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**ABSENTEE FOREST LANDOWNER EDUCATION WORKSHOPS IN METROPOLITAN AREAS**

**NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY:** Absentee forest landowners are usually first-time owners who acquire land for investment and live in more metro areas, or are heirs of family farms who wish to keep their land in the family, but live elsewhere. Traditional Extension education programs are usually conducted in the counties where the land is located, not in metropolitan areas. Many of these absentee owners have never been to an Extension or natural resource education program and do not know who to contact to seek natural resource advice. We expect to attract 100 to 150 local absentee landowners to each of four workshops. These landowners should leave the workshop with increased knowledge and appreciation on how to manage their property to meet their ownership objectives, know who to contact when natural resource questions for their property arise, and the fellowship from interacting with other landowners and natural resource professionals. The goal is for absentee forest landowners to learn science-based information to practice sound, sustainable, and progressive management of their forested properties while conserving (wise use) forest, soil, and water resources in accordance with their management objectives. The experiences of active landowners usually are the best marketing tool to attract other landowners to attend future workshops. Hopefully, the knowledge and friendships gained from the workshop will allow for subsequent gatherings of those interested in forest management and stewardship. In our experience, landowners have indicated that they would like to continue local workshops for more detailed information on various issues (e.g., conservation easements, timber sales, estate planning) or would like to have a field day to view how others manage their forest land. With subsequent funding, we wish to build on these workshops and plan to apply for future funding to create the structure for autonomous forest landowner associations in metropolitan areas, a ready-made audience for further forest resource-based Extension education programs. We will also investigate through our evaluations whether web-based programs, whether webinars or education modules, are attractive as a form of education and information to absentee audiences.

**OBJECTIVES:** Four absentee forest landowner workshops are proposed for funding through the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program (BFRDP). This proposal is a standard BFRDP project and addresses 10 of the 19 priority areas through conducting educational workshops with emphasis on forestry assistance programs, best management practices and forest management planning to fulfill property objectives of the landowner. Absentee forest landowners are usually first-time owners who acquire land for investment and live in more metro areas, or are heirs of family farms who wish to keep their land in the family, but live elsewhere. Traditional Extension education programs are usually conducted in the counties where the land is located, not in metropolitan areas. Many of these absentee owners have never been to an Extension or natural resource education program and do not know who to contact to seek natural resource advice. The objective of the proposed project is to provide educational and management information to absentee landowners to fulfill their management objectives for their property and to know who to contact for professional recommendations. The longer term objective is for absentee landowners to implement sustainable forest management practices and participate in forest community networks. Several collaborators and partners will assist in organizing and conducting the workshops. A comprehensive evaluation of each workshop is planned to determine knowledge gained from the workshop. Follow-up surveys will be conducted to assess if knowledge was retained, practices implemented and whether a professional was contacted for management guidance.

**APPROACH:** Absentee landowner workshops will be held in four metropolitan areas in Tennessee (Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis and Nashville) during the first quarter of 2010. We anticipate 100 to 150 landowners per workshop with proper marketing. Workshops will be held in easily accessible public areas with proper ADA facilities. Through our pilot testing of absentee landowner workshops in Tennessee, we have found the following parameters lead to successful workshops. (1) Hold the workshops in January, February and early March to avoid competing interests for

the landowner's time when the warmer weather occurs (2) Hold the workshop on a Saturday morning beginning at 9:30 am; end the workshop by 2:00. No one wants to attend an all day workshop. (3) Serve a sponsored lunch. Lunch is a good time for participants to mix with each other and to ask informal questions of the speakers. Have one or no more than two presentations after lunch. (4) Have some hands-on, interactive presentations so the audience is not sitting the entire time. (5) Have a landowner testimonial. Forest landowners like to hear experiences of others that may resemble their own objectives and experiences. (6) Have 4 to 6 presentations that will be of interest to absentee landowners. A few subjects could include timber theft/trespass, carbon credits, biomass markets, estate planning and trusts, taxes associated with forest ownership and timber sales, conservation easements, use of consultants, timber sales, wildlife management, cost-share programs, or any other state or local forest issue. (7) A committee composed of personnel from Extension, State forestry organizations, private forestry organizations, and private individuals is formed to plan the workshop four months in advance. The committee should determine marketing strategies, location logistics, and program. (8) Funding is secured for advertising of the workshop, a major expense, since we do not have readily available forest absentee landowner information in most metropolitan areas. (9) Each workshop will have an evaluation by participants to determine what was learned at the workshop and what additional subjects should be addressed in future workshops. Follow-up surveys will be used to determine whether the information learned at the workshop has been retained, practices implemented and whether the landowner has contacted a forestry professional (an indication of success) for management guidance. (10) Handout materials are needed to reinforce take-home messages.

**PROGRESS:** 2009/09 TO 2011/08

**OUTPUTS:** Six absentee landowner workshops were held in Knoxville, Memphis, Chattanooga, Nashville, Cookeville and Waverly, TN. Several marketing actions were evaluated for effectiveness in attracting this non-traditional and underserved audience to these educational workshops. Follow-up participant evaluations of the workshops were conducted 4 to 6 months after each workshop to determine knowledge retained, whether a professional was contacted for information or assistance and if practices were implemented. Two graduate students were funded in part with grant funds to coordinate planning of workshops and to conduct evaluations. Collaborations and partnerships were established with a number of organizations including the Tennessee Forestry Association, Tennessee Dept. of Agriculture, Tennessee Division of Forestry, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Tennessee Exotic Plant Pest Council, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and several NGOs depending on workshop location. Two inservice training sessions for Extension personnel were conducted on planning, marketing, conducting and evaluating successful educational workshops for absentee forest landowner audiences. Three separate webinars on planning, conducting and evaluating absentee landowner workshops were held for natural resource professionals during the summer of 2010 through the Forestry and natural Resources Webinar Portal of the Southern Region Extension Forestry office. **PARTICIPANTS:** Dr. Wayne Clatterbuck was the PI for the project. Two graduate students contributed with facilitating workshop local planning committees, arranging logistics for each workshop, and assisting with workshop evaluations as well as post-evaluations. David Mercker and Larry Tankersley, natural resource Extension specialists with University of Tennessee Extension also assisted with planning the workshops and giving presentations. Local planning committees usually were composed of the PI, graduate student, Extension leader in county where workshop is scheduled, a NRCS representative, a TN Division of Forestry county forester, a well-know local forest landowner, and a TN Forestry Association representative (usually a consulting forester). Others that participated on county planning committees (depending on location) included a TN Wildlife Resources Agency representative, TN Exotic Plant Pest Council representative, minority business or landowner representative, and various NGOs including the Nature Conservancy, Alliance for the Cumberland, Conservation of Open Spaces, and TN Tree Farm. Extension county leaders also partnered with Extension leaders in neighboring counties (part of metropolitan areas) in marketing the workshop. Two separate training sessions (inservices) were conducted for University of Tennessee Extension personnel (38 agents) on planning, conducting, and evaluating absentee landowner workshops. More than 150 natural resource professionals participated in one, two or three webinars on how to plan and market, conduct and evaluate absentee landowner workshops on the Southern Region Extension Forestry Website. **TARGET AUDIENCES:** Our primary target audience is absentee forest landowners. The traditional county Extension model is outreach education through county-based programs. However, an increasing number of forest landowners are absentee, probably 30 to 50 percent and, by definition, do not reside in the county where their forested property is located. Methods of promoting and marketing workshops in more rural areas such as newsletters, public service announcements, columns in local newspapers and direct mail are not as prevalent in larger metropolitan areas. A major task in conducting educational workshops for absentee landowners is identifying them. There is not one medium that would cater to the

entire audience. More effort and expense in marketing/advertising is usually required to saturate or get the word out about the meeting. Mass media advertising through newspaper, radio, internet and television is usually required. Targeting certain times such as rush hours for radio time, capitalizing on a controversial issue that warrants a newspaper article where a meeting can be announced free-of-charge, appearing on television as an interview on a locally produced program, or information blasts on a prominent internet site or provider are examples of marketing and attracting absentee landowners to a workshop. Most absentee landowners are interested in a wide array of subjects: preventing timber trespass, establishing property boundaries, estate planning, reducing forest taxes, easements and trusts, use of consultants, timber sale procedures, cost-share programs, attracting wildlife to their property, best management practices, forest health and pest management. Partnerships with state agencies, the private sector, Extension, and non-profit organizations are essential for credibility during these workshops. Absentee forest landowners are extremely pleased with the information and interaction they receive in these workshops. Most of the participants did not realize that forest landowner assistance and education programs are available and did not know who to contact for information about their forest land. Many absentee landowners had never attended an extension or a forestry meeting. Marketing through paid media on radio, television, internet and newspaper paid dividends in identifying the absentee audience in metropolitan areas. Absentee landowners are excited about future meetings and want more information on managing their land sustainably. Absentee landowners, an underserved audience, represent a great opportunity to extend forest education and assistance to those who have not been part of any networking efforts in the past in practicing wise stewardship of forests. How to plan, implement and evaluate absentee forest landowner workshops were presented as inservice training for Extension personnel and as three regional webinars as continuing education of natural resource professionals. These continuing education sessions were successful according to feedback received from post training session evaluations. However, to our knowledge, other absentee landowner seminars have not occurred, probably because of declining budgets and personnel for new programs. PROJECT MODIFICATIONS: Not relevant to this project.

**IMPACT:** 2009/09 TO 2011/08

55 forest landowners increased their knowledge on responsible and sustainable management of forest land, profitability of forest land ownership, and the ecology of forest development and succession by attending one of the six workshops based on pre- and post-workshop surveys. These landowners have approximately 14,000 acres of forest land. 236 workshop attendees (66 percent) had never attended a natural resource or Extension educational program. These attendees are new clientele for UT Extension in the natural resources subject area. These landowners now know specifically who to contact (Extension, forester, or wildlife biologist) when they have questions about their forested property and have become part of the forest education network. Success was defined by whether the workshop participant contacted a natural resource professional within 6 months of the workshop. 212 (60 percent) of the participants in a mail survey 4 to 6 months following the workshop had contacted a professional about natural resource management. 207 (60 percent) of the participants learned about the workshop through internet and talk radio marketing in metropolitan areas. Identifying absentee forest landowners is an obstacle in marketing educational workshops because databases of these landowners are not available. Non-traditional methods of marketing (internet blogs and advertisements, talk radio, public TV announcements, local community access and newsprint) were investigated through marketing mediums. Paid advertisement is necessary in these venues since a wide net must be cast to attract this non-traditional and underserved audience to educational workshops. The marketing efforts indicated that demographics of absentee forest landowners were similar to those who listen to talk radio. 38 Extension professionals attended inservice training on facilitating (planning, marketing, conducting, evaluating) absentee landowner workshops and will be able to organize future workshops. From workshop participant surveys, local workshop planners know the subject areas that absentee landowners desire for future educational sessions. Most absentee landowners prefer face to face meetings to gain information and one on one assistance on their property, but are amenable to information gained on the internet from credible sources. However, internet webinars and education modules ranked low in preferred educational methods.

**PUBLICATIONS (not previously reported):** 2009/09 TO 2011/08

Watterlatter, W.K. 2011. Engaging absentee forest Landowners. Forest Landowner 69(8): 12-13