A Survey of Private Forest Land Owners in British Columbia - FRDA Report 044

The objective of this study was to develop a profile of private forest land owners and identify their forest management objectives. To profile the land owners, socio-economic characteristics were collected including age, sex, occupation, annual income, education and forestry training.

Approximately 5% of the total forest land in British Columbia is privately owned, and is reputed to be highly productive. Privately owned forest land in British Columbia encompasses a total land area estimated by G.M. Bonner in Canada's Forest Inventory, 1981 to be 1.7 million hectares. A 1973 British Columbia Forest Service report estimated privately owned forest land to be approximately 2.6 million hectares.

The definition of forest land used in this study is: "Forest land includes land that has deciduous or coniferous trees growing on it, cutover land, replanted forest land, or scrub/wild land that has the potential to become productive forest land." This definition of forest land closely approximates that used by the Canadian Forestry Service in application of its Private Forest Lands Program.

The study design included a mail-out questionnaire administered to a random sample of land owners selected from B.C. Assessment Authority records (Phase I), followed by a second detailed forestry questionnaire (Phase II) sent to forest land owners identified from the first questionnaire. A major objective of the study was to examine regional differences of forest land owners and their management practices. For ease of comparison with existing forestry data, the sample design incorporated the geographical forest regions as used by the B.C. Ministry of Forests.

To be consistent with the requirements of the Canadian Forest Service Private Forest Lands Program, the definition of a small private forest land owner included all land owners with a minimum of 20 hectares of forest land to a maximum of 2000 hectares of forest land. The adjectives small and private were used to describe the target population of forest land owners: industrial or large scale forest land owners, large corporations, federal and provincial Crown holdings and other similar agencies were specifically excluded. At the time of this study there was no readily available list of private forest land owners or private forest lands. Two of the main results of this study are the estimates of the number of small private forest land owners, as well as the total amount of forest land held by small private forest land owners.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM STUDY RESULTS

• Fifty-six percent of all land owners cite farm or ranch operation as their primary reason for owning land. These farm/ranch operators own more than 70% of the privately-held forest land. The second most important reason for owning land is for use as part of the principal residence (20% of all land owners and 10% of private forest lands).

• Using an estimation procedure based on a sample of specific farm and residential properties, the amount of non-industrial forest land in B.C. held by land owners on land parcels of between 20 and 2000 ha. is 1.0 million ha.

• Using an alternative estimation procedure based on property owner estimates of total forest land holdings of any size or any property classification, the population of land owners in the study owns 4.1 million ha. of forest land.

• In general, forest land owners are well educated, older, and male. Ninety percent of all forest land owners are male with an average age of 55 years. Forty percent of forest land owners have an annual income in excess of $50,000 while only 30% indicated an annual income of less than $25,000. Two-thirds of forest land owners have completed high school or have higher education. Twenty-five percent of forest land owners have completed a university/college degree, or have a technical/vocational diploma or certificate.

• 42% of all forest land owners own property in the Prince George Forest Region, and 48% of all private forest land is located in the Prince George Forest Region. In contrast, 7% of forest land owners are in the Vancouver Forest Region and their holdings amount to only 4% of the total private forest land in British Columbia.
• Forest management objectives are concentrated on timber harvesting activities. About 75% of forest land owners have undertaken some form of harvesting activity during the last 10 years. Only 8% of forest land owners have undertaken tree planting or site preparation activities during that same time. When asked about their forest management plans for the next 10 years, harvesting activities remained the most important to forest land owners, although tree planting and/or site preparation activities had increased in importance.

Copies of the 146 page report A Survey of Private Forest Land Owners in British Columbia, by C.E. Wetton are available, while supplies last, from:

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