

PEI Woodlot Owner Survey Released

Unlike most Canadian provinces, the majority of PEI's woodland is owned and controlled by private individuals and each one has their own reasons why they own forest lands. For some, it is family land they have inherited while others have purchased it to create a legacy for the future. Some people purchase forest land to develop it for commercial or agricultural purposes and others seek to restore forest health or create places of peace and solitude.

Whatever their reasons, each owner has their own goals and values for the harvest, management or preservation of their forests. But how do they set priorities for their lands? What drives management and harvest decisions? And what can government and society do to help Island land owners improve their forest stewardship efforts?

The answers to these questions are as complex as the ownership patterns of Island forests. But the PEI Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry, in cooperation with the PEI Model Forest Network and Natural Resources Canada - Canadian Forest Service has undertaken an extensive survey into woodland owners' attitudes, awareness and values, to help better understand their decision making process and potential implications.

The 2010 survey, which updates information from the last survey in 2002, has just been released on the PEI Model Forest Network's website www.peiforests.ca. One of the key findings notes that most Island woodlot owners do not see their forest lands as a financial investment (2.3). Instead, they chose to own forest land for reasons such as its connection to their heritage, or for forest protection and personal uses such as recreation, fuelwood and building materials.

In terms of owners' rights (4.6), many respondents felt that society did not have any right to control what they did on their lands. However, approximately the same number felt that ownership did not give them the right to do whatever they wanted with their forest lands. A significant number, 39%, felt that there was need for a forest owners organization (3.8) that could represent their interests.

When seeking forest management advice and assistance, (3.8) more than 70% responded that they received information and advice from a Private Land program staff member while others also used forest contractors, forest consultants and friends and neighbours. In terms of barriers to good forest management, almost 50% felt that lack of financial incentives affected their ability to be good forest stewards. Other concerns included the high cost of silviculture and the need to encourage more protected areas on private land particularly for old growth forest stands.

The PEI Model Forest Network will be sharing the information with the province and others who care about private land forests. Hopefully, the survey results will help land owners, government, industry and society to realize the many goods and services these lands provide and how to encourage more and better forest stewardship.