a fire might get up, but no controlled burns (SC4).

My father thinned it, but he never burned it. There was fire, but it was a wildfire. We got it out before it burned too much (SC13).

Daddy used to burn, but you can't do that now—you have to get a permit and all that. He said you have to clear it out, get snakes out. But we haven't (SC12).

I burned, but I don't know how legal it was, to clear things out to plant trees (SC11).

We did some burning [when I was young]. We cut the fire break. Fires didn't get out of hand. We used a stick with flappers to put out the fire if it spread.... The fire department said, 'At least notify us.' That era is long gone now (SC18).

Burning—I saw that done by others, and I wondered what was going on (NC20).

My grandfather burned the land himself, back in the day. He would say, 'Make sure the fire doesn't get away.' I haven't done that (AL6).



However, one landowner in North Carolina who had planted longleaf under a government assistance program was very interested in prescribed burning, and several in Alabama had prescribed burns.

I wanted the slash to be burned—I thought that would be good for the soil. They decided not to do that because we don't have enough money to burn yet... Grandfather—he kept the stands going. When one stand came down, he planted another one. I don't know if he burned or not. I don't know if my uncle burned in 2009 or not (NC4).

“ *My grandfather burned the land himself, back in the day. He would say, “Make sure the fire doesn't get away.”* ”

I had the burning done about 2 or 3 years ago. I went all the way up to the spraying. Everything you need to do to plant trees (AL5).

This whole thing was forested. We cleared the land—the man cut it before he sold it to us. That's about 18 acres. The other 20 acres—we haven't done anything to it. We had it burned a couple of times since we bought it. Burned by the forest department. The last time was about 4 years ago (AL13).

We burn every three years, if weather permits. I do my own burning—I do it all. My son [*name*] helped on the last burn (AL4).

### Forest management plans

Several of the landowners interviewed had already developed written forest management plans prior to the advent of the pilot project (12 percent, table 5). More commonly, participants in the program mentioned that they had recently gotten a management plan or that making a plan was the next step they planned to take (12 percent and 22 percent, respectively, table 5). Nonparticipants in the program that we interviewed were less likely to have a plan.

I never had a management plan. I never had access to that. [The family land] would have been a great place to do timber... A management plan—we thought it couldn't be done. Now it's a new day. Older folk are more skeptical about the programs. Me, if the opportunity sounds good, I'll go with it. I might not benefit from it, but if someone will ... (SC16).

I talked to [*program forester*], he and the other guy in the office. We went to his office. I didn't follow up though. Maybe I would if the rest of the family was interested (NC10).

Not yet. I'll have one next time we talk (NC2).

That's the next step. I think that's what [*NRCS employee*] does (NC11).

We're working on the paperwork now. We're applying for a grant to pay for the forest management plan (NC13).

I started writing my own forest management plan. [*NRCS employee*] gave me the papers and showed me the format. Started that process 8 or 9 months ago (before SF program). I didn't get started right away. My objectives, I wrote down (NC1).

Yes, I've had that done for 10 years (NC5).

Forest management plan was done in 2006. [Shows us forest management plans]—it's ready to be cut, but they won't cut such a small tract. Those trees in [*county*]

*name*] are 30 years old and need to be cut. It's dying and going to be diseased. What do I do (NC8)?

Forest management plan was done in 2011 (NC9).

Yes, we're working towards that, with [*program forester*] and outside help as well (NC20).

The stewardship plan is in progress for the big farm. I have some notes here on the little farm, a soil and forest evaluation. Total, there are 11 acres of timber in the two parcels and 17 acres of farm land.... After the last big hurricane, lots of trees came down. I had it thinned then. I had not filed a forest management plan. In my plan, I looked towards sustaining the forest, said I was not interested in clearcutting. The next thin will be in 5 or 6 years. I'll cut a third or a quarter of the timber and then replant, to stagger the harvests.... We had gotten an [current use] exemption for this farm. Then I got a letter from the tax assessor. Because I had not filed a forest management plan, they wanted several thousand in back taxes. I knew I had to get a plan. I realized that to avoid fines, I better do something. I wrote my own, and it was accepted. So they reduced the value of the land. I was proud of that.... Now I've been meeting with [*program forester*] and several foresters, and they're in the process of writing a plan for this farm—a stewardship plan, which includes forestry, wildlife improvement, recreation. The forest management plan is almost complete (NC15).

I've had it for about 5 years now. That was way back when they were talking about carbon credits. If you find somebody to buy those, I'm selling (AL4).

Currently working on this. The forester that's supposed to be coming to spray—I talked to him this morning.... I have an NRCS/Forestry Service Conservation Plan and am working on the recommendations in it now (AL3).

We just did that when we planted it back in March (AL7).

Just recently, since working with [the program] (AL6).

We've just never done that. It's part of the program (AL14).

No. I will though. I'll go through the Federation and try to get some help from them (AL16).

Just ignorance. [It's in the process of being written.] (AL2).

Not yet, but we're working on it. With [*the forester*] (AL17).

That's something that [*program forester*] is going to help me with (AL10).

I don't have one for this land. I thought I had done that, but I looked at my notes and the paperwork for the EQIP, and I thought I didn't need one (AL5).

I'm working on a management plan for both properties now. With [*a forester*] and the NRCS office in [*town name*] (AL9).

I've applied for a management plan. [*The forester*], he called me 4 or 5 days ago. Once I get that we'll see about what to do (AL11).

I've applied for a management plan with [*the program forester*]. And, in process of developing one. I had a Treasure Forest plan in late 1980s (AL12).

### Assistance programs

Most landowners interviewed had not participated in any government assistance program prior to beginning to work with the pilot project (15 percent had participated prior to the program, and 15 percent since the program started, table 5). Many indicated that they had little awareness of these programs.



No (NC18).

I don't know what that is (NC11).

Not yet. Maybe my dad did when he was alive (NC17).

No—Oh, there's money available? These are the kinds of things we'd like to know (NC6).

Would like to replant, but have to cut current trees now (NC8).

No. I did hear a little bit about that—certain monies to help replant the land. I heard a little bit, and that's why I'm listening to what you all have to say (NC13).

No, not that I know of.... I'm sure in my getting around throughout community, I've probably heard something about it, but I didn't know what it was, and it didn't pique enough interest. The reality, until that tornado hit, I wasn't even thinking about selling the timber or managing anything. But after that tornado hit, it caused me to start doing research (AL16).

There were, however, several interviewees who had participated in some part of an assistance program at some point themselves, or had witnessed their parents' participation in one.

My mother used a program to have trees planted. I don't know how she got involved. It might have been through the agricultural department in [*town name*]. As children, we didn't pay that much attention. You realize that they did the best they can for you, and as an adult, you try to not be a burden on your parents. It wouldn't have been a burden though, to have paid attention then. Then we'd have the true history. Right now we don't have the true history.... NRCS—we just finished some paperwork with [*name*]. We're working with him (AL10).

Yes, in 1996 we used the Alabama Forestry Commission cost-share program for replanting after harvest. The program stipulated the need to wait at least 10 years after planting before harvest was permissible (AL12).

My father had a pond built with NRCS—back then it probably was cost share. It was around 1980 or 1985 (AL14).

One thing I'm doing now is cogongrass, under a USDA program to eradicate that (AL18).

Several had made efforts to become involved in programs on their own in the past, often meeting with difficulties and frustration, but showing high levels of determination and persistence.

We worked with the Forest Service in [county name] County—the North Carolina Forest Development Program—60/40 reimbursement cost-share program. Forest management plan was done in 2011 (NC9).

Some land was approved for CRP. I didn't want to have the land reseeded. I was approved for that in 2008, but I didn't go through with it. I heard from someone working at the courthouse in Windsor. He walked me through the process. Ended up, I didn't do it. Dad wanted to keep it in field. It was too much work to make it like that to then come back and plant trees (NC5).

For the plan initiated in 2008. The other was out of pocket (NC9).

Not for the forest. For some peanut and tobacco subsidies (NC10).

Yes, on this farm—8 or 9 acres, on the back side of the canal. We decided to plant trees in the 70s. The forestry said they would seed it by airplane. That was a new thing in the 70s. That was probably about 30–75 percent of the costs covered. So that saved several thousand dollars for me (NC15).

We got some cost-share from USDA—maybe a 60/40 split. My first attempt was in the 80s. Long story. When I first started getting involved with USDA, I was into the Black farmer thing—I was not successful with that. All my paperwork was lost. When I applied for the settlement, they denied me. The people that worked for me, they got theirs. We were successful in the 90s to get some money to re-establish the parcels (AL4).

I started working on the plan 4 years ago. I started off with [NRCS] in 2009. I don't give up. I may give out, but I won't give up. They tried to get me to give up—they threw my paperwork away. I came back here in 2013, and I was hot on them. They lied to me, they threw away my paperwork. I kept conversing with [NRCS employee]. When I came back here to stay, I went to the Agriculture office. He said, 'Look this man has been working on this for 4 years—you get him straightened out.' I filled out all the paperwork. [NRCS employee] took it over, and he got it all straightened out. I said, 'Just because you don't help me doesn't mean I'm not going to do it. If I have to use my own money, I'm going to do what I have to do. I'm going to do it whether you help me or not.' That's what Daddy taught me (AL8).

It seems like before they didn't want me to come into the program. I know they were shutting me out. They tried to shut me out after it was all said and done—NRCS. . . . I have power of attorney for each child, and I had a lawyer—we did it all legally. Before all the paperwork went through, they said every child had to sign paperwork. I said I already have the power of attorney papers. I asked if what we were doing was forest management, and they said yes. I said, 'It says right here on the power of attorney that I have the right to manage the forest.' I said, 'No, I won't sign another paper. But I'm not finished with you yet.' Then I didn't have no more problems. They were trying to make me quit, and I'm not a quitter (AL8).

A number of landowners had become interested in applying through the program, several recently applied, and one reported having been approved.

Absolutely. I can't wait to get something going. My wife and I took a course in conservation. We wanted to be able to take advantage of programs (NC15).

At the Roanoke Electric workshop with [program forester], I got an application. I've not filled it out yet. I've been too busy. But I may be interested in that (NC16).



Yes, I have been approved. My thing is knowing who to trust [to get the work done] (NC5).

I did go to the office and did sign up for a program where they reimburse me for the cost of the management plan. I did sign up for that. I'm still in the early stages of that (AL9).

I have an application for EQIP—not yet submitted (AL3).

EQIP. No other programs (AL5).

Yes, [NRCS employee]. It's paying for spraying and planting the trees. This is the first time I've been involved with one of these (AL6).

Yes, cost-share assistance from NRCS. EQIP cost-share program with LRLEAN (AL7).

I'm now signed up for two programs. The spraying has already been done, and the burning is set up. [The forester] will plant the trees. We put the fire lane around the 14 acres yesterday. We'll start on this property today (AL8).

USDA out of [town name]—20 acres.... 20 acres for the goats—the open area. We're going to do a conservation plan to integrate the goats into the overall plan. ... His conservation activity plan (CAP) will be fairly unique. The goats have to have the shrubs to feed off (AL18).

## FORESTRY

### Forestry Information Exchange

Experiences with forestry information prior to the initiation of the pilot projects varied widely. Some interviewees had no one with whom they felt they could talk. When asked about people he could turn to with questions about forest management, one person said:

No one. I don't think anybody around here is managing theirs (NC16).

#### Family and other trusted sources

Several people indicated that they had sought help from a relative in the logging business, but they had not gotten the information that they needed. Because of specialization in the industry, it appears that contacts who work on logging crews or at mills are rarely able to provide the answers that landowners need. This is perhaps because many had worked more on the labor end of things than on the technical side. For example, one landowner said:

My son-in-law is a logger, but he didn't give me any advice—just said to be careful. He said you've got money here, but he didn't know how much. I have to get somebody that I can trust (SC12).

Family and life experience were common sources of information. Several people indicated that they had sought help from a relative or acquaintance who was familiar with forestry, and a number indicated that they had done research using the internet.

As far as my knowledge of planting trees, I did a couple of beautification projects that involved planting about 250 trees. At another school, I taught kids how to plant trees. My father was a farmer. That gave me a lot of first-hand experience. If you can get tobacco seedlings to survive, you can get trees to survive... He has a lot of knowledge about land—innate knowledge. Things I didn't know. I'm fortunate to have my husband. If I didn't have him, I wouldn't know what to do. The neighbors come ask him for advice about their yards. Access to information—I can't come to you if I don't know what questions to ask you. I hope my daughter can join us. We have to get this information to her. We have to be creative to get them interested. [When they hear], 'This will help with your college,' their ears perk up (NC9).

I used to talk to my dad. Now with the organizations, it's been with them (NC1).

“ *I used to talk to my dad. Now with the organizations, it's been with them.*

Farm magazine. I google things. I spent time in the library. I talk to other farmers when I come down. I talk to [name] and his brother—they have a farm.... I talk to some other people that have farms. I have a cousin that just started a cattle business. I went to a workshop in [town name]. I went to one last weekend in [town name]. I do plan on attending some other educational workshops to get more information (AL6).

[Name]— a Black man I lease my pastures from. He always told me it's good to go into land. It'll always be worth something. The old guys always say that.... [Name] has also been a mentor. I park my trucks at his place. I have always talked to him about land, about buying land (AL7).



North Carolina forest owner, Roger McGee, with one of his young longleaf pines. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

NRCS. There's always been an NRCS program. So I went up there. You have to get out and move your feet; do something. Have to adventure out there. One man took a chance on me driving a truck when I was 23.... The guy I rent my pasture from always told me land was worth something. Yes, I feel confident in [the information I have]. I really do (AL7).

[*NRCS employee*]*—*we have a good understanding. We talk a lot. I keep him posted about what's going on. I talk with [the program foresters]. I talk to everyone. The worst thing is to be a know-it-all. I may not do what you say, but I want to feel you out first and see if you know something I don't know (AL8).

I talked to someone at the bank about how my land is not producing, and they said I should come here [NRCS]. That was 7 or 8 years ago.... Talked to [*NRCS employees*].... My husband died about 15 years ago. I was busy with school then, and got more involved in forestry after retirement.... I didn't know about forestry. We never did any burning, but now I know it's a good thing. Now I'm learning how to improve the land.... NRCS. I came here for knowledge and information and to apply for grants. I started going to workshops. I just joined the board of [*pilot project organization*]. I feel pretty comfortable with [the information]. I want to be there for the burning. I want to be part of it (AL2).

I talk to [*name*]*—*when I had the one done in [*county name*] County. I'm talking to different ones in agriculture. That's all.... Other information from my mother and auntie. They stressed that I shouldn't just let the land deteriorate.... I could always use more information, but I also feel confident about it. I try my best to figure things out—the more you do things, the more you learn. You can always learn a little more.... I get a bulletin from the USDA, and I read that. It comes from the county office (AL5).

I talk to my students at school. We talk about entrepreneurship—I show them they can have an income from their family property. Most of the children that I teach, their parents or grandparents own land. Fish ponds or timber or agroforestry or whatever—there's always something they could be doing.... I talk with Alabama

Forestry Commission, USDA. The Internet and YouTube are quite useful. You couple that with what you already know and you can make a good decision.... Yes, I'm getting the information that I need (AL4).

Several landowners in South Carolina had, historically, trusted sources of forestry advice and other information for landowners, either through extension agents or faculty at Clemson or South Carolina State University. These relationships tended to be with a specific trusted individual. Several landowners had a trusted logger or neighbor that they had talked to or sought advice from over the years, although long-term continuity and the fragility of these networks were revealed as some landowners indicated that their trusted source from the past was no longer available.

We could have gone to a guy (for information) down here that did logging for about 40 years. He could tell you all about timber. I don't know of anybody to ask. It's not a good idea [to not get more information about what the timber is worth], but I don't know anything else (SC8).

[There] used to be a contact at Clemson extension, but that gentleman retired.... I have talked to NRCS—so far they've been helpful (SC7).

Many of the North Carolina interviewees had some contact with natural resource professionals.

During my tenure with the school board, we had [*company names*]. [*Name*]—he's a forest consultant. These guys, they have so much knowledge in timberland. I'm going to be laying on their shoulders.... Very good. [*Name, repeat*] is a buyer, so he knows what to plant. And he can come back and purchase from me later (NC2).

USDA—[*name*] land conservationist. I try to be current on what's feasible. I'm limited in what I can do, but I might inspire someone else. I have a cousin in Maryland, and he's interested in different things too. He's got land in other places. We're blessed to have this.... USDA—we've been involved with them for a few years, way before we met [*program forester*]. Farmers market—Chamber of Commerce.... (NC3).

I've gone to [*names*] at NRCS for information and assistance. [*NRCS employees*] told me about the longleaf pine program. We've got a bunch of loblollies around here that are ready to go. The longleaf grow slower but produce more (NC7).

We mostly talk to FSA and NRCS. We haven't talked with anyone from extension. Also the lawyer from the Land Loss Prevention. Also the local Forest Service, for the EQIP program. Also [*program forester*] (NC12).

A lot of people. [*Program forester*], of course, Conservation Fund, Department of Ag, NRCS, FSA, U.S. Forestry Services. Not yet the forest consultants—I have a list of them though.... I've had meetings here at the house. The Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and representatives from the Fund that's sponsoring the grant, from the Roanoke Center, foresters from [*three city names*]. Many with USDA offices over there and their counterparts. They've merged offices to serve multiple counties ... they're stretched thin now (NC15).

Yes. I have been to some [meetings] ... I go to meetings in [*county name*] County—they invite us to a place every year.... My father and I have done that, probably in 2010, to look at Tree Farm. They were showing us how to put in plots. I want to do food plots for deer as well (NC5).

One landowner noted the difficulties he had had in getting in touch with anyone at a nearby Forestry Commission office, highlighting the difficulty that forest owners can have trying to get started when they are unfamiliar with the customs and procedures:



North Carolina forest landowner, Valerie Williams, discusses plans for plant conservation, wildlife protection, timber production, and agritourism on land that has been in her family since the 1880s. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

I've actually driven to one of the [forestry] offices. I made three trips. Every time, the door is closed. I [finally] spoke with someone on the phone. ... I couldn't tell you where there's a forestry office where someone is there I can talk to. That would be good information (SC18).

### Landowner organizations

For the most part, awareness of and participation in landowner organizations was very limited. As one landowner said, "I never heard about there being ones we could join" (SC17). Others also stated that they were not part of organizations:

None. My dad—he learned a lot. He was an honest man and wanted to do the right thing (NC1).

Only organization is the YMCA—I'm a basketball coach. If I had something back here to teach them how to garden, how to sow a seed and reap a harvest. Take a dollar and make ten. You gotta get your hands dirty, or you won't make no money (NC3).

No, not at this time. I'm looking forward to that in the future. Again, American Tree Farm, I'm looking to get into that. EQIP, I'm getting information on that (NC5).

[Laughs] Well, I've tried to. In some cases, I'm not sure. At the last meeting in [town name], the North Carolina Forestry Board had an opening for a non-professional. [Program forester] wanted someone to recommend, so I told him I was interested. Not heard anything. I went to a forestry organization in [town name] and I wanted to get some information on forestry. ... And then I attended a meeting in South Carolina, a group of Black farmers. I tried to get the *Minority Landowners* magazine. I've not followed up with that. ... I will join [organizations] when the opportunity presents itself (NC15).

I used to belong to the Landowners Association. Pay \$10, and they bring a speaker (SC7).

Actually, it's sad to say, but I was actually—I was invited to join the Treasure of the Forests Association. I have several clients who have asked me to get involved with that. I put them off. They told me about it (AL16).

Once we were in the Treasure Forest program. Now we're in the Farmers' Federation, and I'm a volunteer firefighter (AL12).

No, I'm too busy. There's a guy in the State that keeps me in the loop. They'll stick with me and help me manage it years down the road. Alabama Forestry Commission—they'll be right there with me (AL7).

Not at this time. The financial part of it is ... right now the financing is not there (AL10).

None. I plan to join the Federation (AL13).

Only the Federation (AL14).

None. I may join if I can come up with enough time (AL16).

[I am part of] an organization where we meet and try to develop our goat project. We have about 12-15 members. This grant is through the Federation. This is just to purchase goats for our property. We're part of the cooperative (AL18).

None—I don't know anything about that (AL3).

Many landowners expressed feelings that they and their families were behind because they had not had access to forestry information in the past, and several expressed feelings of having been excluded from access to information and programs.

Before, there was no management—the trees were just growing. We were focused on farming. The trees were there to supply fuel for the winter. We didn't think about forestry management until a few years ago. I went out and tried to find people to help us, because I didn't know anything about timber at all. People take advantage of people who don't know (SC14).

If our ancestors had had this information 40 or 50 years ago, life would be different for these kids (SC10).

The lack of information, I tell you.... Growing up, we saw land managed by [*timber company*—we could see the pine trees growing straight. The more privileged folk knew about land management, but that information was not available to most people, especially minority folk (SC18).

“ *If our ancestors had had this information 40 or 50 years ago, life would be different for these kids.* ”

Speaking for African Americans, we'd be further along if we'd had this information a while ago.... My gut feeling is that I've always had access to information, I just didn't know it was there. They didn't do a good job of getting information out to everybody. It was well-kept among those who had it, and kept from the have-nots. Folks just don't know about their programs. They didn't go out of their way to bring folks into the fold. I know folks that have gone and still didn't get the information. It's opened eyes both ways. We're now expecting responses when we do ask.... I grew up in [*name of community*—this other guy had a management plan 50 years ago. His land was worse than ours. It would have been easy for us to manage, but we didn't have the information. It clicked, who had information and who didn't. We should have info, announce programs. It's not a welfare thing—it's for those who have land and could participate (SC16).

I wish my dad would have known about it. Things weren't available to Blacks then. I have two non-profits—it was helping to get people in the know. It was my ambition to make people aware. I even assisted people with their foreclosures. I was able to help one save hers (NC1).

We applied to purchase a farm, and applied for funds, but we just got the run-around. There were no funds available at that time. That's what they said. But there was no shortage of funds that year. I found that out 25 years later (NC15).

We didn't have access to the same organizations that they had, so no, we haven't had that done. But we've seen it done by others who had access to these programs. I noticed that sections of the land that joins ours has been burned and reseeded. I thought someone had to be organizing it—I didn't think they just did it on their own. Through this program, I realize that they had consultants helping them. We would probably do well if we had a little consultation (NC20).

There is some trespassing, mostly hunters. I've tried to call, but haven't gotten answers. One man has been helpful—put up no hunting signs, etc. I just want the land to be safe for my grandchildren to walk around. I'm waiting for something in writing.... Wildlife—there's still discrimination going on. It's hard for me now to go through the swamps, so I wanted access from the other side to post my signs. The wildlife person said, 'Why don't you just swim up [name] Creek to post your signs?' I told him, 'Thank you, I'm going to take care of this.' I got my Smith and Wesson to clean up. Next time bullets came my way, I fired mine. They heard them whistling. They left on a bike, and I saw the picture of them hiding. I told the officer, 'I'm just trying to get it safe, because I want to get people out there' (NC1).

I'd heard of the Black farmers' case, but didn't connect to our land. They were talking about it at that meeting at the church. I was there because of the choir. Because of that, I heard [program forester] speaking. I hadn't followed up on it, because you hear just as much about the fraud that's involved as the people that are actually being helped. I didn't want to get involved in any schemes. I've been told that people in this area have benefited from it. You hear conflicting stories. I've heard of people having to pay a fee. I didn't think the government would charge you a fee. There are so many scams out there you don't really know who to trust (AL9).

**For many owners, the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program was the first opportunity they had had to become involved in forestry:**

Prior to now, we didn't have much knowledge. We've gotten more info from [this program] than we've ever gotten. Someone might tell you this or that, but not the whole package.... [It] brought to light what kind of value our land has. We knew it had value, but not what kind. If the land is yielding, we thought that's good. But if it can be more for us and our children, that's what is so important to us. We appreciate the enlightenment. We're ashamed to say we don't know ... I really don't know. I don't walk the land as I did when I was a child. So we all hope for as much information as we can be given to make our lives better (SC10).

Until [the program] came in, we hadn't really considered how we were using the land. I didn't know about various programs that are available. We want to know about reseeded the property for timber—probably loblolly. My time with the program has been about learning what's available.... It's topnotch information now. I really [think it is]. When I go forward, I get the kinds of responses [I want] (SC16).

I just pay taxes.... I don't know who to talk with. We've got lots of other things to deal with.... We have attended the [program] workshops and would like to continue attending those workshops and working with [program forester]. [The workshops]



bring much more structure and direction. [*Program forester*] been a great resource. He's very committed and passionate. We're neophytes (NC18).

I don't speak to anyone about forestry. My son has spoken to a forester about the land. I went to a meeting of the program. A forester was there. My nephew contacted him, and he gave my son some information (NC19).

I need to talk to [*program forester*]. I'm afraid to go in the woods.... There have not been any forest consultants out here (NC16).

“ *We've gotten more info from [this program] than we've ever gotten.*

No, we don't have anyone. That's why we're excited about this program, so that we can find out more (NC6).

It's been so recent, that we've begun to check into what's available for us. Now we're working through the Sustainable Forestry project.... We've been at a standstill. Not making any big progress or big plans. We have maintained and kept things going, but not really. This project was an opportunity to learn more and become familiar with what's available. This has been, is, a good project. It calls your attention to many things that you need but wouldn't have known about.... I used to look at the land just standing, and other people working on their land. I wondered what they were doing, and now I understand what they're doing.... It's been very valuable for us, the second generation—it gives us direction. Not living on the property is a great disadvantage—you can't keep an eye on what's going on. So to know who to hire and how to get the work done—that has been invaluable for us.... It's my prayer that it will continue for a few more years to go. Based on the meeting a week ago, we're not alone in expressing that.... We're pleased with the project and the personnel that we've worked with. [*Program forester*] is always available. We hope the project will go on for 6 more years. I may not be here, but someone else will (NC20).

I talk to people in agricultural community that I've met at these conferences—the Minority Landowners conference. ... I knew I would need a networking system. Things have become kind of familiar. [My daughter] has been attending the conferences. A lot of my contacts are in Raleigh. I talk to my boyfriend all the time—he's an old-school farmer. He doesn't trust, but he sees me doing some things. He's starting to listen. I tell him, just try this, you're not going to lose anything.... I am an opportunist—if it's

free it's for me. I'm not going to go take advantage of a program, but I'm going to get what they offer. I want to give back. I'm a team player. I will work hard if I'm loyal to a project. So I don't have a problem giving back, and I'm so fortunate in what I've been given through this project. I'm looking forward to the future. I'm interested in outreach. I like that part of agriculture. There are so many niches in agriculture. You can do anything in this field (NC4).

We had a meeting with the Forest Service before they bulldozed here. I told them I wouldn't have a problem—they wanted to build rapport with the community—I don't mince words, and I will address the elephant in the room. I will bring up the race issue, no matter who's in the room. I told them, 'you might want me to come talk to these people, but don't think I don't know that you're using me as a pawn. But I agree that my face may help your initiative. If you're trying to do a good thing'.... Before I went to [university name], I didn't know there were African-American people with doctorate degrees. I didn't see myself in that light. That's why diversity is pivotal—every ethnicity has something to bring to the table. So I'll go with you, but don't have me convince them to do something. I'll only tell my story (NC4).

I feel good about it. It took me awhile to get this information. I went through both African Americans and also Whites. It's not just one side. You have to do the research on your own.... Information through [program forester]—got some good information about getting wills and updated surveys, checking your boundary lines every year, giving you information about someone moving in and staying there for 7 years, and then it's their property. If it's heirs' property, someone could buy my share and go to a lawyer, and make the whole family sell that whole piece of heirs' property. This program has been a real eye-opener.... He came here a few weeks ago and measured the DBH of the trees. He showed me some big poplar trees. Showed me the density of trees per acre. Through [program forester], forestry came out and did it all (NC5).

“ *I think the education piece is so important. Information barrier—this project can help explain in laymen's terms.*

I think the education piece is so important. Information barrier—this project can help explain in laymen's terms. Some will say they won't be involved because the education level is not there. And [there is] a lack of trust—in government and lawyers.... The first thing I'm going to do is disseminate the information.... Ideas we got. It's the how-to (NC6).

We got info from [program forester], and we're going to try to educate ourselves as much as possible. We feel better now that we did prior to getting that plan (NC7).

Primarily [program forester]. There are some other neighbors, friends who are into different programs. Not any particular agencies (NC14).

The advantage of this program is that there's someone to call on and refer you to someone that you know will be willing to help and meet others with similar interests (NC15).

[Program forester]. I mentioned to my family that I've been going to the Sustainable Forestry meetings and I share the information with them. We might set up a trust to keep the land in trust as a family (NC17).

I'll keep working with [program forester]. It's a good pilot program. The team that initiated this should be commended for all their efforts. It's sad to start a business and have no resources. They bring the resources. The workshops—the knowledge is very, very needed. You can send it in the mail, but who's going to read a book this thick (NC2)?



I don't know. I know there's a huge market [for timber]. I live in [town name], and I pass logging trucks all the time, so I know there's a market for it.... I only acquired these properties in the last year and a half. I didn't know about these things before that. My mom runs everything by me, but I didn't hear about these things from her. I didn't know about NRCS, Alabama Forestry Commission, LRLEAN. I'd heard of USDA, everyone's heard of that (AL9).

The pilot project foresters had earned the trust of most of the landowners we talked to, and were often heavily depended on for information and assistance.

I've been reaching out, and everyone has been very responsive. The forester that's retired, [name], I asked him how the weeds and the trees are going. This is new, so I expected it to look a little different (AL6).

[Program forester] told me about this program.... I was at church one day, and there was a meeting. He was one of the guest speakers, and we started talking about forestry and agriculture. It was an outreach program. Before that, I hadn't thought about management at all.... I just call [program forester]. I honestly don't know many people in forestry management. This guy in my church says he's a tree census taker. He works for the Forest Service—Forestry Commission.... When I talk to someone at the NRCS office, I tell my brother and sisters. They're showing interest in it now too.... I feel good about the information. I just talked to [a consulting forester] last week, and I gave him permission to share a land map and contact people at the NRCS office on whatever they're doing. He should be getting back in contact with me (AL9).

Other than [program forester], nobody. I didn't know anything about forestry. He's helping me go through all the steps (AL15).

Just [program forester]. He's helping me go through all the steps (AL11).

Just [program forester], whose name was provided by the county forester. I talk to anyone I meet. I met the county forester in volunteer fire department and he told me about the program (AL12).

Just [program forester]. He's helping me go through all the steps. We knew each other from before. We live in the same area as ... [program forester and AFC forester] who I met in volunteer fire department and told me about the benefits of burning. I was in the city fire department for about 15 years. The Federation had been in contact several times about programs they offered. I attended a meeting of the Federation.

Someone was supposed to get back to us, but the next person we heard from was [the program forester]... We've attended several meetings, and we've been excited about what we hear. Lots of literature, which is very informative. We picked up so much literature we read ourselves to sleep sometimes. I learned about the pine trees—the loblolly. I can tell the difference between them and the hardwoods—I couldn't before. I learned about how important burning is. We've also gone on field visits (AL13).

The forestry folks—[program forester and consulting forester] has been here?... We're excited. We wouldn't be where we are today without [program forester]. I gathered up all my brothers and sister and went to a meeting in [town name], that's how it got started. We were excited from that meeting. That was confirmation that we need to keep driving forward (AL14).

[People I know] basically are managing theirs for two generations down the road. The bulk of them are managing the property for recreational things. One likes to birdwatch and is managing their forestry to invite birds to come. I just got the idea that you can manage a stand for anything that you want it to be.... I'll depend on someone that knows it, like [program forester]... I've been able to sit down with people and then ask questions—people like [program forester], [consulting forester]—he's a church member of mine (AL16).

The information that I've been able to obtain over the last 3 or 4 months from literature provided by [program forester], and some seminars—lectures and written information. Most of my information has come from my association with [program forester]. [Name] introduced us. I'm learning from him—when you're asked to bless the food, be brief [laughs].... I'm pretty confident in it. When it comes to that property, how close it is to my heart and soul—I don't pull punches with it at all. I ask questions and I do research if my spirit needs me to do that. To make sure what I'm seeing and hearing is what's going to take place. It seems like it's legitimate information (AL17).

[Two names, NRCS]. And of course [program forester]... USDA office in [town name]. Basically [employee name]?... I've been well satisfied by what I've been told. I'm not a farmer by nature. I rely on them to give me good information. I'll research it on my own, too (AL18).

I go to meetings with my husband, and I listen. I've just started to get information. Before, I didn't have any idea about forestry (AL19).



People I've met through the program. I had done some earlier research on my own, to make the land more productive. I looked into costs and growth curves of loblolly pines to manage as a tree farm. When do you harvest pulpwood? Or logs? Nothing was finalized. I was studying, but not starting anything.... State programs? I've heard of programs, but I've not taken advantage of those ... (AL1).

[*Program forester*]*—*I started working with him. He recommends other people in [*town name*]*—*a government office (maybe NRCS).... If I have any questions, I call [*program forester*]. They tell me who to call, what to do.... I went to a meeting in [*town name*] and then one in [*town name*]. I met a forester at the meeting. I filled out some forms there and met people there. I got information in the mail. [*Name*] had some fliers. I went to [*town name*] and filled out some forms. He suggested the forester (AL3).

[*Program forester*]. Naturally, the internet—you can get an idea of pricing. A little bit here, a little bit there. Then you have to pull it all together and make it make sense ... (AL10).

No one. I've been reading things on the internet.... USDA—they have programs about agroforestry and forestry business. Texas A&M. Different places, different people that know something about it.... You have to look at all the information and see what fits and what doesn't fit (AL20).

### **Involvement in the forestry program was seen as key to involving the larger community of African Americans in the land and retaining land for future generations.**

It's about sharing information that we didn't have before. African Americans were not aware, still aren't, or are skeptical. As the program expands, as the older group becomes more familiar, and as more African Americans become involved, the information will spread (SC16).

As I learn more about forestry down there, I understand the value and importance of land. The generations before understood the value of the land. They lived off the land. They farmed, and that allowed them to take care of their families. I'm 53, so I'm looking to acquire land, and hold onto it for future generations. I want to pass that on as legacy to my children. There are things unique to the South—types of timber that only grow there. As I'm learning about the importance of history, all this investigative work—we're talking to family about what they've heard. We're getting collective information from everyone. I know the importance of land and [want to know more about] how to acquire and manage land (SC5).

## FORESTRY

# Working Together

Nearly all timber harvesting in the South today is highly mechanized, and it can be difficult to find a logging crew to come out and harvest small tracts of timber, particularly if the stand has low quality timber. A logging crew may have over a million dollars invested in equipment, and the expense and downtime involved in moving the equipment to a new tract must be justified by the returns from the harvest. Exactly what size of tract may be too small depends significantly on the quality of the timber present, but as tract size and timber quality diminish, it can be particularly difficult to engage loggers.

For this reason, many interviewees had historically sold timber when contacted by a logger that was working on a neighbor's land, with the contact being initiated either by the logger or the forest owner. This sort of arrangement, of course, makes it difficult to shop one's timber around and get the best price.

One way of addressing this problem is for landowners to market their timber collectively, either informally with neighbors or relatives or through a more formal relationship such as a cooperative. We asked landowners if they would be interested in doing this, and the consensus answer was a qualified "yes." Landowners noted that they had not had any experience doing this and would need information. They acknowledged that this could make it easier to find a logger and perhaps increase returns, but many also expressed concerns about making sure they were getting a fair deal and not being taken advantage of in such group efforts.

The more people that can pool to do things ... It would be a whole lot cheaper to do a big section than to do it section by section (SC10).

That would be okay, as long as the money is right. If I see an advantage in bundling with a group to get a better rate, I would do that. I'd want everything in writing first. I would entertain it (SC3).

It depends on how it's going to work. You have to make sure you're working with the right people (SC9).

Good thing? I don't think so. He might cheat you out of something too. Sell it with the family, if you can get the family to agree on that. It's hard to think about getting a group together to sell timber (SC11).

Not now (NC10).

Probably not, if they're not part of the family (NC16).

People around here are so busy—they own trailer parks and other things (NC3).

It's not come up. I don't know if it will. There are other minority landowners around here that aren't part of the project (NC15).

Most of those people have already done that. They're White—they must have already been involved. We're just learning about it now. My dad just knew he could get a little money by clearing some of the trees himself (NC1).

We're not opposed to it (NC6).

I have no problems [with that] (NC4).

I don't know. It hasn't been discussed. I can see smaller groups getting together would be helpful.... I see nothing wrong with networking and being a part of a group (NC20).

It sounds like a good idea, but I'm not sure what it would involve.... There are some with knowledge about working with a co-op, but we don't have any experience with that (NC12).

I might be willing to join a cooperative (NC19).

It's always good to be involved as a team—sometimes the team gets a better deal than the individual (NC2).

Yes, we need a co-op, just like the electric co-op (NC9).

I think it would be of interest at some point, when we're ready to sell timber (NC14).

If we were still in the program, maybe someone else in the program would need 50 acres cut. Maybe [*program forester*] could be the facilitator (NC8).

“ *I see the benefits of organizing—it keeps you informed, and you develop a relationship with individuals in those organizations. You can share ideas and learn from others.*

Pretty much want to do it on my own. If there's a profit in it, I will, but in general, I like to do it on my own. If there's a profit, that would be the only way (AL7).

I wouldn't mind doing that if I had the opportunity. I wouldn't dismiss it (AL5).

Whatever will be to my advantage, yes (AL6).

It probably would be better. I'm sure of it (AL11).

If it's something that would benefit my overall property management plan or give me knowledge on how to do things better. Not to be a spokesperson, but if there were a benefit, it's something that I would consider (AL17).

Yes. I see the benefits of organizing—it keeps you informed, and you develop a relationship with individuals in those organizations. You can share ideas and learn from others (AL13).

Yeah, by all means. I understand that's the process by which you can get the greatest return (AL16).

Yes, we're part of the cooperative (AL18).

Yes. I want to learn as much as I can in dealing with our land. I have attended two meetings with my husband, and I look forward to attending more meetings (AL19).

Some landowners, often with the help of foresters from the local program, were already taking some steps to market timber with other landowners.

My son's timber and my timber and the timber of another landowner—hopefully we can find someone who can purchase it by working together (AL2).

We're ready to harvest some trees. Talking with [*program forester*] now—we're trying to pool people together that have trees ready to harvest to get a better price.... Sure, as long as it's fair (AL10).

## FORESTRY

### Land Management Interests

Landowners often have multiple and diverse interests and objectives for their land. Families often had histories in agriculture and, at least in part because of the program, expressed interest in forestry. Yet discussions with them revealed multiple and diverse interests.

#### Farming

While some landholdings were entirely forested, many had portions in agricultural fields or pastures. In spite of the strong connections to family farming among the interviewees, many indicated that their families had stopped farming years ago (often in the 1980s) when farmers had to either “get big or get out.” At this time, many fields were abandoned and over time grew up into forests. In some cases, fields had been maintained and either farmed by a family member or rented out. When farmed by an interviewee, farming was often small-scale, for example growing corn for sale to hunters. More commonly, people had large gardens that continued an element of the subsistence and sharing economy with which they had grown up. Others indicated that they had no plans to farm in their retirement due to age and the work involved.

Lands could also be leased out to a family member or neighbor, often in what had been a long-term relationship over the years. Satisfaction with these arrangements varied. Some people were happy to be supporting a neighbor who was young farmer or to maintain a long-term relationship, whereas others felt that they were not getting enough economic return from the rental and were rethinking their rental arrangements and plans for the land. Farming was often viewed as an activity that was more hands-on than they were interested in, either because of absentee land ownership, work responsibilities, or a desire to scale back in retirement. Nevertheless, many landowners were maintaining their trees and pastures. One landowner indicated that there were tax advantages to keeping land in agriculture that made it easier to hold on to land. Another reported that his mother had always said to “never stop farming because you have to take care of the land ... trees would kill the soil” (SC17).

The fields have grown out a lot. The ‘new ground’ is rented. There’s a high cost to farm yourself (SC10).

People can’t afford to go buy equipment for farming. You have to have a certain amount of acreage—if you don’t, it’s like a rental property. It might cost you \$300 in taxes instead of \$24 if it’s ag use. Makes it harder to hold on to. So they let it go, and they’d keep it if it were cheaper. Sometimes people just stop paying taxes, and the land gets sold (SC10).

At 86, I ain’t got no plan for farming. That part is over (SC4).

No, I’m not interested [in farming].... Forestry is profitable (SC8).

Farming is more hands on. But yes, we’d consider it (SC5).

Rent land for farming to a young man.... Hoop houses are awesome. You don’t have to farm the whole land, and can have trees, too (SC17).

You need connections to grow cotton and tobacco now. It used to be you could have a few hogs and sell them. Now there are no stockyards. And tobacco—once the allotment went away, the warehouse owners were given contracts for tobacco. There



are not now many minority farmers—they got pushed out of tobacco. They were stabbed from the beginning. A small farm that had been owned by a White family with three children, on 30 acres, were given the same allotment for tobacco as my wife's father, who had 85 acres. Minority farmers got less allotment. And they got cheated at market too, if you're not drinking partners with the warehouse owner (NC15).

Some of it is open, but mostly it's forested. I was going to rent the land for farming (NC16).

“ *The fields have grown out a lot. The 'new ground' is rented. There's a high cost to farm yourself.*

Rent farmland—will continue to do that.... For now, I want to keep renting out the farm land. This land is not on the front road, so you can't do much commercial with it (NC10).

Leasing land to be farmed on both tracts (NC12).

Thirty-two acres leased for farming (NC14).

[Names] farm the land—they have the adjoining property (NC20).

Eleven acres is farmed (NC18).

Soybeans and peanuts. Want to emphasize the health value. Organic, herbal (NC1).

High season tunnel for irrigation—had a meeting yesterday with USDA. For a greenhouse, to grow things in the winter. We have chickens, and they ate all the squash. My son hatched them in the house. We get fresh eggs. They got some pretty ones (chickens).... We specialize in vegetables, but we want to get into fruit—figs, grapes, apples, pears.... Want to garden more—much more so. It's a lot of fun. The grandkids are a big help.... [other plans] No more than farming. I know I'm a good gardener. If I had the facilities, gardening wouldn't be a problem (NC3).

I may do some later (NC8).

[Farming] Yes—in the past. Not now (AL2).

No, it would take too much for the farming—cultivating the land ... I would have to hire someone to do that. I wouldn't be able to do that now (AL5).

No, I'm too old for that (agriculture or cows). At my age, it would just take too much. All the machinery I would have to buy. By the time I got situated, I'd be 70 years old.... I love to be around cows. My daddy had 80 or 90 cows. But to get started now,

all the preparation I'd have to make, I'd be too old to keep up with it. Some things just don't make sense. If I was in it already, different story. Forestry meets my needs now. I can just ride around and look at it, and say, look at those beautiful trees.... I thank God every day that I feel the way I do. I got no aches and pains (AL8).

A few interviewees were interested in starting up some farming, or at least keeping the option open for younger family members to farm in the future.

It's rented out now. When I retire, I might farm myself. I'm only 60 (NC17).

My significant other plants soybeans on the ag land. [*Program forester*] says you have to use the land. It got so interesting that I started looking into jobs in agriculture (NC4).

Maybe farming it myself one day. Hopefully one day my son will take over and do some farming (NC5).

Make it a working farm—without all the hard work of the past, e.g., use a tractor to make the work easier. I would like a hoop house (AL15).

You never say never. We can't say that any of the grandkids won't be interested in farming. But I know I'm not (AL10).

Not me personally. But I have a grandson that loves animals, so I don't know what's going to happen.... Maybe grow some vegetables (AL6).

Most, however, were interested in either gardening or livestock:

Farming is over with. People don't do it that way anymore. We rent it out sometimes, but the renter don't want to pay too much. Not as much as we'd get from trees.... We've got chickens. We plan on putting some in trees. I'm going to turn about 2 acres of garden into trees and make my garden a little smaller. I have about 4 acres of garden now (SC11).

My farming days is over. Planting a garden would be wonderful. Corn, okra, peanuts, sweet potatoes (SC7).

I love growing vegetables. We eat them here at home, and I give them away (SC16).

We do some gardening—would call it farming (SC6).

Personal garden—my husband planted vegetables. I plant greens now. It's about time for the fall crops.... Nobody farms here, not a lot anyway. Next door, they did farm, but it's mostly died out. The fields grew up (NC16).

No, just a little gardening. I have a small plot (NC17).

Don't mention cotton—I don't want to do farming. Would like to grow my own food. I just want to be comfortable (AL15).

I have a little garden in the yard. If someone wanted to farm there, that's no problem.... I'd [have] to think about getting some goats—I would do cows, but they would get out. With a goat, I could at least put it back in the truck (AL3).

Did truck farming when younger and rented land to raise cattle. I was also an agriculture teacher. The only thing we've done on this land is raise cattle. We have a small garden (AL13).

Grazing cattle (AL14).

Livestock (AL4).

Ten acres for horses (currently 13) (AL12).

Hay production to keep the land from growing up in trees and shrubs (AL19).



I've thought about a lot of stuff. I feel like cows might have been better. You'd get a quicker return. Cows are sky high right now. But I don't want to lose out on that [trees], for the return in the long term. Trees you can just plant and leave them alone. Cows are a lot of work. But I'm all about work. I wish I had a whole bunch of cows and just let other people drive the truck (AL7).

### Agroforestry

The term “agroforestry” was often not familiar to landowners, and many landowners, consistent with their lack of interest in farming, were not interested. Yet several landowners who had continuing interests in livestock or crops discussed concepts similar to agroforestry. For these individuals, mixing trees with agriculture, livestock, or non-timber forest products seemed to represent a way to have trees while still continuing their interest in agriculture.

I would like to manage the woods, growing stuff in between (SC15).

I'm 64 years old. Don't get me wrong, farming is a good thing, but I'm not doing it. I have cows.... [Agroforestry]. That's what I'm going to look at. I'll never just plant trees on my property. I enjoy the animals. That's just me, that's my hobby right now.... Having the animals on the property is very important. Now I have more time to do that. I'll do forestry on part of the land, but I'll never do that on my whole property. I love the animals. It's a livelihood. Cows and pigs will never die—beef and pork will always be around (SC9).

Truffles—would like to plant some. I don't know if it's possible. They yield nice money. That's not going on in the African-American community. I wouldn't have known about that if I hadn't been going to all the workshops.... I'd like to sell pine needles (NC4).

Ginseng—I've looked vaguely at that. It didn't attract me.... Maybe firewood—but I'm not a woods person (NC17).

After the next thin, I'd like to do some alley cropping. Put in some fences—there's a good grass stand. After the burn, some good vegetation comes up. There's a type of cow in Florida—Pineywoods—I may get a couple of those. I also thought about raising some deer. But it's expensive to get it started. High fences. And the genetics are real expensive. To be on the breeding side. You can raise a lot of them on small pieces of land. I'm told it's better than raising goats. I may get some goats, too (AL4).

## Timber

In spite of a history of minimal involvement in forestry in the past, there was considerable interest in getting involved in forestry. Not surprisingly, this was stronger among the core participants in the program. Yet the interest was broader than that, reflecting the general interest in retaining and making rural land more productive in ways that were not extremely labor or cash intensive. There was a desire to use land more productively in the past, sometimes with references to industry or agency forest land as a model. A number of landowners expressed interest in producing both long-term and short-term income by combining timber production with pine straw harvesting.

If you have it, it might as well be productive. Might as well make money for us and for future generations (SC14).

We're going to plant 127 acres in trees. That way we can keep our eye on it, watch it more closely than what we've been doing (SC11).

Get our forestry looking like the National forest over here, have our timber look just like theirs. It's a process, and I have a good understanding of what we need to do... Whatever we do, the timber should be healthy. If you take care of it upfront, it can take care of itself (SC14).

I love the idea of growing trees back there. I would support that. When [the program] talked about that, I got it, and I understood that this would be good for the land that's not being used. A management program would help us get the best value from the land. Not just let wild trees grow. The location of this land—it neighbors [*timber company name*], so that's a plus (SC3).

I would like to plant trees and make some money—that's the number one goal... The ultimate goal is to make some money and keep it for future generations. And keep a pristine view for next generations... The first thing I would like to do is go ahead and replant the plant and get some pines going. That's going to be several years down the line, but at least then we can put our heads together about development on the land that could produce some income for us (SC7).

I would like to produce timber. I would like to have more hardwoods—oak trees—that will be there for a century or more. I love live oaks. I'm thinking of not only my children, but also my children's children. It's a wonderful thing to have an oak tree in your yard, but it's going to take a long time. I'm also starting to learn about the



longleaf pine. Something that's a short-term and long-term income.... When there's a mission and a purpose, that helps to sustain something. A management plan is part of creating a mission (SC18).

[What to produce?] Just timber, and maybe pine straw.... Forest products—depends on soil types. Based on his recommendations, type of trees—loblolly or longleaf. Whatever the forester recommends. We're leaning towards timber. More low-maintenance (SC4).

Longleaf pine. I've listened to people. I think that's the best way to go. He can sell the longleaf straw. Earn something as it grows. Can sell that while the timber's still growing.... Pine straw and timber.... We just want to clean cut it and get some fresh timber growing. Get whatever we can out of there now and replant it, so you can start getting something off it. It's all mixed up now. Just let pines be out there. Before, we had a little bit of everything. This will work out better (SC11).

It's kind of sad to cut the trees. In the south end of [county name], or near the line with [county name], there's an area where they've cut down a lot of trees. It changes the landscapes, and it looks kind of sad. My drive home is different now. I drive with another co-worker, and we were driving home, and we said, 'Something looks so different now.' It was no longer shaded. It was so sad. So I don't know if that's what I want to do. I know they grow back, but still (AL9).

“ *I love the idea of growing trees back there.... When [the program] talked about that, I got it, and I understood that this would be good for the land that's not being used.*

If the nephews want to plant. You never know the future (NC10).

Children have different ideas—if they knew more ... if my son knew more about forestry, he might do something. He just doesn't know. He works in a factory now (NC11).

Currently no harvesting of the trees. There are 3 or 4 acres of trees, not too mature. I'm not sure how much is woodland. We've had numerous requests [to cut], but I said no. I love Bambi and Rocky Raccoon (NC18).

I'm interested in it. I would like to clear what I have. Put half in fruit trees and the other half in forestry—quick growing prosperous trees for the grandkids. Cut trees? Only clearing. Never sold timber—was in the process a couple years ago, but I seen their work, and I didn't like it, so we didn't go ahead with it. I'd like to have it cleared and then start all over (NC3).

I don't know much about forestry. But yes. Income for each generation (NC6).

Fifteen years ago timber was cut and replanted.... I want to talk to [program forester] about that. The front part's not been cut. It's not as messy as it used to be (NC16).

I want to look at that [forestry], especially on the smaller tracts (NC17).

Would like to harvest trees and reforest it. The land is currently unmanaged. She said, 'It's not a huge property. But I don't want to see it just go to waste' (NC18).

Thinking about selling timber in the future, that's a possibility. We've been given an offer. We will definitely consult with someone before we do that (NC14).

I'd like to maintain timber for periodic revenue (NC1).

It has been cut before. I'd like to clear cut and start new.... I want to start brand new [with forestry]. At 70 years old, I can drive a Cadillac. Want to do a forest management



plan. I want to grow timber—pines.... I want to grow the trees and see what they do. I want to use it as an investment. At my age, I don't really want to buy a lot more apartments. I have people to maintain, but I don't want to leave that burden on the family. It can substitute as another investment. Those CDs aren't paying a lot.... Nothing yet—just trying to get some trees growing. This week I'm going to talk to a forestry consultant and do a forest management study. I'm not looking to the government for anything free. Just need a direction—I'll pay. When you ask for something free, people control you. I don't want to be controlled—I want to be the controller.... Forestry is the way to go at this point in time. Future development? It depends. Because of the growth of the county—I would still sit on it and watch the trees grow (NC2).

They just bulldozed an area. Big piles of wood and debris—slash. They're going to start the bedding in November. I enjoyed watching that process. We had pine trees on there before, but the last stand was in 2009—just cleared then. It's best to go ahead and replant them. That wasn't done because the money was needed for my grandfather. It was important for us to put the pine trees back out there. I was able to get a grant through NRCS for underserved populations to have those trees planted. I was very happy. We were in the midst of a bind trying to save that land (NC4).

Longleaf pine. And poplar. Mixture of a little oak if possible. All species, but mostly pine. I was going to have it reseeded with longleaf. The volunteers that came up, now I can't do it.... Longleaf grow taller and give you more money. Higher quality of tree (NC5).

Thirty acres—it was cleared and planted when bought. Cut it twice. Last time in 1996, then replanted. Thinning done in 2013 (AL12).

Clearcut last year—we plan to replant. I'd love to replant hardwood. That side of the road grows hardwood very well.... Hopefully it's going to be a bottom that you walk through, and you'll look up at 60–70 foot hardwoods. That may or may not be the reality. It might be deemed that something else will be better there (AL16).

Most of the land is forest and undeveloped. To my knowledge, there have been a few timber harvests over the years, and the trees came back naturally, but there was no forestry program. The most recent harvest has been over 20 years ago (AL17).

I want to learn more about forest, harvesting (AL6).

I'm not sure what I want to do with it yet. [Name] said it might be hard to find a logger to cut the small acreage. There are trees ready to be cut and replanted. At some point, hopefully in my lifetime, they can be harvested again (AL9).

Right now there is no better use for these lands [than timber]. Agriculture—you'd have to do a lot of work now to put it back into agricultural processes (AL16).

To clear certain areas. And to have as much forestry developed on it as possible. When I leave here and my sons take over, they can continue to build. My goats are basically to clear the land. I don't want to put a dozer over there or anything (AL18).

Yes, [it was] cut once in a while for some income. Never replanted.... My interest now is in forestry, to make the land more productive.... Trees—selling them. Making some money. I want it to be more productive. I attended a workshop about trees—it grows faster.... I've been hearing about longleaf. I'm looking at some options.... Trees grew when we stopped farming. I want to take advantage of that. I want to have it be more productive and more marketable.... I want to cut, replant, and get new growth. So on my 70th birthday I can say, 'Look how those trees have grown; now we're in for some money.' ... Hopefully we'll cut some timber and make some money.... In the next 2 years, we'll get it cut and replanted. Waiting for some money. I want to just see it grow up in trees (AL2).

“ *I want to start brand new [with forestry].... I want to grow the trees and see what they do.*

I want to replant the trees that have been cut (AL3).

I think forestry is the best choice for me. If I was really into farming or vegetables, there are spots where that would be good. On the other piece, there are two spots that would grow really good hay. Again, it's hard when you're trying to get somebody to do something when you're not here. The trust that you have to put in people—people say they get 10 bales of hay, but they may get 20. You have to be there to watch. With forestry, it's possible to be there at the important times to watch it (AL5).

You can sell pine cones and pine needles. It's money (AL20).

A few landowners were not interested in timber:

We're not interested in timber—we have enough here (AL19).

**What types of forest products have you used or sold?** Don't know, not interested (AL12).

I'm not interested in forest management. I don't want anyone telling me what I can and cannot do. ([*Consulting forester*] advised that the plan will be based on what she wanted to do—she then conceded she was interested.) (AL15).

## Wildlife

Many, but not all, landowners had a family history of hunting on their land. Some continued to hunt, while others had largely given it up but still provided opportunities for others to hunt—often family members, friends, and neighbors.

They hunt only with those who get permission from us. We hope ... only certain people hunt there. Just a little group of people that have hunted there for years. They have offered us a donation—no amount has been set. We're not selling hunting rights (NC20).

Yes, people I know. I wouldn't want to charge anyone. I don't hunt myself, but I have nephews and friends that hunt. I'm more of an athlete. Some people that hunt don't play sports. But hunting is a sport. If I go play on your court, I wouldn't want you to charge me (NC2).



I let people hunt, Momma would let them do it. I wouldn't have a problem leasing it to a club... We don't hunt—not in a long while. I have my hunting license, maybe I'll go get a bear one day (NC14).

There's not much hunting here. I'm not sure how careful the young boys are. We made up some rules for the kids who do hunt. Don't fire towards the house. Tell us when you're out there. That kind of thing. Only family hunts there, and maybe they'll bring a friend (NC14).

Brother and neighbor (a White fellow he used to work with) hunts on land—deer, rabbit, squirrel (NC16).

There is a hunting club—they don't hunt on my land, per se. They were here before we got back. My neighbors, the [names], let a hunting club come in. I have a cousin three tracts down that has a deer blind. They don't hunt around the house. We don't hunt at all (NC3).

People have asked me if they could hunt. It's a consideration, but I'm funny about people being on my property. Once they get on your property, you can have contracts but you can't watch them. They may say they won't drink out there, but you don't know. Next thing you know they've shot somebody. We're leery of that (NC4).

I don't hunt or fish. That's almost unheard of. I've fished just a few times. I had no time to hunt when I was growing up. Dad stopped hunting and fishing. Some uncles hunt. I have no desire whatsoever. I let other people hunt, friends and family. There's no payment. I want to keep it like that (NC17).

People hunt on the land without permission. One gentleman asked, and he said it so nicely that we gave him permission to hunt deer. No one in the family hunts—I never picked it up from my dad (NC18).

Some people hunt but pay no fees. We give them permission, but they don't pay. One guy said 'I hope they didn't cut down my [deer] stand,' and I said, 'Why do you have it down there in the first place?' (AL15).

I don't do much hunting anymore. We have a family friend that goes out there and hunts sometime. No leases (AL11).

We don't hunt, but if others want to, we let them. Friends of the family—we could charge for it, but we don't (AL14).

I don't hunt anymore. We have some people that we give permission to hunt. They're not managing—they just hunt (AL16).

Sometimes family hunts there—no hunting leases (AL3).

I can hunt, but I don't take the time to do it. No hunting leases (AL4).

No one hunts there. Some relatives might go. It's posted, 'No Hunting,' but I'm not there so I don't know (AL10).

There's a sizable creek that runs through the property. There are quite a few deer on the property—maybe not now with the timber harvesting. The land has the ability to do all that—hunting and fishing (AL20).

From age of 12 to about 28 or 29, I hunted that property. There's a few little streams—I never fished there, but I hunted for 30 years. I hunt primarily deer. I've seen turkey there, but I never killed one. Raccoons, rabbits, squirrels. It's been a while (about 15 years?) since I hunted.... There is a written hunting lease. I'm an honorary member of the hunting club, as well (AL17).

Views on hunting leases and hunting clubs varied. Sometimes a family member was the link to a hunting club, providing some cash or meat in return for the opportunity to hunt. Others found that leasing hunting rights provided some income to help defray taxes and other expenses, and would also help keep other hunters who did not have permission off of the property. On the other hand, some landowners worried about losing control of their land to hunting clubs, or about the hassle that might be involved in dealing with hunting clubs.

One time my brother called and said some guy wanted to know if he could hunt. I'd like to know how land is rented out to hunters. I don't live there, so I don't see people in the grocery store that I can talk to (NC8).

I have leased it for hunting. I don't know how that will work once we cut the timber. Will cut that timber. Nephews hunt out there (NC11).

We lease some land for hunting—mostly to locals (NC12).

Hunts personally and may lease land to other hunters (NC12).

Hunting leases. Grandfather was a trapper. Sell meat and furs in Ohio (AL6).

Family members hunted—deer, possum, coon, you name it. We have hunting leases on the land now. The people who hunt there give us some meat (AL2).

I didn't lease it to hunt because—my main reason, in Alabama, my auntie leased it out and she had a problem with the leasee—it was on part of the 53 acres. He didn't want us to even come up to the land. Then another thing was we had a bad experience—signing the land over. Other family members lost land through leasing. They thought they were signing a lease, but they were signing a deed. They lost the land—we didn't. That's why I'd rather not be involved in that (AL5).

**Other landowners liked to provide habitat for wildlife, but did not allow hunting.**

I don't think so. No idea. I haven't given anyone permission to hunt there, but people still might be hunting there anyway (NC19).

No hunting yet. We're worried about someone starting a fire. We know people hunt out there—we've seen a tree stand there (NC9).

We go once in a while to hunt. Daddy didn't believe in those 'No Trespassing' signs—he said it made a bad neighbor. But this one time, I went out there, and there were about 50 people there on the land, on my mother's cousin's land and my mother's land. So we put up signs. If people get hurt on your land, they can sue you. You have more protection if you have signs up, because then they know they're not supposed to be there (NC10).

People hunt—but we posted no hunting. We hear gunfire. On the other side is another landowner, so it could come from there.... Didn't know about hunting lease—will look into that (NC6).

Other than having a place for the wild animals to exist ... when I was younger, I enjoyed hunting, and I will still use it for hunting, and that's about it. Other than that, I cut timber for financial gain.... I used to hunt with the club, and since I don't hunt anymore, I still let them hunt there.... I want to let wildlife grow on it. We hunt deer, but other than that, that's about it (SC4).

I'm not a hunter, but I'll allow others. Friends hunt from time to time.... He [Father] always allowed people to hunt, but he never charged anyone. He didn't want a hunting club to tell him when his friends could hunt on the land. The little bit of taxes we got, we can pay them. You don't want to be surprised when you walk out on your land and somebody's sitting in a tree. We let them hunt, but you hunt at our discretion, not because you paid us a couple dollars (SC10).

[Nephew]: I like to hunt. Out here in the country, you got a little freedom to mess around. Now you can't go anywhere you want, hunting or fishing. He [Uncle] wants to keep it, and I'm 100 percent with him. [Aunt]: He's all over the place hunting. I like to 4-wheel ride with my sisters. They cut the pathway, and we use it when it's not hunting season. That keeps it open. All these roads we ride on Sundays.... [Nephew]: I'm part of a hunting club. We give a few dollars out to hunt [on various tracts, owned by other people too]. I give my uncle something for it (SC8).

We don't hunt or fish. But we do lease our land to people who hunt. It provides enough for taxes, on some of the tracts (SC14).

Hunt clubs—the advantage is that they protect the property and keep poachers out. So we have to consider that. We probably already have poachers. A hunting club would be the guardians (SC5).

No one hunts. People have asked, and people do hunt without permission. There's no hunting lease—it's an option (SC19).

Some guys have crossed over and hunted, without permission. I put up 'No Hunting' signs. I want to block it unless they ask permission. It's up to my family to make that decision (allow hunting). I don't want it (SC7).

The deer hunters took over. We're afraid to go out there. They're hunting on our land (SC11).



Deer hunt—people are fighting hard over ... the right to hunt deer (not on my land). People were arguing, about to fist fight. I told them, you can't put a gate up to my property. It's getting really competitive, the right to hunt.... Now hunting lands are limited, and hunters are many. That would be a great opportunity. I don't want to get into dealing with that. No hunting leases. Might do that when my brother comes back—he can monitor that. I can't, from here. There are some nice turkeys, but I'm not getting into that because I can't supervise it (SC16).

And wildlife observation, particularly of deer, turkey, and songbirds, was valued by many landowners.

This is a sanctuary. We have friends coming from Texas, and they want to kill the deer. I told him I'd pick one out for him and he could kill it. I never picked one out (AL13).

It might be interesting to do some wildlife watching. There are a lot of birds. We thought about putting in some roads, to see some wildlife. Sometimes we drive back there with a tractor, but it's too thick to take a tractor back there (SC6).

[Sister 1]: I'm a bird lover. [Sister 2]: I watch birds from the house (SC2).

Mother has Alzheimer's—she likes to watch the birds. That's maybe more universal than minorities, but I don't know. Her mission is sustaining birds—cardinals, blue jays, wrens. It was interesting to my mother to watch birds. She loves that red bird. But I don't hear a lot of minorities—don't see them in 4-H. I'm trying to get the boys I work with at the church interested in 4-H (SC18).

Anything we can do on our land to sustain nature. Protecting wildlife is important (SC18).

“ *Anything we can do on our land to sustain nature.  
Protecting wildlife is important.*

A lot of people want to hunt. I believe in organic farming. I understand having timber and trees. Some kind of cooperative where land can be hunted, trees can be harvested, and some can be farmed. Farming is risky, as far as profitability. [My cousin] has talked of a putting course or a shooting range. Or an archery or skeet shooting range. Something that doesn't damage land but also provides some kind of recreation (SC18).

Yes. I saw a deer yesterday. I cleared it so you can look straight back. We wanted to build a house a half acre from here, in the woods, where it's cool. We like to see animals. [Photo of white deer with spot]—so many people were after this notorious albino buck—8- or 10-point buck. This young one was an offspring. Deer right out the door. It's nice back here (NC3).

I'd like a wildlife refuge (NC4).

That's another avenue. We could turn into a nature observation, birdwatching (NC6).

If it's for wildlife, it's good.... I love wildlife. Not to kill it, unless I eat it.... I was on the bushhog in June, and I saw some turkeys' nests. They said to just leave them alone. I counted 10 eggs in one and 12 in another. So I didn't bushhog this area. But you can't do it earlier, because the grass isn't tall enough. I've been bushhogging for the last 2 weeks (NC7).

Prime hunting land—big bucks. [Place name] runs the length of the property. [Place name] is a swamp, a historic tributary. The animals love it ... Dad always said the water never dries out, so it's a prime place for animals. [Company name] went to survey—there was a huge hibiscus down there. Wildflowers planted on edge for hummingbirds.

I got it certified, and I worked hard to open it up by October. I still want to manage the timber for wildlife. Hardwoods and oaks.... Wildlife: Quality deer and turkey—not to be shot, but to be seen.... I've talked with [name] with National Wildlife ... I want to maintain it for timber and provide agrotourism. I've been researching the fire pits—they said it would be a first for [county name] County. They said I need a restroom or port-a-johns.... Three major objectives—timber, agrotourism, wildlife. I want to protect wildlife—have cover and food and raise young in safety (NC1).

My hunting is less hunting and more bird watching and squirrel watching and hog watching. Sometimes I miss a deer when I'm watching a fox run by. When it's cold, the prettiest Canadian geese come in here. I'm a nature lover. I love to be outside when it's conducive (AL18).

I looked into planting fruit trees for animals.... Plant trees for animals—not necessarily for hunting. See herds of deer and different animals there (AL5).

Both love the idea of wildlife roaming freely over their property—planted grass field to attract squirrel, turkey, and deer (AL12).

Would like to clean up understory, create gaps (down woody material) for wildlife (e.g., turkey), put in fire lanes. No thinning and no harvest. [The program forester is considering helping them adjust some of their forestry plans to encourage small game, because they're fond of wild turkey.] We don't hunt them. This is a sanctuary. We have all kinds of critters—we saw a skunk on the way home, and we had to stop and wait for him. But he lives here too (AL13).

Bird and wildlife watching (AL15).

## Fishing

Fishing is a popular form of recreation among African Americans in general in the South; many family landholdings in the South have ponds on them. Although we did not specifically seek information about fishing and ponds, they came up as desired activities on the land and ways to connect future generations to the land.

Fish. I need to put pond out there and stock it. There was once a pond, but it's dried up now (SC2).

I'm going to expand my little pond—for fishing, just family use (SC16).

My dad has a boat, loves fishing, but he hasn't been out in a long time because he can't navigate the boat. One of his goals is to have a fish pond. If we could make that come true for him, that would be great. Maybe that would keep him off the tractor (SC4).

If there's some kind of water conservation for wildlife, and also pond for the next generation to fish, they'll learn to love the land (SC18).

We would like to have a duck pond or a fish pond. We just went fishing, and we didn't catch no fish, but my grandson caught seven fish (NC3).

There is a small pond on the land (NC19).

Might put a pond on it for fishing. I definitely want to improve the property from several aspects (AL6).

I'd love to have a pond out there. It might take too much to put a pond out there now. There was a pond there. I caught my first fish out there, with a straight pin and piece of fatback (AL11).

What other options would it be? When I was younger, I thought about clearing it and putting in a catfish pond (AL11).



Have an intermittent stream for which we mow the banks. We haven't developed it into a pond (AL13).

There is a pond on the 53 acres—one time I had inquired about putting a motor in there so the water would be clear for the fish. There were some nice fish in there. I was thinking of putting a motor in there so the fish would be able to breathe better (AL5).

### Recreation and other facilities

Consistent with the high importance of family involvement with land and sense of community around landholdings, many interviewees had dreams of developing facilities on their property that would provide a venue for family and community get-togethers and events. While many of these were in the dream stage, we did conduct interviews at several family and community parks that had been created out of private land.

I always thought of having a bed and breakfast where people can come and stay. That way, you keep the home and provide a service (SC4).

I'd like it cleaned up. I have to duck and look out. I'd like a cleared path, so you can appreciate the beauty of it even more.... I'd like to see it nice and cleaned up so I can take a walk.... Would like for a [name of LLC] conference center to be built. Celebrations for families—people need space for birthdays, weddings, and they'll funeralize you in a building if there's space, Alpha Kappa parties.... We have one hall in [this community], so it would be nice to have another. Some events have more than 400 people. They have to go to Hilton Head to accommodate at least 500 people.... My hopes and dreams are to leave a pristine area for children and hold gatherings (SC7).

This park—a few churches got together, and it's a place for the kids to play and to serve food. You wouldn't want to sell this, regardless of the price. It becomes invaluable (SC8).

[I'd like a] butterfly farm and community center.... I'd also really like to—in this community, there's no place to meet outside of the churches. There's no community meeting center (SC15).

I would love to see something commercial, like a B&B that would serve two purposes—a place for people to come home but also serves as income and jobs for family members. Also maybe a home for the senior citizens. I also love the youth, and

I have a 501C3. I have a dream of turning an old house into a home for at-risk people. I had a dream about a hoop house ... I saw this in a dream. At-risk kids were working there, and they were getting GEDs ... I'd like to do something commercial (SC17).

My vision for the land is to turn the [former] pub into an event center for fundraisers. I would utilize my portion for some kind of community use. Maybe a park or a pool. I believe in giving back. I have no intention of living there. I would use mine as a reception area for events that will bring people together. At the same time, you're making it a place to come to learn and grow and develop. That gives social benefits for larger community. I'm a very social person. I love networking and bringing people with positive energy together. You share experiences and grow and learn to love and embrace people rather than be a person who divides. I like to bring people together. ... I'm only concerned with that front commercial portion because I feel a need to honor my mom and dad. I'd like to see the back part used and generate some kind of income. If we could grow some trees, I'd like to be part of that (SC3).

We want to do the agrotourism thing. There's a local farm near [city name] with hay rides, pumpkin farms, etc. Now we're practicing growing watermelons and pumpkins to see how it works in this area. We're searching out things we could do (NC12).

Looking at health issue—I want to have walking trails and bike trails—outdoor interactive fitness. A young man is making signs now for walking trail. Hay rides. I have organized through my ministry—my ministerial calling in 1997 connected with developing the farm. 501C3. I was set up as Christian community economic development corporation in 1999. I'm now bringing it to fruition (NC1).

“ *I want a picnic area by the pond.... I'd like to keep a place for the kids to go hunting and things like that. I'd love to go fishing too.*

I want a picnic area by the pond.... I'd like to keep a place for the kids to go hunting and things like that. I'd love to go fishing too. I'd like to enhance my pond one day. If I do get a chance to retire, I'd like to go sit under the trees and go fishing.... I want to fix up something like a picnic area. There's an area that's like a pasture. I think it would be a really nice place for a picnic (AL3).

I want to put a park across the street and make this a family center. I want a park right across from here. This will be the spot for family reunions. No one lives near here, but everyone comes home each year. Everyone will be here for Thanksgiving—we're just getting this started (AL8).

I did entertain putting in a cemetery on part of it. Somewhere that's similar to the cemetery in town. Our people are being buried in the woods on family property, and it's not being maintained. We can do better than that. I've entertained making a nice cemetery up there (AL17).

I would like to create a training program for younger people. I'd like to bring them back to the land. Be a farmer, but also knowledgeable about broader agribusiness (AL20).

My background is in engineering and manufacturing. Maybe sometime you'll be able to develop it into some kind of manufacturing or assembly. But a dream like that would require losing other parts of land (AL1).

I have these dreams that the property will look like something you see on TV—the pine trees lined up in a row, there are passable roads and wildlife that will make its way to safety before your eyes, a place to go fishing. Something that will enhance the community as well. Tree programs going on. I see it as being a piece of property



that you're very proud of because you see it enhancing the wildlife, but also for the recreation for the community. Trees providing more clean oxygen into the atmosphere. You see on Saturday morning on these hunting excursions—people say, we're going to the [name] property. This property has that kind of value to it, if it's managed properly (AL17).

Individual recreation, often just walking the land or collecting interesting things, was important.

I have gone out there—you can get a good nap out there. Curl up under a tree—peace and quiet (NC14).

They enjoy walking on the land being in nature (NC18).

We used to go out there some. It's so grown up now. It's so bad you can't see the house anymore.... Now I'm always looking for spiders and snakes out there. You don't think about that when you're young, but once you get old, you start looking (NC10).

I'm not an outdoors person. That's probably my downfall, because I don't enjoy the land that way. I want to get better with that—be out there more and see what's going on out there. I would know more if I was more of a nature-loving person (NC11).

If it's possible, I would like to have a portion, maybe half an acre, cleared, so we can walk under the pine trees to have a cook-out or some kind of event. I saw somewhere, the stand was so clear that you could live out there. I want that too (NC4).

I collect pine cones for decorations. If I see pretty bushes, I might use them for decorations (AL13).

We walk across the place and run across a few things (AL14).

[Husband]: I walk the place every other day. My uncle instilled that in us: 'Know what's on your property.' [Wife]: I collect flowers from the forest sometimes (AL18).

My son takes me over there on his 4-wheeler (AL2).

We used to ride horses on the firebreaks. The most recent practice was to paint the boundary lines.... There's no place big enough to fish (AL4).

## Water

Relatively few landowners expressed concern about water conservation or watershed protection. People often responded by talking about ponds. The most robust response was

from an interviewee involved in county government, who was aware that the county was paying stormwater fees because of the lack of attention to watershed management in the area. Other responses reflected the individual situations of the landowners. Being in the lowlands near the coast, many were more concerned with flooding and an overabundance of water. Others' land was in areas where drainage ditches had been dug, and they felt they had little control over water. In drier areas, several people mentioned the need to pay more attention to water, and one landowner was particularly interested in ecological restoration.

When it rains, we've got too much water (SC8).

Hugo was bad. In [town name], water was all in houses. They lost houses—rivers in their house—you'd see people's clothes in trees, 2 weeks later [Hurricane Hugo in 1989] (SC1).

When I had this house built, I didn't realize the land would flood. Not into the house, but at the front step. I dug ditches. I was talking to a gentleman, a guy that still logs, he said if I was to clean the woods up so the sun would get in, the water would dry up faster. I'm still cutting (SC13).

I don't have control of that. [Timber company name] built ditches, so the water doesn't stay around (SC9).

You always have to be concerned about the water. The water table is not very deep. Last year I've been entertaining the idea of putting a pond back here. Maybe adding water to the land, especially if I bring animals back to the land. Water is always... There used to be a low area back here, a marshy area. There was this mallard—we wanted to hunt it, but it always left before we could get to it. I understand the water table and the wildlife that it brought. We want to make sure we have water, because water brings life (SC18).

“ *We want to make sure we have water, because water brings life.*

We don't have too much water. There used to be some ponds. We used to dig ditches. All those streams, in my boyhood days, it would dry up. The dam ... the recreation park, there's a ditch that goes through—it keeps [the] branch in water most of the time (SC14).

Would like to restore the Carolina Bay... We got a wooded area—then there was both farm land and woods. Swampy area—originally a Carolina bay, an original Carolina bay. There's less water now because there's a ditch [that used to overflow the roads]. They said we can restore it if we want to, because the water source is still there (SC17).

No water on the property, just small ditches (NC18).

There was a stream there on the western half. The beavers dammed it up. My cousin blew up the dam, but they came back. There used to be a clear spring. That's where the stream came from (NC10).

[NRCS employee] and I talked about that. The other land [heirs' property]—that's really important. It has a lot of drainage problems that we need to address (NC11).

There was a spring back there in the '30s to the '50s—you could get a drink from it. The spring is gone now—it dried up. It was logged, and it got filled up. The neighbors used to depend on that spring—to drink, cook, clean (NC5).

An easement around the edges to protect the waterways and the wildlife (NC5).



I know a man, [name], a creek ran through his property, and it had these mussels in it—they were paying him every year to maintain that waterway (NC12).

I would be very much interested in [water conservation] (NC14).

There is water on the land, according to what I was told. We're not doing anything in particular to take care of the water. I had a conversation with my brother about what could be done because of the water on the land, but we haven't gotten into any details about it (AL10).

[There's been] nothing done with streams—they're just there (AL17).

More recreational uses and more work to prevent erosion, protect water quality, and improve the aesthetics by planting quality vegetation (AL12).

It's extremely important. If we don't protect the water, we're all in trouble. I mark out all my SMZs unless it's mature (AL4).

The 14 acres is adjacent to this property—we wait until the water goes down, and he kept cows out there (AL8).

Part of the land goes down to the Alabama River. My baby brother that passed away, he liked to fish there (AL14).

We have the water tested every 3 months—the well water. I have a pond on my personal property. We have a slough that goes to Grandma's property. We make sure the water flows. We have alligators near here—that 16-footer was near here. I have one that comes to have her litter in the spring, and she will let you know when you get there. I have learned, they are too quick for you to deal with (AL18).

The 240 acres is near the river. . . . Depending on the section, there's a lot of water (AL6).

The timber, the aspect of what they can produce. The animals have value—it's a place for the animals. The beauty of the place, the water, the access to the water on both sides (AL18).

## FORESTRY

### New Focus on Land Management

Many landowners were just beginning to pay attention to their land and its management after years of inattention. This may have been because they had recently retired or moved back home, because a death had left them with primary responsibility, or because they had recently become more inspired to bring their land under better management, either through contact with the program or for other reasons. The responses of these landowners reveal deliberate processes of information gathering, family discussions, and decision-making that highlight the fact that people are making long-term decisions about one of their most significant economic assets as well as an exceptionally meaningful place with ties to memories and family history. It is not surprising that people take the time to gather information and deliberate under these circumstances. Notably, the program was both inspiring them to undertake and helping them through this process.

As we learn more and more about different options ... we're trying to gather more information. None of us are farmers, and [my brother] doesn't even like going in the woods. We need good information to make good decisions as a family. We're still in that fact-finding stage (SC5).

We're in the learning phase. What's the turnover rate? If we clear-cut and plant back with trees, how much turnover are we looking at? You have to make sure it has value to you, or to someone else if you die. I'm 64 now, I don't want no headaches. I just want to cruise on in. I get up in the morning, and do what I want to do. If the forestry makes some money for the children ... but if it's not going to benefit, you have to look at that too.... Being in the conversation with [the program], and getting all this information. Knowledge is power. It makes a lot of sense—to put in some trees and reap some benefits (SC9).

“ *We're in the learning phase. What's the turnover rate? If we clear-cut and plant back with trees, how much turnover are we looking at? You have to make sure it has value to you, or to someone else if you die.* ”

I've had the 8 acres since 1986. I felt the effects of it since I retired. I've been thinking about what direction I'm going to go. I was a principal, so I didn't spend nights here. You don't see your home until Saturday. Prior to moving here, it's hard to manage unless you have someone to help. The best I could do was control the lawn. When the career ends, you have more time. It's on my bucket list, to manage my acreage here.... I've always been interested in doing a small truck farm. Work with Clemson, how to grow better vegetables on that small tract. Another interest of mine was a Christmas tree farm. I went to another one to see how they do it—there's a lot of work in it. The main crop for them was Virginia pine. You have to spray for bugs, keep the bugs out, shape them ... it's a full-time job. I don't know if there are many Christmas tree farmers in this area.... At this stage in my life, I want to make the best use of land that I do have. That's why it's important to me. I can only speak to what's best for [me].... That's why it's good to work with people with similar plans for land—we can work together. Looking forward to continuing with [the program]—I



hope they doesn't kick me out of the club. I can't make all the meetings. I love it. I'm going to be more active this year (SC16).

I'm trying to get the best advice to get the best outcome (NC3).

Nothing yet—just trying to get some trees growing. This week I'm going to talk to a forestry consultant and do a forest management study (NC2).

I was going to get it reseeded. Now I'm in the process of a tree thinning. I'm trying to get educated. I don't know what I'm doing. This program is helping a lot. I'm learning what avenue I should take (NC5).

We're exploring options now to see what we can do with the land other than just holding it. We're looking to see what we can gain other than trees standing idle (NC20).

Whatever we can produce in about 15-20 years. We developed a plan to get into forestry to assist grandchildren when they get ready to go to college. One is 10 years old now—she's going to need some assistance earlier.... It's a sacrifice. We're retired and retired early—didn't get all that one could. We have to budget and plan to buy extra seeds. Have to plan for every project when you're retired.... We're retired and have the time to do a little research. When you're young, you're so busy making a living you don't have time to make a legacy. We have to pull the others in.... After we took the farm over, for a few weeks or so I talked to my wife about farming it myself, soybeans. I ran the numbers, and it wasn't worth it. We need something less labor-intensive.... Other options that may have more appeal for children—money, wildlife preservation, hunting. They want things they can handle online that don't require them to go out there.... We were worried—forestry is fragile. We invested so much that could have gone into savings. We can't regroup—this is it for us.... You have to have that 40 or 60 percent up front (for cost-share).... It's a crapshoot—you have storms, disease, fires. It's risky (NC9).

I wanted to learn everything I could about it on a small scale. When I moved back home and bought more acres.... I've looked at some property. I don't know how to look at the soils. I don't want to buy some property and not know if the soil will perc.... As a female, I was hoping the program would help me learn this business. Maybe plant corn and do ethanol and make money on the land. And pass this knowledge on to the next generation through this grant. I'm frustrated. They need to take out the stipulation that you have to have 10 acres.... I was hoping to learn and pass it on my nieces and nephews who are in their 20s and 30s. But I can't train them if I don't know. That's

how you continue to grow.... That's the point of this program, to help first generation landowners. As a female, I don't have a husband, I don't know anything about land. My father couldn't buy land—he was discriminated against.... I had a contract on 92 acres—now I'm glad he backed out. I didn't know anything about soil. I'm spending this kind of money on land, and I don't know anything, if I've got the worst land in the world.... I'm a country girl, and I don't mind getting my hands dirty, but I don't want to make a bad investment (NC8).

I thought this program would be good for first generation African-American landowners. We can learn about management—thinning, the whole process. When I retire, I plan to move back to the land and get 50 or 100 or 200 acres.... This is an excellent program. We did our plan, but didn't have enough acres. Then we were on our own. I did have a forest management plan done. In [county name], the trees are ready to be cut. The problem is getting someone to come get timber on 5 acres. My sisters did it too. The 24 acres need to be thinned. We don't know where to go from here. We got a list of people in the area who buy and sell timber, and I've contacted some. It's hard to get a logger to come for that little amount. Maybe if someone else is cutting. I don't live there, so it's hard.... It's ready to be cut—once it's cut, you have cost-sharing programs, which I learned through the workshops. I'm disappointed because I wanted to be in the program so I could learn these things so I can know what to do with 50 acres when I purchase it (NC8).

“ *I don't know anything about land.... I didn't know anything about soil. I'm a country girl, and I don't mind getting my hands dirty, but I don't want to make a bad investment.* ”

I started writing my own forest management plan. [NRCS employee] gave me the papers and showed me the format. Started that process 8 or 9 months ago (before involvement in the Sustainable Forestry Program). I didn't get started right away. My objectives I wrote down—obtain periodic revenue from timber while providing for wildlife. Safe place for wildlife. Long-term productivity and diversity of resources (NC1).

I'd like to stagger the harvests—that's the point of leaving something for the grandkids. I want to minimize my out-of-pocket expenses. That's from the forest management plan that I wrote.... I want to have sustainable forest land and recreational things like a fish pond, outdoor rifle target range to charge people to use. The general objectives are to defray taxes and provide income, through sawlogs and pulpwood.... There are 8 acres of loblolly out there. There are 42 acres of mixed stuff. I said I didn't want the oaks cut. I saw where they had crushed a lot of the small hardwoods when they were getting out the pines.... Another objective is to improve the quality of the loblollies and the growth of the hardwoods. Also to enhance the wildlife habitat and use sound management practices. I want to maintain the aesthetics of the forest.... I'd like to do fishing and hunting, and soil conservation. I'd like to do a planting for turkeys. There are plenty of deer already.... I'd also like to plant 5 acres of black walnut and locusts for poles.... I'd like to do an irrigation well, with pumps and piping for water for the fish pond.... I'd like to do the shooting range. My wife is vehemently opposed to that though.... I'd like my forest management plan to incorporate all that (NC15).

Mix of pines ... place for family to enjoy and some hunting. Maybe a pond for the ducks. A lot of ducks flying back there in the swamps. Just walking out and seeing the squirrels and the rabbits and some snakes. And gardening—I love that. I used to hate it but now I love it. Just seeing Mom and Daddy working out there together.... And the bears—they get in the garden. And groundhogs (NC5).

[Photo of pine plantation]—pine straw raking. Had that picture for 20 years—vision of what I'd like the land to look like. Can teach the boys and girls in the neighborhood to make some income.... Needs assessment—learn how to sell timber. Then replant trees or learn to grow cane, sod, corn, and/or soybean or any other crop that I might not be presently familiar with. I'm open to new ideas.... I would like to learn the process to use these crops for fuel, solar energy, ethanol, and other marketable products such as corn meal to be sold to various companies worldwide. Not only will this yield personal revenue, but revenue for [county names] Counties and provide employment as well (NC8).

After we get it managed, we have a plan to have some in forest, some in agriculture, and some in housing (AL20).

I was out on the land yesterday—we were out there putting in firebreaks. We're doing some more clean-up today. I have a bulldozer coming out here today. I want to make a little park area. I want to put in a pond. I need to dig a nice pond, and I want to put fish in it, so the kids can come fish in it. Down in this area, we don't have a park. The community could have family reunions out here.... I have a lot I want to do here—a lot of cleaning up. It's expensive—\$90 an hour is costly. Just this road, I put over \$1,500 on this road. I pushed the old house down—I did it all myself. Rented the dozer to do the road.... We need to do a lot of cleaning up and bringing the land up to standard. It's all thick—we're going to burn this place in October. Once I burn it, I'll be able to bushhog it, so the trees can really go. This will be the first burn.... We're going to plant trees—hardwoods in the bottomlands. We've sprayed, and then we're going to burn and then plant trees this winter (AL8).

I want to see what the options are, once I get those forest management plans in. I know it's not their job to tell me what to do, but if I ask for your expert opinion.... I know how to research and see if things are feasible (AL9).

If you get too many irons in the fire, before you know it, everything is cold (AL10).

We just talked about timber production, that that should be a goal. We also talked about the cattle. That's probably the most we can do with it.... We haven't talked about officially leasing it, but we allow some folks to hunt on it. We have some Cherokee rose bushes—[the person who hunts on it] takes that out and in exchange for that work, we gave him exclusive hunting rights to the deer.... Our plan is to take a comprehensive analysis of what we have and get guidance on what we should be doing. The idea is to manage the property to its fullest potential (AL14).

Forestry and hunting are the main objectives. I want to look at what is the most productive over the long term (AL20).

## FORESTRY

### Buying and Selling Land

As noted, land is important for its ties to family history and is emblematic of the struggle African Americans have had to obtain land and feel like they have become equal members of society. Land has also played an important role in keeping families together and managing risk over generations. As discussed earlier, interviewees expressed virtually no interest in selling family land. A few people who had purchased land indicated that they might sell some of that, but family land was universally considered sacred and not for sale. Also, as previously discussed, many families had understandings that if family land must be sold, that it be purchased by other family members (or at least offered to them first). In addition to the sentimental and cultural values associated with it, land was seen as important and a good investment, and while some landowners were focused on getting a handle on the land that they did have, others indicated an interest in buying more.

We want to work with what we've got right now (SC11).

Not sell. We've got enough to handle right now. If there were a good opportunity, that would be an option (SC19).

I wish I could acquire, but it'll probably stay the way it is. The trees will grow on it, and I'll just let them go (SC13).

I won't sell it. I might buy more if I see more land that I could acquire (SC2).

My DNA says acquire. If I sold land without making a good deal to acquire real property, things will come down from heaven and up from hell (SC18).

Plan to acquire more. These days it costs more. God's not making any more (SC14).

Buy more—definitely. They ain't making no more of it (SC15).

Definitely not buy more [laughs] (NC8).

We're not looking to purchase any more, unless it's adjoining ours (NC20).



Hope to manage it at least so it covers the taxes.... No plans to purchase any more land, and not trying to sell current land (NC19).

I won't sell none, but I'll buy some. A guy offered to sell me 5 acres yesterday (NC3).

I'm interested in buying and then selling some land for rental properties (NC5).

I would like to buy more (NC1).

I have a community economic development background. I had the interest of building low-income housing. This other guy, if he donated it to me, I would do low-income housing on that side and continue with the conservation on my land. That's big—600 or 400 acres (NC1).

My background is land acquisition for State of North Carolina—I was an agent for State DOT. I'm very comfortable in negotiating.... I would buy more. I wouldn't sell at this point. But to be realistic, at some point, I'm going to want to bring some gold home (NC2).

Maybe develop part of it—retirement community.... Maybe put in houses—we're thinking about building a retirement complex. I don't know if there are codes here that would prevent something like that. It might be zoned agriculture.... Future plans are open. That's why we're in this program. We want to learn what options are available (NC6).

“ *My DNA says acquire. If I sold land without making a good deal to acquire real property, things will come down from heaven and up from hell.* ”

If anything, acquire more land. Why not (NC6)?

I don't know, maybe build houses. I thought of building a house on the 5 acres in [county name] County, but they said the land won't perc. It does or it doesn't (NC8).

I may be interested in buying some more land (NC14).

I don't want to. There's the small farm—29 acres. There was a young man near here who wanted to buy a small plot for a house before he went to serve in Iraq. My wife agreed to sell him one acre for the house. He left and served for one year. While he was gone, his dad took over the purchase and put a trailer there and rented it out. When he came home from Iraq, he had no place to live. He ended up living another place, which he didn't want to do. Another nephew, my wife sold him half an acre for his trailer. Now he wants more space for all his cars. I think we'll sell him another half-acre.... I would be interested in buying more. I look at what's available, the land in [county name] County that's for sale. There's one place with five or six springs. I could do something with that, at least to ensure the family water supply. East of 95, the water table is high, or it used to be, and you're more likely to find good water there (NC14).

I would maybe purchase more land. I'm looking in [county names] Counties. I'm looking at farms, with a combination of leased land and forests. I may purchase more, but I want to pay it off in 10 years (NC17).

I'd love to buy more near here for the ranch. We're not planning to sell (NC18).

There are other things we're thinking of doing on the land, but I don't wish to disclose that now. We need to find out what the State of Alabama will allow. We'd like to provide some kind of services on the land that would provide job opportunities for some people that are skilled or unskilled. But to do that, we need to do some more



research and make contact with people in Alabama to see what direction that county is going in. For me, it's heartbreaking to know that we grew up in [county name] County and things are still ... when you look at Demopolis, Tuscaloosa, and the stores and things, you still have to drive almost as far as you did when I was a kid to get decent groceries. The little town hasn't grown. To me, that's hurtful. When we go down to do a minor repair, you have to drive to Tuscaloosa or Demopolis to get what's needed. We'd like to see the area develop more (AL10).

Not sell. It's hard to find property for sale. It's so expensive. This was 290 acres, and they wanted \$750,000 for it. When we able to get this, we paid less than \$1000 an acre. Hunting in this area is very popular, so that's why it's hard to find. We'd rather lease it out for hunting rights [than sell land] (AL13).

We don't expect to sell, but if the opportunity presents itself to sell, we might. We just want to make sure there are no issues down the road (AL14).

Sell no, acquire yes. I'd like to buy more in [county name] County. In my own mind, my grandmother and my grandfather were valuable to [county name] County for many years. Just the mention of their name among older individuals, it brings a smile to people's faces. The fact that they meant so much to the community, [county name] County will be a place of home to our family. Not residence, but home. To purchase more property—I'd like to do anything to enhance and beautify their image because it started with them (AL17).

“ *We just love that we have our own place, that we can make it better than when we got it, and that we can care for the land and the wildlife.*

I would like to acquire more land, but not sell. I know what's going on top of the land, but also what's underneath (AL20).

No, I just want to keep what I've got. Taxes are no joke. If the boys want more, they're going to have to buy it themselves (AL3).

I've looked at buying more land in [county name] County. It was off Highway 20—they were selling it only in sections, not in acres. The owners had already decided who they were going to sell it to (AL5).



Land and forests were important to people for a number of reasons:

The first thing is pride. Income from harvesting and selling timber, but it's more the idea that you're only limited by your own intelligence and experience. What are the benefits of owning property? I don't know the limitations. I know that if you own property, you can find a market to sell or lease, you'll always have an income. There's always something—cows, goats, timber. The benefit it knowing that it's unlimited what I can do. So that's why I'm here—to learn more things. That's why I go to meetings, to blend it into my mix.... Using timber for daughter's education is a last resort. But I know I can. I've used land as collateral. I don't like to, but sometimes you have to when you have a growing family (AL4).

I haven't thought much about it until recently. Even myself, I thought of it as just swamp land, that nothing could be done with it. When you learn what could be done with it, it changes your perspective on things. Talking with [*forester*], it made me realize that's something everybody doesn't have, a piece of the Earth. I'm still learning the value of land ownership (AL9).

... Forestry improves the timber quality and value of the land—well-kept forestry. (A logger had looked at it 2 years ago and said it did not have much value.) It improves the view (curb appeal) and enhances the beauty of the property while providing food and place for wildlife. We get so many compliments on the work that we've done—everybody in this area that comes by. We're always trying to improve the land. We recently had the property appraised and the land is worth 5-6 times what they paid for it 20 years before (AL13).

We just love that we have our own place, that we can make it better than when we got it, and that we can care for the land and the wildlife (AL12).

## FORESTRY

# Knowledge of Forestry Markets, Certification, and Bioenergy

We asked a variety of questions about knowledge of forestry, awareness of markets, certification of sustainable forest management, and bioenergy as a way to gauge people's knowledge and experience with forestry. In general, interviewees knew very little about these. They did express enthusiasm about learning more. A few people had worked in the wood products industry and knew something about different products and markets.

### Markets

Interviewees had relatively limited knowledge of marketable forest products and where they went in their area, with only a few exceptions. They were aware of this, and many expressed a desire and intention to learn more.

I have no idea (SC9).

None. If I had known more about that, we would have been taken less advantage of with this last cutting (SC18).

I don't know much about the logging business, but they use different sizes for different things. Some have to go to lumber yard or pole yard, some to *[paper company]* (SC1).

No, I'm not that familiar with that. If I know a logger and I allowed him to cut my timber, that's all. There are some good, and some bad. I've got some good deals and some bad deals.... I now know more about how to negotiate with a timber buyer than in previous years (SC4).

No. I never had any involvement with that. From my own observation, my aunts sold timber to a guy, and I know they got ripped off. If someone approaches you to buy timber, you have to do due diligence and do your research to find out market prices. They didn't do that, so they didn't get a good price. You also have to replant. That's why it's important to be in a program like this, so you get the best value for your timber. A lot of people don't get what they should because they don't know they



should negotiate. Also, the waiting period for the next crop—you may get better crop next time (SC3).

I don't have that information. I have friends who have sold timber lately. I have a sister and her husband who died recently. Looking at what they got, I don't think they went to the right market, although it was part of the family process there. They didn't get what they should have.... Sister lives in New York, but they own part of 104 acres. The family sold as a group. The portion they got, they didn't get what I thought they should have. The prices should have been higher. This was last year, in 2013 (SC6).

Not familiar with it. If I were growing hogs, I'd want to know what they're worth in the market.... When it [wood products] sold—I just wanted to get rid of it. I was not managing. I didn't know what I was doing. It's sad and embarrassing. You would think a person with a degree would know, but I didn't give it much thought. It won't happen again—to my son (SC16).

I used to drive a pulp truck (SC13).

There are mills in [town name] that buy hardwood and pine. Chip and saw. Some companies go in and get the stumpage for biomass kinds of things (SC10).

Nothing (NC19).

Not much.... Some of it, I'm somewhat familiar with. Just across the border with North Carolina, there's a paper mill. It's one of the places of employment for people who didn't farm. The reforestation is nothing like it is today. But the paper mill was a source of employment for many people. Forestry is not new. Those who have worked with it have grown with it. I remember when timber was harvested and not reforested. It would take years. Now I can see that forestry has grown along with making information available to citizenry. Knowledge was limited.... I don't know how you would get it [information] even if it were there. The internet and computers are new, and a whole generation is not comfortable with them. I use the computer a lot, but my parents are not privy to that. I can go on the ipad and google it, and someone else would have to hear about it through word of mouth. That's why I'm so grateful for the project—it's reaching more people (NC20).

“ *The internet and computers are new, and a whole generation is not comfortable with them.... That's why I'm so grateful for the project—it's reaching more people.* ”

I know a little simply because we got some information in the mail from some timber people who wanted to cut. Some people came to look at what we do have. One said wait 3-5 years, the other wanted to cut it all down (NC6).

He [the logger] carried it out, probably to the [city name] pulp mill. I guess when they carry a load, it depends on the market where it goes—North Carolina or Virginia (NC10).

We're just getting into timber, so we don't know anything yet.... They are bringing in speakers with information about it, like selling trees for chips (NC12).

There's a connection with loggers—they've done the legwork.... I know from my dad where wood goes. I know the different mills—he took me around. [Town names]. People say I look like my dad (NC1).

My first job was in a sawmill. I was 16. I flunked out of school and flunked off the job—my momma made me quit. I had to leave the job and bring the grades up, so my momma made me quit. I was working after school at the sawmill. In January, I



worked after football season.... I know a little bit about forest industry. I know a lot of things are made from wood, the chips, the bark. There was a paper plant next door.... That was a big plant—they ship wood everywhere. If a person really thought deep enough, and didn't replant, and trees get extinct, the price would go way up. The price can't go way down, if you look at supply and demand. If people cut and don't reseed, the price will be out the roof. Because of supply and demand. We're shipping a lot to foreign countries (NC2).

I met with two timber companies, [company name] and [company name], and other places that buy logs. I try to keep up with it. I know they just hired two more people at the [company name] plant in [city] (NC5).

Nothing. I imagine there's a good market for it—I see lots of trucks. My brothers and I have talked about having a good survey on the last. It's been 25 years since anything was harvested there (AL14).

I don't know that. I'm assuming that would come with the information in the management plan. If it doesn't, I'll be asking [names, program and consulting foresters]. I have the confidence in [program forester] that he has the knowledge for any question that I have or will seek the answer if he doesn't know (AL17).

I've not been engaged in it (AL20).

No, I would assume.... I see people hauling it all the time.... I would let several companies cruise it before selling it (AL2).

**What do you know about existing markets for wood?** I google it. It depends on the time of year, and there are different prices for different kinds of woods. I checked when I first planted. I don't have any personal memory, but I do know that's it's sold similar to the stock market—it goes up and down.... I'm trying to acquire as much knowledge as I can. Now I have personal investment in it (AL6).

When I was coming up as a young boy, it wasn't called chip and saw—it was paperwood and logs. Now they take the whole tree. That's exciting to me too. I sold that timber—it'll be 20 years before I sell timber again, unless I buy another place. Now when I think about buying, I walk over it and see what I can do with it. If it's not profitable to me, I won't touch it. If I can turn a profit, I'll do that. ... There's a lot of timber around here, but it's heirs' property. You can't buy it. It just sits there. You can't get families to come to agreement, and it's just going downhill. They're losing money, and they don't even know it. I showed some people, kinfolks, their land, and I told them they got beetles,

and their trees are starting to fall, and I told them they're losing money. That whole time that could have been cut and replanted, and in 20 years, he could have more money. He didn't know. I tried to tell him, that's all you can do (AL8).

I know where the paper mills are, but I don't know the market (AL11).

Price of pines are half the price of hardwoods (AL12).

The current market—I understand that in our area, the pulp and paper industry is huge. We do have some sawmills that are looking for sawlogs. In our area, that's about it right now (AL16).

Only from readings. It's just been sitting there, so I've been reading on my own to find the best option for this. Just want to get the basic understandings of how much it would cost to do anything with it. You want to make it productive and enjoy either hunting or ... what do you do with it, even if it's family land (AL1)?

At one time I was looking into ... I was told that the oak trees do better on the 18 acres than pine trees. I'm quite sure it was because the oak trees were growing more rapidly. On the 53 acres, I was told that the pine trees do better.... Specific pine trees? No, I do not know (AL5).

## Certification

Interviewees know very little about the various programs for certifying the sustainability of forest products, such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Tree Farm, and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Most of those who were aware of these programs had learned of them through the pilot project.

Only time I've heard about it is during the briefing that [*the project forester*] gave (SC18).

I believe I've heard of it. There's a lot of talking and training at the workshops (SC7).

I heard of it briefly. It's a big selling point for some of our customers at [*the paper mill*]. I know a little about it (SC14).

Vaguely. I don't know enough now (NC17).

I talked to a friend of mine that's doing Tree Farm (NC2).

Heard of it, but there aren't enough acres here to do it (NC3).

I have heard about those at the workshops. I am interested in getting that certification. But I'm very careful about getting too many irons in the fire. That would have to be—I'd have to have family approval (NC4).

We heard about it at our last meeting, and we'd like to learn more about that. We can clearly see the benefits of doing that. It seems to increase the potential for maximum income, depending on the investment. We heard about it at the workshop, but I hadn't heard of it previously (NC9).

I think [*program forester*] went over that at that workshop that my cousin and myself went to (NC10).



We're working with the wildlife department to try to become a certified Tree Farmer (NC5).

Yes, I heard of that. It's wonderful. I'm going to write a grant with them too. SFI (NC1).

Plan to be certified American Tree Farm—higher productivity and get a higher price when you do decide to sell (NC5).

You get a plaque on your land. I talked with a lady flashing her certificate around. I want to put one up at my place (NC15).

[Had not heard of certification, but when told about it.] We would look at that, definitely. It would help ensure that the forest is meeting a certain standard (AL14).

Not really. I've come across those terms in my personal research, but I don't know the details (AL1).

Yeah, somewhat. I've heard about it, but I don't know what it means. It's a certain way you have to keep your forest to get it certified.... No, don't know enough to make an informed decision (AL15).

I'm looking into that—that's what I really want. If we could go that route, in 40 years—not just the timber, but the land with that kind of product on it, that's what I'm looking at (AL8).

There was some confusion among the concepts of certified foresters and forest certification.

When I was talking to agriculture in [county name] County, they said that when you get someone, they have to be certified (AL5).

“ *When people sell the timber from a certified forest, they know they're getting a good product.* ”

Yes, I want to become a certified forester (forest?). I do want to pursue that. I talked with [name, partner organization] about that.... I talked to someone about how to get the trees certified. I've talked to several people about Tree Farm. I understand the trees are worth more if they're certified (AL6).

Most of those who were aware of these programs had learned of them through the pilot project.

I was a Treasure Forest owner, but left because of annual fees. I did not see the benefits.... It is ok ... but paying the fees are a drawback. There has to be a balance between what you pay and what you get for it. The next generation will have to worry about that—it is their decision (AL12).

I've heard the term at the workshop. We visited a forest [that was certified].... Yes. Certification would mean that I'm doing the right thing to keep what we have. You can be learning at the same time that you're experimenting (AL18).

Yes, I learned about it in the workshop. I learned quite a bit about it.... I want to learn about it and weigh the pros and cons (AL2).

Yes, the plan is to certify the forest. Working with [program foresters]—we take the lead from them. It's been extremely good and helpful. It's becoming a self-education process. We understood that certification would open up more avenues for revenue. We'd be able to take that to other family members and spark some interest. Every time I talk to someone, they tell me I'm an absentee landlord. We want our land to be some kind of benefit to the county (AL10).

Went to a certification workshop in [town name] two weeks ago.... What we understood most about that is planning. It's important to have a sound plan.... Maybe, it is having a sound plan to improve the quality of the forests and people will have better quality products. But, not thinking of selling wood or the land.... When people sell the timber from a certified forest, they know they're getting a good product.... Also, the people that we leave it to will have a better product. What bothers us most is the clearcutting. They just cut it and leave it there (AL13).

I think it should be mandated. Any individual talking to a landowner about how to develop his property needs to have the criteria in order to give me that information. [talking about certified forester?] ... The forest being certified—that's a good deal too. If I buy a car that's been certified, it means the technicians have gone through it and saying they can offer me something as good as new. Having a tree that's certified, it's more valuable than one that has just sprung up.... Yes, I think that's the way to go. If I'm doing a harvest and want to get the top dollar, I want to show the buyer my tree has the highest quality (AL17).

It's all coming together—I'm just waiting on the paperwork—Treasured Forests, Tree Farm, and probably FSC. The whole bundle on one property.... I know it will help me market the wood better. It's discussed at every meeting (AL4).

We're working on that with [program forester]. We're working on certification now—FSI [SFI?] ... (AL10).

## Bioenergy

Bioenergy represents an important emerging market in some areas of the South. Most forest bioenergy products currently either come from mill residues or, if they come directly from land, are essentially the same as pulpwood. In-woods chipping does occasionally occur, and it represents a potential market for products from unmanaged stands. Awareness of bioenergy from woody biomass was low.

Bioenergy; corn for ethanol. I don't think it's happening anywhere around here (SC7).

Heard of corn ethanol, not from trees (SC8).

I've heard of [using] corn, but not anyone buying trees for bioenergy (SC9).

No, don't know much about it. They grow corn and soybeans for fuel. That's all I know (SC3).

If you're talking about taking corn—they're doing that in Brazil, right (SC5)?

I know it's being done, but not around here (SC11).

I've heard the term, but I don't know. Corn, yes, but you have to be a farmer.... I know I have a lot of trees—I just need to do something with them (SC12).

I've heard of ethanol from corn, not so much trees. I work at a paper mill, and I work on the utility side. We do alternative energy—burn tires and bark—those are initiatives for the paper mill. But I don't know much outside of that arena (SC14).

I've heard about it using soybeans. I've not heard of wood being used, just grains and beans.... I hear different opinions. Some say it's good for the environment, and some say it's not. I heard that a higher percentage of bioenergy clogs your engine up. But it's supposed to clear the air (NC10).

I've heard about that from the corn, but not from the trees (AL5).

I've heard about it from magazines.... I've read about it. No opinions on it (SC4).



Center for Heirs' Property Preservation forester, Sam Cook, and Forest Service researcher, Cassandra Johnson Gaither.

There's a plant over at [town name] that converts chips to electricity.... Good idea. Good to be independent of those countries, the better. The wars are all because of the oil. You look at the countries with oil, that's where the problems are. Weaning ourselves off foreign oil [is important] (SC10).

We're interested in everything. We need more information. The more info we can get from you or [the program] or anybody. The key is awareness. What programs are out there today? Then we can get understanding, then answer a lot of these questions. How will it impact property in a negative or positive way (SC5)?

I'd be interested. That would be a way to utilize what's out there now. To use what's left over after harvesting.... Even the climate ... has been affected, so anything to help save our environment (SC6).

What I'd like to see it happen—there's so much underutilized rural farm land and so much rural poverty—is income generation. We have resources. They're just not being utilized (SC15).

No more than that it's an up and coming thing of the future. They're testing it out. Some homes have pieces of it. We've got energy problems. They're fighting over there now, they might not be able to ship this stuff out. Solar energy is just not going to do it anymore (SC17).

A little, but not enough. They use different products to make energy. A little about forest products to make energy—not much (SC19).

You can use the bio to heat homes. They use it at plants. I want to say something about the environment. In Europe, they use it. What we would throw away, you can turn that into products. I have to research this. I think it would be a good thing for the environment (NC5).

I've heard of it, but I don't know what it means. I heard that word in one of the workshops (NC8).

Some, very little. I'm intrigued by that. Once I educate myself more, I think it'll be a good thing (NC9).

I've heard of it, but I'm not familiar with it.... I might consider selling biomass if I had more information about it (NC11).

We might be interested if we had more information about it (NC12).



That's the ethanol, produced from corn. I think there's a company in [city name] producing pellets from sawmills.... Sure, we might be interested [in selling woody biomass for energy] (NC14).

I think it's a great idea. Most of the farmers have never heard of it, even ones growing soybeans and corn. I was shocked (NC15).

I've heard of it, but I don't know much. I've heard of them using wood chips. There's a solar farm in [town name] (NC16).

Pellets—I saw that somewhere. As long as it doesn't interrupt wildlife management. [Name] will work with me on that (NC1).

They have a pilot plant over in [town name]. That's the way to go. It's clean (NC2).

The plant in [town name] sends pellets overseas.... It's no problem. It's another market for the landowner (NC17).

“ *We're interested in everything. We need more information.... The key is awareness. What programs are out there today? Then we can get understanding.*

I've heard of it being produced with corn ... to be honest with you, no, I don't know. I did hear that in [county name] County, in [town name], that there's a new plant there making wood (NC19).

I haven't heard anything about that, but I will make a note (AL10).

I haven't heard about that. I will learn (AL2).

I've heard of it, but I never paid any attention to it (AL14).

I don't know, it's some kind of green energy (AL15).

I've heard of it, but I don't really know what it is (AL17).

You hear different things. They have a yellow pine they're talking about making fuel from it (AL8).

Not outside the big plants. You hear about the grains that will be used. It's a lot different from the way it used to be. There are a lot of ideas out there, but nothing is churning fast enough to say I want to go forward with it (AL1).

Yes, and when they put the pellet mill in [town name], I asked about how it would affect the timber market. I have a daughter who buys the pellets for her home heating. We started asking questions about the pellet mill. Not for my own heating, but from a market standpoint.... It's something I'll be interested in, from an environmental standpoint.... Tax credits for heating with those types of fuels (AL6).

I heard about. They were supposed to put something like that in [town name]. It sounds like it might be something that's doable. I don't know much about it. But I heard a little talk about it, and it makes a whole lot of sense (AL7).

I'm connected to the electrical industry as a technical teacher and have helped students to understand the processes for creating bioenergy. Recognize the benefits of whole tree logging and of use of chipper/mulcher to remove tops and limbs after harvest.... Interesting because it would save trees.... It utilizes the land more efficiently, allows you to use more of the trees.... Yes, the grandchildren have already made the connection between greenery and oxygen in the air.... I'm not knowledgeable about the details but I recognize it would be cleaner than what's being used now.... Would love it. It would help to clean up land while making money from the products (AL12).

Heard about it in workshop but not sure they understand the idea. I haven't spent that much time trying to understand it. At that last workshop they were talking about it. The one over in [town name]. It's okay, but we're interested in the animals [wildlife]. It's a good idea. It would save the big trees.... Take out the small stuff and use it for bioenergy. I would agree with that.... If you go long term, you won't have any trees left. Though they can replant.... We're relying too much on oil. I know a lot of people are against other means of supplying energy, but we need to look at all options.... Not thinking about it for this property. We haven't heard much about bioenergy (AL13).

Bioenergy is the greenhouse gases information, where you need so much green energy to offset our production of carbon. [Carbon sequestration] Switchgrass and stuff.... It may be a good option for some people, but probably not a viable option for me, being in public office in an area that is heavily dependent on forestry. I have dealt with trying to bring in a bamboo plant. We've tried to find some landowners that were willing to produce. We ended up having a huge backlash from the forest industry. They put all the propaganda out there that these are invasive plants, that you're unable to contain it. That killed a good opportunity for an industry in this area.... Personally, I think we could produce stronger materials that could produce more rapidly and make the land more productive through alternative growths. Some of the bamboo we were looking at would be ready in 5 years and can regenerate. Bamboo for pulp and paper, for the fiber. They said flooring could be, but mostly that was for fiber portion. That's been 6 or 7 years. They [pulp and paper] have a very strong lobby (AL16).

They're taking wood chips and pine needles and using them to create an energy source and fuel (AL20).

I have. I was hoping that would come to south Alabama. In [town name], they had a pellet mill on target. The pellet mill went to [town name]—they only chipped one load, but something happened. They couldn't sell them. I don't know. Something will happen.... I'd be interested in selling for that. I'm not sure if it will. If I'm able to purchase some other properties somewhere else, I wouldn't have to be as concerned about the quality of the wood. If I couldn't get chip and saw, I could still sell them the lower quality stuff—they're just going to grind it up (AL4).

## FORESTRY

# Constraints to Managing Forests

There was a broad group of responses to questions about constraints to forest management. Money and heirs' property issues or family agreement were the most common responses, although lack of information was also mentioned multiple times. Other constraints mentioned were health, equipment, and staying on top of management activities and deadlines. What was notable, however, was that many people responded that although they had constraints they felt they were on a viable path forward now, largely due to the program.

We're not in a good place, but moving in that direction (SC2).

Capital. Being retired, I've got the time (SC18).

Money's always involved, but information (SC13).

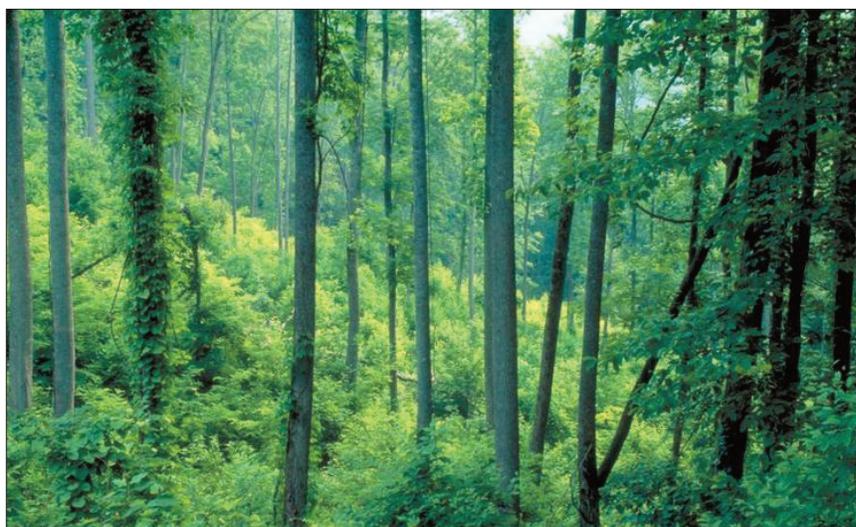
Information. We can work with some of that and get that to the family. Getting more information and discussing with family. Read this, study it a little bit (SC11).

Like I said, the only thing about it is living up north and trying to do it from up there. Next time I will be more abreast and will watch them while they're doing the job. That's the only thing. I would try to be there when they're doing it to make sure that they're doing it. Otherwise, I may have to start all over again like this last time (AL5).

“ *We're learning so late in life, as we're trying to get it set up for the next generation. I wish we could have done this sooner.... Even if it seems late, it's not too late.* ”

We're learning so late in life, as we're trying to get it set up for the next generation. I wish we could have done this sooner.... Even if it seems late, it's not too late. We're more aware of the possibilities. When we leave, those after us can follow through and gain more information.... This project is new. But what has been available before? Little or nothing. That's why this project is so important.... There have been many little farms in [county name] County, and all over ... (NC20).

Not having enough information or current information about what's available—resources, connections (NC6).



We have no plans to do much with the forest. I like nature and animals. But it may be another source of income.... We'd like to know more about our options for the forest (NC18).

I really don't think there would be ... I don't know how to answer that question. We haven't really put anything to the test yet. We're in the beginning stages. We don't have enough knowledge to make informed decisions (AL17).

The biggest thing is that I want to find someone who's been successful with it. Once I get the plan, I'd like them to help oversee the plan. We just want it to be successful. We want to restore it and give the younger generation something to be part of (AL20).

Heirs' property issues. We're off-site owners.... As we learn more and more about different options ... we're trying to gather more information.... We need good information to make good decisions as a family. We're still in that fact-finding stage (SC5).

Then the heirs' property issue 'family unity'—you can't do anything until all these deeds are taken care of (SC17).

For me, buy-in from my other brothers and sisters (SC16).

Equipment. Not many boys—there's one, but I think he's going to be a city boy (SC10).

I don't know the biggest constraint, but trying to figure out what the cost might be. The unexpected is my biggest concern. Whatever it'll be, I'll post a check (NC2).

A tractor would help. Help to clear the land—I can't do it. I would need forestry management. Basically that's it. Materials. An investor that would be willing to help with the trees. We're on a fixed income—social security and disability, my wife and myself (NC3).

It would be easy to say finances. Sometimes I don't see that as a constraint—there is funding. Obama—new Farm Bill. I am looking to use as many programs as I possibly can.... One constraint might be follow up from people that I have done business with. My immediate circle will call me back. But sometimes when I'm working with others on a project, they will not get back in contact with me. That bothers me. I went to Minority Landowners conference in [*city name*]. They may say they'll email me, but they never do. That angers me. I feel like you don't care about my community (NC4).

Monetary. Knowledge. And trust in someone that I know can do it. Trying to find the right person to do it. Get references from other landowners.... And education—knowing what to do and hoping that the government doesn't cut the budget. Now you have to pay to have a management plan done—I'm glad mine's been finished (NC5).

I think just getting everything done. We have a good plan. Hitting deadlines and making sure things happen. We've been delayed cutting trees because of the weather. By the time it dried up, guys were working in other areas. Knowing what to do and hitting your deadlines (SC14).

I can't find a logger. I'm at a standstill. They do a real nice write-up, but they won't do that small acreage (NC8).

Last time we got a forest management plan, it didn't cost us anything. To make any changes, you have to show them your forest management plan.... To get results, take down some of the barriers for us (NC9).

Time, money, interest—all of the above. Probably mostly a lack of interest (NC10).



Cattle grazing is important to some landowners, leading to an interest in silvopastoral systems. (Photo by Sarah Hitchner)

Time and not being knowledgeable about what's there. I only have my property taxes to go on. I came in in the middle of the story (NC19).

Time. I stay so busy. I'm a caregiver for everybody around here (NC16).

I'm retiring, so soon I'll have more time to look at options. On my own land, I have to pay off the mortgages.... I have to pass the baton to the next generation. I want them to be able to keep the land and pass it on to their children. My generation is aging. I'm the younger one. The others are 60-80. I'm trying to get things set up (NC17).

I'm 65, so there's an age limitation (NC1).

None that we're aware of (NC14).

None at the moment. I'm not sure where I stand on the big plan.... One thing holding me up is finding a surveyor. All the people recommended to me are no longer in business. I finally found a guy in [city name]. We corresponded, and he was supposed to be here on June 6th. I've not heard from him. So I haven't gotten the land surveyed yet. It costs \$3,500—that would have been a constraint, but I saved for it. That could pose a problem, if they start charging for forestry plans. That would be a constraint (NC15).

“ *We need information, resources to reach the full potential. What we need is someone to look at what we have and tell us, you should do this or do this, or don't do this.*

Right now, I don't have any that I know of. There have been no major changes or changes that we plan to make....Getting it started would be a constraint. We need information (AL19).

Knowledge and financing. I want to gain as much knowledge as I can about it. I want to make sure I have the money on hand for the spraying, planting, etc (AL6).

I guess finances would be one, once I figure out what I want to do. If I don't have the finances to accomplish what I want to do (AL9).



Capital—for walking trails, cabins, recreational activities—to create a place for young people (AL12).

I guess finance. There's concern about being able to do what we want to do. Being able to invest more [in the land]. We haven't budgeted all that we'd like to do. It's a possible constraint, but we're not sure how constraining it is.... As long as our health stays good. You never know at our age. We have a young man that looks after us. He's not our child, but he calls us Mom and Dad (AL13).

Money—expense is the big thing....Information—ignorance—I don't know what can be done. And ignorance about the prices of things....Lack of cooperation from county agency (AL15).

A couple things. The initial costs. Knowledge of how to maintain the land, with firebreaks and pest control—managing those particulars. It would be an investment to plant back and monitor the tree growth curves....Estimating the out-of-pocket costs to start something—the economics of it. It has to be a full plan with your investment that you're able to produce something. Otherwise, you would do something else with your money (AL1).

None really. Just roads/access (AL4).

It's maybe, 'Will someone go in and cut it?' And will they damage other trees to get the marketable ones (AL2)?

Probably time. Not just my time but also speaking for my brothers in particular—retired but working. Two brothers live in Georgia, but that distance is not such a hindrance. We need information, resources to reach the full potential. What we need is someone to look at what we have and tell us, you should do this or do this, or don't do this (AL14).

The property I own—time to get the job done. I have a time schedule to finish up certain parts. The weather at one time held me up. Also a health issue that set me back about 4 months (AL18).

I don't really see anything like that. I don't see anything that hinders me. We've done a prescribed burning on it, and everything looks good (AL7).

I really don't have any constraints. I don't know what my brother and sister want to do. It's good to learn what's available. For the most part, it's just sitting there (AL11).

I really don't have any. The key thing is that we want to replant and we aren't going to allow it to become a volunteer stand again (AL16).

## FORESTRY

### Forest Characteristics

“ *Forester recommendations included protecting stream buffers, leaving bottomland hardwoods and wetlands for wildlife, and encouraging owners to market smaller stands collectively with nearby landowners to make forestry operations more feasible.* ”

Pilot project or contract foresters visited the landholdings of interviewees to assess the condition of their forests. Nearly all the forest stands were unmanaged natural regeneration, often densely stocked or with a dense understory, reflecting the absence of prescribed burning and thinning. Some older stands had sawtimber or chip-and-saw, while many lacked sufficient large trees and were only suitable for pulpwood harvest. A number of stands had sufficient trees and forest health for the forestry recommendation to be continued growth with scheduled thinnings or harvest within the next 5 or 10 years. Other stands had been heavily harvested recently, had ice or windstorm damage, or had overall poor stand development; in these cases, foresters recommended clearing and selling any merchantable wood followed by site preparation and replanting. Most stands also needed construction of fire lanes and introduction of prescribed burning. A few stands showed rutting or other soil damage from prior harvest. Forester recommendations included protecting stream buffers, leaving bottomland hardwoods and wetlands for wildlife, and encouraging owners to market smaller stands collectively with nearby landowners to make forestry operations more feasible.



## CONCLUSIONS: Summary of Research and Concluding Remarks

Engaging African-American forest owners represents both a historical and contemporary challenge, requiring continuous efforts to engage landowners, create awareness of forestry opportunities, and ensure that financial and technical assistance are available. Our research indicates that African-American forest owners in the U.S. South have had very little engagement with forestry besides occasional opportunistic timber sales. Forest management techniques, such as tree planting, prescribed burning, and thinning, have rarely been undertaken, and forest owners often have had little contact with forestry professionals or conservation personnel. A significant portion of owners have heirs' property issues which require time and assistance in working with other family members to define and update their land ownership status to a point where they can begin to fully engage in forestry. Forestry assistance without such legal assistance will have few benefits for these owners. Many African Americans are managing land that has been in their family for many years, and the heritage value of this land is immeasurable. While nearly all landowners want to keep this land in their family for generations to come, few are earning any returns from their land. Sustainable forest management provides a land use option that can fit well with the lifestyle of many owners, who are often either older and retired or busy with jobs and with limited time to devote to their land. Resolving heirs' property issues can encourage landowners to adopt sustainable forest management; at the same time, potential sustainable forest management income can provide impetus to families needing to resolve heirs' property. The Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program is addressing these issues in an integrated fashion and shows how programs of this nature can simultaneously redress past inequities for African-American landowners, ensure future timber supplies in States where forestry is one of the major economic activities, and protect watersheds and wildlife habitat.



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# GLOSSARY

- CAP**—Conservation Activity Plan
- CRP**—Conservation Reserve Program
- DBH**—Diameter at breast height
- DOT**—Department of Transportation
- EQIP**—Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- FIP**—Forestry Incentives Program
- FSA**—Farm Service Agency
- FSC**—Forest Stewardship Council
- LLC**—Limited Liability Company
- LRLEAN**—Limited Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network
- NRCS**—Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service)
- SFI**—Sustainable Forestry Initiative
- SNA**—Social network analysis
- SMZ**—Streamside management zone
- USDA**—U.S. Department of Agriculture
- YMCA**—Young Men’s Christian Association

## APPENDIX

# INTERVIEW GUIDE

### RAPID APPRAISAL BASELINE RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN LAND RETENTION PROGRAM

**John Schelhas, Sarah Hitchner, Rory Fraser, Cassandra Johnson Gaither, and Amadou Diop**

*Because pilot project activities will be underway at the time of rapid appraisal, some areas of questioning need to also probe to learn how attitudes, interests, and practices have changed since the contact with the pilot projects. Areas where this is a particular concern are marked with an asterisk [\*].*

#### 1. Introduction of all family members in attendance

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

● Who is the primary manager of the land? \_\_\_\_\_

● Where does the primary manager live in regards to the land?

on the land  within the county  in State  out of State?

Person	1	2	3	4	5
Age					
Gender (M/F)					
Education (0-16+)					
Employment (or retired)					
Race/Ethnicity (B, W, other)					
Generation (1, 2, 3)					

**2. Do you have more than one parcel of land?  Yes  No**

- Describe land and forest ownership characteristics for each parcel.

Parcel	1	2	3	4
Parcel size (acres)				
Land tenure / ownership arrangement				
Leased land (acres; + = from, - = to, others)				
How land acquired? (p = purchase, i = inheritance, g = gift, o = other)				
Acquired from whom? (r = relatives, i = other individual, f = forest industry, o = other)				

**3. Is land owned other than individually? (e.g., heirs' property or LLC)**

I Ask these questions.

Parcel	1	2	3	4
<b>Legal status</b> h = heirs' property, p = partnership, l = LLC, o = other				
Number and characteristics of owners (describe)				
Management responsibility/decision-making structure (describe)				

#### 4. Heirs' property questions

- Do you have heirs' property?  Yes  No. What does this mean to you?
- Have you started dealing with your heirs' property issue?  Yes  No. How?
- Have there been conflicts regarding your heirs' property (inside family or with others outside your family)?  Yes  No. Describe.
- Have you ever considered selling heirs' property land?  Yes  No. Why or why not?
- \*Does having heirs' property hinder your use or management of the land?  
 Yes  No. How?
- Clearing title:  
How important is clearing title to you?  
What do you (personally or as a family) need to do to clear title?  
What sort of assistance do you need?
- How would having clear title change or influence what you do with the land?
- Do you have any other plans for addressing heirs' property?  Yes  No. Describe.

#### 5. Land and forest values and attitudes

- Sense of place:  
Can you describe some of your earliest memories of this (these) land(s)?  
Have your feelings about your land changed over time?  Yes  No. How?
- Why do you own land and forest (or why is your forest land important to you)?

*(Don't prompt landowners, but possible categories include income, investment, legacy or heritage, aesthetics or scenery, wildlife or biodiversity, timber, NTFPs, firewood, recreation, ecosystems services, etc. Detailed textual responses in the landowner's words are more important than prearranged categories.)*

#### 6. I'll list some things that people do with their land. Tell me if you like to do them or not, or whether it makes no difference to you.

	Yes	No	Indifferent	Why?
Farming				
Forestry				
Agroforestry				
Hunting				
Outdoor recreation				
Observing nature				
Protecting watersheds				

- Do different family members or co-owners of your land think about the land and forests differently from you? In what ways? Why?
- How similar or different do you think the next generations of your family's values are to yours? (mostly forest related)
- Is ownership of your forest land across generations and over time important to you (forest legacy)?  Yes  No. In what ways or why it is important?

## 7. Current land use

	Acres	Percent Farm Income	Percent Total Income
Crops			
Pasture			
Forests			
Other			

- Does your land produce profit or cost you money to maintain?  Profit  Costs money  
Comment.
- Who is responsible for paying the taxes?
- How are losses and profits distributed if there are multiple owners?

## 8. Context of the forest land in the household economy and values

- Does having forests make your land more valuable to you and your family? In what way?
- In what ways, if any, do forests contribute to your savings and investments?

## 9. What are the people who own land near yours doing with their land (e.g., agriculture, forestry, development)? Who owns it? Is it staying in the family?

## 10. Decisions about forest management and harvest (Open-ended question, check-off for interviewer convenience.)

*What do you want to do with your forest land?		
Activity	Yes	No
Timber		
NTFPs		
Hunting (personal)		
Hunting (lease)		
Agroforestry		
Conservation		
Biomass		
Other		

What forest management and harvest activities you are presently (or have been) engaged in?		
Activity	Yes	No
Tree planting		
Burning		
Thinning		
Harvest		
Other		

What forest products have you used or sold?		
Product	Yes	No
Pulp or biomass		
Saw timber		
Firewood		
Other		

- Who decides how your land and forests will be used? Comment.
- Have you used cost-share or financial assistance programs?  Yes  No.  
Which ones and when?
- \*Do you have a written land and/or forest management plan?  Yes  No.  
Why or why not? When was it done or last updated? Year: \_\_\_\_\_

### 11. \*Social relationships, forestry information, and land management

- To whom do you talk about forests or forestry?
- Where do you get forest management information and technical assistance? Why?
- What is your level of confidence in the forestry information you generally get?
- To what organizations related to land or forests do you belong?
- Would you be willing to join with other forest owners to sell timber or manage your forest? (such as a cooperative or a group marketing effort)

### 12. \*Potential for increased income and asset value

- \*What are the biggest constraints on your ability to manage your forest (e.g., information, time, money, market access, etc.)?
- What do you know about existing markets for wood? [probe for names of mills, products bought, etc.]
- What types of forest products, e.g., timber pulp and paper, sawtimber, pole, biomass, fuel wood, NTFPs, etc., would you be interested in producing from your land?

### 13. Bioenergy questions

- Have you heard about bioenergy?  Yes  No.

Explain: We define bioenergy as selling of woody biomass or grasses to companies that produce energy or make products used to for energy (e.g., pellets, liquid fuels like ethanol, etc.)

- Do you have any opinions on bioenergy?
- Do you think that bioenergy is important to meet our future energy needs?  
 Yes  No. Why?
- Do you think bioenergy from trees is a good long-term energy option for the United States?
- Should the government promote bioenergy development? How?
- How might bioenergy fit into your forest management plans?

### 14. Do you know about forest certification (e.g., SFI, FSC, Tree Farm)? Yes No

- What do you think about certification?
- Would you be willing to certify your forest land?  Yes  No. Why?

### 15. \*Future plans

- What plans do you have for your land in the future? (e.g., family's intent in staying on the land, changes in land management)?
- Do you expect to sell land or acquire more land or forest? Why?
- Are you interested in learning more about forest management and/or changing your forestry practices?
- What do you think the next generation may do with your forest land (keep or sell, change management, etc.)?
- Are there land use or forest changes that you think would make better use of your forest land than forestry (e.g., development, agriculture)?

### 16. Questions related to the local Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention project

- Would you be willing to participate in future activities of this project, such as research, filming, landowner meetings, etc.?
- Would you like to be contacted by a forester from the U.S. Endowment project for assistance with managing your land?

### 17. Would you mind indicating the general level of your annual household income?

Income	Please check:
< \$25,000	
Between \$25,000 and \$50,000	
Between \$50,000 and \$100,000	
Between \$100,000 and \$250,000	
Over \$250,000	
Decline to answer	

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**Schelhas, John; Hitchner, Sarah; Johnson Gaither, Cassandra; and Jennings, Viniece. 2017.** "Sunshine, Sweat, and Tears": African-American Ties to Land and Forests in the South. e-Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-220. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 154 p.

**Abstract:** The Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program is a comprehensive effort to address the long-standing problem of under-participation of African Americans in forest management. This report describes the results of rapid appraisal baseline research for pilot projects in this program in three Southern States. The research used a carefully selected purposive sample and was designed to enhance our understanding of minority land ownership and forest management. African-American landowners interviewed valued land highly for its connections to earlier generations and were nearly unanimous in wanting future generations to retain their land. However, heirs' property status often results in insecure property ownership, and most families received little or no economic return from their land. Forest stands tend to be naturally regenerated pine forests that require thinning, burning, or even complete harvest and replanting if owners are to benefit economically from forestry. Limited experience with forestry in the African-American community and a history of inequities and distrust create a challenging situation. Many forests have been unmanaged and require family landowners to both implement forestry practices that are unfamiliar and engage forestry professionals for the first time. Sustainable forest management can facilitate land retention, but landowners often require time and assistance to engage family members, consider options, and resolve ownership issues.

**Keywords:** African-American forest owners, family forestry, heirs' property.



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