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Forestland Controlled by Schools of Forestry: Characteristics and Management

How schools use their forests.

By Charles E. Burkhardt, Thomas J. Straka, and Steven H. Bullard

Most forestry schools control forestland. Traditionally, the school forest has served as a laboratory for field instruction and research. This article reports on a 1985-86 survey of the 1 candidate and 46 accredited forestry schools in the United States on the ownership, objectives, and management of school forests.

The survey's purpose was to determine the extent and distribution of forestland ownership by forestry schools. The survey addressed how the forestry schools gained control of the land; the objectives of forest management, and how important the school forest was to the teaching, research, and service functions of the university. The importance of revenue production and the allocation of school forest revenue was also established.

Survey Findings

Only three schools of forestry do not control any forestland (University of Arizona, Louisiana Tech University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison) (*fig. 1*). Of the remaining 44 schools, the

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average holding is 6,185 acres. Three schools control more than 20,000 acres each (University of Georgia, University of Montana, and State University of New York-Syracuse). Eighty-six percent of school forest acreage is owned by the schools themselves; 7 percent is leased; and the remainder is mostly under special-use permit. The school for-

Table 1. Primary objectives of school forest ownership.

Objective	Forestry schools
	%
Field instruction	52
Research	39
Demonstration	7
Production	2

ests were primarily acquired by donation (63 percent), government transfer (12 percent), and purchase (6 percent).

Sixty-eight percent of school forests are managed by a forest manager, 90 percent of whom report to an administrator or committee. Twenty-one percent are managed by a faculty member as a secondary duty. Managers of school forests considered field instruction and research the primary purposes of the school forest (*table 1*). More than two-thirds of the school forest managers considered the school forest to be crucial or important to teaching and research (*table 2*). School forests that were considered crucial or important to teaching were an average distance of

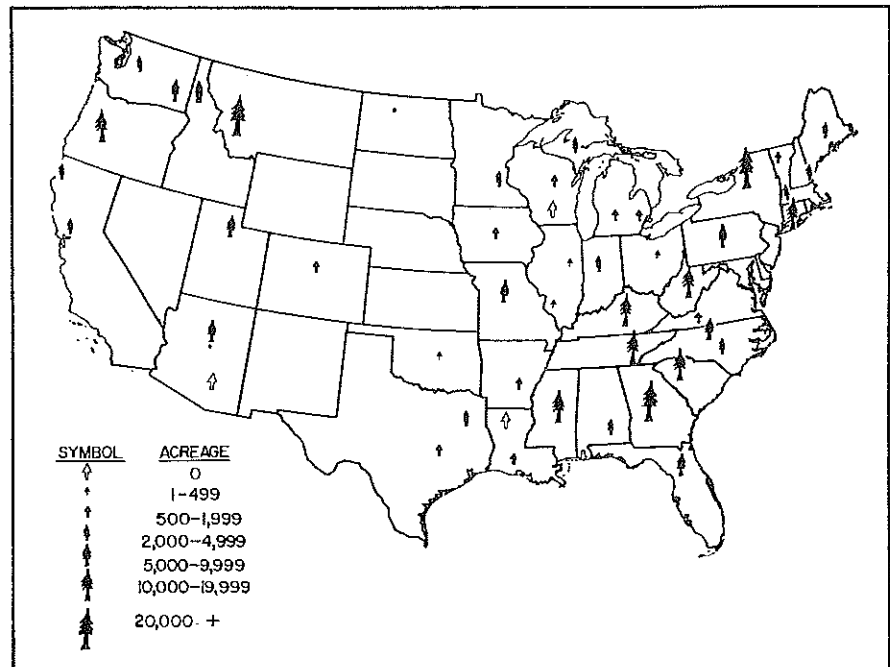


Figure 1. Forest acreages under control of the 46 accredited and 1 SAF candidate schools of forestry (1986).

Table 2. Importance of school forests to the teaching, research, and service functions of U.S. forestry schools.

Degree of importance	Forestry school function		
	Teaching	Research	Service
 %		
Crucial	37	26	5
Important	40	42	26
Moderately important	14	23	38
Slightly important	7	7	21
Not important	2	2	10

Table 3. Comparison of eastern and western school forests.

	East (n = 34)	West (n = 10)	U.S. (n = 44)
Average size (ac)	5,817	7,399	6,185
Average distance from campus (mi)	45	58	48
Crucial or important to:			
teaching (%)	76	80	77
research (%)	70	60	68

less than 15 miles from campus. Approximately one-half of the forests are within 50 miles of the forestry school, but about one-quarter are more than 100 miles from the school.

Fifty-seven percent of the schools have a fully developed management plan for their forests; the same percent have a wildlife management program. Recreation is an important use of just over half of the school forests. About one-half of the forestry schools that control forestland use that land in their "summer camp."

Thirty-five school forests produce revenue. Almost three-quarters of the revenue is controlled by the forestry school or the forest manager; the remainder is controlled at the university or state level. Thirty schools allocate the revenue among various uses. On average, more than 60 percent is used to support school forest operations (fig. 2). Research and demonstration receive about 25 percent of school forest revenues; teaching and scholarships receive about 10 percent.

School forests west of Colorado's

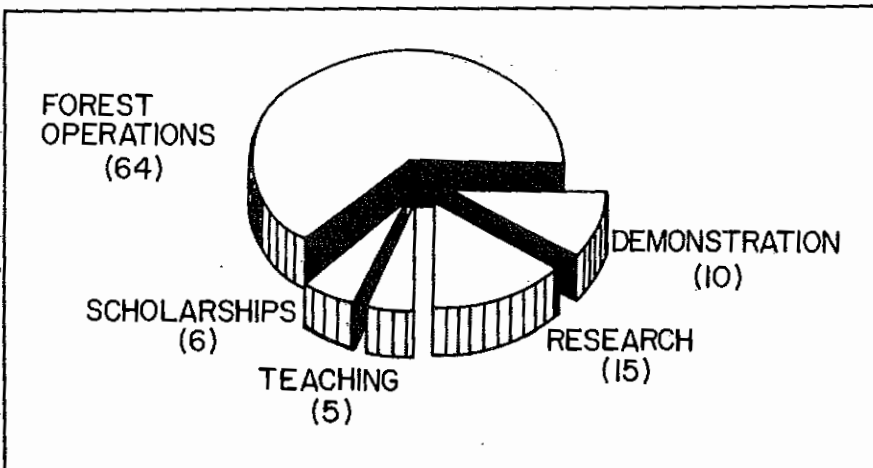


Figure 2. Typical school forest revenue allocations (percentage of funds).

eastern border are somewhat larger and farther from campus than those to the east, but differences between eastern and western school forestland are not as great as might be expected (*table 3*). This is probably because of the high percentages of donated land in both regions. School forests acquired through donations are more likely to vary in size and distance from campus than those purchased or leased.

Importance of School Forestlands

U.S. forestry schools have direct control of more than a quarter-million acres of land. Survey results highlight the importance of these lands to forestry research and education. Although university budgets have suffered in recent years in most states, only 2 percent of managers listed revenue production as their foremost goal. School forests are considered either important or crucial for teaching and research purposes, and typically more than one-third of their revenues fund demonstrations, scholarships, teaching, and research programs.

School forests are very important to the teaching, research, and service functions of forestry schools. They serve as the field laboratories for forestry researchers, the teaching laboratories for forestry professors, and the demonstration areas for forestry extension professionals. School forests have become an integral component of most forestry schools, actually affecting the character of many forestry programs. Falling enrollments and tight university budgets are causing university administrators to take a hard look at the recreational and timber values represented by these landholdings. It is possible that some of these holdings will be liquidated or school forest revenues diverted to cover budget deficits.

The forestlands controlled by schools of forestry are critical tools in educating natural-resource managers. This survey supports the importance of this resource to forestry education and research. ■