

Forestry Landowner Cooperatives— Providing Opportunities for Increasing Forest Productivity

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Forestry Landowner Cooperatives

A forestry landowner cooperative is made up of forest landowners who come together to jointly manage their parcels for multiple benefits. They may also co-own and/or control other forestry-related businesses that distribute benefits to members on the basis of use. There are many benefits to landowners of being a member of a forestry landowner cooperative including having conventional services provided at less cost, and having access to new services that are not normally available to the small forest landowner.



The Extent of the Forestry Landowner Cooperatives Movement

Working with colleagues at the University of Wisconsin, we called cooperative extension and/or state forestry staff in all 50 states to identify forestry landowner cooperatives currently operating. We found that as of February 2002, there were nine forestry landowner cooperatives in operation, four emerging cooperatives, seven organizations considering the forestry landowner cooperative model, and ten other organizations that fulfill many of the objectives of a forestry landowner cooperative but have not yet chosen to organize as a cooperative (most are limited liability partnerships). Of the nine cooperatives currently in operation, only two were in existence prior to 1998.

The forestry landowner cooperatives movement is centered primarily in the eastern United States. All thirteen of the existing or emerging cooperatives identified in February 2002 are located in the Midwest (see map). Much of the land in forestry landowner cooperatives is growing northern hardwood species. Recent upward trends in the value of, and markets for, hardwoods make it more beneficial for landowners to manage their forests well. These trends also make it more advantageous for public and private forestry assistance groups to work with these landowners. In addition, the focus of cooperatives on sustainability and the production of multiple benefits, and their role in identifying or supporting “Green” loggers and manufacturers, helps ease the concerns of landowners about the condition of their land following harvest and the processes used to manufacture products from their trees.



Location of existing and emerging forestry landowner cooperatives, February, 2002

Cooperatives currently represent only a small number of landowners and acres—as of February 2002, membership in the nine existing cooperatives totaled 399 landowners with more than 56,000 acres in management. However, these cooperatives provide examples of how private landowners can work together to achieve ecological, economic, and social benefits for themselves and their communities.

The next step in this study is to identify the organizational objectives of forestry landowner cooperatives, evaluate how effective the cooperatives are in meeting these objectives, and measure or describe the impact of forestry cooperatives on forest productivity.

Forestry Landowner Cooperatives and Sustainability

In *The Status of Timber Resources in the North Central United States*, North Central Research Station scientists focus on regional timber sustainability. They highlight findings related to the amount of timberland found in the region and the amount of wood harvested and processed. They ask us to consider what it means to be sustainable in terms of wood products, and whether this is a legitimate or attainable goal for the region. With more than two-thirds of the timberland area in the region in the hands of non-industrial private forest landowners, forestry cooperatives that encourage landowners to manage their land sustainably for multiple forest products offer some hope for increasing the volume of wood harvested. Furthermore, cooperatives that are vertically integrated, with the benefits of management, harvest, and processing staying within the local community, help highlight what we mean by local, regional, and global forest sustainability. Finally, forestry cooperatives help develop and pass along local knowledge about where our wood and fiber come from.



Learn More About Forestry Landowner Cooperatives

Forestry Landowner Cooperatives Websites:

- Headwaters Forestry Coop: www.headwatersforestrycoop.com
- Living Forest Cooperative: www.livingforestcoop.com
- Sustainable Woods Cooperative: www.sustainablewoods.com

Other Cooperatives-Related Websites:

- Community Forestry Resource Center of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy—advice to forestry cooperatives and communities: www.forestrycenter.org
- Coop Services—private, non-profit corporation providing services to cooperatives and communities: www.co-opdevelopmentservices.com
- Cooperative Life—the Northeast Federation of Cooperatives: www.cooplifecom.com
- University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives—center for the study and promotion of cooperative action: www.wisc.edu/uwcc

Selected Literature:

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