

The Many Benefits Of Family Forests

(NAPSA)—From the availability of cleaner air and water to support for tourism and rural economies, the public benefits from private family forests in a variety of ways.

Yet some people are surprised to learn that family forest owners make up the largest group of owners of our nation's forestlands. That's larger than the percentage of forestlands owned by the government. Most family forest owners—it's estimated that there are 10 million of them—actually own small tracts of land that are between 1 and 99 acres in size.

Their Many Contributions

Family forests make a tangible contribution to the well-being of this nation in a number of ways:

- Nearly two-thirds of this nation's drinking water flows from privately owned forests. Forest lands serve as a natural filter and reservoir.

- Approximately 90 percent of endangered species depend on forests for the habitat they provide.

- Working family forests play a key role in keeping rural economies healthy and thriving. Recreation, tourism, hunting and fishing, and the production of lumber and other forest products are all supported by family forests.

- Family forests help to keep air clean. For every ton of wood a forest produces, about 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide are removed from the air and replaced with about 1.1 tons of oxygen.

What Drives Them?

According to a recent study, many family forest owners are motivated by what they describe as a love of the land—a deep attachment to the forest's beauty, peacefulness and wildlife.

A sense of stewardship and responsibility to care for the land are also mentioned as factors that



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drive many of these owners. Said family forest owner Marlene Zdanovec, "Growing trees is not just for tree farmers. It's for everyone, everywhere."

Challenges And Responses

Experts, such as the American Forest Foundation, believe family forests face a number of challenges, such as increased pressure to develop forestland and insufficient land management planning.

For example, from 1963 to 2002, the U.S. experienced a net loss of 13 million acres of forestland to nonforest use. That's an area larger than the area of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. This is forestland lost forever once it is converted to development.

The Foundation believes that there is a need for increased public awareness and understanding of the role that family forests play in the lives of all Americans—from the air they breathe and the water they drink to developing viable forms of alternative fuel that may one day lead to energy independence.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.forestfoundation.org.