

Q & A with Catherine Mater: The New Generation of Private Landowners Study

Catherine Mater has been a senior fellow for the Pinchot Institute since 1997. An engineer in the forest products industry, she has extensive experience in assisting in the development of new engineering technologies and marketing strategies for the wood products industry in both domestic and international markets. Catherine is a member of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forestry Research Advisory Council, which provides advice to the Secretary. Catherine conducted the research on the Next Generation of Private Forest Landowners Study, referenced in the article on page 1.

What is the importance of this study?

Mater: This is the first time that any direct interview or research work has been conducted with children of forestland owners (non-industrial private forestlands) in the United States. We began to explore this area a few years ago, when we were funded by the Wood Education Research Center (WERC) to interview “non-joiner” forest landowners to determine what conditions would force them to fragment or convert their family forests. “Non-joiners” are those forest landowners who are not affiliated with forestry or environmental organizations. These people fall outside the main forestry information loop and rarely seek outside advice on managing their own family forests. They are essentially landowners who are disconnected. For the WERC project, over 100 non-joiners were interviewed in nine eastern hardwood states. In contrast to key issues typically identified by woodlot owner and forestry organizations (such as property and estate taxes), interviewed non-joiners ranked taxes significantly below their key concern: lack of interest from their own offspring to maintain forestlands in family hands.

Thus, the next iteration of research was to find out what these offspring really think about owning and managing their own family forests. This is very benchmark qualitative research. The sample size of 300 interviews, while not being large enough for statistical evaluation, has similarity of responses across gender,

age, and location of offspring – enough so to suggest statistical *possibilities*. If so, we see a troubling family portrait where future ownership of family forests are concerned.

How were offspring selected for this study?

Mater: This is really important to understand. Our methodology for interview selection wasn't to just seek out offspring geographically located across the United States. We first contacted current private forestland owners to ask their permission to interview their offspring. This was an important first step as we found that the parents were clearly thinking about the future of their forestlands, but did not know what their children thought regarding future ownership of the family forests. Other selection criteria included offspring gender, and family forest size (32% had family forests less than 100 acres in size, another 44% had 100-400 acres of forestlands in the family. 300 offspring in 25 states in six regions were interviewed by phone. These offspring represented 200 families and about 300 thousand acres of forestland.

How was the study conducted?

Mater: The study contained five key question categories:

✿ **Demographics** – We wanted to know who the offspring were and obtain general information about the lands they will inherit. Examples of some questions asked each offspring: What is their profession,

annual household income, and age bracket? Do they know how much forestland they will inherit? What do they know about the characteristics of their family forests? How long have the lands been owned by their family? Do they plan on living on the family forestland in the future? We see troubling waters just from glean- ing this demographic information alone: more than half (both male and female offspring) work in professional fields, make between \$51,000 and \$100,000 per year in household income, do not live near their family forests, and do not plan to live on the family forestland in the future.

✿ **Affiliations** – These questions gauged what organizations offspring and their parents are involved in. Are they involved in forestry or environmental organizations? Interestingly, offspring were less engaged than their parents with respect to organization affiliation, and male offspring were more connected with forestry and/or environmental organizations than the female offspring.

✿ **Knowledge of forest management** We wanted to understand how much offspring know about the management of the family forests. How aware and knowledgeable are they relative to the management goals and objectives for their family forests? Do they know if a written management plan exists? Are they involved in the management of the family forests? If not,



do they want to be? Once again, based on offspring responses, we see foundation for real concern regarding the future of family forests: almost 60% of all offspring have not been involved in the management of the family forests – regardless of location, gender, or age. And of those not involved, 60% do not want to be. The good news is that 40% of the offspring are involved, and the majority of those involved (70%) participate at a decision-making vs. advisory level.

Offspring were also clear (60% stated so) that if they owned the land, they would wish to develop income off the land coming primarily from timber harvesting. But male offspring – by a large margin – were much more interested in income generation than their female counterparts. This is most interesting as over 60% of the offspring stated that their family forests were currently primarily managed for wildlife protection, not income generation.

✿ **Perceptions** – Again we note this was the first time any research on offspring perceptions has been conducted. We were interested in knowing what offspring perceive to be the most valuable characteristics of their family forests. What do they understand to be the reasons for their family - owning - forestlands? Is ownership due to inheritance, love of land, investment? How are the family forests being currently used? And, as almost 60% stated that land use and changes around their family forests do shape their views and decisions regarding future ownership, we wanted to better understand what offspring were observing. For example, 46% of offspring stated they are aware of current plans to subdivide forestland near their family forests for residential use.

Regarding what offspring consider to be the most valuable characteristics of their family forests, we learned that males and females really do think differently. Female offspring valued the undeveloped status of the forestland and the legacy of family owning forestland at significantly higher levels than male offspring, who valued the ability of the land to produce income as a valuable characteristic.

✿ **Decision-making** – These questions assessed what decisions the offspring would make once they owned the family forestlands. Over 80% of the offspring wanted to own their family forests, even though (as noted earlier) most do not want to be involved in the management. Many thought their parents were managing the land just fine. There were significant differences between male and female responses on why they wanted to own the land. Males were more geared toward investment, but the females wanted to maintain family legacy of the land. Key challenges to owning the land tended to be in contrast with what the non-joiner parents stated in the WERC study, where taxes ranked very low as a condition that would force fragmentation and conversion. Offspring are clearly concerned about taxes, as both male and female offspring ranked taxes as their top challenge to owning the family forest. They also ranked taxes as a key condition that would force them to sell or subdivide their family forestland. However, females were more concerned about not having the knowledge to manage the family forests while males were more concerned about sibling rivalry. Interestingly, both WERC parents and offspring were in agreement with ranking the need to pay for medical expenses as a condition that could force them to sell the family forests. This is

probably the first time in forest landowner research in the United States where family health and forest health have been linked together. This new linkage fosters some out-of-the-box thinking regarding follow-on opportunities.

What are the next steps?

Mater: Following through on the findings of this first study of the next generation of forest landowners is going to be extremely important if we are to get out ahead of conservation challenges such as forest conversion and fragmentation. Five ideas that immediately come to mind:

✿ **Spur additional offspring research** to achieve statistically significant response levels. We certainly learned during this initial round of interviews that no one is cultivating the offspring voice in the maintaining family forests discussion. Yet, they are the critical path. And relying on parents understanding of what offspring think may well be a recipe for failure. We need to be much more assertive in linking directly to the offspring pipeline.

✿ **Rethink strategy, even incentives, that establish positive performance in bringing offspring to the family forest management** plate at an early age. As noted in the study results, the longer the offspring feel disconnected from the family forest, the greater the difficulty in capturing their interest.

✿ **Focus much more strategic thinking on the differences between male and female offspring perceptions and thinking geared toward what drives their decisions.** There's a growing trend of females owning forestlands. Maintaining family legacy is an underlying strong occurrence in the female offspring. We need

to fully understand and implement different approaches in reaching out to female versus male offspring, with results likely to also benefit understanding of sibling rivalry issues.

✿ **Actively pursue funding for thinking through, designing, and implementing innovative pilots that link human health (i.e., medical costs and access to affordable health care) to forest health.** Are there ways to develop

collaboration between these two worlds? If so, such an effort would not only instantly spark interest from offspring, but could increase awareness to a point where people who never thought of owning forestland before might be inspired to do so. What seems an improbable link may just be possible where you have such a common thread of concern in both current and future forestland owners. Examining creative—even crazy—ideas should be a top priority

✿ **Retool outreach programs to fully acknowledge the importance that income generation based on timber harvesting plays in maintaining forestlands in family hands.** Where parents may rely less on income generation as a purpose for owning forestlands, their children are clearly thinking differently. If we have some level of confidence in this initial study's results, to reach offspring – speak to their pocket-book!

Environmental Film Festival Celebrates 14th Year in D.C.

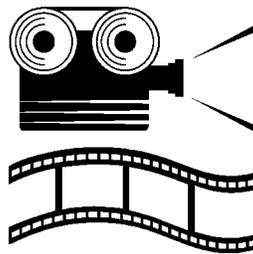
From the tigers of India's Emerald Forest to the grizzly bears in Yellowstone National Park, from Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley to Washington, D.C.'s Anacostia River, and from the delights of organic tea to the challenges of globalization, the 14th annual Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital will present films on a broad spectrum of environmental topics from March 16 to 26, 2006.

Over 100 documentary, feature, animated, archival, experimental and children's films will be screened at a variety of venues throughout the Washington, D.C. area, including museums, embassies, universities and local theaters. Most films include discussion with scientists and filmmakers and are free.

A national leader in showcasing the finest in environmental filmmaking, the Environmental Film Festival brings winning selections from national and international films festivals to Washington, D.C. Winners from the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival will be presented at this year's

Festival, as well as selections from the Telluride Mountainfilm Festival and Portugal's CineEco Festival.

"Buyer, Be Fair: The Promise of Product Certification," a film directed by John de Graaf that is premiering at the Festival, shows how consumers and businesses can promote environmental sustainability and social justice



through product labeling, focusing on Forest Stewardship Council certified wood and Fair Trade coffee.

The origins and evolution of planet Earth are investigated in the film, "Genesis" by the French scientist-filmmaker team of Claude Nuridsany and Marie Perennou and also in the film, "Miracle Planet II: The Violent Past." The role of preda-

tors in shaping ecosystems is examined in "Strange Days on Planet Earth: Predators." The unique relationship between people and whales as told by whale biologist and pioneer Roger Payne is explored in "A Life Among Whales."

Oscar-winning and Oscar-nominated animated shorts on environmental topics include the Frederick Back classic, "The Man Who Planted Trees" and the hilarious "Creature Comforts" by the creator of the Wallace & Gromit series. In addition, film historian Max Alvarez will evaluate the depth and context of Hollywood's treatment of environmental themes over the years..

By offering fresh perspectives on a broad range of environmental subjects, the Environmental Film Festival seeks to incorporate environmental topics into the mainstream of life. For complete program information on the 2006 Festival, visit our website at www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org in February or call the Festival office at 202-342-2564 for a printed film brochure.

