

Minority Forest Landowners in Southeastern Alabama

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the characteristics of minority forest landowners and their forest resources in Macon and Bullock counties in Alabama through a landowner survey. The size of forestland held by these landowners was relatively small, with a mean of 113 ac. Most of their forests were mixed pine and hardwood stands. The top ranked management objectives of these landowners were for timber production and wildlife (hunting). About two-thirds of these landowners have thinned or harvested their forests. However, the forestland has not significantly contributed to the landowners' income. The lack of capital, labor, and knowledge of forest management and marketing impeded the landowners from generating more benefits from their forestland. South. J. Appl. For. 23(3):175-178.*

Most of the forestland in Alabama and the South is owned by nonindustrial private (NIP) forest landowners. Some of these NIP forest landowners are minorities, particularly African Americans. Though several studies have been done on the NIP forest landowners in the South in general (Birch 1996, Birch et al. 1982), little is known about minority forest landowners. This study investigated the characteristics of minority forest landowners and their forestland in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, and their management objectives and constraints.

Macon and Bullock counties are located in southeastern Alabama. These two counties are in Alabama's Black Belt, where more than a quarter of the population is African-American. They are good representatives of the Black Belt counties in southeastern Alabama in light of their socioeconomic conditions and forest resources. The Black Belt counties in Alabama are among the poorest in the state and the nation according to average personal income, unemployment rate, and other socioeconomic indicators (Auburn University at Montgomery 1991). The limited employment opportunities and income sources have been among the major constraints to economic development in these counties.

Southeastern Alabama, however, is endowed with rich forest resources. Some 73% and 74% of the total land in Bullock and Macon counties, respectively, is under forest coverage (Vissage and Miller 1991). A significant portion of the forestland in these two counties is owned or managed by African Americans. However, the economic contribution of the forest resources to minority forest landowners is very limited, even though forestry is a viable option for economic development in the region (Bliss et al. 1993, Kolison et al. 1993, Gan et al. 1994, Kolison et al. 1994, Gan et al. 1995). Understanding of minority forest landowners will provide further insight into the forest ownership in the region and help develop effective economic development strategies for the southern rural communities. This article reports the results of a minority landowner survey conducted in southeastern Alabama.

Methods

A survey of minority forest landowners was conducted in the two selected counties, Macon and Bullock. The survey sample, 52 minority forest landowners, was randomly drawn from a list of the minority forest landowners mainly provided by Tuskegee University's Cooperative Extension Program and small farm experts who had a good knowledge of minority forest landowners in the study area. Landowners were also encouraged to provide us with names and addresses of other minority forest landowners they knew. Please note that not all the landowners on the list had been served by and had sought assistance from the Cooperative Extension Service. It would be very difficult to obtain a complete list of all minority forest landowners

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in the region. The list was the best available information on minority forest landowners in the study region. The survey was conducted by two small farm specialists who had worked in the area for many years. The personal interview approach was used to ensure a high response rate and consistent understanding of the survey questions by the landowners. The interviews were conducted from January to March, 1994. A survey questionnaire was carefully designed using farmer friendly language. It contained 20 questions to address characteristics of forest landowners and their forestland, ownership objectives, past forest practices, and landowners' constraints in forest management and utilization. The survey instrument was pretested in both counties. No post-test was conducted.

Results

Forest Landowners

Most of the minority forest landowners surveyed were relatively old. About two-thirds of them were 50 yr and above. Twenty-nine percent were between 30 and 49 yr old. Only 4% were younger than 30 yr (Table 1).

The majority of the minority forest landowners had a relatively high level of education. Eighty-three percent of the forest landowners completed at least high school. And, 6% of them attended only elementary school (Table 1).

The median annual household income of the forest landowners was between \$30,000 and \$39,999. Twenty-three percent of them made less than \$20,000/yr. One-quarter of the landowners had annual household income between \$20,000 and \$29,999. Another 10% earned \$30,000 to \$39,000 annually. Forty-two percent of the forest landowners received \$40,000 or more of income each year (Table 1). The average family size of the forest landowners was 2.65 persons with a median of 2 persons.

Forestland

The size of the forestland owned by the minority landowners surveyed in Macon and Bullock counties ranged from 10 to 698 ac, with a mean of 113 ac and a median of 70 ac. About one-third of the landowners held less than 50 ac of forestland. Twenty-seven percent of the landowners

owned 50 to 99 ac. Thirty-four percent of the landowners controlled 100 to 499 ac. Only 4% possessed more than 500 ac. In terms of land area, the forest tracts between 100 and 499 ac in size accounted for 53% of the total forestland held by these landowners. Twenty-two percent of the total forestland area was in tracts of at least 500 ac, 15% between 50 and 59 ac, and another 10% less than 50 ac (Table 2).

The major type of the forest owned by the minority landowners was mixed pine and hardwood stands, which accounted for 38% of the total forestland area controlled by these landowners. More than a half (53%) of the landowners surveyed had mixed pine and hardwood forest stands. Thirty-six percent of the total forestland owned by the participating landowners was predominantly pine, and 25% was predominantly hardwood.

Most of the forests owned by these landowners were relatively young. Thirty-eight percent of the landowners surveyed had forest stands younger than 10 yr old. Thirty-two percent of the total forestland owned by the participating minority landowners was also younger than 10 yr old, with 21% between 10 and 19 yr old and 20% between 20 and 29 yr old. Only 26% of their forest was 30 yr old or older (Table 2).

Ownership Objectives

Nearly half of the minority forest landowners (48%) identified their ownership objective as for timber production or wildlife (hunting). The second most popular objectives were for fun or fuel wood. Recreation (hiking, picnicking, and viewing) was ranked as the third most recognized objective, followed by investment and cropland and water protection (Table 3). Most of the landowners considered timber production as one of their main objectives, but they did not think that they managed their forest as an alternative investment. Some landowners managed their forestland to supplement their household income. Some used their forest resources as emergency funds to pay for unexpected hospital bills and children's education.

Table 2. Characteristics of the forestland owned by minority landowners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Characteristic	Percent of landowners	Percent of area
Area (ac)		
1-49	34	10
50-99	27	15
100-499	34	53
500 and above	4	22
Species composition		
Pine	29	36
Hardwood	13	25
Mixed pine and hardwood	52	38
Don't know	6	1
Age (yr)		
0-9	38	32
10-19	23	21
20-29	19	20
30 and above	14	26
Don't know	6	1

Table 1. Characteristics of the minority forest landowners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Characteristic	Percent of landowners
Age (yr)	
< 30	4
30-49	29
50 and above	67
Education	
Less than elementary school	6
Less than high school	9
High school and above	83
Didn't respond	2
Annual household income (\$)	
< 10,000	13
10,000-19,999	10
20,000-29,999	25
30,000-39,999	10
40,000 and higher	42

Table 3. Ownership objectives of the minority forestland owners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Ownership objective	Percent of landowners	Ranking
Timber (sawtimber and pulpwood)	48	1
Wildlife (hunting)	48	1
Fun	25	2
Fuelwood	25	2
Recreation (hiking, picnic, viewing)	19	3
Investment	14	4
Cropland and water protection	14	4

Management Practices Performed

A majority of forest landowners had implemented some management practice on their forestland. Sixty-two percent had thinned or partially harvested their forest. Sixty percent of the landowners also had built fences around their forest properties for the purpose of property protection or livestock grazing. About one-third of the landowners had planted trees on their land for regeneration. Other practices used by the minority forest landowners included fire protection, weed control, and disease control. In addition, 71% of the landowners had let livestock graze on their forestland (Table 4).

Income Contribution and Management Constraints

Forest resources had supplemented the income of minority forest landowners, but their contribution to the landowners' income was quite limited. Thirty-eight percent of the landowners said that they had not received any monetary income from their forestland. Fifty-two percent of the landowners had received less than 10% of their annual household income from their forest resources; and 10% had generated 10 to 20% of their annual household income from their forestland (Table 5).

The main constraints faced by the minority forest landowners in managing and utilizing their forest resources to improve their household income were lack of capital, labor, and knowledge of forest management and marketing. Forty-four percent of the landowners felt that they faced the constraint of capital in managing their forest. Forty percent of them said that they did not have time to manage their forestland. Thirty-eight percent indicated that they did not know how to manage their forest resources. And 29% had limited knowledge of forest marketing (Table 6).

Technical Assistance Received and Needed

About two-thirds of the minority forest landowners received technical assistance in forest management or/and marketing in the past (Table 7). Most assistance came

Table 5. Contribution of forest resources to the annual household income of the minority forestland owners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Income from forestland (in percent of the total household income)	Percent of landowners
0	38
0-10	52
10-20	10
> 20	0

Table 4. Management practices implemented by the minority forestland owners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Management practice	Percent of landowners
Thinning/partial harvest	62
Fence	60
Regeneration/planting	33
Fire protection	31
Weed control	10
Disease control	6

from forest industries, Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, consulting foresters, or the Alabama Forest Commission.

The majority of the forest landowners expressed a need for technical assistance and a willingness to participate in continuing education programs to improve their knowledge and skills in forest management and marketing. Most needed technical assistance is forest regeneration including site preparation and tree planting. Fourteen percent of the landowners indicated that they also needed assistance with forest management plan design, timber marketing/sale, and livestock grazing. Other needed technical assistance included fire prevention, wildlife management, and disease control.

Conclusions and Discussion

A significant portion of the NIP forests in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, is owned or managed by minority forest landowners. These landowners have diverse ownership objectives ranging from timber production, recreational uses, and livestock grazing to resource conservation. However, these forestlands have not significantly contributed to the landowners' household income. The main constraints faced by these landowners are lack of capital and the knowledge of forest management and marketing.

These results draw attention to the need for establishing a new program or/and enhancing current programs aimed at assisting limited-resource minority forest landowners in applying sustainable forest management practices. First, there is a need to let these landowners be aware of the potential income and other benefits that can be derived from their forestland. Many of these landowners do not fully realize what their forests can do for them. Second, technical assistance to these landowners is necessary and critical. Many of the landowners have very limited knowledge and skills in forest management and selling timber.

Sustainable management of NIP forests is also in the interest of the public. This is because positives or nega-

Table 6. Major constraints in forest management and utilization for the minority forestland owners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Constraint	Percent of landowners
Capital	44
Labor	40
Knowledge of forest management	38
Knowledge of forest marketing	29

Table 7. Technical assistance received and needed by the minority forest landowners in Macon and Bullock counties, Alabama, 1994.

Technical assistance	Percent of landowners
Landowners who received technical assistance in the past	67
The most needed technical assistance	
Regeneration	29
Management plan design	14
Timber marketing/sale	14
Livestock grazing	14
Fire prevention/protection	10
Wildlife management	10
Disease control	6

tives generated by forest management transcend the ownership of the land. Therefore, it is essential to provide technical assistance to the limited-resource minority forest landowners to ensure the efficient and sustainable management of their forest resources. Governments, universities, forest industries, and consulting foresters should all have a role to play in assisting these landowners.

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