

RECOMMENDATIONS

Survey findings point to **significant changes** in family forest ownership and management **over the coming decade**. Anticipating turnover in ownership and changes in management priorities can help local governments and agencies forecast tax revenue, plan for wildfire and emergency services, identify investment opportunities, and craft landowner assistance programs to match family forest owners' needs. The following recommendations, based on these findings, can help prioritize actions:

- **Build on networks** among trusted landowners, their families, and neighbors to share experiences. This likely will increase the impact of assistance programming. Using only agency foresters to convey information may limit the number of landowners

reached and impact on forest management decisions.

- Design programs that **target improvement to forest health**. Given owners' reasons for owning forests and their past and planned actions, such programs are likely to be successful.
- **Pursue traditional communication methods**, which will remain important to reach the target forest management audience effectively.
- Target programming to audiences with less experience managing family forests. The aging population of family forest owners means a sizable amount of land may transfer ownership in coming years. New forest owners may not have forest management training or practice.

ABOUT THE STUDY

These results are based on data from a mail survey conducted from October to December, 2016 by University of Idaho's **Social Science Research Unit** in conjunction with the **Policy Analysis Group**. Primary funding was provided by the **Idaho Department of Lands**. Additional funding was provided by **University of Idaho Extension** and the James A. & Louise **McClure Center** for Public Policy Research.

A stratified random sample was used to ensure overall coverage of family forest owners. The sampling frame was constructed from Idaho Department of Lands records of forest land ownership.

Forest ownerships of less than 5 acres and greater than 5,000 acres were removed, as well as those with military, international, or incomplete addresses. The population from which the sample was drawn included approximately 36,000 family forest owners across four regions based on boundaries used by the Idaho Tax Commission for valuing forest land and stumpage. Each owner was identified as being a part of one of four size categories (5-49 acres, 50-100 acres, 101-250 acres, or 251-5,000 acres). The final sample included 2,869 family forest owners. A total of 903 usable survey responses were received, with a final weighted response rate of 36%.



ABOUT THE POLICY ANALYSIS GROUP

The Policy Analysis Group is administered by the College of Natural Resources. Sign up for the e-newsletter to be the first to know about current research and upcoming projects by emailing pag@uidaho.edu.

View Policy Analysis Group publications and research at uidaho.edu/cnr/pag



ABOUT THE McCLURE CENTER

Inspired by Senator McClure's legacy, the University of Idaho's James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research conducts nonpartisan research, informs public dialog, and engages students in learning about public policy making. To join the mailing list, visit www.uidaho.edu/mcclurecenter and click on "Stay Connected".

View the full series of *Idaho at a Glance* policy briefs at www.uidaho.edu/IdahoataGlance



University of Idaho
714 W. State Street
Boise, ID 83702



University of Idaho
McClure Center for
Public Policy Research



IDAHO AT A GLANCE

Idaho Family Forest Owners

April 2018, Vol. 9. No.1

Authors: Dennis R. Becker, Ph.D.¹; Philip S. Cook, M.S.²

HIGHLIGHTS

From the densely forested Bitterroot Mountains of northern Idaho to the Ponderosa pines of central Idaho's river canyons to the woodlands of the Lemhi and Caribou mountain ranges of southeastern Idaho, family forests contribute to Idaho's beauty, ecology, economy, and culture. How owners manage their forests and whether they convert forests to other uses is of significant public interest.

In 2016, the **University of Idaho's Policy Analysis Group**³ conducted a study of family forest landowners to understand management trends and behaviors on the

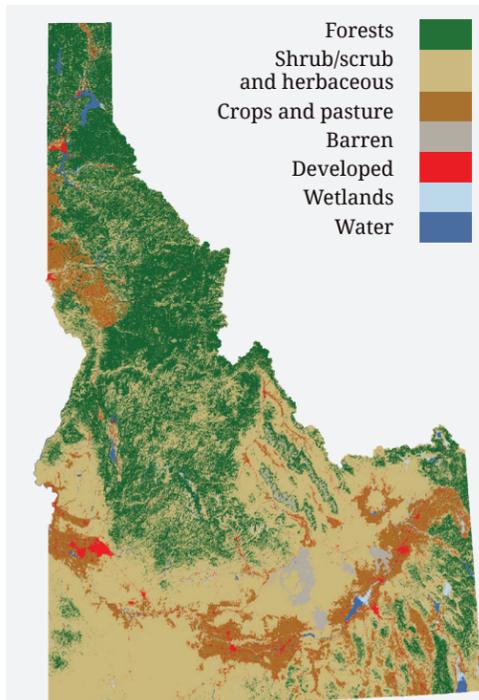
1.7 million acres of nonindustrial private forests throughout Idaho. Family forests are owned by families, individuals, trusts, estates, family partnerships, and other unincorporated groups of individuals. Family forests provide **numerous benefits including timber for wood products, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and clean water**.

DEMOGRAPHICS. The average age of Idaho's family forest owners is **64 years old**, and 26% of all family forest acres are owned by someone at least 75 years old. Family forest owners are more likely white (98%), educated (58% with at least a college degree), and wealthier (26% with household income more than \$100,000) than average for Idahoans.

LAND MANAGEMENT. Family forest owners in Idaho are active managers of their land. They are **more likely** than other family forest owners across the United States to **engage in active management**. Forestry assistance programs that target improvements to forest health are likely to resonate with family forest owners.

INFORMATION SOURCES. Since owners rely heavily on family members and friends in decision-making about their forests, relying only on agency foresters to convey information may limit the number of landowners reached and decision-making impact.

LAND TRANSFER. Sale or transfer of ownership **will affect a significant portion** of Idaho's family forests in the near future. This may mean assistance programs will need to target audiences with less experience managing forests.



¹Director, Policy Analysis Group; Professor, Department of Natural Resources and Society, College of Natural Resources.

²Principal Researcher, Policy Analysis Group.

³The University of Idaho's Policy Analysis Group was established by the Idaho Legislature in 1989 to provide timely, scientific, and objective data analysis on the impacts of natural resource proposals of interest to the people of Idaho.

BACKGROUND

In a 2016 study, the **Policy Analysis Group** at the University of Idaho surveyed family forest owners in Idaho to better understand their management decisions and preferences. This information is informing decisions about public forestry assistance programs and potentially to guide private decisions about investments in forests.

Idaho forests are owned by a variety of public and private entities. For this study, **family forests** were identified as privately-owned forested lands between 5 and 5,000 acres and subject to fire protection assessment under the Idaho Forestry Act (Title 38, Chapter 1, Idaho Code). Other private forests include those owned by forest industry organizations that also own and operate wood-processing facilities, and those owned by companies such as real estate investment trusts (REITs) or timber investment management organizations (TIMOs) that do not own wood-processing facilities.

In Idaho,

- Approximately **36,000 family forest owners** own 1.7 million acres, or **8% of all forest land**.
- Family forests account for **56%** of all privately owned forest land.

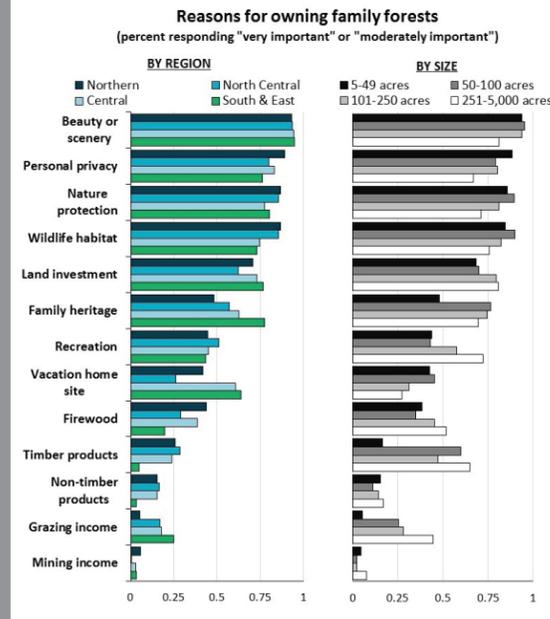
Region	Size	Percent of Idaho's 36,000 owners	Percent of Idaho's 1.7 million acres
Northern	5-49 acres	57%	16%
	50-100 acres	4%	6%
	101-250 acres	2%	8%
	251-5,000 acres	1%	14%
North Central	5-49 acres	14%	5%
	50-100 acres	2%	4%
	101-250 acres	2%	7%
Central	251-5,000 acres	1%	15%
	5-49 acres	7%	2%
	50-100 acres	<1%	1%
South & East	101-250 acres	<1%	2%
	251-5,000 acres	<1%	7%
	5-49 acres	5%	1%
South & East	50-100 acres	<1%	1%
	101-250 acres	<1%	2%
	251-5,000 acres	<1%	8%
TOTAL		100%	100%

REASONS FOR OWNING FAMILY FORESTS

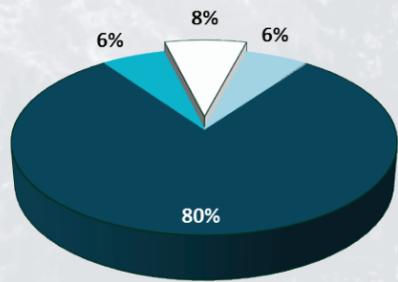
While families own forests for many reasons, most important are **beauty or scenery, personal privacy, nature protection, and wildlife habitat**. Least important are non-timber products, grazing income, and mining income. By region, owners in the Central and South & East regions indicate higher importance for their forests as a vacation home site. Owners in the Northern region indicate less importance for grazing income. By forest size, owners with the smallest family forests indicate less importance for family heritage and timber products. In addition, as forest acreage increases, owners are more likely to place high importance on grazing income and less likely to place high importance on personal privacy.

Family forests contribute to Idaho's beauty, ecology, economy, and culture. Collectively, family forest owners' decisions enhance or degrade the landscape. **How owners manage their forests and whether they convert forests to other uses is of significant public interest.** Forest management impacts ecological health, wildlife habitat, susceptibility to pests and wildfire, and water quality.

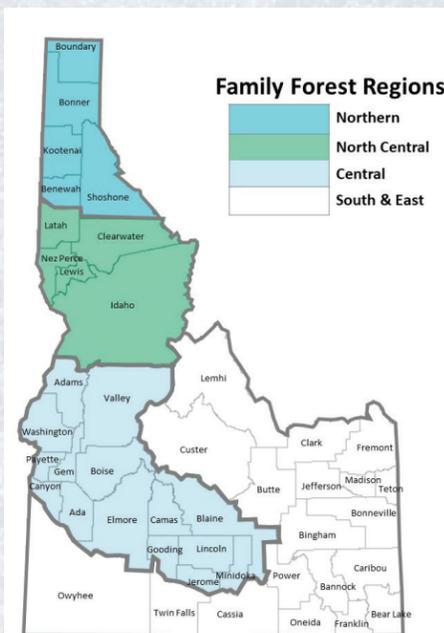
The consequences of **family forest owners' decisions also extend to businesses and governments.** The forest products industry depends on timber harvests from family forests for a portion of their wood supply, county governments depend in part on yield taxes from timber harvests on family forests, and the income and jobs family forests provide contribute to the economies of many communities. Family forests matter.



Idaho Forest Ownership



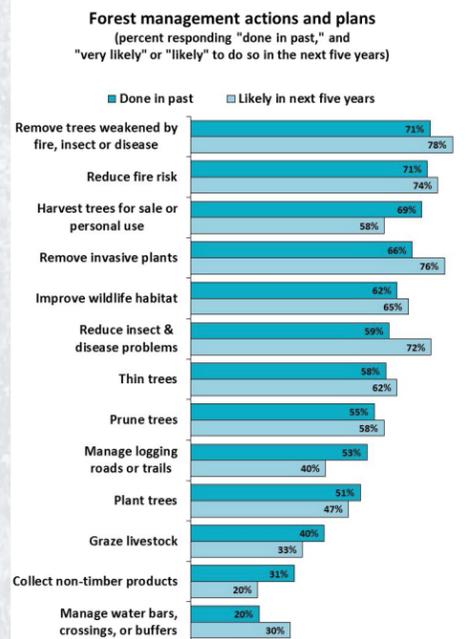
- Family forests (1.7 million acres)
- State forests (1.2 million acres)
- Federal forests (17.1 million acres)
- Other private forests (1.3 million acres)



LANDOWNER ACTIONS

Concern exists that as land is sold or passed to heirs, the level of activity and investment in family forests will change. **Less active management** could lead to **increased fuels buildup and greater wildfire risk, delayed yield tax revenues** for counties from timber harvests, and **conversion of forests to non-forest uses**. Development changes the nature of rural landscapes.

The survey included several questions about family forest owners' management actions, barriers to action, and types of technical assistance needed. We compared this information to forest owner age, whether they lived on or near the property, and forest acreage.



Approximately 91% of survey respondents have undertaken at least one management action on their land in the past. This **high level of active engagement** is contrary to findings about family forest owners in most other parts of the country (see National Woodland Owner Survey, www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos). Family forest owners' past management actions varied, but most often included removing trees weakened by fire, insects, or disease; reducing wildfire risk; harvesting trees for sale or personal use; removing invasive plants; improving wildlife habitat; and reducing insect or disease problems. Additional survey findings include:

- **Resident owners**, who live on or within one mile of their property, are **more likely** than non-resident owners to **harvest trees** for sale or personal use; **engage in forest improvement** actions such as planting, thinning, or pruning trees; **remove trees** weakened by fire, insects, or diseases; and **reduce the threat of insects or diseases**.
- **Owners who have commercially harvested timber, removed invasive species, or managed water bars, crossings, or buffers** are on average **older** than those who have not.
- **Owners who have commercially harvested timber** are more likely to own **larger forests** (more than 50 acres) and to be located in the Northern and North Central regions of Idaho.
- **Family forest owners who have participated in the University of Idaho Extension Forestry Short Course** are significantly more likely to have **engaged in all forest management actions**, except livestock grazing.

If past actions are an indicator of future intent, then the majority of family forest owners in Idaho will actively engage in forest management.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

When asked about management actions they are likely to initiate in the **next five years**, almost **90% of family forest owners** are likely or very likely to undertake at least one action. These include **removing trees** weakened by fire, insects, or disease; **removing invasive plants**; **reducing wildfire risk**; and **reducing insects** or disease problems. Future plans vary as follows:

- **Owners with larger forests** are more likely in the future to graze livestock, manage logging roads or trails, and manage water bars, crossings, or buffers.
- **Resident owners** indicate greater future likelihood to reduce wildfire risk, remove invasive plants, reduce insect and disease problems, and graze livestock.
- **University of Idaho Extension Forestry Short Course** participants are more likely to engage in all management actions.

When asked about management plans for their family forest, **28% of owners have a written management plan**. More forest owners had management plans in the Northern (38%) and Central (20%) regions compared to the North Central (11%) and South & East (3%) regions. Notably, 30% of plans are at least 20 years old and may need updating.

Approximately **33% of family forest acres** are owned by someone who plans to **sell or transfer** some or all of their forest land in the next five years. Of those lands, approximately 76% may be sold to non-family members.

Numerous factors may limit family forest owners' decisions about forest management. Cost (62%), forest health conditions (52%), access to correct tools or equipment (49%), and ability to do the work themselves (49%) are most often cited as very or moderately limiting. A family forest owner's age is significantly related to ability to do work themselves, certainty about actions to take, and ability to find the right contractor.

INFORMATION SOURCES FOR FOREST MANAGEMENT

Family forest owners are faced with numerous management decisions. Knowing where to obtain information, who to trust, and the manner in which owners prefer to receive information can facilitate efficient delivery of forest management assistance.

This survey revealed that **personal relationships matter most in decision-making**. Spouses, other family members, and friends are the most influential and consulted most often in owners' decisions. Private consulting foresters, other forest owners, loggers, and public agency foresters also are important sources, but much less so. Private consulting foresters and loggers are used much less in the Central and South & East regions of the state; likely fewer work in those regions.

Approximately **55% of family forest acres** are owned by someone who has **received forest management information** from the Idaho Department of Lands, University of Idaho Extension, or the U.S. Forest Service. The majority of family forest owners prefer to receive information about forestry programs and activities through the mail (61%), with electronic media such as email (31%), websites (21%), and TV or radio (13%) much less preferred. Among current owners, social media is the least used source of information for decision-making and the least-preferred method of receiving information about forestry programs (3%).

Sources of information for forest management decisions

(source used in the past five years)

