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# An Evaluation of the NY Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program:

## *Survey of Woodland Owners Visited by a NY Master Forest Owner Volunteer*



**June 2009**

**HDRU Series No. 09-7**

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**TO CITE THIS REPORT:**

Broussard Allred, S., Goff, G., Wetzel, L., and M. Luo. 2009. *An Evaluation of the NY Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program: Survey of Woodland Owners Visited by a NY Master Forest Owner Volunteer*. Cornell University Human Dimensions Research Unit, HDRU Series No. 09-7, June 2009, 39p.

## Executive Summary

The New York Master Forest Owner (MFO) Volunteer Program trains woodland owners in the principles of forest stewardship and helps them to better manage their own woodlands. The program also encourages MFO Volunteers to motivate other woodland owners to become more actively involved in their forestland. The purpose of the following study was to determine the impacts associated with the MFO program, especially in building landowner communication networks and influencing management decisions. How do owners rate their experiences with MFO volunteers? Did woodland owners make any decisions based on the MFO on-site visit? Would they recommend the program to others? Questions were also posed concerning the nature of the forestland on the owners' properties, as well as the basic attitudes of the owners towards owning their woodland.

A pre-tested mail survey with 25 questions was developed covering topics of ownership motivations, the nature of the peer interaction, information exchanged, behavior that resulted from the peer interaction, attitudes about landowner cooperation and communication, and demographics. In May of 2008, the survey was mailed to 584 forestland owners throughout New York State. The sample for the survey was obtained from on-site visit reports submitted by MFO volunteers to Gary Goff, Director of the New York MFO/COVERTS Program. The sample represents all on-site visits reported to the Director over the years 1999-2008. On-site visits consist of discussion-oriented "woodswalks" where the MFO Volunteer goes to another woodland owner's property or vice versa. Master Forest Owner Volunteers are requested to send the Program Director a report containing the name and address of the landowner for all the on-site visits they conduct. Of the 584 surveys mailed, 270 returned a completed survey, 11 returned surveys that were unusable, and 102 surveys were undeliverable, for an overall response rate of 56%.

Woodland owners were asked to rate the quality of their interactions with MFO Volunteers. A majority of forest owners found these interactions enjoyable (62%) and found the MFO to be credible (66%) and worthy of recommendation to other forest owners (68%). Conversations most frequently centered on the characteristics of the owner's property (87%), the owner's goals/reasons for owning the forestland (87%), forest stewardship (64%), and the benefits of being a professional forester (61%). MFO Volunteers had the greatest influence on forest owners in: setting goals and priorities for forest management on their land (70%), thinning forest stands (64%), consulting with a professional forester (61%), and seeking out more information on forestry (57%). In addition, 31% of owners found their interactions with MFO Volunteers economically beneficial, either through timber sales, non-timber forest products (average gain of \$5,200), or enrollment in a tax-saving program (average savings of \$2,500). Owners made an average of an additional \$8,825 by deciding to do a timber sale, as well as an average of \$9,778 by selling timber for more than they might have prior to their conversations with volunteers. MFO Volunteers had the least significant influence on owner's decisions concerning: hunting and fishing (65%), recreating own forestland (63%), building and maintaining trails or access to roads (56%), and firewood harvesting (54%). These were activities in which many were already engaged.

The respondents were also asked to list any organizations from which they could receive additional forestry-related information. The two most frequent responses were the New York Forest Owners' Association (NYFOA) (53%) and the Nature Conservancy (38%). The landowners were also asked how they were referred to the Master Forest Owner Program. Fifty-six percent of respondents learned of the MFO Program through either the New York Forest Owners Association or a Cornell University Cooperative Extension (CCE) County Educator. When asked to what extent they communicated with other woodland owners in their community, 64% percent responded that they interact with other forest owners in their community regarding forestry matters, though most contact is casual. Twenty-three percent of owners already cooperate in watching for trespassers and another 23% would be very likely to do so. Other common cooperative activities were allowing access for recreation or hunting. However, owners would be least likely to cooperate in leasing land for hunting and fishing (82%).

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## Introduction and Methods

The New York Master Forest Owner (MFO) Volunteer program was instituted in 1991 with the goal of training woodland owners in the principles of forest stewardship to better equip them to manage their own woodlands and also to motivate other woodland owners to become actively involved in their forestland (Goff and Muth 2006). A four-day (~40 hour) training is required to become a certified NY MFO Volunteer. The initial training covers topics of silviculture, wildlife management, forest economics, ecology, and forestry related programs, agencies, and organizations. Refresher workshops are offered throughout the year for continuing education. Requirements to become and maintain Master Forest Owner Volunteer certification include 1) a forest visit from a current MFO Volunteer prior to attending the training, 2) a visit by the candidate to his/her Cornell Cooperative Extension County Association Educator, 3) attendance at the 4-day training, 4) conducting on-site visits with at least 5 forest owners following training, and 5) aiding in program review and evaluation by keeping and submitting records of activities related to being a Master Forest Owner Volunteer.

The mechanisms by which MFO Volunteers fulfill the goals of the program are by conducting on-site visits with other forest owners, collaborating with agencies and organizations on forestry educational events, and preparing forestry articles for media outlets. Thus the program relies on peer learning strategies as well as landowner networks in achieving program goals. There are currently 148 *active* MFO volunteers in New York State that report about 150 annual visits to forest owners that collectively own over 9,000 acres. Additionally, MFOs participate in or lead approximately 300-350 outreach activities yearly that reach audiences in the thousands. The numbers reached are likely larger as the reporting rates of MFOs for site visits and educational activities is approximately 50% (Goff 2008). The last comprehensive survey of landowners visited by an MFO was conducted in 1997 (Broderick et al. 1999).

To determine the impacts associated with the MFO Volunteer Program, we conducted a mail survey of forest landowners that had past on-site visits with MFO Volunteers. The survey sought to investigate the role of the MFO Program in building landowner communication and

information networks as well as influencing behavioral decisions. A twelve-page survey was designed with 25 questions, including demographics, ownership motivations, communication with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer, the impact of contact with a MFO, general forestry topics, and landowners and organizations. A pre-test focus group was held on April 2, 2008 in order to obtain feedback on the content and layout of the survey and the accompanying cover letters prior to survey mailing (Appendix A). The six participants in the focus group represented the forestry community through their affiliation as Master Forest Owner Volunteers. The resulting insights prompted clarifications in the wording and format of questions as well as changes in the tone of the cover letter (Appendix A).

The sample for the survey was obtained from on-site visit reports submitted by MFO volunteers to Gary Goff, Director of the New York MFO/COVERTS Program. The sample represents all on-site visits reported to the Director over the years 1999-2008. On-site visits consist of “woodswalks” where the MFO Volunteer goes to another woodland owner’s property or vice versa. Master Forest Owner Volunteers are requested to send the Program Director a report containing the name and address of the landowner for all the on-site visits they conduct. While compliance with this program requirement is not 100%, many MFOs do indeed complete this reporting. The final survey was sent to 584 forestland owners throughout New York state in a series of four mailings using the Tailored Design Method (Dillman 2008): (1) an advance notice postcard (May 5, 2008), (2) a survey and cover letter (May 12, 2008), (3) a reminder/thank you postcard (May 23, 2008), and (4) a second copy of the survey and cover letter to the remaining non-respondents (May 30, 2008) (Appendix B). Of the 584 owners contacted, 270 returned a completed survey, 11 returned surveys that were unusable, and 102 had undeliverable surveys, for an overall response rate of 56%.

## Characteristics and Attitudes of Respondents

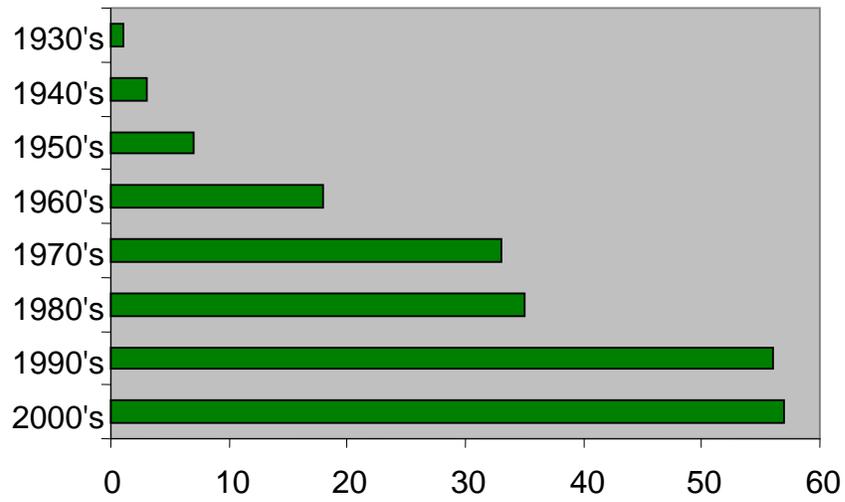
The survey assessed a number of demographic traits that are outlined in Table 1. The large majority of respondents were males (80.3%, n=175) between the ages of 55 and 64 (34.2%, n=75), however a number of respondents were 45 to 54 years old (26%) or 65 to 74 years old (17.4%). When asked the relationship of their woodlot to their residences, 159 forestland owners indicated that they own their woodlot as part of their primary home, 73 indicated that their woodland is property separate from their home, 46 indicated that it is part of their farm or ranch, and 32 indicated that their woodlot is part of a vacation home (categories were not mutually exclusive). Forestland owners have acquired their land at many different points in time, ranging from as early as 1938 to as recent as 2007. The mean year that respondents acquired their land was 1987 with a standard deviation of 15.43 years (n=210); the full range of responses is presented in Figure 1. Respondents own a mean total acreage of 111.9 acres (std. dev=215.77, n=219) with a mean wooded acreage of 67.32 acres (std. dev=127.43, n=214). The range of the owned acres of land and wooded land is examined in more detail in Figures 2 and 3, respectively.

Almost three-quarters (69.4%, n=150) of the survey respondents live on or within one mile of their forested property (Table 1). Most respondents indicated that other individuals are involved in their decision-making process for forestland use (71.9%, n=159)(Table 1). Among those 159 respondents who include others in their forestland decisions, 81.1% involve their spouse or partner and another 28.3% involve their children. Nearly half of the respondents (49.5%, n=109) reported that they had communicated with or participated in an event sponsored by a Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) County Association at least due in part to their contact with a MFO (Table 1).

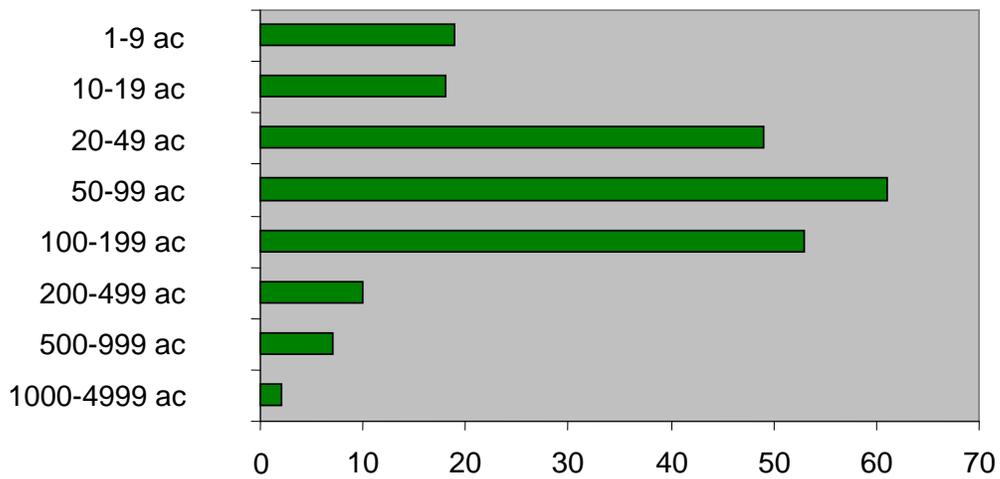
**Table 1.** Demographics of Respondents

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Male	175	80.3
Female	43	19.7
<hr/>		
Under 25 Yrs of Age	1	0.5
25-34 Yrs of Age	4	1.8
35-44 Yrs of Age	21	9.6
45-54 Yrs of Age	57	26.0
55-64 Yrs of Age	75	34.2
65-74 Yrs of Age	38	17.4
85 and Over Yrs of Age	3	1.4
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Live on/Within 1 Mile of Forestland	150	69.8
Do Not Live on/Within 1 Mile of Forestland	65	30.2
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Others Involved in Forestland Decisions	159	71.9
Others Not Involved in Forestland Decisions	62	28.1
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Spouse/Partner Involved	129	81.1
Children Involved	45	28.3
Other Relatives Involved	18	11.3
Parents Involved	6	3.8
Business Partners Involved	6	3.8
Friends/Neighbors Involved	9	5.7
Others Involved	6	3.8
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Have Participated in a CCE Event	109	49.5
Have Not Participated in a CCE Event	12	5.5
Don't Know	99	45.0

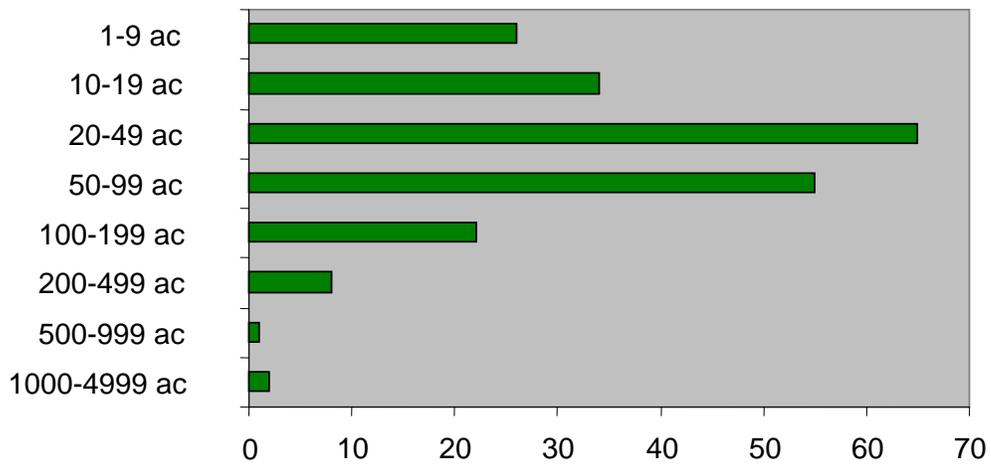
**Figure 1.** Year Land Acquired (n=210)



**Figure 2.** Total Acreage Owned (n=219)

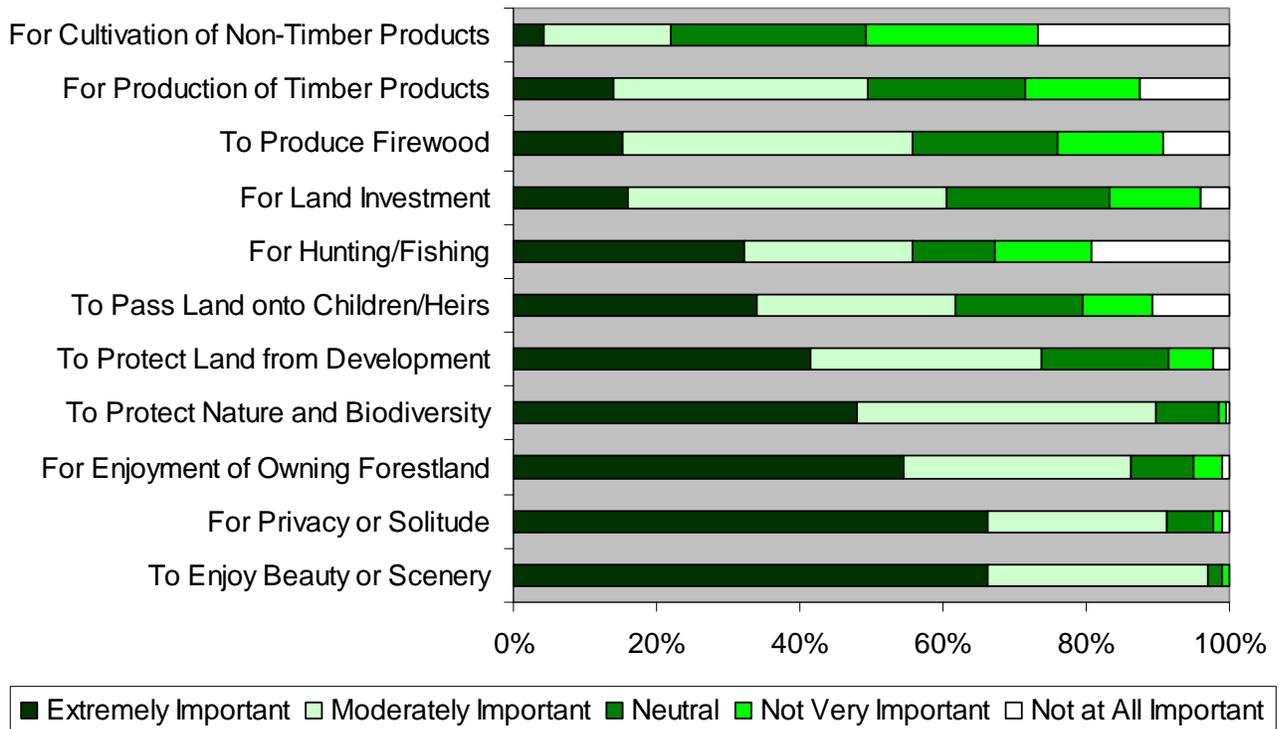


**Figure 3.** Wooded Acreage Owned (n=213)



Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of reasons for owning woodland. The enjoyment of beauty or scenery and the need for privacy or solitude appear to be the most significant motivations for owning woodland, with 66.3% and 66.2%, respectively, of our respondents indicating these reasons to be extremely important and only 2% and 8.7% ranking them at or below neutral (Figure 4). Around half of our respondents also find the sheer enjoyment of owning forestland (54.6%) and the protection of nature and biodiversity (48.1%) to be extremely important motives as well. The harvesting of various products from the forestland (firewood, timber, non-timber) seems to have least priority in the respondents' rationale for owning their land. Over 78% of our respondents rated the importance level at neutral or below for the cultivation of non-timber forest products, 50.4% for the production of timber products, and 44.3% for the production of firewood.

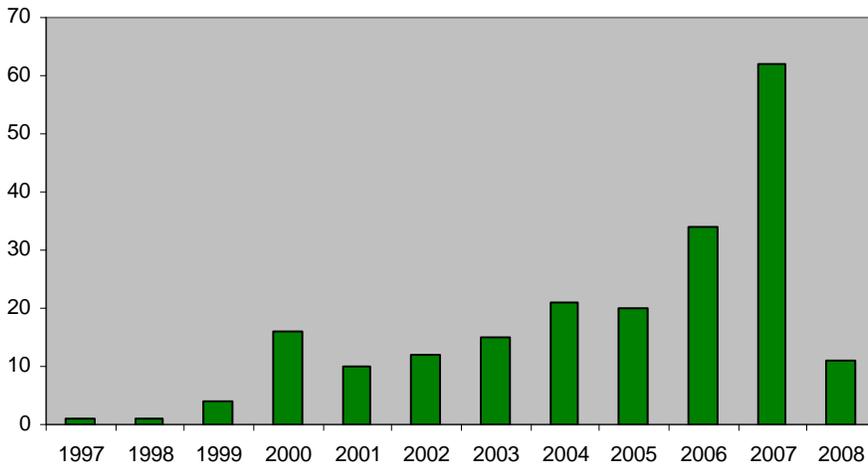
**Figure 4.** Woodland Ownership Motivations



## Communication with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer

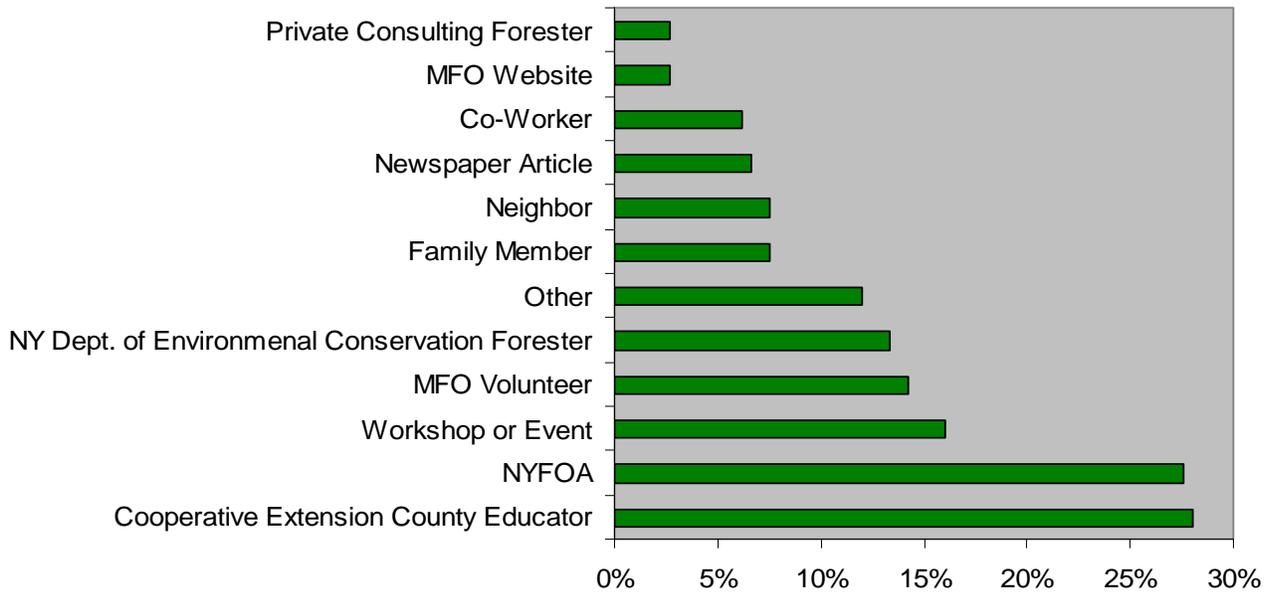
Given the aims of the study, a major focus of the survey was related to forestland owners' experience with the Master Forest Owner Volunteers. Most respondents (83.7%, n=221) indicated that they have had interaction with an MFO within the past eight years. The sample was asked to report every year in which there was such an experience with a MFO, the frequency results of which are depicted in Figure 5. Most owners have had a recent interaction with an MFO (14.1% (n=38) could not recall the year of interaction).

**Figure 5.** Year(s) of Interaction with MFO Volunteer



Forestland owners learned about the MFO Program from a wide array of sources (Figure 6). The most common sources of awareness are the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) (27.56%, n=62) and Cornell University Cooperative Extension (CCE) County Educators (28%). A relatively high percentage of respondents (12%) cited other resources for their knowledge of MFOs, including the radio, Catskill Forest Association, Farm Days literature, and agricultural fairs.

**Figure 6. Source of Awareness of MFO Program**



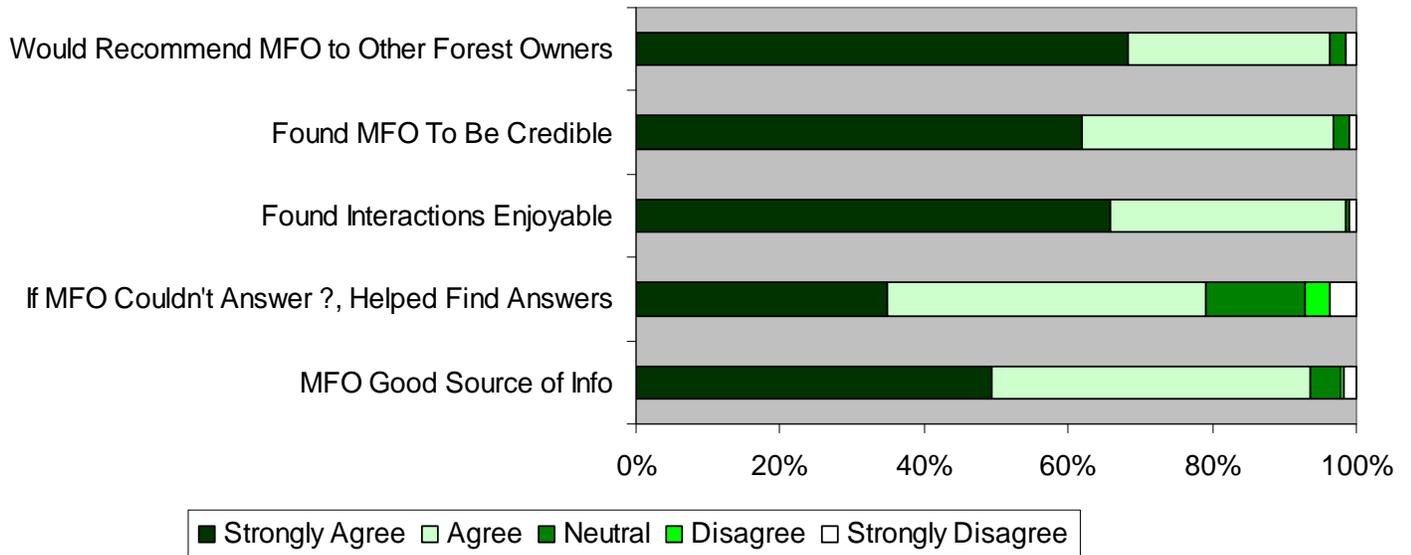
Almost all respondents (90.6%, n=203) received a visit from a MFO at their own property, the majority of which were single visits (83.7%, n=159) or two visits (12.1%). Woodland owners were also asked whether they had visited the wooded property of a MFO Volunteer. Only 12.1% (n=27) of the respondents have visited the forest of a MFO Volunteer either on a single occasion (61.5%, n=16) or for as many times as six visits (3.8%). Beyond in-person interaction, some forest owners also communicated with MFOs via phone (23.5%, n=8), email (17.6%), or through various training programs or classes (17.6%).

### **Experience with Master Forest Owner Volunteer**

In order to characterize the value of the woodland owners' experience with a MFO Volunteer, respondents were asked their level of agreement with statements describing their interaction. As Figure 7 demonstrates, most respondents had a very positive experience. Approximately two-thirds of the woodland owners strongly agreed that the MFO was worthy of recommendation to other forest owners (68.3%), that the MFO was credible (65.9%), and that the interactions were enjoyable (61.8%). The survey also asked respondents to indicate whether the MFO was able to connect them with others or relevant information if the MFO

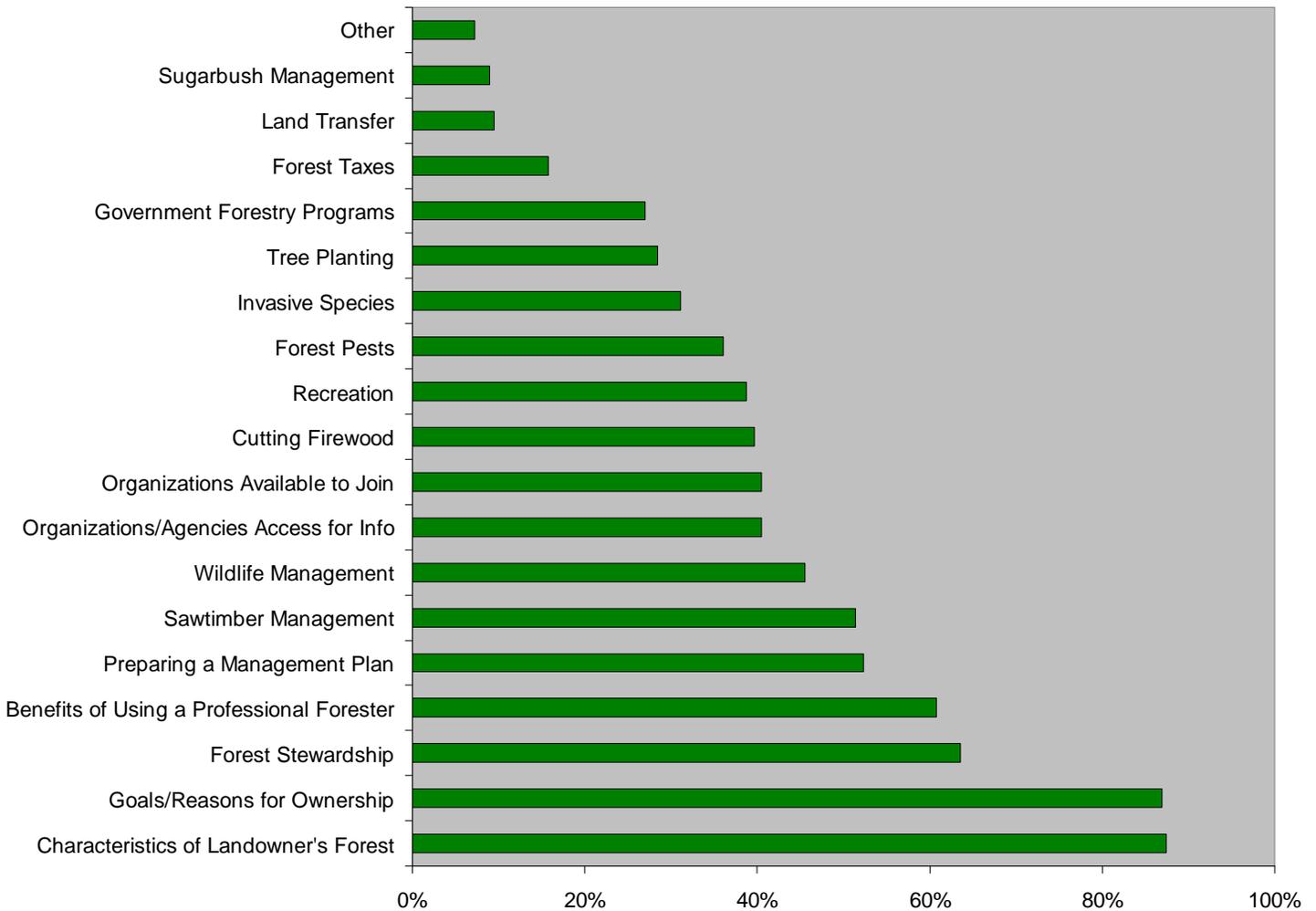
could not answer a question that they had; 34.8% strongly agreed and 44.3% agreed with that statement.

**Figure 7.** Characterization of Experience with MFO Volunteer



Landowners were asked to describe the subjects they discussed with the MFO Volunteer during the on-site visit. Respondents spoke with MFOs about a wide variety of subjects, ranging from government forestry programs to forestry organizations available to join, as depicted in Figure 8. The most popular topics of discussion include the characteristics of the respondents' property (87.4%, n=194), the respondents' goals or reasons for owning forestland (86.9%), forest stewardship (63.5%), and the benefits of using a professional forester (60.8%). Subjects that were not frequently discussed between landowners and MFOs were forest taxes (15.8%), land transfer (9.5%), or sugarbush management (9%). The "Other" category includes such topics of conversation as grapevine control (16.7%, n=2), property lines (8.3%), and the sale of particular trees (8.3%).

**Figure 8.** Topics of Discussion with MFO Volunteer



### **Impact of Communication with Master Forest Owner Volunteer**

To examine the impact of contact with a MFO on the woodland owners' forestry-related choices, respondents were asked to choose from a set of seven options each with distinct decisions and reasoning related to a series of actions. These seven options are comprised of:

- I do it now or did it in the past, at least in part, because of my contact with a MFO
- I plan on doing it, at least in part, because of my contact with a MFO
- I have decided not to do it, at least in part, because of my contact with a MFO
- I do it now or did it in the past but not because of my contact with a MFO
- I have decided not to do it but not because of my contact with a MFO
- Never thought or heard of it
- Not applicable

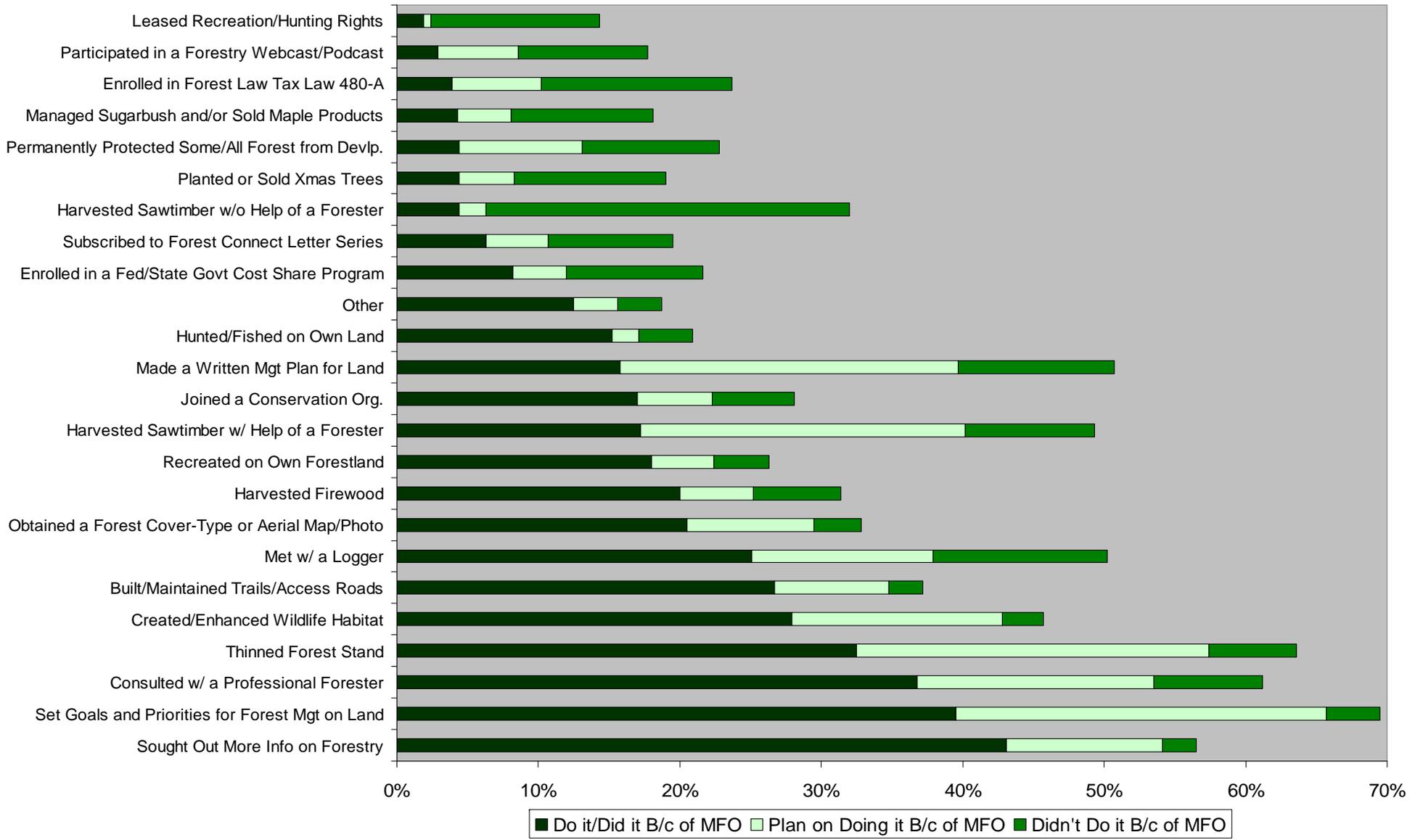
Figure 9 shows decisions that were influenced, at least in part, by an MFO interaction, while Figure 10 shows decisions made independently of any MFO Volunteer interaction.

Combining percentage across the first three categories, Master Forest Owner Volunteers have the greatest influence on forest owners setting goals and priorities for forest management on their land (69.5%, n=146), thinning their forest stands (63.6%, n=133), consulting with a professional forester (61.2%, n=128), and seeking out more information on forestry (56.5%, n=118). For management planning, 23.9% (n=50) indicate that they plan to develop a written management plan for their forest, but only 15.8% have followed through on that action.

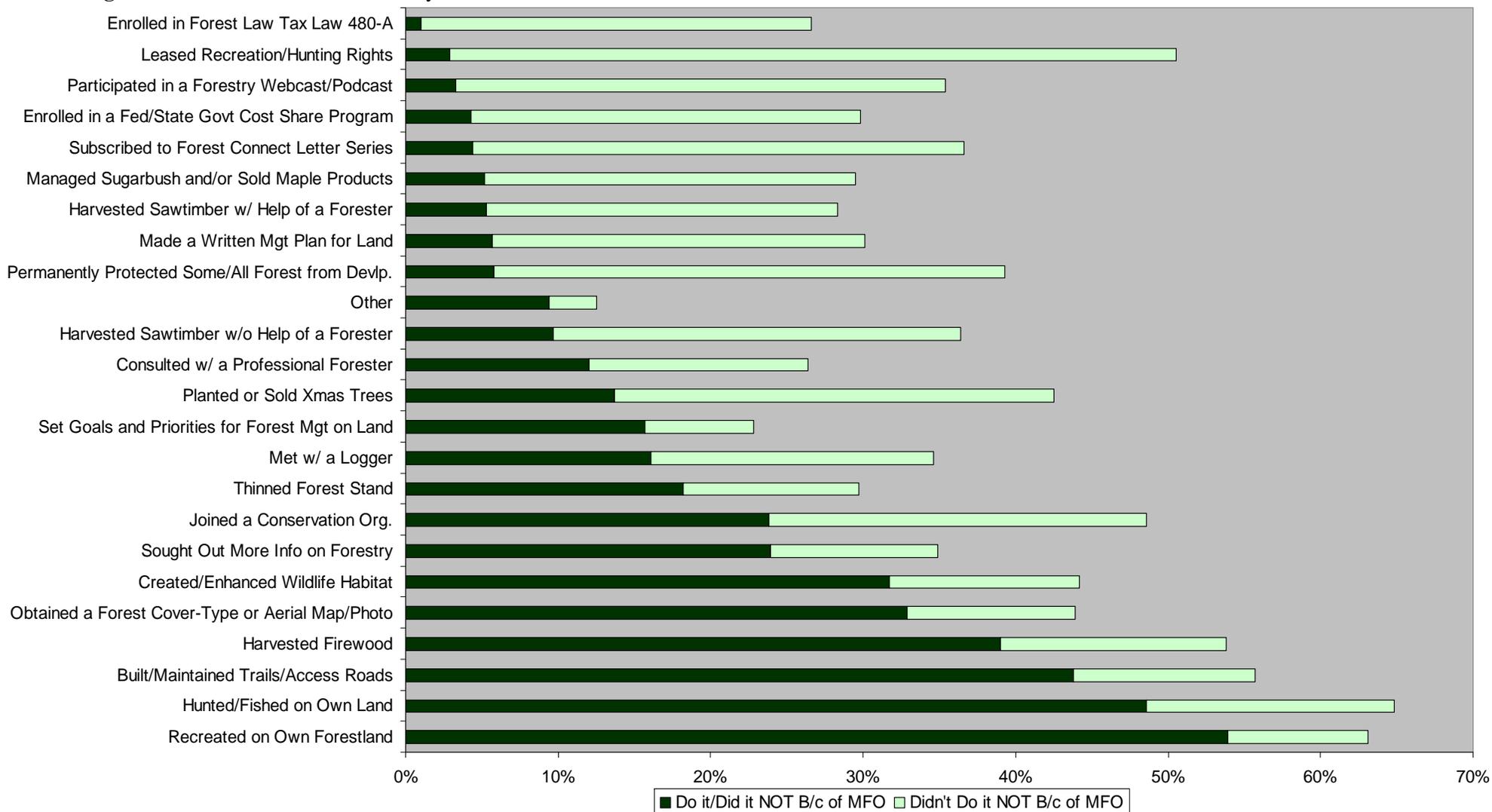
MFOs influence was less significant for respondents' decisions concerning hunting and fishing on their own land (64.8%, n=136), recreating on their own forestland (63.1%, n=130), building and maintaining trails or access to roads (55.7%, n=117), and harvesting firewood (53.8%, n=113) as shown by the large percentage of respondents acting independently (Figure 10). A high number of woodland owners indicated that they do not lease recreation or hunting rights (59.5%, n=125), mostly without the influence of a MFO (47.6%).

It is also worth noting that the highest percentages of respondents that answered "never thought or heard of it" were for the following forestry-related activities: enrolling in the NY Forest Tax Law 480-A (27.5%, n=57), enrolling in a federal or state government cost share program (26.9%, n=56), subscribing to the Forest Connect Letter series (18.5%, n=38), participating in a forestry webcast or podcast (14.8%, n=31), consulting with a public or private professional forester (14.4%, n=30), obtaining a forest cover type map or aerial photograph of forestland (13.3%, n=28), permanently protecting forestland through a conservation easement (10.7%, n=22), preparing a written management plan for their forestland (10.5%, n=22), and leasing recreation/hunting rights (6.2%, n=13). The unawareness levels for each of the other activities were less than 5%.

**Figure 9. Decisions Influenced by MFO Volunteer**



**Figure 10. Decisions Not Influenced by MFO Volunteer**



Interactions with MFOs have been economically beneficial for some woodland owners, from sales to program enrollments. These decisions as well as the amount of money respondents gained or saved over and above what would have been obtained without the involvement of a MFO, are outlined in Table 2. Approximately a third of the woodland owners (31.1%, n=64) indicated that they have benefited economically from their communication with a MFO. The greatest economic benefit has been derived through timber sales, selling non-timber forest products, and enrolling in a tax-saving program.

**Table 2.** Actions Taken with Influence of MFO

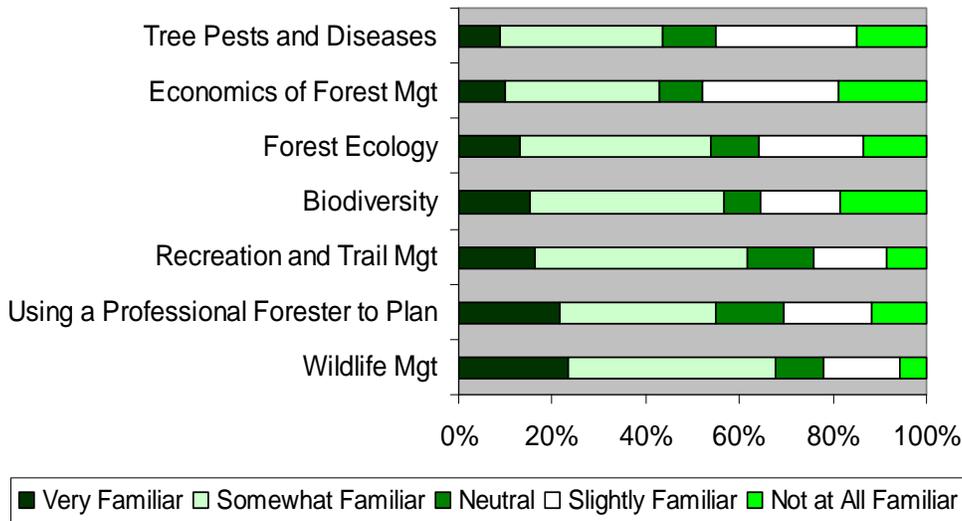
<b>Action</b>	<b>Yes (n)</b>	<b>No (n)</b>	<b>Mean Amount Gained/Saved (\$)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (\$)</b>
Benefited Economically from MFO Visit	64	142	n/a	n/a
Decided to Do Timber Sale	36	29	\$8,825.00	\$7,562.18
Decided to Sell Firewood	17	46	\$1,552.14	\$1,657.32
Sold Timber for More Than Might Have Gotten w/o MFO	25	32	\$9,777.78	\$8,482.01
Sold Non-Timber Forest Products	6	54	\$5,200.00	\$6,788.23
Enrolled in Tax Saving Program	8	54	\$2,500.00	\$2,121.32
Enrolled in Cost-Share Program	12	50	\$1,566.67	\$826.24
Made Wise Equipment Purchase	11	48	\$1,850.00	\$1,626.35
Leased Land for Hunting/Recreation	0	61	-	-
Received Payment for Maple Products	1	60	-	-
Other	19	5	-	-

### **Forestry Awareness**

Woodland owners surveyed have a diverse range of familiarity with pertinent forestry topics (Figure 11). The percent indicating “very familiar” was less than 20% for all topic areas except wildlife management. For wildlife management, 23.5% (n=213) are very familiar with wildlife management, 44.1% are somewhat familiar and only 5.6% are not at all familiar,

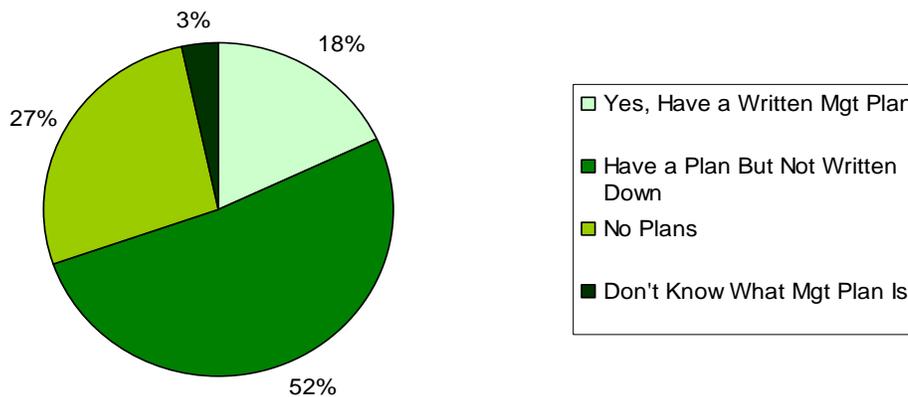
making this subject with the highest perceived level of familiarity among respondents. Respondents were generally somewhat familiar with most topics. In contrast, tree pests and diseases as well as the economics of forest management appear to be the most unfamiliar topics. Nearly 19% of respondents are not at all familiar with either of these subjects while only almost 10% are very familiar.

**Figure 11.** Level of Familiarity with Forestry Topics



Respondents were also asked about their forest management plans, the results of which are shown in Figure 12. Although more than a quarter (27.2%, n=59) of the respondents have no management plans, slightly more than half (51.6%) report having unwritten plans.

**Figure 12.** Management Plans of Woodland Owners

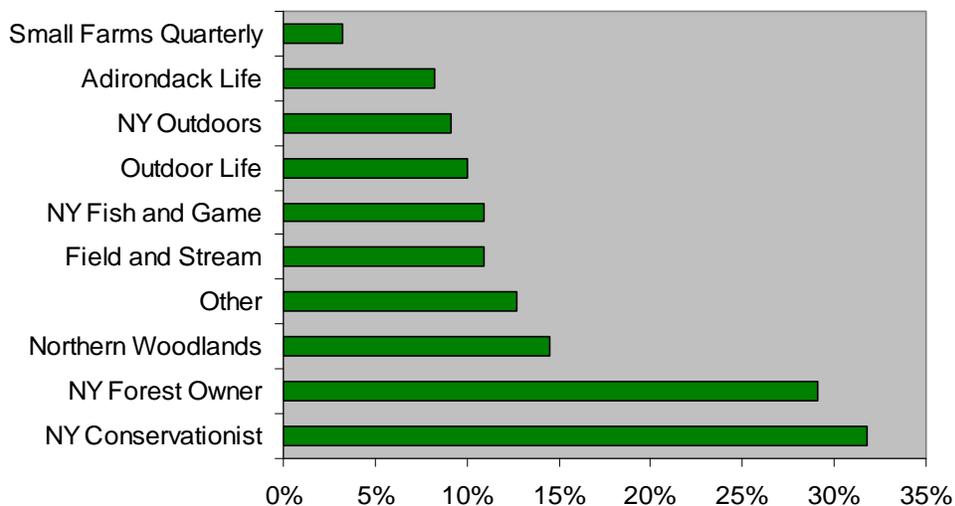


When questioned as to whether they were able to identify, by name, any professional foresters in their area, about half (48.6%, n=105) were able to provide the name of a professional forester that works in their area. Woodland owners who indicated that they did not know a forester working in their area (51.4%, n=111), were asked how they might go about finding one. Many respondents indicated that they could find a professional forester by contacting CCE or DEC (52.8%, n=20), NYFOA (11.1%), searching the internet (11.1%), or through a casual chance meeting in town (5.6%).

Respondents were asked to list conservation or environmental organizations that they were aware of from which they could receive forestry related information. The two most common responses were the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) (54.3%, n=63) and the Nature Conservancy (27.6%). There were 21 other organizations that received only a single or a few mentions.

A large majority of respondents do not subscribe to conservation publications, as demonstrated in Figure 13. The most popular publication subscriptions among our respondents are *New York Conservationist* (31.8%, n=70) and *New York Forest Owner* (29.1%). *Small Farms Quarterly* has the least amount of subscribers with only 3.2% of respondents. Other subscriptions listed by landowners outside of the given choices include *Nature Conservancy* (14.3%, n=4), *Florida Trail Newsletter* (10.7%), and *New York Outdoor News* (7.1%).

**Figure 13.** Publication Subscriptions

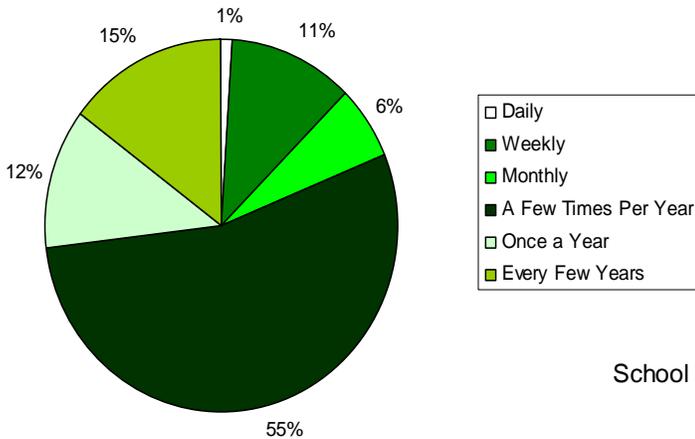


## Landowners Cooperation and Communication

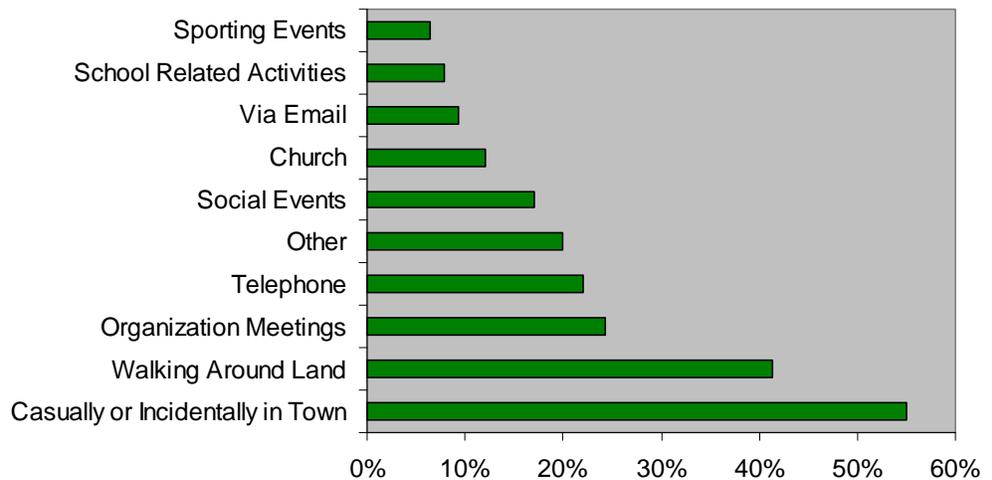
This section focuses on a series of questions about peer-to-peer landowner cooperation and communication. These questions were not specific to the MFO program but were focused on broader interactions among woodland owners in the community. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63.6%, n=140) indicated that they interact with other forest owners in their town or community regarding forestry matters, reflecting a sense of community among woodland owners. This communication is of a varying frequency and capacity. The largest percentage of respondents (54.2%, n=52) communicate with fellow woodland owners a few times per year (Figure 14).

As shown in Figure 15, the most frequent contexts for communication with other forest landowners are casually or incidentally in town (55%, n=77), while walking around their land (41.4%), or at organization meetings (24.3%, n=34). A notably high percentage of respondents (20%, n=28) indicated “other” circumstances for interaction with other woodland owners, such as being neighbors (14.8%, n=4), for work or business (14.8%), or attending various seminars or workshops (11.1%).

**Figure 14. Frequency of Interaction with Area Forest Owners**

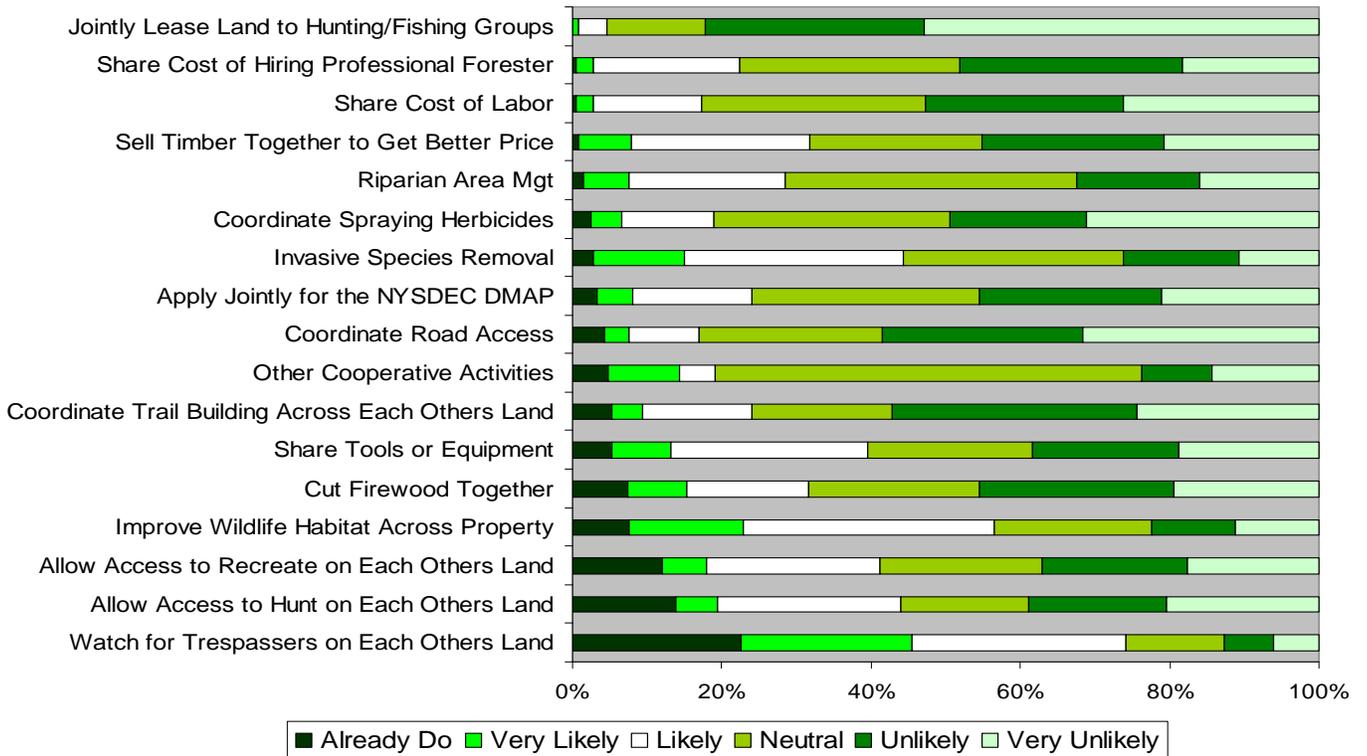


**Figure 15. Context of Interaction with Forest Landowners**



Woodland owners were asked to rate the likeliness that they would cooperate with other landowners in their community on forestry-related activities. The results are shown in Figure 16. Respondents are the least willing to jointly lease land with their neighbors to hunting or fishing groups, with 52.8% (n=113) describing it as very unlikely and 29.4% as unlikely. In contrast, landowners are extremely apt to watch for trespassers on each other's land, or allowing for hunting or recreation access. Nearly a quarter indicated that they already do (22.5%, n=48) and another quarter described this as very likely (23%). Improving wildlife habitat and invasive species removal were popular "likely" cooperative activities.

**Figure 16.** Likeliness of Cooperation on Activities with Forest Owners in Community



## Summary and Conclusions

- Most respondents were males (80%) and own an average of 112 total acres and 67 wooded acres, and are 45-64 years of age.
- The most important ownership motivations are the enjoyment of beauty or scenery (66%) and the need for privacy or solitude (66%).
- More than half own their woodlot as part of their primary home (51%) and live on or within 1 mile of their forestland (70%).
- Most respondents learned about the MFO Program through the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) (28%) and Cornell University Cooperative Extension (CCE) (28%).
- 91% have received a visit from MFO on their property and 12% have visited the forest of a MFO Volunteer.
- Respondents had a very positive experience with the MFO indicating that they would recommend the MFO to other forest owners, that they found the interaction to be enjoyable, the MFO to be credible, and a good source of information.
- The most popular topics of discussion between MFO Volunteers and landowners were the characteristics of the respondents' property (87%), the respondents' goals or reasons for owning forestland (87%), and forest stewardship (64%), and the benefits of using a professional forester (61%).
- MFOs influenced landowners, particularly in setting goals for their woodland (70%), conducting timber stand improvement (64%), consulting with a professional forester (61%), and seeking out information and resources for forestry management (61%).
- 31% of woodland owners indicated that they benefited economically from advice given during the MFO on-site visit, most commonly by selling timber for more money than might have gotten otherwise.
- The most familiar topic among woodland owners was wildlife management; they were least familiar with tree pest and diseases and the economics of forest management.
- About half have an unwritten management plan (52%), 18% have written management plans, and about a quarter have no management plan (27%).
- Nearly half of woodland owners were able to name a forester in their area by name.
- For respondents they were most familiar with the following conservation organizations that provide forestry related information: NYFOA (54%) and The Nature Conservancy (28%).
- Close to 2/3 (64%) interact with other forest owners in their community regarding forestry matters about a few times per year (54%) casually/incidentally around town or while walking around their land.
- While a majority of respondents do not subscribe to conservation publications, the publication with the highest subscription rates for respondents were *New York Conservationist* (32%) and *New York Forest Owner* (29%).
- While woodland owners are not likely to cooperate with neighboring forest owners on formal agreements such as jointly leasing land to hunting or fishing groups or conducting a coordinated timber harvest, they are much more likely to assist other woodland owners in their community in a casual or informal manner such as watching for trespassers on each other's land and allowing access for recreation and hunting.

## References

Broderick, S., F. Milici, L. Snyder, G. Goff, and J. Finley. 1999. Reaching private woodland owners through Coverts: How are we doing? *RGS*. 11(3):24-25, 32.

Dillman, D. A. 2000. *Mail and internet surveys: the tailored design method*. New York: Wiley.

Goff, G. and A. Muth. 2006. Yours for the asking.....Peer assistance for forest owners. *Small Farms Quarterly* Winter 2006: 16-17.

Goff, G. 2008. NY Master Forest Owner/COVERTS Program: 2008 Program Year. <http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo/newsletters.htm>.

## **Appendix A: Focus Group Report**

A pre-test focus group was held on April 2, 2008 in a meeting room at the Arnot Teaching and Research Forest in Van Etten, NY. The purpose of the focus group was to obtain feedback on the context and layout of the surveys and accompanying cover letters prior to mailing the survey to the full sample. The six participants in the focus group represented the forestry community through their affiliation as Master Forest Owner Volunteers.

The results of the pre-test were as follows:

### Completion Time for Survey

- Average completion time=18.8 minutes
- Range of 14-25 minutes

### Suggested Revisions to the Letter

- Move the paragraph on the technical, administrative aspects of the survey to the inside cover of the survey
- Make the tone a little more grateful
- Link to forest stewardship
- Create and mention a benefit for completing the survey for extra incentive (ex: entry into a lottery or a small amount of money)

### Suggested Revisions to the Woodlot Owner Survey

#### *Changes*

- Add more colored images (on inside cover, at corner of pages) or a fun forest fact at the bottom
- Change the color of Q1 from blue to black
- Remove e, f, and g from Q1 and create a separate question from it
- Change the wording of Q2 to simplify it
- Add an option of workshop/event to Q4
- Revamp the format of Q8 by adding key words above the table to clarify and remind and split up into influenced by MFO and not influenced by MFO
- Add option G to Q8- I have decided not to do it regardless of my contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer
- Remove the first sentence of Q9
- Reformat Q9 by making it a yes/no option and if yes, how much
- Reword Q25 to ask if you have “ever communicated with or participated in an event sponsored by”- include the CCE acronym in the question
- Add option of Don’t Know to Q25

#### *Possible New Questions*

- Make e, f, g of Q1 into Q2 asking “Is your woodlot:”
- Add new part to the beginning of Q9 asking “Did you benefit economically from a visit with a MFO? If yes, go on to parts b-k.”
- In Q19, make a new question asking how many total acreage of land you own before asking how many wooded acres
- Fears, Threats, Concerns, Challenges

### Suggested Revisions to the Master Forest Owner Survey

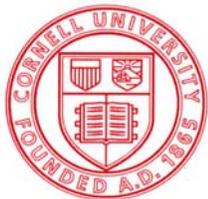
#### *Changes*

- Add inside cover page
- Remove the word established from Q3
- Reword Q5e to the same as Q25 on Landowner survey
- Add option for Not Familiar to Q14
- Bold Q20
- Add “to discuss the specifics of this survey or suggestions you would like to discuss in greater detail” to Q21
- Underline “does not impact” in Q21
- Add “If yes, name \_\_\_\_\_” to Q21

#### *Possible New Questions*

- In Q1, make a new question asking how many total acreage of land you own before asking how many wooded acres
- Ask follow up to 3b “% of total that are referrals from:”
- Add 3f- “Is your local Cornell Cooperative Extension aware of the MFO program?- yes/no/not sure
- Add 3g- “Does your local Cornell Cooperative Extension support the MFO program?”- yes/no/not sure

## Appendix B: Survey Cover Letters



Cornell University

College of Agriculture  
and Life Sciences  
Department of Natural  
Resources  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
108 Fernow Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
t. 607-255-2115  
f. 607-255-2815  
[www.dnr.cornell.edu/extension](http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/extension)

May 13, 2008

Dear First Name Last Name,

We need your help to evaluate the impact of the NY Master Forest Owner (MFO)/COVERTS Volunteer Program and to understand your perspectives about forestry. You are one of the approximately 600 forest owners that have received an on-site visit from a MFO volunteer in the past 8 years. It is important to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the MFO program on behalf program sponsors (Cornell University in partnership with other organizations). The results of this survey will allow us to document the impact that the program has on forest stewardship and also make warranted improvements to the program. It is important that we receive input from as many landowners as possible to help us fully understand and document landowner perspectives about forestry and the MFO Volunteer program. Your participation is voluntary and we would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to complete the enclosed survey.

Please be assured that all results will be compiled collectively, such that individual replies will not be associated with specific names, the forest owner, or the volunteer who made the visit. Your individual responses will remain confidential and your name will not be used in any reporting. Researchers at Cornell University will be conducting the data analysis and will keep the collected information protected and confidential.

When you complete the survey, mail it back to us in the enclosed postage paid envelope. Please do so soon so that we may remove your name from future mailings and thus not inconvenience you with follow-up reminders.

Please contact Gary Goff (607-255-2824, [grg3@cornell.edu](mailto:grg3@cornell.edu), 104 Fernow Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853) or Shorna Broussard (607-255-2149, [srb237@cornell.edu](mailto:srb237@cornell.edu), 122C Fernow Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853) if you have any questions regarding the survey. A summary of the results will be posted on the NY MFO website [www.cornellmfo.info](http://www.cornellmfo.info) by early fall, or please give us a call at 607-255-2115 to request a copy in the mail. Thank you very much for your help with the survey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary R. Goff".

Gary Goff  
Senior Extension Associate  
Director of NY MFO/COVERTS Volunteer Program

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shorna Broussard".

Shorna Broussard, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension

May 8, 2008

A couple of weeks ago, you received in the mail a survey seeking your opinions about the NY Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program.

If you have already completed and returned the survey to us, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. It is only by asking people to share their insights that we can document program effectiveness and make necessary improvements to the Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary R. Goff".

Gary Goff  
Director of the MFO Program and Senior Extension Associate



Cornell University

College of Agriculture  
and Life Sciences

Department of Natural  
Resources

Cornell Cooperative Extension

108 Fernow Hall

Ithaca, NY 14853

t. 607-255-2115

f. 607-255-2815

[www.dnr.cornell.edu/extension](http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/extension)

May 23, 2008

Dear NY Forest Owner,

We hope that you will take the time to complete the enclosed survey. The results from this survey will help us improve the Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program and understand your general perspectives about forestry. It is important that we receive the input of as many landowners as possible to help us fully understand and document landowner perspectives about forestry and the MFO Volunteer Program. You are one of the approximately 600 forest owners that have received an on-site visit from a MFO volunteer in the past 8 years and we will use results from the survey to help improve the MFO Volunteer program. Several weeks ago, you may have received a survey. In case this survey was lost in the mail, or if you have misplaced it, we have enclosed a new one.

Please be assured that all results will be compiled collectively, such that individual replies will not be associated with specific names, the forest owner, or the volunteer who made the visit. Your individual responses will remain confidential and your name will not be used in any reporting. Researchers at Cornell University will be conducting the data analysis and will keep the collected information protected and confidential.

When you complete the survey, mail it back to us in the enclosed postage paid envelope. Please do so soon so that we may remove your name from future mailings and thus not inconvenience you with follow-up reminders.

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Shorna Broussard, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension

We need your help! A couple of weeks ago, you received in the mail a survey seeking your opinions about the New York Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program.

If you have already completed and returned the survey to us, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. It is only by asking people to share their insights that we can document program effectiveness and make necessary improvements to the Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program.

Thank you,

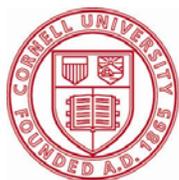
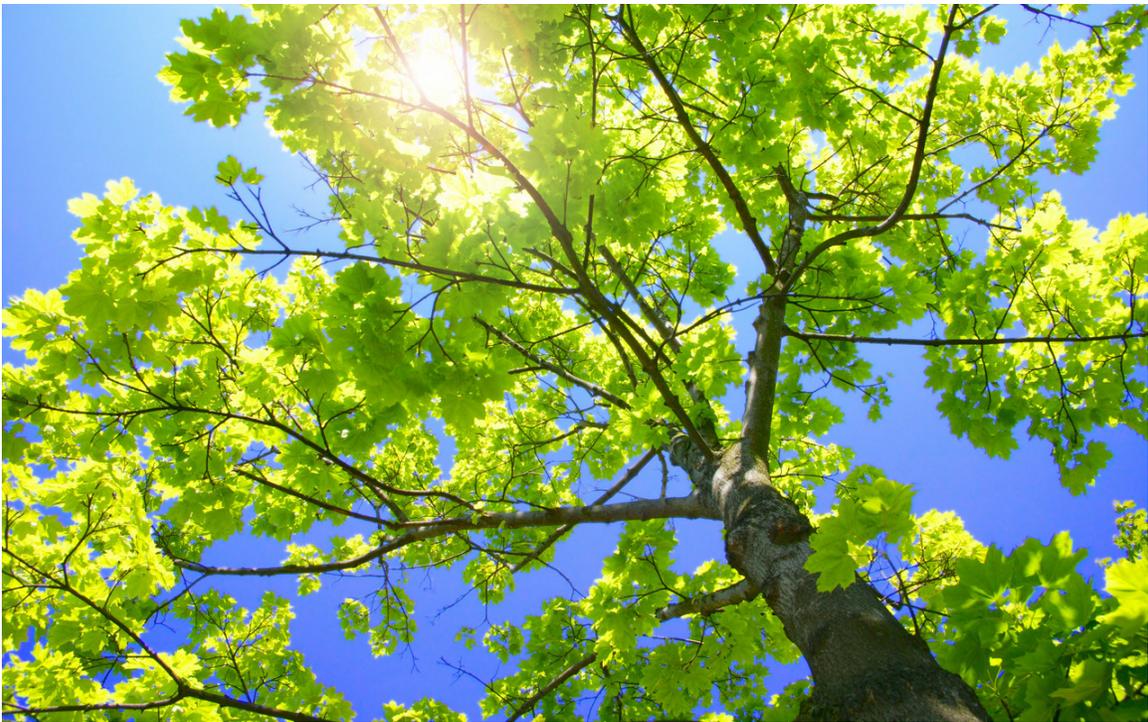
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary R. Goff".

Gary Goff

Director of the MFO Program and Senior Extension Associate

# Survey of Forest Landowners

*An Evaluation of the NY  
Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program*



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension

We hope you will enjoy completing this survey about your woodland and your experience with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer. We appreciate your help.

If you have any questions, please contact Master Forest Owner Volunteer Program Director Gary Goff at 607-255-2824 or by e-mail at [grg3@cornell.edu](mailto:grg3@cornell.edu). You may also contact research study director Dr. Shorna Broussard by telephone at 607-255-2149 or by email at [srb237@cornell.edu](mailto:srb237@cornell.edu). This study has been reviewed and approved by the Cornell University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Cornell University IRB at 607-255-5138 or [irbhp@cornell.edu](mailto:irbhp@cornell.edu).

# Reasons You Own Your Woodland

1. People own woodland for many reasons. How important are the following as reasons for why you own your woodland? The primary decision maker for your woodland should complete this question.

	Not at all Important	Not very Important	Neutral	Moderately Important	Extremely Important
a. To enjoy beauty or scenery	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. To protect nature and biological diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. For land investment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. To protect the land from development	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. For privacy or solitude	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. Enjoyment of owning forestland	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. To pass land on to my children or other heirs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. For production of firewood	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. For production of timber products, such as logs, pulpwood or other products	<input type="checkbox"/>				
j. For cultivation/collection of non-timber forest products (maple syrup, mushrooms, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
k. For hunting or fishing	<input type="checkbox"/>				
l. Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

2. Do you own your woodlot as: (Check all the apply)

- Part of your primary home
- Part of your vacation home
- Part of your farm or ranch
- A property separate from any of your residence(s)

# Communication with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer

3. Have you interacted or met with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer in the last 8 years (approximately 1999-present)?

- Yes
- No (If no, please return the survey to us in the envelope. Thank you.)

4. If yes, please indicate all of the times you interacted with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer. Please list the season (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall) and year of each visit below.

- a. Season \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Season \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Season \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
- d. I don't remember

5. How did you hear about the Master Forest Owner program? Check all that apply.

- Neighbor
- Co-worker
- Family member
- New York Forest Owners Association
- Article in newspaper
- Master Forest Owner website
- NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation Forester
- Private Consulting Forester
- Cooperative Extension County Educator
- Master Forest Owner Volunteer
- Workshop or event
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't remember

5. Please indicate the type and frequency of your communication with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer.

- The Master Forester Owner Volunteer came to visit my forest  
If yes, please indicate the number of times \_\_\_\_
- I went to visit the Master Forest Owner Volunteer's forest  
If yes, please indicate the number of times \_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't remember

# Your Experience with Master Forest Owner Volunteer

## 6. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The Master Forester Owner Volunteer was a good source of information regarding the specific subjects in which I was interested.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. If the Master Forest Owner Volunteer was not able to answer my question(s) directly, he or she was able to connect me with someone or tell me how to find that information.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. I found my interactions with the Master Forest Owner Volunteer to be enjoyable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. I found the Master Forest Owner Volunteer to be credible.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. I would recommend a Master Forest Owner Volunteer to other forest owners.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## 7. What did you and the Master Forest Owner Volunteer talk about or discuss? Check all that apply.

- My goals for my forestland or why I own forestland
- The characteristics of my forestland (tree species, acres, years owned, etc.)
- The organizations or agencies I work with to obtain forestry information.
- Conservation-related organizations that I could join (NY Forest Owners Association, Ruffed Grouse Society, The Nature Conservancy, etc.)
- Government forestry programs (Forest Tax Law 480-a, cost-share programs, etc.).
- Forest stewardship
- Benefits of using a professional forester
- Preparing a management plan
- Tree planting
- Sawtimber management
- Cutting firewood
- Wildlife management
- Recreation (hunting, fishing, bird watching, hiking, snowshoeing, etc.)
- Sugarbush management (sugar maple management, maple processing, maple products)
- Land transfer (passing the land to heirs, spouse, or others)
- Invasive species
- Forest taxes
- Forest pests or diseases
- Other (please specify)

# What did you do as a result of your contact and communication with a New York Master Forest Owner Volunteer?

8. For each of the activities below, please tell us about your decisions by selecting one of the following options.

- A. I do it now or did it in the past, at least in part, because of my contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer
- B. I plan on doing it, at least in part, because of my contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer
- C. I have decided not to do it, at least in part, because of my contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer
- D. I do it now or did it in the past but not because of contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer
- E. I have decided not to do it but not because of my contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer

F. Never thought or heard of it

G. Not applicable

- = Because of MFO
- = **Not** Because of MFO

*Do it or Did it*  
*Plan on Doing*  
*Don't do it*  
*Do it or Did it*  
*Don't do it*  
*Don't Know*  
*Not Applicable*

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
a. I obtained a forest cover-type map or aerial photo of my land.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
b. I set goals and priorities for forest management on my land.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
c. I prepared a written management plan for my land.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
d. I consulted with a professional forester (public or private).	<input type="checkbox"/>						
e. I met with a logger.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
f. I enrolled in Forest Tax Law 480-a.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
g. I enrolled in a federal or state government cost-share program.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
h. I leased recreation/hunting rights.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
i. I harvested (or hired to have it done) firewood.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
j. I harvested (or hired to have it done) sawtimber/pulpwood <b>with</b> the help of a forester.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
k. I harvested (or hired to have it done) sawtimber/pulpwood <b>without</b> the help of a forester.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
l. I planted or sold Christmas trees.	<input type="checkbox"/>						

- = Because of MFO
- = **Not** Because of MFO

*Do it or Did it*  
*Plan on Doing*  
*Don't do it*  
*Do it or Did it*  
*Don't do it*  
*Don't Know*  
*Not Applicable*

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
m. I created or enhanced habitat for wildlife.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
n. I have recreated on my forestland (hiking, bird watching).	<input type="checkbox"/>						
o. I have hunted or fished on my forestland.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
p. I thinned my forest stand (timber stand improvement).	<input type="checkbox"/>						
q. I managed my maple sugarbush and/or sold maple products.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
r. I joined a conservation organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
s. I sought out more information on forestry.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
t. I have built or maintained trails or access roads in my forest.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
u. I have permanently protected some or all of my forestland from development (conservation easement).	<input type="checkbox"/>						
v. Participated in a forestry webcast or podcast	<input type="checkbox"/>						
w. Subscribed to the Forest Connect Letter series	<input type="checkbox"/>						
x. Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						

**9. Please estimate the amount of money you have gained or saved over and above what you would have obtained without the involvement of a Master Forest Owner Volunteer:**

- a. Benefited economically from a visit with an MFO  Yes  No (If no, skip to question 10)
- b. Decided to do a timber sale  Yes  No How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Decided to sell firewood  Yes  No How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Sold timber for more than I might have gotten without the MFO volunteer's advice  Yes  No  
How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Sold non-timber forest products (maple products, mushrooms, etc.)  Yes  No  
How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Enrolled in a tax saving program  Yes  No How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Enrolled in a cost-share program  Yes  No How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Made a wise equipment purchase  Yes  No How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_
- i. Leased land for hunting or other recreational purposes  Yes  No How much? \_\_\_\_\_
- j. Received payment for raw sap or other maple products  Yes  No How much? \_\_\_\_\_
- k. Other (please specify)  Yes  No How much gained or saved? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## General Forestry Topics

**10. This question is very important, so please take your time in responding.  
Please define “forest management” in your own words.**

# Landowners and Organizations

## 11. How familiar are you with the following principles of forest management?

	Not at all Familiar	Slightly Familiar	Neutral	Somewhat Familiar	Very Familiar
a. Economics of forest management	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Forest ecology	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Biodiversity	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Wildlife management	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Recreation and trail management	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. Tree pests and diseases	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. Using a professional forester in forest planning	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## 12. Do you have a forest management plan? (Select one)

- Yes, I have a written forest management plan.
- I have plans for my forest, but they are not written down.
- I have no plans.
- I am not sure what a forest management plan is.

## 13. Do you know the name of a forester in your area?

- Yes

If yes, please list their name. \_\_\_\_\_

- No

If you do not know a forester working in your area, how would you go about finding one?

**14. Do you know of any conservation or environmental organizations (The Nature Conservancy, New York Forest Owners Association, etc.) that you can participate in or get information related to forestry? If yes, please list them here.**

---

18.

**15. Do you interact with other forest owners in your town or community regarding forestry matters?**

- Yes  
If yes, how often do you interact or communicate with them?
- Daily
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
  - A few times a year
  - Once a year
  - Once every few years
- No

**16. In what capacity do you interact with other forest landowners in your town or community?**

- Organization meetings (ex: Fish and Game Club, Sierra Club, etc.)  
please specify all organizations below

- 
- Church service or activities
  - School related activities
  - Casually or incidentally in town
  - Social events
  - Walking around on your land
  - Sporting events
  - Via e-mail
  - Via the telephone
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Do you subscribe to any of the following publications? Check all that apply**

- Outdoor Life
  - Field and Stream
  - New York Fish and Game
  - New York Outdoors
  - Small Farms Quarterly
  - Adirondack Life
  - Northern Woodlands
  - The New York Conservationist
  - New York Forest Owner
- Other conservation publication (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**18. How likely are you to cooperate with forest owners in your community on the following activities?**

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely	Already Do
a. Allow access to hunt on each others' land	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b. Allow access to recreate on each others' land	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c. Jointly lease land to hunting or fishing groups	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d. Apply jointly for the NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
e. Coordinate trail building across each others' land	<input type="checkbox"/>					
f. Coordinate road access	<input type="checkbox"/>					
g. Share tools or equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>					
h. Improve wildlife habitat across our properties	<input type="checkbox"/>					
i. Coordinate spraying herbicides	<input type="checkbox"/>					
j. Share the cost of hiring labor	<input type="checkbox"/>					
k. Share the cost of hiring a professional forester	<input type="checkbox"/>					
l. Sell timber together to get a better price	<input type="checkbox"/>					
m. Watch for trespassers on each others' land	<input type="checkbox"/>					
n. Cut firewood together	<input type="checkbox"/>					
o. Invasive species removal	<input type="checkbox"/>					
p. Riparian area management	<input type="checkbox"/>					
q. Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

# Demographic Characteristics

19. How many acres of land do you own?

a.) Total acres \_\_\_\_\_

b.) Wooded acres \_\_\_\_\_

20. What is your gender?

Male

Female

21. What is your age?

Under 25 years

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

75-84

85 and over

22. In what year did you acquire your woodland in New York?

\_\_\_\_\_

23. Does anyone other than you participate in decision making related to your forestland?

Yes

If yes, indicate below.

Spouse/domestic partner

Children

Other relatives

Parent(s)

Business partner

Friends or Neighbors

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

No

24. Do you live on or within 1 mile of your forested property?

Yes

No

25. Have you ever communicated with or participated in an event sponsored by a Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) County Association (at least in part because of your contact with a Master Forest Owner Volunteer)?

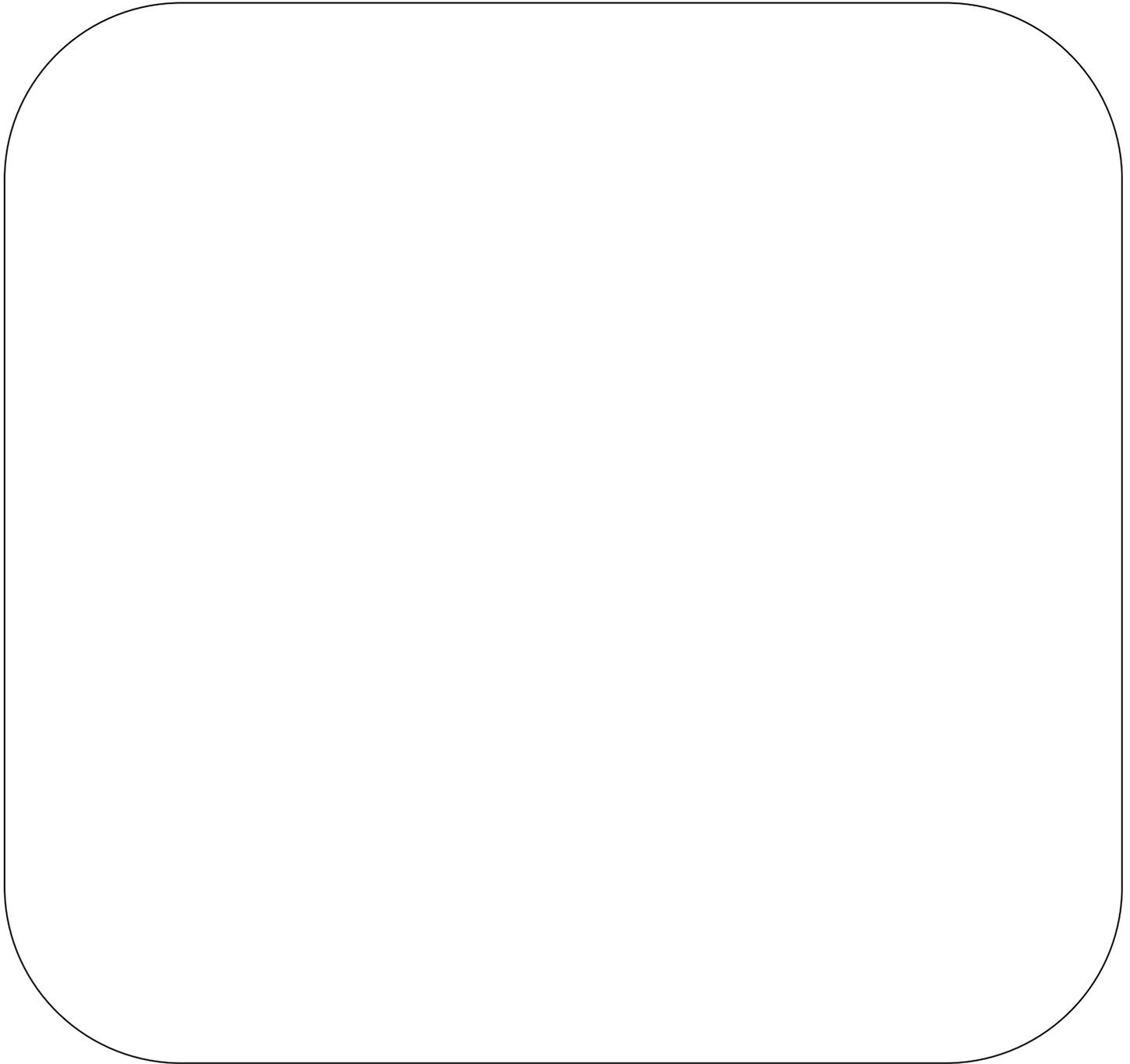
Yes

No

Don't Know

## Other Comments?

Please let us know if there is anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences with a New York Master Forest Owner Volunteer.



Please return the completed survey in the envelope provided. *Thank you very much* for taking the time to tell us about your experiences with a New York Master Forest Owner Volunteer.