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# Social and Emotional Dimensions of Succession Planning for Family Forest Owners in the Northeastern United States

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR  
FAMILY FOREST OWNERS IN THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

A Thesis Presented

by

Hallie Schwab

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The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Keeping forestland intact has emerged as a critical policy objective at state and federal levels. This target has been supported by substantial public investment. The collective impact from the bequest decisions of millions of landowning individuals and families has the potential to affect the extent and functionality of future forests in the United States. Despite a growing body of research devoted to studying these transitions in forest ownership, much remains unknown about how family forest owners make decisions in this arena. The social and emotional dimensions of woodland succession planning have been particularly under-examined. This thesis explores the process of planning for the future use and ownership of woodlands through in-depth analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews with family forest owners in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, and Vermont. The first article investigates how family forest owners evaluate and integrate stories derived from their social networks when planning for the future of their woodlands. Analysis of the themes contained in stories framed as “cautionary tales” revealed common fears surrounding succession planning. The second article explores the complexity of emotional relationships with family forests showing how emotional geographies manifest in the succession planning process. Together, these studies deepen understanding of how family forest owners plan for the future of private woodlands and offer implications for Extension and outreach.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	II
LIST OF TABLES .....	V
LIST OF FIGURES .....	VI
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW .....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Family Forests: Shrinking Parcel Sizes, Shifting Priorities and Demographics.....	2
1.3. Planning for Future Forests.....	5
1.3.1. Clarification of Key Terminology .....	5
1.3.2. The Status of FFO Planning.....	7
1.3.3. Triggers and Motivations for Planning .....	7
1.3.4. Barriers to Planning .....	10
1.4. Supporting Informed Decision Making: Extension and Outreach.....	11
1.5. Gaps in the Literature.....	13
1.6. Research Purpose and Questions .....	14
1.7. Thesis Structure .....	15
Works Cited .....	16
CHAPTER 2: SUCCESSION STORIES: HOW SOCIAL NETWORKS INFORM THE WAY FAMILY FOREST OWNERS PLAN FOR FUTURE USE AND OWNERSHIP OF PRIVATE WOODLANDS .....	21
2.1. Abstract.....	21
2.2. Introduction.....	22
2.3. Woodland Bequest Decisions .....	22
2.4. FFO Social Networks.....	23
2.5. Gathering Information about Succession Planning.....	25
2.5.1. The Saliency of Negative Stories.....	26
2.6. Research Questions.....	27
2.7. Methods.....	28
2.8. Results.....	32
2.8.1. Information Sources and Dissemination.....	32
2.8.2. Classifying Succession Stories .....	34
2.8.3. Threats to Continuity .....	35
2.8.4. Threats to Relationships.....	37
2.8.5. Loss of Control .....	39
2.8.6. Responding to Cautionary Tales.....	40
2.8.7. Triggers.....	41
2.8.8. Correctives.....	42
2.8.9. Complications .....	44
2.9. Discussion.....	45
2.10. Conclusions/Implications for Extension.....	46

Works Cited .....	50
CHAPTER 3: ‘BOUND UP WITH THAT DIRT’: EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES OF WOODLAND SUCCESSION PLANNING .....	54
3.1. Abstract .....	54
3.2. Introduction .....	55
3.3. Place Attachment .....	56
3.4. Emotion and Family Forest Ownership .....	57
3.5. Overview of Emotional Geographies .....	59
3.6. Justification for an Emotional Geography of Woodland Succession .....	60
3.7. Research Questions .....	62
3.8. Methods .....	63
3.9. Results .....	64
3.9.1. Dimensions of Attachment to Woodlands .....	64
3.9.2. Profiles in Emotional Relationships with Woodlands .....	71
3.10. Discussion .....	91
3.10.1. Elucidating Woodland Attachments .....	91
3.10.2. The Role of Emotion in Succession Planning .....	93
3.11. Conclusion .....	95
Works Cited .....	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	105
APPENDIX A: EXTENDED METHODS DESCRIPTION .....	117
APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	150
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM .....	155

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1. Priority Landscapes by State.....	30
Table 2. Classification of Succession Story by Genre.....	34
Table 3. Dimensions of Attachment to Woodlands and Number of Respondents Exhibiting Each Dimension .....	65
Table 4. Priority Landscapes by State.....	119
Table 5. Participant Classification Matrix for Semi-Structured Interviews .....	122
Table 6. Classification of Succession Story Genre.....	130

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1. Map of Study Area and Priority Landscapes.....	29
Figure 2. Nadia's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Selected Dimensions of Attachment .....	75
Figure 3. Julie's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Selected Dimensions of Attachment .....	79
Figure 4. Franklin's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Selected Dimensions of Attachment .....	85
Figure 5. Sam's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Dimensions of Attachment .....	90
Figure 6. The Role of Emotion in Woodland Succession Planning .....	94
Figure 7. Map of Study Area and Priority Landscapes.....	119



## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1. Introduction**

Four-hundred twenty-three million acres of forestland in the United States are held in private ownership, representing an estimated 11 million landowners (Butler, 2008). The majority of this private forest (and 36% of forestland nationwide) is controlled by family forest owners (FFOs), a group of landowning families, individuals, trusts, family partnerships, and other private entities who do not own and operate a primary wood-processing facility (Butler et al., 2016). The land management decisions made by FFOs, including decisions to sell, transfer, or subdivide property, thus have the potential to significantly affect the public benefits that forests will provide in the future (Catanzaro, Markowski-Lindsay, Milman, & Kittredge, 2014). In the coming decades, millions of aging FFOs will face decisions regarding how they will divest of their land holdings. This transfer of landed assets heralds opportunities for both conservation and further fragmentation (Butler et al., 2016).

Intact forests render ecological, economic, social, and cultural value to society (Pearce, 2002). In addition to provisioning goods and materials in the form of fuel, fiber, and food, forested ecosystems furnish critical supporting and regulatory services. These include groundwater recharge, flood mitigation, carbon storage, and climate stabilization (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). This functionality is threatened by forces of urbanization, increased housing development, and conversion to other land uses (Stein et al., 2005). Many forest benefits, such as wildlife corridors, recreational opportunities, and the ability of forests to contribute to rural economies are sensitive to forest block size and

are likely to be compromised by fragmentation (McEvoy, 2013). The erosion of large forest blocks accompanying shifts in land use can alter light and moisture conditions in edge habitats (Medley et al. 1995), facilitate the dispersal of non-native species (Dale et al. 2005), and interrupt mutualistic species interactions (Magrath, Laurance, Larrinaga, & Santamaria, 2014).

Maintaining a viable forest base will require tools that address the pressures threatening family forests. FFOs have been long acknowledged by the natural resources community as a critical population to engage in the perpetuation and stewardship of forestland in the United States (Bliss, 2008; Catanzaro et al., 2014; A. Egan & Jones, 1993; Kittredge, 2004). For decades these private landowning families and individuals have been targeted by planners with policy tools designed to keep forests intact, including cost share, landowner assistance, preferential tax programs, and education (Kilgore et al., 2015).

### **1.2. Family Forests: Shrinking Parcel Sizes, Shifting Priorities and Demographics**

Trends in forest property ownership and shifts in landowner objectives signal a new reality for natural resource professionals concerned about keeping forests as forests. Of particular concern is the confluence of shrinking parcel sizes, demographic changes in the landowning population, and the relatively minor role that timber production plays in the hierarchy of FFOs' reasons for owning woodlands. Each of these trends has the potential to impact future uses or pressures on the nation's forestland.

Nationally, the number of FFOs is on the rise, as average parcel sizes have grown smaller (Butler & Ma, 2011; Pan, Zhang, & Butler, 2007). This shift in ownership patterns portends changes in the activities that are likely to occur on these lands. From an economic standpoint, the slowing of active forest management related to parcelization has implications for both the supply of timber and non-timber forest products and the viability of rural economies built around forest resources. Forest management becomes more challenging on smaller parcels due to reduced economies of scale for contractors, and the need to mobilize many individual owners (Moldenhauer & Bolding, 2009; Shifley et al., 2014). The likelihood of timber harvest is inversely related to population density and proximity to development (Barlow et al. 1998). The owners of small parcels are accordingly less likely to see the advantage of membership in traditional landowner assistance programs associated with support for timber production (Sampson & DeCoster, 2000).

Kittredge (2004) identifies two arenas in which family forest owners have the potential for substantial impact on a public good: the decision to harvest timber, and the decision to sell or transfer land. Researchers have long been interested in the factors driving timber harvest on private lands, compelled in large part by concerns about the flow of lumber and wood fiber (Egan, 1997). For many years the literature on non-industrial private forest owners was dominated by studies linking the likelihood of harvesting timber to factors like property size, landowner education, and market incentives (Dennis, 1989; Greene & Blatner, 1986). Recent scholarship has recognized a much broader range of ownership objectives among private woodland owners including aesthetic and amenity

values, privacy, wildlife viewing, and preservation of heritage for future generations (Butler, 2008; Erickson, Ryan, & De Young, 2002; Finley & Kittredge, 2006; Ticknor, 1993). Only 10% of respondents to the 2006 National Woodland Owners Survey rated timber production as an important or a very important reason for ownership, indicating a vast majority who prioritize other values associated with woodland ownership (Butler, 2008).

This move towards multiple-objective ownership may track with concurrent demographic shifts within this population. Private woodland owners today tend to be older, more affluent, and better educated than their counterparts in previous generations. Jones, Luloff, and Finley (1995) note, “the multigeneration, farm-based owner of the 1950s has yielded to a well-educated, white collar or retired owner, who is either non resident or of urban, nonfarm origin” (p. 42). While scenic and aesthetic values ranked highly among all woodland owners surveyed by Erickson et al. (2002), the authors found non-farmers particularly motivated by non-economic factors associated with ownership and management of their properties. Stated broadly, individuals whose ownership is tied less directly to commodity production or livelihood are more likely to cite amenity values among their chief ownership objectives (Abrams, Gosnell, Gill, & Klepeis, 2012). While the challenge of timber management on small parcels elicits apprehension from professionals in the forestry sector, this issue is unlikely to concern the growing segment of owners oriented towards non-production values. Increased housing density, however, threatens to diminish some of the features such as privacy, wildlife observation, and passive recreation that landowners are now seeking (Butler, 2008).

### **1.3. Planning for Future Forests**

One of the most pressing issues on the horizon concerns what will happen to the landscape as many private woodland owners reach retirement age. Forty-three percent of FFOs in the US are over the age of 65, which means that a significant portion of privately held forested land is likely to come up for sale or transfer in the near future (USDA Forest Service, 2013). An estimated 3.8 million FFOs will be making decisions about the future of their land in the coming decades (Butler, 2008). The average tenure for FFOs with 10 or more acres in the United States is 26 years (Butler, 2008). This suggests that sale or transfer decisions are made infrequently by individuals who may have little experience with the process.

#### **1.3.1. Clarification of Key Terminology**

The subset of the family forest literature devoted to the study of land transfer is rendered less cohesive by a lack of consistent terminology. This issue stems in part from the challenge of adapting concepts from the financial sector to woodland contexts. When used by legal and financial professionals, the term estate planning generally emphasizes objectives such as distributing assets in a way that minimizes tax burdens and enhances financial security (Lee, 2010; Peters, Haney Jr., & Greene, 1998; Preisser & Williams, 2010; Siegel, Haney Jr., & Greene, 2009). This definition fails to address some of specialized concerns that are important to woodland transfers. Catanzaro et al. (2014) differentiate between conventional estate planning, with its focus on fiduciary goals, and “conservation-based estate planning” that “directly involves formalizing plans to keep

some or all of landowner's land in its natural, undeveloped state," (2). Markowski-Lindsay et al. (2016) use the term "conservation bequest" to describe actions that keep land intact and maintain forest cover. Gruver et al. (2017) employ the term "legacy planning" to capture the breadth of options through which landowners transfer land to heirs.

In this thesis, I adopt the term "succession planning" to denote the process through which landowners transfer ownership of property to the next titleholder. A succession plan is typically a collection of tools and documents that function to realize a suite of goals that might include financial security, equity, and ecological objectives. The whole of succession planning can be considered a process that includes conversations with heirs or professionals, evaluation of options, and establishment of appropriate legal instruments (Catanzaro, Rasku, & Sweetser, 2010). In simple terms, succession planning involves a method of conveyance (sale, donation, or bequest) and a recipient (heir, conservation organization, or other buyer). Landowners often use legal tools such as wills or trusts to transfer assets and designate future ownership. Individuals can influence the terms of future use through conservation easements, in directives formalized through estate planning documents, or informally through verbal instructions for heirs (Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016). Gruver et al. (2017) note that absent legal structures or formalized planning mechanisms, inheritance can lead to unwanted subdivision borne out of the desire to create equity among multiple heirs. In summary, the tools and strategies that FFOs have to transfer land afford variable levels of assurance that forests will remain intact.

### **1.3.2. The Status of FFO Planning**

The succession planning actions taken by FFOs occupy a relative gap in the literature. A study conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons reported that only 60% of Americans over the age of 50 had created a will (AARP Research Group, 2000). Several studies in New England underscore the need for natural resource professionals to engage woodland owners about planning for the future. A survey of woodland owners in Kennebec County, Maine found that only 48% of respondents had created a will leaving land to heirs, and that 73% had not spoken to their heirs about their wishes for the future (Quartuch, Leahy, & Bell, 2012). A multi-state survey of FFOs in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, and Vermont found 35% had used no legal tools, 44% had used a will only, and roughly 21% had used a will plus an additional entity such as a trust, LLC, LLP, or family partnership to plan for future use and ownership of their land (Markowski-Lindsay et al. in review). Despite their limited scope, these studies indicate sizable gaps in the planning coverage for private woodlands and provide a strong case for enhancing assistance to FFOs undergoing the succession planning process. Such outreach should be informed by a sound understanding of triggers, motivations, and barriers to planning.

### **1.3.3. Triggers and Motivations for Planning**

Much remains unknown about the process of planning for the future of family forest lands. Markowski-Lindsay et al. (2016) conceptualized FFO bequest decisions as a two-step-process in which landowners are prompted to act, opening up an array of options regarding future use and ownership. Many of the common planning triggers in woodland contexts mirror those in the general population, including advancing age, significant life-

cycle events and milestones, family dynamics, and serious illness (Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016).

Once this process is set in motion, both external forces and internal motivations shape the options that landowners pursue. Stone and Tyrrell (2012) named property taxes, age, physical limitations, and family considerations as chief contributors to FFO decisions to subdivide. Similarly, Gruver et al. (2017) found that individuals who had subdivided their land frequently described feeling constrained by their financial or familial circumstances and forced to break up their property due to a lack of alternatives. Although landowners frequently cite property taxes as a force pressuring their decision to sell or parcelize (Butler et al., 2012; Rickenbach & Gobster, 2003), Kilgore (2014) failed to find a positive association between tax rates and the sale of forestland in a review of Minnesota parcel records. These mixed results underscore the complexity of planning drivers and suggest that taxation is but one factor weighing on FFO decisions about land tenure.

Several studies of willingness to adopt permanent conservation have cited the role of environmental motives, place attachment, and personal values as important factors in landowners' decisions to implement conservation easements (Farmer, Knapp, Meretsky, Chancellor, & Burnell, 2011; Keske, Hoag, & Bastian, 2011). Ryan et al. 2003 found that "intrinsic motivation" related to feelings of attachment and concern about impacts on neighbors were stronger motivations to adopt agricultural easements than economic incentives. The relative weight assigned to economic and values-based considerations may be related to land use and objectives. For example, Farmer et al. (2015) found that



the availability of financial incentives for easements was more important to landowners who derived income from their land, than for individuals who enjoyed their properties chiefly for amenity values.

Landowner decisions are also thought to be influenced by the social, economic, and ecological context of the communities in which they are embedded. Perceptions of local development pressure have been credited with prompting landowners to initiate planning for their land, and in particular to consider options for permanent protection (Farmer, Chancellor, & Fischer, 2011; Markowski-Lindsay, Catanzaro, Millman, & Kittredge, 2016). Creighton, Blatner, and Carroll (2016) noted the high resale value of forestland and lack of economic opportunity in rural areas as factors enticing woodland inheritors in Washington State to parcelize and sell. Additionally, Creighton et al. (2016) found that FFO perceptions of costs associated with a restrictive regulatory environment weighed heavily on the decisions of both outgoing owners and heirs.

In seeking to understand how ownership history and characteristics affect succession decisions, several researchers have investigated differences in bequest motives between woodland purchasers and inheritors. Amacher et al. (2002) found that inheritors of woodlands were more likely than first generation woodland owners to make bequests of land with standing timber rather than cash from timber sale. In an analysis of National Woodland Owner Survey Data, Majumdar et al. (2009) discovered that inheritors were more likely than first generation woodland owners to be motivated by a desire to pass along a legacy to their children or heirs. While more research is needed, these findings

suggest that family legacy may contribute a sense of connection or rootedness to a particular property that influences the succession planning process. However, while FFOs consistently rank leaving a legacy for heirs among the top objectives associated with their ownership, a majority of current owners (82%) purchased part or all of their land as compared to only 20% who acquired their land through inheritance (Butler, 2008). Future studies of woodland succession should therefore look beyond landowners' stated intentions and investigate the dynamics that inhibit successful generational transfer.

#### **1.3.4. Barriers to Planning**

A lack of planning within families across generations has been implicated as a significant driver of forest parcelization and fragmentation (Fidel, 2007). Indeed the broader literature on the succession of private non-industrial forestland warns that forced liquidation of family forests is often a consequence of estate and succession planning that fails to adequately protect assets or provide sufficient guidance to heirs (Siegel et al., 2009). Broderick, Hadden, and Heninger (1994) determined that even landowners who had wills passing land to the next generation sometimes significantly underestimated the burden of estate taxes that could force heirs to sell part or all of the land. In other instances, the tools chosen to distribute assets among family members may have unintended consequences. Forestland is often willed to multiple heirs when a landowner dies, resulting in parcelization in the absence of provisions or mechanisms to keep the property intact (Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 2015). Furthermore, poor communication and a failure to engage heirs in the planning process can engender

mistrust and hinder the success of even carefully crafted estate plans (Gruver, Metcalf, Muth, Finley, & Luloff, 2017; Preisser & Williams, 2010).

Catanzaro et al. (2014) identified finances and family disagreements as common barriers to estate planning for family forest owners. This observation echoes findings from the agricultural succession literature that identify distributive justice among heirs as a key challenge and source of tension (Taylor & Norris, 2000). Beyond the question of distributive justice, planning was inhibited by the challenge of overcoming the geographical distance of heirs, the discomfort of discussing and negotiating sensitive issues, and feeling overwhelmed by the planning process (Catanzaro et al., 2014). Barriers can also arise from a disconnect between the wishes of current owners and the preparedness of the inheriting generation. In a study focusing on the offspring of FFOs, Mater (2005) found that the next generation knew relatively little about the family land, had low rates of involvement in land management and anticipated taxes as a barrier to ownership. Apart from taxes, expense-related barriers included concerns about the cost of paying legal professionals to prepare or revise estate documents (Catanzaro et al., 2014). The research available on this subject makes clear that both outgoing owners and woodland inheritors lack key information and support that might facilitate the ability to make educated decisions.

#### **1.4. Supporting Informed Decision Making: Extension and Outreach**

Efforts to support sustainable management on private forestlands through non-regulatory mechanisms have included financial incentives (landowner assistance, cost share, and

preferential tax programs) (Ma, Kittredge, & Catanzaro, 2012) and educational approaches (notably, through Extension Forestry programs) (Sagor, Kueper, Blinn, & Becker, 2014). Evidence of the effectiveness of such interventions is mixed. Despite decades of promotion and substantial public investment in such programs, fewer than 15% of FFOs have written management plans, and participation in cost share and adoption of conservation easements has remained below 10% (Butler et al., 2016). Concerns have been raised over whether landowner assistance programs help prompt behavior change, or effectively pay landowners to implement activities they would have undertaken regardless of financial incentives (Greene, Kilgore, Jacobson, Daniels, & Straka, 2007). Kilgore et al. (2015) found that federal landowner assistance programs increased the likelihood of FFOs engaging in certain land management activities such as habitat improvement and tree planting, but had little impact on decisions to subdivide or sell.

Kittredge (2004) suggests that rather than seek to change behaviors, a more appropriate goal for natural resource professionals might be to support informed decision-making. In the United States, Extension Forestry programs function as the outreach arm of land-grant universities, translating and disseminating key insights from academic research to landowners and practitioners (Sagor et al., 2014). Extension programs in several regions have targeted estate and succession planning in their outreach to landowners in various forms including educational workshops, web-based content, and printed materials (Becker, Kaplan, Dickinson, & Jacobson, 2013; Bentz et al., 2006; Catanzaro et al., 2010). Preliminary program evaluations suggest that workshops based on succession

planning curricula developed for FFOs have proved successful at spurring follow-up actions in participants (Catanzaro et al., 2014; Withrow-Robinson, Sisock, & Watkins, 2012). More research is needed to support the development of outreach materials that meet FFOs' informational needs and address obstacles to planning.

### **1.5. Gaps in the Literature**

Even with the findings described above, understanding of the succession planning process for FFOs is still in its early stages. To date, research efforts have focused on answering basic questions about what actions FFOs have taken or intend to take to plan for the future of their land, and questions about triggers, motivations, and barriers. Economic analyses of the costs, benefits, and financial viability of various planning options have dominated the literature exploring the factors influencing FFO succession decisions. And yet rational actor models that rely on the assumption that individuals act to maximize personal benefit have been critiqued for failing to explain how landowners behave in the real world (Ostrom, 1991; Peñalver, 2009). A significant challenge to this worldview is the low enrollment in landowner assistance and cost share programs despite the potential for substantial cost savings. Neoclassical economic models also fail to adequately explain decisions to keep forests intact given the high payoff of selling to developers in some regions, and examples of individuals acting according to non-monetary values over financial calculations.

Surveys of FFOs across the United States have consistently demonstrated the primacy of non-monetary amenity values among stated reasons for owning woodlands, including

beauty, wildlife, nature, legacy, and privacy (Butler et al., 2016; Butler & Leatherberry, 2004). While approximately a quarter of FFOs report harvesting timber at some point during their ownership (Butler et al., 2016), the message from landowner segmentation and social marketing research approaches is clear: for the typical FFO, woodlands are viewed as more than a source of income or a strictly financial asset (Butler et al., 2007; Finley & Kittredge, 2006).

This thesis furthers the study of FFO succession decisions through in-depth exploration of two understudied aspects of the planning process: social and emotional dimensions. A robust literature on FFO social networks has focused primarily on how interpersonal connections inform land management decisions (Kittredge, Rickenbach, Knoot, Snellings, & Erazo, 2013; Knoot & Rickenbach, 2011; Rickenbach, 2009; Sagor & Becker, 2014), but has not been extended to the study of succession decisions beyond conservation easements. Additionally, several recent studies of FFO decision-making have referenced the presence of emotional bonds that landowners form with their woodlands (Creighton et al., 2016; Gruver et al., 2017; Markowski-Lindsay, Catanzaro, Millman, et al., 2016) although the content and context for these affective relationships has not been explored in depth.

## **1.6. Research Purpose and Questions**

Purpose: Characterize selected social and emotional dimensions of succession planning for family forest owners in the northeastern United States.

Question 1. How do FFOs learn about the succession planning experiences of others?

Question 2. How does knowledge of the negative succession planning experiences of others affect the way FFOs plan for the future use and ownership of their own woodlands?

Question 3. How do FFOs express and reveal attachment to woodlands?

Question 4. How do emotional relationships with woodlands influence the succession planning process for FFOs?

### **1.7. Thesis Structure**

The following chapters have been structured as journal articles, one focused on question 1, and the other focused on questions 2 and 3. Each chapter includes a tailored literature review, a description of methods, analysis of data collected as part of a qualitative study with family forest owners in the northeastern United States, and a discussion of practical implications for Extension and outreach. An extended methods section is included as an appendix.

Together, these studies deepen present understanding of the succession planning process. In centering the voices of family forest owners, this work lends nuance to a body of FFO literature still dominated by quantitative survey methodology and exposes considerations for future research.

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## **CHAPTER 2: SUCCESSION STORIES: HOW SOCIAL NETWORKS INFORM THE WAY FAMILY FOREST OWNERS PLAN FOR FUTURE USE AND OWNERSHIP OF PRIVATE WOODLANDS**

### **2.1. Abstract**

The collective impact from the bequest decisions of millions of landowning individuals and families has the potential to affect the extent and functionality of future forests in the United States. Previous research emphasizes the critical role that social networks play in informing family forest owners' decisions regarding land management. While many landowners ultimately consult legal professionals when formalizing plans for future use and ownership of their land, exposure to the succession planning experiences of family, friends, and peers can contribute to awareness and evaluation of options. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 32 family forest owners in Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont and found that participants frequently referenced the planning experiences of others when describing how they arrived at decisions about their land or articulating intentions for the future. Of 58 "succession stories" recounted by woodland owners, over half were framed as cautionary tales. Thematic and narrative analyses of cautionary tales showcased three themes revealing landowners' fears surrounding woodland succession planning: threats to continuity, threats to relationships, and loss of control. This study illuminates how the succession planning perceptions and strategies of family forest owners are influenced by information exchanged in individuals' social networks, with implications for Extension and outreach.

## **2.2. Introduction**

An estimated 36% of all forestland in the continental United States (about 290 million acres) is owned by families, individuals, and non-commercial private entities, collectively referred to as family forest owners (FFOs) (Butler et al., 2016). The fragmented and decentralized nature of forest ownership in the United States places the future extent and functionality of these landscapes in the hands of millions of independently acting families and individuals. As many as 2.7 million FFOs are currently at or approaching retirement age and will soon face decisions regarding future ownership of their property, including options to sell, subdivide, donate, or leave a bequest of land to heirs (Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016). In some contexts, transitions in ownership incite changes in land use, including conversion of forest to a more developed condition. Efforts to achieve equity through bequests of forestland to multiple heirs may fuel unplanned “subdivision by inheritance” (Metcalf et al. 2015). Mounting concerns about the loss of forestland to urban and suburban development (Stein et al., 2005), an aging landowning cohort, and a trend towards shrinking parcel sizes (Butler, 2008) lend a sense of urgency to the study of FFO transfer decisions.

## **2.3. Woodland Bequest Decisions**

Research on bequest decisions in the woodland context is relatively sparse. Studies to date have investigated FFO motives, triggers, and barriers related to succession planning. Succession planning can be instigated by a complex set of factors, many related to external triggers such as the aging process, life course events within the extended family, significant illness, financial concerns, or perception of development pressure

(Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016). Internal motivations or value orientations are often named as important factors behind the decision to adopt permanent conservation measures such as easements (Farmer et al. 2015). Individuals who inherited their woodlands are more likely than non-inheriting peers to prioritize leaving a legacy of land to heirs (Amacher et al. 2002; Majumdar et al. 2009).

Both exogenous and personal factors constrain the ability of some FFOs to realize their goals associated with future use and ownership (Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016). Creighton et al. (2016) identified barriers to successful generational transfer in Washington State related to regulatory uncertainty, financial instability, and urbanization. Finances and family disagreements emerged as common obstacles to estate planning for FFOs in Massachusetts (Catanzaro et al. 2014). Broderick et al. (1994) discovered that some landowners substantially underestimated the burden of taxes associated with bequests of land, which could precipitate unwanted subdivision or sale. Gruver et al. (2017) compared the planning experiences of landowners who had recently subdivided, adopted conservation easements, or taken no action, and found that while each professed feelings of connection to their land, members of these groups differed in their sense of control and agency over their situation.

#### **2.4. FFO Social Networks**

Landowners are social actors whose decisions reflect and respond to surrounding stimuli (Kittredge, 2004). Landscape context, local social norms, and the activity of neighbors can facilitate or constrain certain types of management on FFO lands (Lind-Riehl et al.,

2015). Previous research has emphasized the important role that social networks, comprised of experts, peers, and kin, play in informing landowner behavior (Hujala & Tikkanen, 2008; Kittredge et al., 2013; Knoot & Rickenbach, 2011). When considering options for land management, FFOs engage both peers and professionals, through face-to-face meetings or by way of written materials and other media (West et al. 1988; Knoot & Rickenbach 2011). Rickenbach (2009) found that members of a woodland cooperative in Wisconsin considered neighbors, kin, and friends as the most important non-expert information sources when discussing the management of their land. Woodland owners in Michigan reported receiving management advice from “lay peers” about as often as from state or federal foresters, but characterized peer advice as more likely to impact their adoption of new practices (West et al. 1988). Landowners may perceive information from peers as more trustworthy than advice from professionals (Gootee et al. 2010). For the majority of FFOs who do not have a formal management plan or working relationships with foresters (Butler, 2008), informal interactions and observations of other landowners may be an especially important source of ideas about land management.

In the United States, Extension Forestry programs are the leading disseminators of forestry education for private woodland owners (Sagor et al. 2014). Studies of FFOs’ social networks have helped fuel the development of “peer-to-peer” models that seek to foster an environment that affords landowners opportunities to learn from one another, as an alternative to the top-down, expert-driven delivery that characterized traditional Extension (Catanzaro, 2008; Hujala & Tikkanen, 2008; Kueper, Sagor, & Becker, 2013; Snyder & Broderick, 1992). Programs designed around peer exchange include models



that train local opinion leaders to propagate innovations within their spheres of influence (such as master volunteer programs) and structures that facilitate opportunities for landowners to learn from each other as equals (such as Woods Forums in Massachusetts) (Kueper et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2012). Additionally, peer learning is often a feature of landowner associations and woodland cooperatives (Kueper et al. 2014). Structured opportunities for landowner exchange allow participants to discover what peers are doing on their land and avoid making similar mistakes (Kueper et al. 2013). By offering an array of programming on topics from wildlife management to invasive species removal, wildfire preparedness, and forest health, such programs have attracted a broader segment of the FFO population than more traditional timber-oriented offerings (Kueper et al., 2014). Peer-to-peer approaches have been credited with reaching previously unengaged audiences, increasing knowledge of local resources, and facilitating information sharing within peer networks well beyond the scope of the program in the months following the interaction (Ma et al., 2012).

### **2.5. Gathering Information about Succession Planning**

The process of drafting and formalizing common estate planning tools such as wills, trusts, limited liability companies and limited liability partnerships is different from other types of decisions that FFOs make about their land, as they are typically accomplished with the aid of legal and financial professionals. The work of gathering advice and considering options, however, may begin long before landowners consult an expert through informal conversations with friends, family, and neighbors. According to the legal and land protection specialists interviewed by Markowski-Lindsay et al. (2016),

many clients come citing specific instances of other families' failed arrangements or bitter conflicts as motivation for their own planning. Evidence from the fields of social psychology and public health may help to explain the heightened salience of information delivered in the form of cautionary tales.

### **2.5.1. The Saliency of Negative Stories**

Social psychologists have suggested that the human brain registers negatively valenced events as more emotionally potent than positive instances (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Baumeister, DeWall, & Zhang (2007) argue that individuals fixate longer on scenarios that engage the emotions, which could serve to enhance the instructive potential of such examples. Additionally, narrative may be an especially powerful medium for conveying information. Citing studies that demonstrated higher recall of information from narrative texts over other formats of information delivery, Graesser and Ottati (1995) argued that "story representations have a privileged status in the cognitive system" (p. 124). These effects have been harnessed in the arenas of health and behavior change to craft messaging intended help people break addiction. Public health reviews have shown that anti-smoking advertising campaigns that incorporate highly emotional content or personal stories increased viewers' likelihood of quitting (Durkin, Biener, & Wakefield, 2009). Audiences evaluated smoking cessation ads framed around personal testimonies or eliciting negative reactions as more thought provoking, memorable, and worthy of discussion (Terry-McElrath et al., 2005). Emotional content appraised as personally relevant could augment viewers' perceptions of their own vulnerability to risk and facilitate corrective action (Durkin et al., 2009).

These findings suggest that cautionary tales may hold particular psychological resonance that could increase the likelihood that such episodes are shared, remembered, and subsequently drawn upon for guidance.

## **2.6. Research Questions**

Given these findings on the impact of negatively-valenced stories, we posed the following research questions:

1. How do FFOs learn about the succession planning experiences of others?
2. How does knowledge of the negative succession planning experiences of others affect the way FFOs plan for the future use and ownership of their own woodlands?

To answer these questions, we analyzed “succession stories,” instances where landowners recounted the planning experience of others when articulating their own intentions for the future of their land. These anecdotes are worthy of investigation because they reveal the substance and tenor of received wisdom about estate planning that circulates via casual conversations and informal exchange in FFO social networks. These succession stories illuminate an understudied portion of the information flow that shapes woodland succession planning. Furthermore, the stories that are retained and repeated provide insight into the way FFOs process and evaluate options, and at times act, when planning for future use and ownership of their land.

## **2.7. Methods**

Participants for this study were recruited through a regional mail survey designed to elicit baseline information about the succession planning behavior of FFOs in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, and Vermont (Markowski-Lindsay et al. in review). The sample frame consisted of forested parcels 10 acres or larger obtained from publically available tax parcel records. To concentrate the impact of planned outreach and education efforts, two priority watersheds in each state (Figure 1 and Table 1) were identified with input from USDA Forest Service projections of watersheds expected to see high or medium increases in housing density (Stein et al., 2005). Of 2500 surveys mailed to randomly selected FFOs in the 8 watersheds, 789 were returned for a 34% response rate. Forty-two percent of survey respondents indicated willingness to participate in a follow-up interview with a researcher.

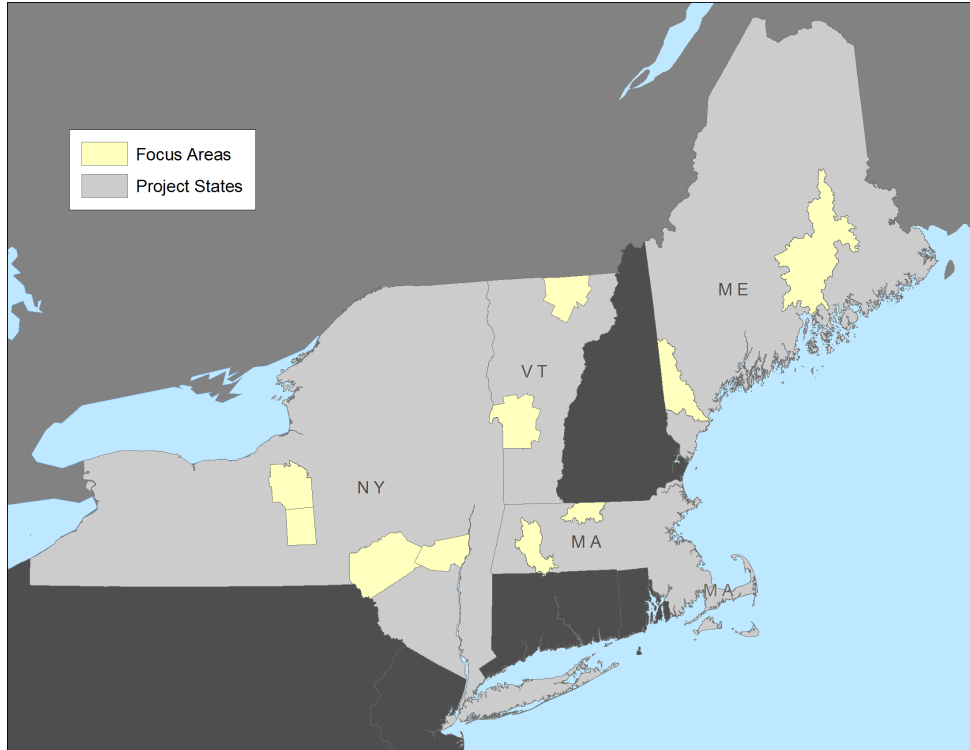


Figure 1. Map of Study Area and Priority Landscapes

Based on answers to survey questions regarding anticipated or realized estate planning steps, individuals within this subset of survey respondents were classified as beginning, intermediate, or advanced planners. A total of 32 respondents were chosen for participation (8 per state, 4 per watershed) by way of a quota method that randomly selected individuals from within each priority area, alternating between the planning stages. This procedure facilitated the assembly of a group of participants reflecting a broad spectrum of succession planning perspectives and experience.

Table 1. Priority Landscapes by State

State	Priority Landscapes	
Maine	Lower Penobscot River Watershed	Saco Watershed
Massachusetts	Millers Watershed	Westfield Watershed
New York	Cortland/Onondaga Counties	Delaware/Greene Counties
Vermont	Orleans County	Rutland County

Thirty-two semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were conducted between August 2015 and March 2016 in FFOs’ homes or in a neutral location such as a public library or restaurant. Three interviews were conducted over the phone. Semi-structured interviews allow for some of the flexibility of open-ended interviews while providing a measure of consistency and comparability across cases (Wilson, 2013). Following a pre-determined guide, interviewers asked participants to describe their preferences for the future use and ownership of their properties and outline their intentions for reaching stated goals. Additionally, participants were asked in-depth open-ended questions about their planning process, including triggers, barriers, use of professional assistance, information gathering, and communication with others. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The full set of 32 transcripts was coded and analyzed by the lead author with the aid of NVivo qualitative analysis software. Analysis proceeded by way of iterative cycles of reading, coding, refining, and recoding. Code generation was both deductive and inductive, building on existing literature while remaining sensitive to emergent properties

of the dataset. Fragments coded under similar labels were isolated and examined together, providing an opportunity to revise or expand codes as needed (Saldaña, 2016).

To examine the stories that landowners told about the succession planning experiences of others, narrative and thematic analyses were performed on portions of the interview transcripts where participants invoked the planning decisions made by members of their social networks. Following the criteria proposed by Labov (1972, 1982; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) as cited in Frank (2012), segments of speech needed to have at minimum some kind of complicating action (one or more notable events that prompts a reaction) and a resolution to be recognizable as a basic story. Riessman (1993) notes that identifying the boundaries of a narrative episode is a critical analytic challenge. To delineate distinct stories, the lead analyst sought to identify what Riessman (1993) called “entrance and exit talk” (p. 58) after Jefferson (1979).

The form of narrative analysis employed here aligned with Lieblich et al.’s (1998) description of a “categorical-content” or content analysis approach. Stories were categorized according to source (whose planning the speaker referenced), action (what kind of planning was undertaken), outcome (what happened as a result of planning), and impact (how the speaker understands or derives lessons from the episode). Each story was then classified according to genre as an episode touting success (success story), cautioning against unintended consequences (cautionary tale), detailing positive outcomes despite apparent risks or drawbacks (success with caveats) or informing about the planning process (informational) (Table 2). The categorization of stories reflected the

speaker's framing of the episode, rather than the analyst's judgment of the episode as resulting in positive or negative outcomes. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify recurring storylines within cautionary tales, and characterize the ways these stories influenced the planning of interviewees. Relevant quotations excerpted from the interview transcripts were used to illustrate themes in the report.

## **2.8. Results**

Fifty-eight discrete stories recounting the succession planning experiences of others were identified within 19 of the 32 interview transcripts.

### **2.8.1. Information Sources and Dissemination**

Across the full set of succession stories, 39 episodes recounted the experiences of kin, most commonly parents, but also siblings, children, and other members of the extended family. Seventeen stories featured friends, neighbors, or peer landowners. Two stories concerned the experiences of strangers, including a friend of a co-worker, and a speaker at a workshop.

The data support the idea that family, friends, and peers play an important role in informing landowners' approaches to planning for the future use and ownership of woodlands. Succession stories represent a mechanism of informal information sharing that occurs organically within FFO social networks. Landowners do not necessarily come into possession of succession stories by actively soliciting the advice of peers. Our interviews suggest that FFOs also acquire awareness of the experience of others through observation and casual conversation.



Succession stories furnish FFOs with empirical evidence of planning that succeeded or failed to achieve the outcomes of real landowners, which renders them different than other types of planning advice or information. Unlike consultations with attorneys or financial professionals, succession stories are available to landowners at no cost. Furthermore, previous studies have concluded that for FFOs, the source of new information matters. Gootee et al. (2010) demonstrated that FFOs with non-professional backgrounds evaluated information according to a different set of criteria than forestry professionals, including “social impressions” of the disseminator, rather than the scientific credentials widely recognized in academic and research circles. When choosing professionals to help manage their land, FFOs place a high premium on trustworthiness (Gass et al. 2009). Similarly, when it came to the subject of succession planning, some respondents in our sample viewed peer advice as less biased than professional counsel, which they feared might be driven by profit motives over the client’s best interests. As one landowner put it,

*I wouldn't consider them [professionals] having the best information that I needed for that particular subject. I mean, I might end up talking with a lawyer regarding the financial implications, or maybe an accountant, once I have zeroed in on an option or two that I like, but I certainly wouldn't start there.*

—Ralph, ME

As this quote illustrates, some landowners looked first to peers for direction before engaging professionals to formalize their wishes into legal tools.

Overall, these findings do not suggest that FFOs are substituting peer advice for professional counsel when engaging in estate planning. However, succession stories do serve to complement professional guidance by expanding the perspectives available to landowners making decisions about their land.

### 2.8.2. Classifying Succession Stories

Out of 58 succession stories, 32 episodes were categorized as “cautionary tales,” making this by far the most prevalent narrative framing. Cautionary tales contained warnings about things that might go awry during the planning process, including accounts of poor planning, unintended consequences, bitter conflict, and personal loss. Only 10 stories recounted unqualified successes, while an additional five accounts tempered this success with caveats. Eight “informational” stories served primarily to call attention to options or educate the speaker about the planning process. The framing of three episodes could not be determined.

Table 2. Classification of Succession Story by Genre

Type	Description	Count
Cautionary	Stories of failed or unsatisfactory outcomes offering warnings about tactics to avoid or alternatives to consider	32
Success	Stories featuring tactics or strategies that achieved desired outcomes	10
Informational	Stories that call attention to available tools or options or otherwise educate about planning process	8
Success with Caveats	Stories highlighting risks or threats present despite satisfactory outcome	5
Unclear	The function/impact of the story cannot be determined	3
TOTAL		58

This paper focuses on analysis of cautionary tales due to the frequency of their occurrence, the emotional potency of their content, and their potential saliency supported by the social psychology literature. Cautionary tales showcased a spectrum of misfortune, disappointments, and personal tragedies organized around three overarching themes: threats to continuity, threats to relationships, and loss of control. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn and illustrated with representative cases from interviews with landowners. This is followed by an analysis of patterns in how interviewees responded to cautionary tales.

### **2.8.3. Threats to Continuity**

Stories about *threats to continuity* typically recounted breaks in family heritage or interruption of a desired land use as a result of a failed transition, financial troubles, or unwanted development. A desire for continuity was expressed in various ways across the set of interviews, from wanting to keep the property in the family, to maintaining a working landscape, to passing the land to someone with similar values about forest management or stewardship. Respondents frequently cited inadequate planning as the culprit in scenarios where these goals were compromised. In other instances, the legal tools put in place failed to achieve their intended purpose due to poor communication with heirs. Many stories highlighted the challenge of aligning future use and ownership. For example, a landowner prioritizing fairness might accomplish ownership goals through a will leaving land to multiple children, but fail to address use through tools or provisions that support goals to keep the property intact.

An episode recounted by one New York landowner illustrates a representative threat to continuity tale. Pete<sup>1</sup> described watching a friend's farm torn apart when the owner passed away and left the property to his five adult children. With the heirs scattered throughout the country and unprepared to farm or continue paying the taxes, the house and the land were sold and converted to a housing development.

Pete acknowledged that the farmer's stubborn refusal to sell the farm during his lifetime resulted in an outcome his friend would have abhorred. He imagined the farmer rolling over in his grave at the sight of houses built atop his beloved property. The absence of a plan that identified a willing successor and provided the financial support to pay for the property foiled the farmer's goals of keeping the land intact and in the family. Pete described the impact that witnessing this episode had on his own plans:

*I'm going to have to make sure my kids financially take care of it or set it up so they can, because I know that's happened to friends of mine and their family. It's passed down and just--because of the cost of farming, the cost of paying taxes, they couldn't afford to pay taxes on vacant land...So, it ended up being split up. The family didn't have people interested in living on the property and people couldn't afford to—so [I've] got to figure out some kind of way to make sure if we pass it down to family that it's not a financial burden to keep it the way we want it.*

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<sup>1</sup> All landowner names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants

Pete's approach to succession planning is informed by the pitfalls exhibited in his friend's planning. Guided by a desire to pass on his property to his children in its present rural, undeveloped state, Pete is developing a strategy that will allow him to transfer the land to multiple heirs while ensuring that individual needs are met. He has a will in place already, and is considering a trust, but the cornerstone of his process is the emphasis on open communication and engagement of the entire family in the decision-making.

#### **2.8.4. Threats to Relationships**

*Threats to relationships* can be found in stories of interpersonal conflict and family infighting, often related to insufficient planning or a failure to achieve equity among heirs. Several respondents described a vacuum following the death of a parent that provided an opening for inheritors to quarrel over their fair share of a property or other assets. Ambiguity might stem from the absence of formal estate planning tools, a failure to communicate plans to heirs, or a plan that transferred property to multiple owners without a mechanism to support joint ownership. The intensity of these struggles varied from mild relationship strain, to legal contests, to permanent estrangement.

One New York landowner described the fallout precipitated by her mother's decision to bequeath the family property to her two children. Tension mounted when it came to negotiating a fair price for one sibling to buy the other out. Irene claimed that her brother had unrealistic expectations about the property's value and demanded an exorbitant sum for his share of the property. Irene was compelled to pay for an expensive appraisal and ultimately purchased the land, but indicates that the ordeal created a permanent rift in her

relationship with her brother. *“I have not spoken to him since. It destroyed us,”* she declared.

The experience has left Irene committed to settling her estate plans well in advance of her death to ensure that her own children are spared the strife she experienced with her brother.

*No fighting. I don't want any because we--I went through an awful lot of infighting with my brother, and there was only two of us, so I don't want my three children to have to deal with anything at all except a straight transfer of everything.*

Irene's strategy for avoiding conflict will involve initiating conversations with her children, attempting to identify a single willing heir, and making plans to compensate the others with other assets.

*That's why I want to make sure everything is hunky dory. So my three kids always have each other.*

Irene is willing to broach difficult subjects with her kids now to avoid plans that might strain relationships in the future.

### **2.8.5. Loss of Control**

The theme *loss of control* emerged in accounts of individuals whose wishes or directives were ignored by heirs, and instances where decision-making capacity was compromised by restrictive regulations or economic forces. Several stories featured running out of time or good health to enact desired plans. In other instances, a legal tool intended to achieve specific outcomes turned out to be flawed or unenforceable. Respondents often framed loss of control narratives around actors without agency, “forced” to sell because of high taxes, or constrained in their options by external circumstances such as local housing markets. Some landowners expressed wariness of mechanisms that would impose restrictions on the activities performed on the property, including enrollment in current use taxation program or a conservation easement. For landowners seeking to dictate the terms of use and ownership beyond their lifetime, sometimes referred to as “ruling from the grave,” stories showcasing the limits and vulnerabilities of estate planning were particularly disturbing.

Kurt, a landowner from Maine, recounted the failure of his neighbor’s efforts to enforce his wishes through a trust. The neighbor envisioned the trust as a way of forcing his combatant sons to cooperate and exerting control over use of the property after his death through the inclusion of specific provisions dictating joint decision-making and guidelines for occupancy. Instead, the father’s untimely death sparked an unraveling of his carefully laid plans.

*Well, he got killed in a snowmobile accident, and it was a shock and everything. And the first thing the two boys do is allow somebody to live in the camp. And they never enacted the trust. They took the money, plowed through it. One brother definitely plowed through it. The [other] brother has his own business, so he had a little bit more sense. And now, one of the brothers is running a business out of the camp, doing some guiding out of the camp, and it's a disaster. And to sit back and watch it--so, to see this trust just get annihilated that my friend was so proud of--and there was no teeth to the trust.*

This cautionary tale is particularly chilling because it demonstrates the potential for thwarted outcomes even when the landowner has been proactive about planning for the future. Watching this drama unfold had a profound impact on Kurt, who spoke at length about the lessons he derived from his neighbor's misfortune. Based on this evidence that trusts are not "bulletproof," he intends to bolster his own succession plan with stipulations that forbid subdivision, keep the property in the family in the event of divorce, and name a disinterested third party to oversee the distribution of assets. These measures represent efforts to codify his vision for the future in a way that binds heirs to comply.

#### **2.8.6. Responding to Cautionary Tales**

*And again, you learn a lot if people just open their eyes and look at what other people are doing and take the pieces that are good for them. —Kurt, ME*



Respondents varied in the degree to which they were able to articulate the impact of cautionary tales or attribute specific strategies to such stories. In part, this observation reflects differences in interviewees' planning stages and timelines. Broadly, cautionary tales tended to function in one of three ways, as triggers, correctives, or complications.

### **2.8.7. Triggers**

Participants frequently cited knowledge of others' failed outcomes as information that exposed new concerns, highlighted vulnerability in their own planning, or incited them to take tangible steps to address the future of their own property, such as consulting an attorney, drafting a will, or initiating conversations with heirs.

Several landowners described assisting an elderly relative with estate planning, or the events following the death of a family member as experiences that prompted introspection or action. One landowner remarked that "rushing to the end" to update his mother in law's will inspired him to revisit the will and trust he intends to use as vehicles to pass on his own woodland. Another recalled the ordeal following the unexpected death of an ex-wife who passed away without enacting formal plans, and the way the episode underscored his own commitment to planning that would offer more security for the children.

Some respondents looked to peers to provide benchmarks for their own planning timeline. The absentee owner of a woodland in Maine learned about the importance of cultivating the next generation's sense of attachment to the land by observing a friend's experience of raising a son with no interest in spending time outdoors. Determined to

avoid the same fate, the landowner has started exposing his own son to the Maine woods through fishing trips and hikes.

The cautionary tales that functioned as triggers commonly took the form of unanticipated inciting episodes that evoked a strong emotional reaction and a swift and direct response.

### **2.8.8. Correctives**

Many landowners expressed a desire to avoid the mistakes made by individuals in their inner circle. The stories that inspired corrective action often lacked the sense of immediacy found in the stories that functioned as triggers. These stories were more likely to reference processes such as habits of communication or practices governing fairness than discrete provoking events.

One landowner recalled the traditional principles that dictated inheritance in her mother's family, where the eldest son was the sole beneficiary of the family vineyard. The injustice of her mother's treatment still fueled potent feelings decades later and informed her sensibilities about creating equity for her own children.

*I promised myself, even as a kid, if we ever, ever have anything, it's going to be shared equally...I really would like to see it that they all walk away with something and not have the same deal I grew up with.* —Anna, ME

Several participants characterized their approach to communication with family as a deliberative reversal of the models their parents demonstrated in handling their end-of-

life affairs. A Massachusetts landowner described her father's reticence towards discussing his plans for the woodland with his kids as a strategy to avoid listening to their complaints.

*I think my father's concerns were private for the most part. He didn't want anybody to know what he was doing, no how, no way...And now that he's gone, I'm like, "Oh, that's why he wouldn't tell us," because he didn't want to hear it.*

—Nadia, MA

Unfortunately, the failure to talk through the details while her father was still alive contributed to turmoil between the siblings after his death. Identifying this family tradition of poor communication helped the landowner articulate a plan to interrupt this dynamic with her own children. Another landowner recounted his surprise, learning upon his father's death that the family's assets had not been protected.

*I was under the assumption more long term planning had been done because I know they were dealing with a lawyer and I know they were dealing with an accountant...I just assumed and they didn't want to talk about it very much.*

—Pete, NY

Acknowledging that he did things the "wrong way" with his parents, the landowner described his present efforts to engage his children in dialogue at every step of the planning process.

### 2.8.9. Complications

Not all cautionary tales elucidated a path forward. For some landowners, information contained in the stories of others provided a jolt of new awareness but did not necessarily offer solutions to their present situation.

One respondent cited the example of a friend from a fifth-generation landowning family. The family tradition of leaving a share of the property to the children of each generation had resulted in a convoluted ownership structure that rendered the land “worthless” to all. While the speaker acknowledged the absurdity of his friend’s situation, he recognized the tension between fairness and pragmatism as a problem with no easy answer.

A Vermont landowner noted the experience of a neighbor who struggled to find a local conservation organization willing to accept his bequest of land, a “beautiful” property with streams and a waterfall.

*I'm not sure where the land ended up, but he was just trying to give it to somebody with those same values he had.* —Tom, VT

Awareness of the neighbor’s frustrating experience had left him skeptical of conservation as a viable option and unsure of how to proceed towards a goal of keeping his own woodland intact.

As with correctives, the relevance of cautionary tales that functioned as complications might not be apparent immediately, but may be filed away and recalled years later when landowners are prompted to act. For some, complicating tales contributed to a sense of anxiety or paralysis that made it more difficult to act.

## **2.9. Discussion**

Our findings indicate that some participants found accounts of failed planning compelling enough to adjust their own plans or consider new courses of action. Notably, many of the strategies developed in response to cautionary tales sought to ameliorate the interpersonal dynamics at the center of succession planning. General tactics, including enhancing communication with heirs, engaging family members in land management and the planning process, and cultivating a shared understanding of fairness, appeared to be transferrable from one case to another. A smaller subset of respondents derived inspiration about specific legal mechanisms or modifications, such as language in an estate document, or stipulations for heirs. This distinction between general and specific tactics is instructive about the value of cautionary tales. The stories of others may be better at emphasizing broad principles than suggesting remedies to narrowly defined problems.

The three themes identified within the genre of cautionary tales reflect the interpretive lenses accentuated by the speaker repeating them rather than the subject matter alone. Stories with similar plotlines can often be framed in multiple ways depending on the

speaker's choice of emphasis. A commonplace account of dissolved woodland holdings, for example, might highlight the sting of seeing the converted into house lots, the feud between siblings that precipitated the sale, or the rejection of a parent's vision. In recounting the experiences of others, interviewees assume an interpretive role, presenting the details of the case through their own filters. The act of telling a coherent narrative is an exercise in making meaning (Bruner, 1990).

Viewed in this light, landowners are engaging in more than simple repetition when they recount the experiences of others—they marshal narrative resources borrowed and adapted from a variety of sources and make choices about structure, tone, and representation (Frank, 2012). Our analysis of cautionary tales provides more than a straightforward accounting of the type of information FFOs have access to through their social networks. Narrative analysis of these stories illuminates the threats that FFOs perceive about the succession planning process by exposing the values that landowners hold dear: continuity of management and heritage, preservation of interpersonal relationships, and maintenance of control.

### **2.10. Conclusions/Implications for Extension**

While past studies have documented the influence of interpersonal contacts on FFO decisions about a variety of management considerations (Kittredge et al., 2013; Knoot & Rickenbach, 2011; Rickenbach, 2009; West et al., 1988), this paper is novel in its use of qualitative methods to evaluate the role of social networks in informing the way landowners plan for the future use and ownership of their land.

Understanding the way social ties expand landowners' access to information about the succession planning process in natural settings provides the basis for applying the findings of this study to outreach materials and structured learning opportunities. We offer recommendations about the source and delivery of information, as well as content and format.

Kittredge et al. (2013) proposed that “peer or locally derived informal contacts and information may have greater value to owners” (p. 73) than technical reports produced by experts. Our findings suggest that exposure to the planning experiences of peers, friends, and kin helps FFOs compare planning options and assess the outcomes of various strategies. Extension programs can emulate the natural performance of FFO social networks through programming that facilitates peer-to-peer exchange. Bringing landowners together to learn from one another could increase exposure to divergent ways of thinking, and expand the network of peers that individuals can turn to for advice about their woodland (Ma et al., 2012).

This research emphasizes the power of cautionary tales to spur landowners to take action or think differently about planning options. Several existing resources on succession planning embed personal stories and vignettes into more traditional forms of Extension such as printed guides, landowner curricula, and books. *Your Land, Your Legacy*, a Massachusetts-based handbook, features case studies of real Massachusetts landowners who used different strategies to meet their goals for the land (Catanzaro et al., 2010). Of

11 cases, only one presents a cautionary tale, warning of the consequences of insufficient planning. *Ties to the Land*, a training guide developed in Oregon, chronicles a fictional family through their succession planning experience to demonstrate how they navigated family dynamics to achieve their goals (Bentz et al., 2006). These materials have been based heavily on the dissemination of success stories designed to facilitate the spread of best practices.

Based on the salience of cautionary tales in our study, we propose that such stories could be successfully used to educate FFOs about common pitfalls and motivate landowners to take action. A growing literature devoted to “error exposure training” offers some practical suggestions to guide the incorporation of cautionary tales into outreach to FFOs. Exposure to “vicarious errors” in training settings has been shown to enhance ability to tackle complex problems, promote critical thinking and adaptability, and support the transfer of knowledge to new scenarios (Joung, Hesketh, & Neal, 2006). Joung et al. (2006) used true stories of firefighters’ experiences as case studies demonstrating errors that resulted in considerable damage or injury to people and property. This approach could be adapted for woodland succession planning by presenting immersive storylines featuring real landowners and building in ample time for discussion and reflection to reinforce learning. Facilitated debriefing of cautionary tales could help to address the “complication” response that might leave some landowners feeling overwhelmed.

We recommend a program of Extension that utilizes cautionary tales and success stories in concert to alert FFOs to potential hazards and reinforce skills and practices that have



helped landowners meet their goals. Personal stories in the form of cautionary tales can prompt learning and introspection, but may not always supply examples of tools or strategies to emulate, or information tailored to the specific needs of individuals. Planning successes are frequently held up as exemplars in Extension programming, organizational websites, and outreach publications, and such cases can help to highlight the range of approaches and resources available to landowners. Hearing the testimony of peers who have adopted a particular planning tool can aid landowners who are considering taking similar action, however these curated success stories may not reflect or address the apprehension that landowners bring to the succession planning process. Facilitating opportunities for landowners to learn from peers as equals (and not solely from opinion leaders) could foster a rich learning environment that benefits from the perspectives of all participants (Ma et al., 2012).

Our classification of three types of cautionary tales may provide a useful framework to support peer-directed conversations about woodland succession planning. The scenarios showcased in these stories acknowledge common anxieties surrounding the succession planning process and invite FFOs to consider the values informing their own preferences for future use and ownership. This study's recognition of three of these core principles related to continuity, relationships, and control, lays the groundwork for evaluating the fit between available planning tools and individual objectives.

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## **CHAPTER 3: 'BOUND UP WITH THAT DIRT': EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES OF WOODLAND SUCCESSION PLANNING**

### **3.1. ABSTRACT**

Transfer of forestland from aging owners to the next generation is a complex social process. These transfers drive patterns of land use that will affect the public benefits provided by these landscapes. Family forest owners, who control 36% of forested land nationally, can designate future use and ownership of woodlands through formal and informal planning strategies. Previous studies have suggested that place attachment values may induce landowners to consider conservation bequests, or pursue estate-planning options that keep forest intact, however the content and context for these bonds is under-examined. A thematic analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews with family forest owners in Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont revealed 10 dimensions of attachment that lend nuance to understandings of emotional relationships with woodlands. Drawing on the field of emotional geography, we investigate the ways in which emotions act as propellants or friction to owners' abilities to act decisively or exercise various planning options. In doing so, we recognize the role that a broad suite of emotions plays in the succession planning process.

*Nadia: Well, it sounds simple enough, doesn't it?*

*Barry: Yes.*

*Nadia: Sell the property and divide the money.*

*Barry: Yeah, but it's not. It's not simple when you consider Nadia's attachment.*

*—Interviewees, MA*

### **3.2. Introduction**

The forested land base of the northeastern United States is dominated by private ownerships in relatively small holdings (Butler 2008). Nationally, trends show an aging landowner population coupled with decreasing parcel sizes (Butler et al. 2016), foretelling a large-scale shift in ownership in the coming decades with the potential to interrupt the flow of public benefits from private forestland. According to the 2013 National Woodland Owner Survey, as many as 2.7 million family forest owners (FFOs) are nearing or past retirement age and will soon face decisions about who will succeed them in ownership (Butler et al. 2016). The estate planning options available to forest landowners offer varying degrees of control over future land use. Planning that retains land in its forested condition (including the sale or donation of development rights through conservation easements, donation to a conservation organization, or bequests to heirs with directives against development) can be considered “conservation bequests” (Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016).

Research on family forest owners has increasingly acknowledged the importance of non-timber values to woodland owners. This creates an opening to consider factors beyond financial valuation that motivate decisions about land management and use. While

several recent studies have recognized emotional bonds as a potentially significant factor affecting the way woodland owners approach succession decisions, emotional dimensions have remained a relatively under-examined aspect of land ownership. Our study begins to fill this gap by investigating the content and context for emotional bonds to woodlands. Our findings expand the meanings of place attachment as it relates to land ownership, and argue for a more robust consideration of emotion in woodland succession planning.

### **3.3. Place Attachment**

The social-psychological construct of place attachment, defined by Scannell & Gifford as the “bonding that occurs between individuals and their meaningful environments” (Scannell & Gifford 2010, p. 1), provides a useful theoretical foundation for understanding emotional relationships with place. Many theorists have accentuated the emotional underpinnings of place attachment. Low (1992) references a “cognitive or *emotional linkage* of an individual to a particular setting or environment” (p. 165), while Brown and Perkins (1992) referred to “the behavioral, cognitive, and *emotional embeddedness* individuals experience in their sociophysical environments” (p. 279), (emphasis added). These place bonds have most often been portrayed in positive terms, as exemplified by Tuan’s (1974) “topophilia” or love of place, and Hidalgo & Hernandez’s (2001) definition that centers on the desire to maintain proximity to significant places. Others have highlighted feelings of devastation and loss caused by displacement or forced relocation from meaningful places (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010; Fried, 2000; Fullilove, 1996). In this paper, ‘attachment’ is viewed as a vehicle for a range of emotions.



### **3.4. Emotion and Family Forest Ownership**

A search for references to emotion in the literature of family forests and land ownership revealed engagement with the notion of place attachment, both as a named construct, and as generalized “bonds” or sense of “connection.” Numerous reports have acknowledged that FFOs develop deep affective ties to the land beyond the utilitarian value they derive from property ownership (Creighton et al., 2016; Lähdesmäki & Matilainen, 2014; Steiner Davis, 2008). Researchers have commonly used measures of place attachment as a proxy for emotional bonds to place. Feelings of attachment have been shown to be positively correlated with the adoption of conservation easements (Farmer et al. 2011), application of conservation practices on agricultural lands (Ryan, Erickson, & DeYoung, 2003), and support for land protection at the community level (Lokocz, Ryan, & Sadler, 2011; Walker & Ryan, 2008). Creighton et al. (2016) noted the prevalence of deep attachment to place among family forest owners in Washington State, and proposed the cultivation of shared family values as a predictor of successful generational transfer. Drawing on conversations with legal and conservation professionals in Massachusetts, Markowski-Lindsay et al. (2016) revealed that owners with strong attachment to the land (often related to length of ownership or family legacy) tended to be more motivated to consider conservation bequests than peers without such a deep connection. Within this literature, discussions of place bonds seldom reference distinct emotions associated with attachment.

Discussions of emotional relationships with private forestland that deviate from the attachment orientation are comparatively sparse. Lähdesmäki & Matilainen’s (2014)

typology of forest inheritors based on the theory of psychological ownership used individuals' sense of identity as woodland owners and perceptions of control to classify attitudes towards forest management. They identified some inheritors of family property who felt emotionally constrained by tradition and the legacies of their predecessors, and others who felt empowered by a sense of their management as a continuation of the family heritage.

Beyond management, emotional baggage associated with property could ultimately influence individuals' decisions to retain or sell forestland. Gruver et al. (2017) observed that strong family ties could serve as a barrier to decision-making for the future by imbuing what might otherwise be an economic transaction with emotional heft. In a similar vein, Grubbström (2011) explored the restitution of family farms in Estonia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and found that absentee owners living outside of the country retained strong emotional bonds to the land that often translated into a reluctance to sell or partition properties. The emotional bonds that Grubbström (2011) references are likely amplified by their position within a traumatic historical and political context. The question of how relationships formed under other circumstances might propel landowners towards particular options for succession planning remains an important area for further inquiry.

As Manzo (2003) notes, emotional relationships with places are far more complex than the positively valenced bonds that have dominated the place attachment literature. Rather, “experiences-in-place” can incite a full range of emotions including fear, dread,

alienation, and ambivalence (Manzo 2005). A deeper investigation of emotions elicited over the course of land ownership, and particularly those triggered by succession planning, is needed.

Current understanding of FFO succession decisions could be further enhanced through engagement with an emerging body of literature devoted to emotional geographies. This literature has paid close attention to the construction and performance of place, the formation of bonds with natural and built environments, and the emotional resonance of particular places.

### **3.5. Overview of Emotional Geographies**

Following Anderson & Smith's (2001) call for more explicit treatment of the emotional in the geographical realm, a burgeoning literature on "emotional geographies" has flourished, including two edited volumes that showcased a diversity of methods and subject matter engaged under this banner (Davidson et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2009). Despite the superficial differences across pieces authored by scholars trained in an array of academic traditions, these works exhibit shared interest in the mutability of emotions across time and space, and the way emotions "coalesce around and within certain places" (Davidson et al. 2005, p. 3). Many recognize the embodied and relational nature of emotions (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). Some examine the consequences of emotional suppression, both in everyday life, and in the context of social research itself (Herron & Skinner, 2012; Smith, 2005).

We propose that the sub-discipline of emotional geographies offers an important contribution to the study of family forest owner succession planning on the basis of three related assertions: 1) the personal (emotional) has profound implications for matters of public interest, 2) succession planning constitutes an emotionally heightened space, and 3) emotions can spur or stall action.

This paper briefly addresses each of these claims in turn before investigating the role of emotion in the succession planning experiences of 32 woodland owners in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, and Vermont.

### **3.6. Justification for an Emotional Geography of Woodland Succession**

#### *1) Private (Emotional) Dynamics Have Implications for the Future of a Public Resource*

Anderson & Smith (2001) caution against the dismissal of emotion as a purely private affair with trivial impact on public or policy matters. In reality, the future of America's woodlands rests in large part in the hands of millions of families and individuals faced with difficult choices regarding how they will transfer land to the next generation. These deeply personal decisions are inextricably bound up with complex family dynamics, capricious market forces, and a litany of situational factors, while the consequences of these private deliberations impact a collective resource. When private forest owners elect to permanently surrender development rights through an easement or donation to a conservation organization, functional benefits provided by forests including wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, microclimate regulation, and flood mitigation are kept intact (Rickenbach et al. 2011). When private forestlands are sold, subdivided, or passed

to heirs without legal protections, fragmentation may compromise the flow of services and value to society (Stein et al., 2005).

*2) Succession Planning as an Emotionally Heightened Phase in the Trajectory of Ownership*

Past studies of intergenerational land transfer have focused largely on issues such as timing (Kimhi, 1994), timber value (Amacher et al. 2002), and taxes (Broderick et al., 1994). Yet estate-planning professionals attest to the highly charged nature of conversations concerning mortality, fairness, finances, and one's legacy (Preisser & Williams, 2010). The proceedings may be guilt-ridden or anxiety provoking, wrought with dread and conflict, or infused with hope and optimism. These emotional experiences may have bearing on the way landowners engage family members in the planning process, address setbacks, or respond to new information. Anderson and Smith advise researchers to pay attention to contexts in which emotions are obviously heightened, and also to situations where "emotions are, for a time, brought to the fore by personal joys and tragedies" (2001, p. 7). Succession decisions represent some of the most tumultuous and uncertain periods in land ownership, and are often triggered by painful or unexpected life course events such as death, divorce, or illness (Markowski-Lindsay et al. 2016) .

### *3) Emotions can Spur or Stall Action*

Ahmed has argued that emotions can stimulate or stall action (Ahmed 2004 as cited by Harris et al. 2012). Harris et al. (2012) underscored the role of emotion in modulating the yard management practices of suburban homeowners, illustrating how emotional experiences empowered some homeowners to innovate and transform these spaces, and left others feeling trapped within regimes of conventional lawn care. Similarly, Kearns and Collins (2012) described stakeholders' emotional ties to a coastal region of New Zealand as "a resource and motivation for place protection" with the ability to "generate mobilization against change" when meaningful locations were threatened by development (p. 937). Emotions may likewise move some woodland owners to take bold action to realize objectives about the future use and ownership of their properties, while paralyzing others in a state of indecision.

### **3.7. Research Questions**

As place attachment has not been fully articulated in the family forest literature, we begin by exploring the varied ways in which landowners express and reveal bonds to woodlands. We posit that these dimensions of attachment serve as antecedents to a range of emotions that arise during the succession planning process. Our inquiry into the role that emotion plays in planning trajectories is informed by emotional geographies. The following research questions were posed:

1. How do FFOs express and reveal attachment to woodlands?
2. How do emotional relationships with woodlands influence the succession planning process for FFOs?

### **3.8. Methods**

The findings presented in this paper are based on analysis of the qualitative portion of a multi-phase study of family forest owners' succession decisions in the northeastern United States. A four-state mail survey implemented in Phase I of the project served as a recruiting and filtering mechanism for the interviews that are the focus of this study. The sample frame for the initial survey was derived by pulling tax parcel records of all FFO-owned forested parcels, 10 acres or larger, in Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont, and reducing this list to the residents of towns within eight priority watersheds (Markowski-Lindsay et al. in review). The forty-two percent of mail survey respondents who volunteered to take part in a follow-up interview were sorted into six planning and action stages according to responses to a question about steps taken or intended to decide the future use and ownership of their land. This classification was used to recruit 32 individuals with a variety of planning experiences to participate in semi-structured interviews across the geographic areas covered by the survey. The final pool of interviewees included four individuals per watershed for a total of eight per state.

Interviewers followed a pre-developed guide that posed open-ended questions regarding landowners' vision for future use and ownership, the planning process, and perceived barriers. Of particular relevance to this analysis, participants were invited to share the story of their land acquisition, the aspects they liked most about their woodland, and what the process of planning for the future felt like. Interviews took place in participants' homes or a neutral meeting place within the community (three were conducted over the

phone due to distance) and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Analysis of the transcripts took the form of an iterative coding and theming process. NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to tag relevant segments of text with inductive and deductive codes. Following Saldaña (2016), the research design was emergent, with wide-ranging first-cycle codes that were refined and developed in subsequent coding cycles according to the evolving interests of the study. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to distill categories into salient themes. All names used in the write-up have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants.

### **3.9. Results**

#### **3.9.1. Dimensions of Attachment to Woodlands**

To address the study's questions about the nature of FFOs' emotional relationships with woodlands, the results section is organized in two parts. We first present the findings of the thematic analysis in the form of ten dimensions of attachment to woodlands. Second, to illustrate the interplay of these dimensions in context, the stories of four participants are presented as exemplars that weave together excerpts from the interviews with insights from the place attachment and emotional geographies literature. In doing so, we show how emotion manifests throughout individual trajectories of land ownership. This exploration into the emotional worlds of FFOs illuminates an aspect of the decision making landscape that is seldom made explicit.



Respondents articulated a web of interconnected themes related to a sense of connection to place. Their narratives reflect complex interactions between embodied, interpersonal, and symbolic engagements with woodlands. The themes presented here represent dimensions of place attachment as expressed within a woodland context. The 10 dimensions described below (Table 3) reflect commonalities across landowners' varied pathways to forming emotional bonds with their woodlands.

Table 3. Dimensions of Attachment to Woodlands and Number of Respondents Exhibiting Each Dimension

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
1. PHYSICAL	Land-shaping activities; “working the land”, often blurring the lines between labor and leisure	25
2. RECREATION/AMENITY	Recreational or aesthetic enjoyment; appreciation of amenities such as quiet, privacy, or wildlife observation	26
3. HERITAGE	Family legacy or sense of history often expressed as desire to keep property in the family or carry forward elements from the past	21
4. STEWARDSHIP	Activities and values related to the desire to be a caretaker by preserving or “improving” desired features of the landscape	21
5. WAY OF LIFE	Owning land as a way of preserving or maintaining a certain lifestyle or ethos (rural, farm, or country)	18
6. SOCIAL	Interpersonal and often intergenerational engagement; land as gathering place for loved ones	16
7. MEMORIES	Land stores and evokes vivid memories	15
8. CUSTOMIZATION	Investment of time, resources, and labor to personalize natural or built environment of a property	10
9. SACRIFICE	Struggle or tradeoffs associated with owning or retaining land; decisions motivated by emotions or adherence to values over financial considerations	6
10. THERAPEUTIC	Landowner attributes healing qualities to landscape, deriving physical or psychological benefits	4

## **1. Physical**

Respondents described a range of land-shaping activities on their woodlands, typically undertaken to “improve” the property or derive some material benefit from the land. Although the focus of the interviews was the use and ownership of woodlands, landowners typically spoke more holistically about working the land, recounting activities such as harvesting timber, cutting or burning brush, mowing fields, planting orchards, removing invasive plants, and collecting firewood that spanned a gradient from fields to forests, and highly managed to unmanaged landscapes. Such interventions accomplished a variety of objectives from enhancing aesthetic quality and facilitating recreational access, to improving forest stand health or wildlife habitat or generating products for home use or income. As Morse et al. (2014) point out, many landowners derive enjoyment and satisfaction from the ritual work of maintaining their properties, effectively narrowing the distinction between certain labor and leisure activities on the land. Working the land confers an intimate knowledge of the woods and allows landowners to shape landscapes according to their own idealized visions.

## **2. Recreation/Amenity**

*Recreation/amenity* bonds were generally linked to physical and biotic characteristics of the landscape, including geologic and hydrological features, forest and vegetation type, and wildlife communities. These features enable various forms of recreation including hiking, horseback riding, hunting, swimming, and wildlife observation. Landowners also valued amenities associated with these rural natural settings such as aesthetic qualities, privacy, and quiet. The importance of these characteristics is corroborated by national

surveys that consistently include beauty, wildlife, and nature among the top reasons for owning woodlands (Butler et al. 2016).

### **3. Heritage**

Landowners with a *heritage* attachment to the land often referenced an ancestral history of occupation on their property going back one or more generations. Others interpreted heritage in a broader regional or cultural sense, referring to their family's connection to a particular mountain ridge, or township. While this type of familial bond to place constituted the most visible form of heritage attachment within the sample, several landowners demonstrated a fascination with past owners and activities that shaped their land in the absence of any direct lineage to these individuals. Heritage bonds left some individuals feeling like the land was a part of them. As one respondent put it, "I'm kind of bound up with that dirt."

### **4. Stewardship**

Respondents revealed *stewardship* attachments in the form of enacted values or land-shaping activities oriented around maintenance, preservation, or the production of some ideal version of the landscape. Notably, landowners in this sample interpreted stewardship in varied ways, from minimal intervention to intensive management. Some landowners interpreted their role as caretakers of the land in its present condition, while others sought to "improve" forest stands or soil fertility to enhance wildlife habitat or the productive potential on the land.

## **5. Way of Life**

Land ownership permitted respondents to assert chosen ways of living in the world, enact values, and express land-based identities. A *way of life* attachment was typically articulated as either an idealized vision or a livelihood strategy. Respondents expressed commitment to lifestyles that referenced both aesthetic and productive signifiers, including “rural,” “country,” “agricultural,” and “working landscape.” Individuals coopted these terms to different ends, using them to evoke the picturesque qualities of woodland life, the use of land for particular activities and enterprises, and at times the character of the residents themselves. Proponents of agricultural and working landscape lifestyles pointed to values such as hard work and self-reliance to characterize their land-based ethos. The notion of a rural or country lifestyle tended to be wrapped up in the ability to enjoy certain amenities: a slower pace away from urban centers, the freedom to do as you please away from the rules and judgment of others, or the ability to practice meaningful activities. Respondents who cared about *way of life* ran the gamut from farmers to lifetime hunters to dedicated homesteaders and devoted horse-owners. *Way of life* often provided a thread connecting the present with past and future as evidenced by woodland owners who sought to recreate historic landscapes or expressed a desire to carry their mode of living forward.

## **6. Social**

For many woodland owners, interpersonal relationships featured prominently in accounts of land use and enjoyment. Family forests provide a venue for people to come together and bond over shared experience, whether structured around a collaborative work project,

or a recreational pursuit. Many woodland owners valued their properties as gathering places for friends and loved ones. Others recounted efforts to engage multiple generations of family members in activities on the land as a way of deepening connections to the land. In these ways, woodlands facilitated the establishment and maintenance of social ties

## **7. Memories**

For many respondents, woodlands were a container for potent memories ranging from the fond to the painful. Specific landscape features can become cognitively linked to important activities or rituals, interactions with loved ones, or elements of personal history. Scannell & Gifford (2005) argue that memory is a chief vehicle in the formulation of place meanings that help to cement bonds between people and their significant places.

## **8. Customization**

*Customization* refers to the investment of time, resources, and labor into the personalization of the natural or built environment of a property. Landowners created new structures or modified existing conditions to reflect their personal style or aesthetic, meet personal or familial needs, and facilitate social interactions or desired uses. Several respondents employed skill and artistry in carpentry or construction to showcase wood harvested from the property in home furnishings or structures. Others excavated ponds, cleared trails, or built cabins to enhance recreation or access to the property. These examples highlight a creative process that deepens bonds with place. Drawing on

Duncan's (1973) work linking group identity to "landscape taste" in a suburban context, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) hypothesized that physical modifications of the environment can be a project of identity formation, allowing residents to become enmeshed with the landscape.

## **9. Sacrifice**

*Sacrifice* evokes struggle or tradeoffs associated with owning or maintaining land. Several respondents described hardships that a parent or relative endured in order to keep the property in the family, or carry out management. Stories of past owners' perseverance in the face of adversity motivated some owners to plan for the future of their land, and lent emotional weight to these decisions. Others described their own ownership as a sacrifice that entailed cutting back on expenses in other areas of their lives.

## **10. Therapeutic**

Woodland owners with a *therapeutic* attachment to their land attributed healing qualities to the landscape, deriving physical or psychological wellbeing from exposure to nature. Respondents described their wooded properties as a place to recharge, escape the stresses of work or home life, or experience social relief. For some respondents, the salutatory effects of woodlands were obtained through recreational pursuits, while others cited the restorative effects of amenity values such as stillness or quiet. Still others pursued wellness through engaged practice on the land, which might include ritualistic activity or

physical manipulation of the environment in the form of chores, echoing Dunkley's (2008) theory of therapeutic landscapes as 'taskscape' (after Ingold, 1993).

### **3.9.2. Profiles in Emotional Relationships with Woodlands**

Equipped with an expanded vocabulary for talking about emotional relationships with woodlands, we now turn to the stories of four respondents to illustrate the ways in which the dimensions of attachment underpin a suite of emotions that influence the woodland succession planning process. Each profile showcases a subset of these themes, demonstrating the complex emotional geographies of individual planning trajectories. A conceptual diagram accompanying each profile (Figures 2-5) illustrates the individual's emotional geography over time. The x-axis displays a timeline of key phases in land ownership and decision-making, and the y-axis, a spectrum of emotion from positive to negative. The three-panel sequence for each individual highlights the dominant emotions associated with significant events in the owner's personal history, the dynamic nature of emotional responses across ownership and planning trajectories, and the salience of select attachment dimensions at various points in time.

#### **Nadia: Heritage and the 'Family Heart' (Figure 2)**

*Key Attachment Dimensions: Heritage, Sacrifice, Stewardship, Memory*

Nadia's account provides insight into the symbolic weight of heritage in succession planning and the deliberations activated by transitions in ownership. Individuals who inherit their woodlands often acquire a set of pre-formed associations along with the

physical property, some grounded in first-hand recollection, and other “memories” assimilated from lore passed down through the generations (Setten, 2005). Bennett (2009) calls these “secondary memories” and posits that they can “seep into the terrain of our own memories and sense of nostalgia” through the practice of storytelling, or handling of photographs and other artifacts (Bennett, 2009, p. 189-190).

Nadia (MA) and her siblings inherited family land after the death of their father. At the time of the interview, the co-owners had not yet come to an agreement about what to do with the property. As out-of-state residents, her siblings are inclined to sell. Nadia alone has expressed interest in pursuing permanent conservation, perhaps even creating a park in her father’s honor.

Nadia advocates her position through an appeal to heritage, shared family values, and collective sacrifice.

*So, I would just say that the family heart--when I say that, I mean my father, myself, my children, the family heart is there. And so, you want to see it go to a good--well, you figure your parents struggled their entire life to keep something since 1946, you don't want to just blow off the last piece of it to nothing.*

In conjuring the image of the ‘family heart,’ Nadia imbues the land with an intimate personal history, threatened by the specter of development or other uses incompatible with her memory of the place. When articulating her sense of connection to the property,



Nadia evokes her father's devotion rather than specific formative experiences on the land. For Nadia, attachment to the property is more symbolic than material.

*His land [was] his life. He absolutely love[d] this. And had my mom not passed away, they'd be living up here. And that was his plan. So, being I'm the same blood and the same heart, I know that.*

In this statement, Nadia positions herself as a defender of her father's memory and legacy by advocating for preservation of the family land. The entwinement of property and sentiment renders it impossible for Nadia to treat decisions regarding the land as simple economic transactions, even after the pain of her father's death has subsided with time.

*I'm past most of the emotional part. Then I'm just like, 'Okay, let's just get this done.' But, I certainly would hate to just get it done and regret it by not doing it properly.*

Nadia characterizes the dissipation of her grief as the removal of a barrier preventing attention to the pragmatic concerns of settling the estate. Nevertheless, Nadia's continued emotional investment creates friction with family members who hold alternative visions. Nadia's case illustrates how emotional relationships with place are far from stable, and can be altered by personally meaningful experiences or episodes (Figure 2). The land has taken on heightened significance for Nadia since her father's death, amplifying a sense of duty to safeguard the property from development. This feeling of responsibility is closely

linked to the dimensions of heritage and sacrifice. Furthermore, Nadia's account highlights the fluidity of emotion throughout planning trajectories. Following the transfer, emotions associated with mourning functioned as a drag on planning, but with the passage of time, emotions such as admiration, pride, and loyalty have been channeled into a stewardship ethic, spurring planning for preservation. Nadia's ability to realize this vision is constrained by the need to share decision-making authority with her siblings.

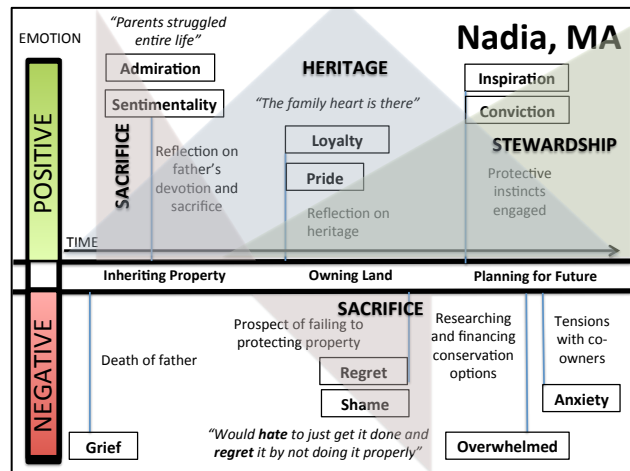
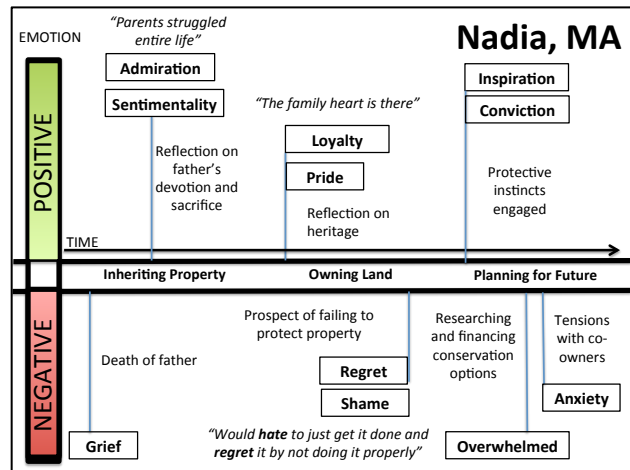
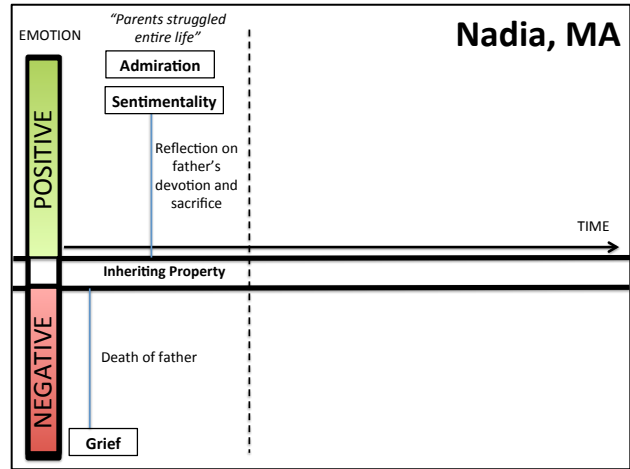


Figure 2. Nadia's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Selected Dimensions of Attachment

### **Julie: Spatial Memory (Figure 3)**

*Key Attachment Dimensions: Memory, Recreation/Amenity, Social*

On the surface, Julie's (VT) relationship with her woodland displays classic signifiers of positive attachment. Early on in the development of place attachment as a construct, Tuan (1974) defined topophilia simply as the "affective bond between people and place or setting," (p. 4) effectively setting a course for a longtime bias towards the study of positive emotions in the nascent attachment literature (Manzo 2003).

Julie spoke as someone who had come to know the woods intimately through routine and recreation. Her regular walking route on trails crisscrossing mixed hemlock hardwood forest, ledge, and wetlands was referred to affectionately in her household as "the hike," a name that could set family dogs off in a frenzy of enthusiastic recognition. Julie described the impressive birdlife attracted by the water on the property, and the joy of bringing her grandchildren down to the marsh to watch beavers at work constructing a dam.

Beneath this exterior however, Julie's testimony illustrated what Chawla (1992) termed the "shadow side" of place experience. Intimate places can call up bitter memories, as in cases of domestic violence, divorce, or the loss of a loved one (Marcus, 1995). As our interviews showed, emotional relationships with home places can affect the way owners think about the future of associated woodlands. For Julie, the woodland she purchased with an ex-husband and the house they built together lingered as reminders of a dark

chapter in her past. She expressed doubts that she could truly reset the relationship to place even after remarrying.

*If we sell this place, then the next place would be ours, not mine. And that's, in many ways, sometimes why I want to leave here, because I started this place with a different guy. And I had to get rid of him to finish it...It wasn't a very good time in my life. So, there's some bad memories that come with this place, so it's kind of why there's part of me that wants to move on and have someone else have the opportunity to enjoy what's here.*

On the other hand, Julie acknowledged gratitude that her property had served as a refuge for family members during times of need, such as when her son's home burned down.

*The one thing I can say about this place, the house in particular and the property, [is] that I've been able to share it with my sons in various ways. Different stages of their life, they've had to live downstairs. So, they've come back. And post fire, I had--I was able to take in six people...There's enough space on the property that I never felt overrun or crowded...It makes me happy to be able to share it, especially for someone in need.*

Jones (2005) argues that memory is inherently spatial and therefore key to understanding emotional bonds with place. Several respondents recounted vivid memories linked to meaningful activities or rituals, interactions with friends and family, or significant

episodes within their personal histories. As evidenced in these accounts, memory serves as a potent vehicle for the formation of enduring place attachments (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

As Julie's narrative illustrates, residential spaces can evoke complex emotional responses with the power to influence owners' decisions about retaining or disposing of property. Manzo (2005) notes that place associations need not be wholly positive or negative, but grow increasingly multi-faceted as they gather layers of experience. Julie describes competing emotional ties simultaneously pulling her away and making her reluctant to leave.

*I'm kind of in limbo about--it's possible that we may sell and move out of state. But, I like this place too. So, I'm kind of teetering, and I'm waiting to see. I'm just kind of waiting to see what happens.*

Julie's uncertainty is borne out of the co-existence of multiple embodied experiences of place, notably the joyful interactions related to recreation/amenity and social attachment dimensions, and the mixed emotions contained within vivid memories (Figure 3). This ambivalence has effectively stalled her progress in planning for the future of the property. At present, she has no legal documents in place specifying use or ownership after she is gone.

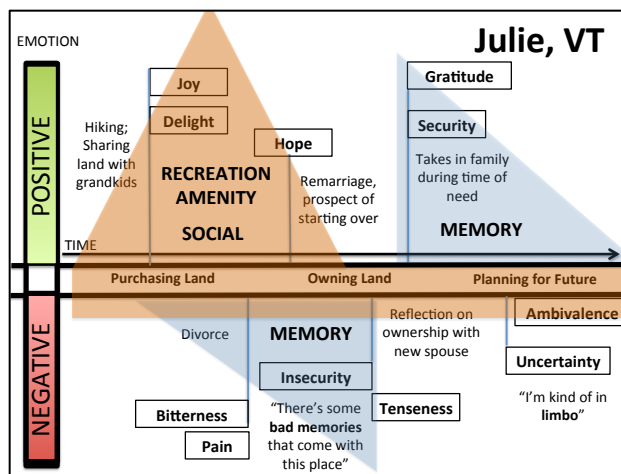
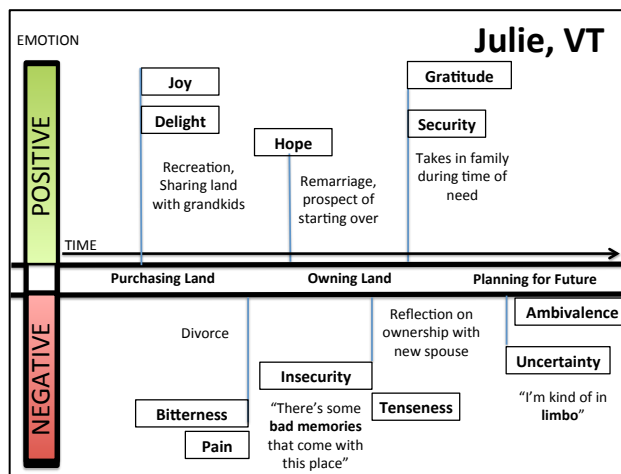
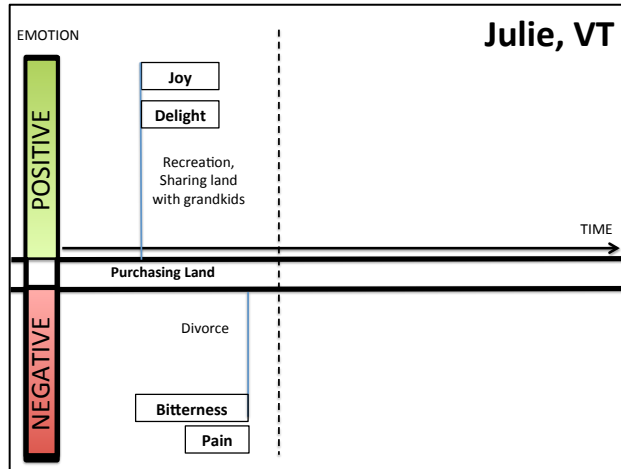


Figure 3. Julie's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Selected Dimensions of Attachment

### **Franklin and Sam: Transmitting Emotional Relationships**

When asked about their vision for future ownership of their woodlands, many respondents expressed a desire to transmit a set of values or land-based relationships to designated heirs. Can emotional relationships with place be transmitted across generations? The two cases that follow depict owners evaluating their own feelings about the land, while assessing the willingness and suitability of heirs to carry on management of the woodland in their stead. We see in these deliberations how the prospect of relinquishing control brings strong emotions to the fore.

#### **Franklin (Figure 4)**

*Key Attachment Dimensions: Stewardship, Sacrifice, Way of Life, Recreation/Amenity, Physical, Social*

A strategic vision, a touch of negotiation, and a great deal of sacrifice allowed Franklin (VT) to succeed in buying the land with a beloved pond abutting the house on two acres where he lived with his wife. When he learned that absentee owners from southern New England had placed the neighboring property on the market, Franklin feared that the site would be sold to developers. Although he could only afford to pay roughly half of the sale price, Franklin made an offer, buoyed by his conviction that this was “too nice a piece of property to see houses springing up all over the place out there.” Franklin argued his case by asserting common ground with the owners—they had kept the land open all these years, and he assured the family that he was committed maintaining those same values.



His impassioned appeal paid off, and Franklin has made good on his promise to steward the land. A strong and consistent ethical core runs through his narrative, embodied by his ethos of “wise-use” and desire “do the right thing.” Franklin’s concept of stewardship is exemplified by an active approach to management and enjoyment of the property. In practice, Franklin applies this philosophy by opening the property to controlled hunting and recreation, harvesting timber as needed for modest home projects, gathering firewood to share with friends and family, and accommodating small-scale organic farming.

A potent thread running through Franklin’s narrative is a rejection of financial value for the land. Despite the sacrifice and tradeoffs involved in holding on to the property during times when money was tight, Franklin has consistently weighed affective and ethical considerations over the financial. He describes forgoing things he was accustomed to and tense years when the threat of forced liquidation loomed as a menacing possibility.

*There was a time we were struggling to keep it, you know, because we had three children, and they’re all going to college and all that stuff. And we almost had to sell it and that would have been devastating to me.*

Franklin’s imagined response to being forced to sell off land recalls descriptions of loss and anguish described in the literature of displacement and place disruption (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010; Fried, 1963; Fullilove, 1996) Throughout this period of uncertainty, spending time outdoors helped to allay his anxiety.

*I worked my regular job and then at night I'd come home, and I'd go down and sit by the pond down there and sit in the brush down there and watch the wildlife and that was the most relaxing thing. I mean, that was just a little frosting on the cake for wanting this land.*

The land is a sanctuary for both Franklin and the wildlife for which he is committed to providing refuge. Since retiring, Franklin has been contemplating the future of his land and his intention to leave the property to the next generation. This prospect is the source of renewed anxiety, as Franklin appraises his unsuccessful campaigns to relay his sense of passion to his heirs.

Franklin recounted wistfully his efforts to instill his love for the land in his granddaughters, through frequent visits to the pond to teach them about the resident wildlife. From a young age he trained the girls to identify the pelts of all the mammals in the state of Vermont, and on long car rides he and his wife led a game they invented to entertain the children and reinforce their learning.

*Somebody would bring up a species, somebody would bring up the habitat, somebody would bring up, you know, how many young they had and what was their food supply [...] They knew all that stuff. And they could take any pelt out of the dozens of pelts that I had, pick it up, tell whether it was a male or a female or [...] how their whole structure was formed so that they fit with their natural history and their ability to survive and so forth.*

While he had hoped these early experiences would kindle a connection that persisted into their adult lives, by high school they had cultivated different interests and “now they don’t have time for grandpa and the pond.” Franklin’s attempts to pass on his land ethic to his grandchildren illuminate a deeper significance behind the notion of intergenerational transfer—a desire to transmit something more than physical property in the form of values, relationships, or a particular way of life (Steiner-Davis & Fly, 2004).

More troubling still, Franklin has reason to believe that his three adult stepchildren do not share his deep connection to the natural world or appreciation for the property’s value as intact forest. Franklin recounted the story of refusing their requests some years ago to build their own homes on tracts carved from the property as evidence of their discrepant values and tendency to regard the property’s worth in purely financial terms. Such parcelization, he asserted, defied the very objectives that moved him to buy the land in the first place. In contrast, Franklin’s valuation of the land is emotional, sentimental, ethical, and highly personal. Of his woodland, Franklin professed, “I don’t care if I sold it for a dollar and it’s gone, as long as it didn’t...as long as the goals are met, you know?”

Franklin presents his vision for the future as an extension of his identity and evidence of enduring values. Championing wildlife and responsible stewardship is expressed as both a vocation and central moral tenant.

*Yeah, they know my whole life has been involved with the natural world and observing and trying to do the right thing for the land and the waterfowl and all the species that go along with it.*

While Franklin has made his wishes abundantly clear, he acknowledges that this verbalized desire is all that presently enjoins his heirs to carry on his legacy of wise-use. To be worth anything at all, he reflected, this vision would have to be formalized in writing. In his ideal scenario, Franklin would obtain a commitment from his stepchildren to keep the property in its present state, and the land would stay in the family. If they did sell, Franklin hopes that the land would go to someone with values similar to his own. At present, Franklin's planning is mired in the contemplation stage. Though he is able to articulate a series of steps to enact his wishes, including discussing his plans with family and professionals and developing a binding legal document such as a will, trust, or LLC, Franklin perceives the way forward as an emotional landmine fraught with difficult and painful conversations.

As Franklin's story demonstrates, emotion can mobilize protective instincts, or thwart planning progress by complicating links in the chain of decisions. Looking at the emotional trajectory of Franklin's ownership, we see the theme of sacrifice as most salient during a period of financial uncertainty when he was confronted on a daily basis with the tradeoffs and anxiety caused by his refusal to sell off land (Figure 4).

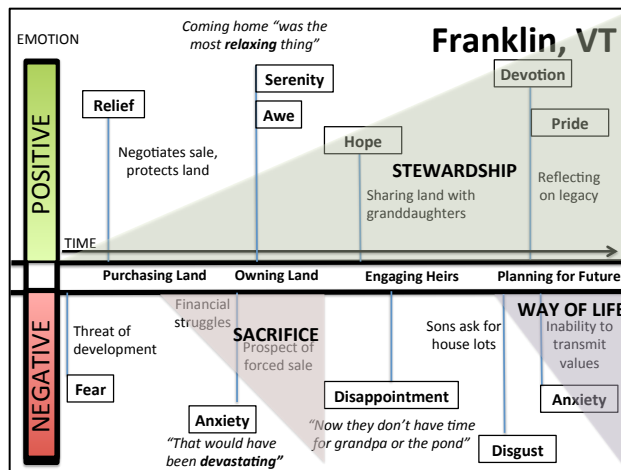
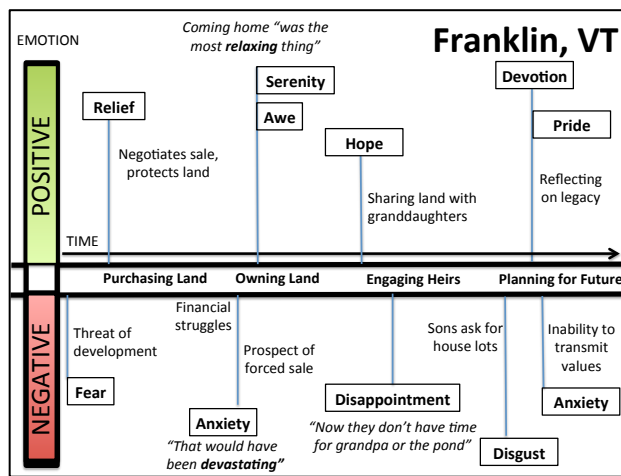
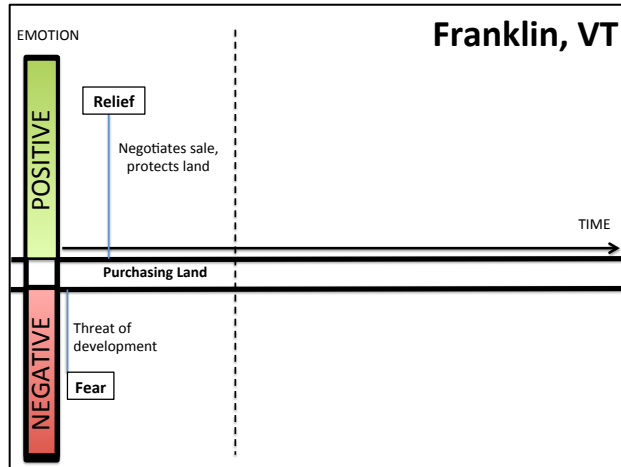


Figure 4. Franklin's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Selected Dimensions of Attachment

Although the attachment dimension of stewardship is ever-present throughout Franklin's narrative, the significance of this theme is amplified as he has been reflecting more on his legacy in retirement. This value orientation is accompanied by emotions such as devotion, pride, and hope that fuel ongoing efforts to engage his heirs. At the same time, Franklin's recognition of the forces threatening his way of life is a source of renewed anxiety he navigates the succession planning process.

### **Sam (Figure 5)**

*Key Attachment Dimensions: Therapeutic, Stewardship, Recreation/Amenity, Social*

Sam (NY) too faces the prospect of finding a caretaker for the land he loves. Sam and his wife originally purchased their property as a retreat several hours from their primary residence in another state. As Sam recalls, they knew the place was something special right away, park-like with a dramatic waterfall and gorge, wooded stream, and fossils embedded in the shale along the banks, a landscape they were proud to share with visiting friends. Sam described the land as a therapeutic refuge and a source of stability in their ever-changing lives.

*It's always a sanctuary to go up there and to get away from what we've been contending with here, wherever else we've been living...It's like an expensive psychologist or psychiatrist... There's been only one constant in our lives for the past 39 years, and that's the fact that we've had that property...It's--we always*

*like to have that little constant of that being pretty much the same even though our lives have completely changed in many ways and we've lived in many different places.*

This excerpt depicts the psychic benefits that some individuals derive from owning woodlands. Twigger-Ross & Uzzell (1996) call this sense of stability anchored through specific personally meaningful locations “place-referent continuity.” It is ongoing engagement with *this* property that gives Sam peace of mind. This type of bond can be contrasted with Feldman’s (1990) concept of “settlement identity,” which is used to describe cognitive schemas that individuals may apply to generalized categories of places with similar attributes (such as seasonal lakeside communities, or rustic hunting cabins), or the phenomenon that Stokols and Shumaker (1981) called “generic place attachment.”

Since Sam and his wife have moved to a new state, what was once a three-hour drive is now much further, causing them to consider if keeping the property is still worth it.

*And every time we kind of feel like, well, we got a real nice place now in Virginia, and, in many aspects, it's got similar attributes to the place up there. We kind of think well maybe, do we really need the place up there, and each time when we go back up, when we look and we realize, yeah, we need to keep this place.*

Sam’s commitment to keeping the property is an example of what Scannell and Gifford (2010) call “proximity-maintaining behavior,” generally interpreted as evidence of

positive attachment. Sam acknowledges that this particular property holds meaning that exceeds the sum of its recreation or amenity values. For now, the strength of this bond outweighs matters of practicality or convenience, but Sam recognizes that the prospect of transmitting this relationship to the next generation is unlikely. His children appreciate the leisure opportunities afforded by the property, but could satisfy these same interests in a forest with comparable features. Sam explains,

*They enjoy the hiking. They enjoy all that, but they're quick to go up and they can--they'll like another area to hike as well. And so, it's not something that they are--would have embraced or have embraced as their own...we haven't really talked specifically and formally about what they might like to see happen to this property at the end.*

In other words, the inheriting generation values a certain class of amenities that could be easily found in a substitute. Sam ventures that while his children have their fair share of fond memories associated with the property, they would ultimately be better served financially if the property were sold during his own lifetime. For this reason, the will and trust Sam has in place to transfer his assets offer little guidance on future use. Although it would constitute a break in family heritage, liquidating the asset would confer at least two advantages in Sam's eyes: facilitating the creation of equity among multiple heirs, and affording an opportunity to identify a buyer with similar values.



*We would love to be able to know that the property is going to be kept in kind of the same way it is. I would hate and would actually resist the selling to somebody who had the desire to split it up.*

The impulse to handpick a successor is a reflection of Sam's notion of stewardship, and desire to exert control over the outcome of a sale without burdening his heirs with real estate or restrictive covenants. Such a strategy is not without risk, as Sam concedes. There are limits to the extent to which owners can influence future use when selling outside the family without a conservation easement. Sam's story illustrates how individuals weigh emotional bonds against familial and circumstantial factors to fashion acceptable compromises.

Across Sam's narrative, recreation/amenity and social dimensions provide the basis for positive emotions like awe and pride (Figure 5). These experiences contribute to the emotional core of Sam's bond, a highly personal therapeutic attachment that developed in response to stresses in other areas of his life. Sam's relationship to this land is thus a product of meaningful experiences and interactions occurring within the context of particular life stages. As he formulates a plan for the future of this woodland, the notion of stewardship becomes more salient, even as Sam wrestles with questions of balancing loyalty to heirs with his commitment to the land.

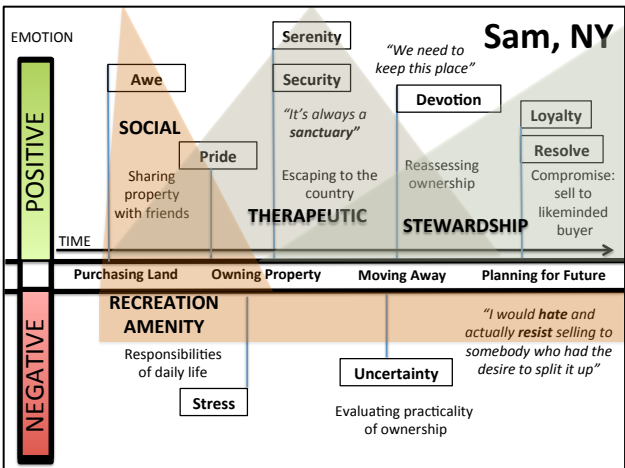
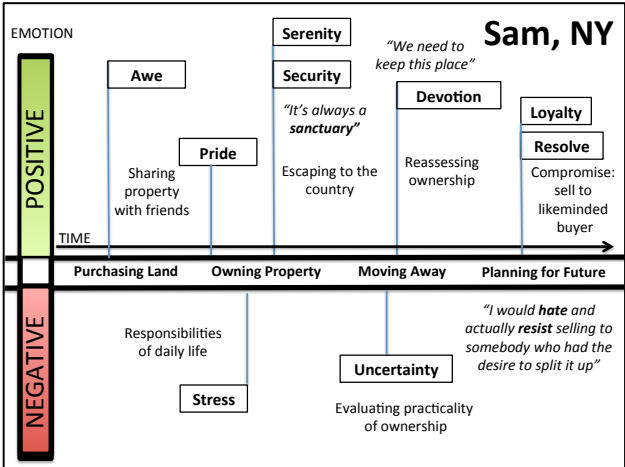
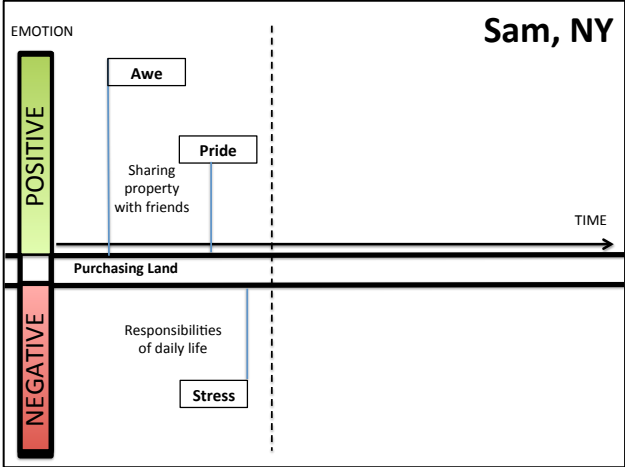


Figure 5. Sam's Emotional Trajectory, Overlaid with Dimensions of Attachment

### **3.10. Discussion**

#### **3.10.1. Elucidating Woodland Attachments**

Our research offers new footholds for understanding the notion of attachment in the context of woodlands and suggests that potent bonds can arise out of what might be categorized as “everyday” individually meaningful land-shaping practices and interpersonal engagements.

The cases featured in this paper exhibit varied paths to coming to know woodlands, via recreational pursuits, physical labor, and social interactions. All of the individuals profiled could be said to hold attachment to their land, but as we show, woodland owners develop this sense of connection through a wide range of experiences and processes. The dimensions of attachment to woodlands presented here constitute an expanded vocabulary for characterizing emotional relationships to forested landscapes that builds on the existing literature on forest ownership.

Our findings add to a body of literature exploring critical geographies of home, resonating with past work showing that the concept of “home” for people living in rural areas is often intertwined with experiences of the natural environment (see Morse & Mudgett, 2017). Most of the participants in the study had a residence within one mile of their woodland, and many spoke about their land as an extension of home. This proximity and entanglement with the activities of daily living renders family forests different from the kinds of natural settings that have been most often studied in place attachment research, notably sites of leisure and recreation such as national parks, multi-use trails,

wilderness areas, and rivers (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). Our work with FFOs reveals private woodlands as spaces of concentrated care and activity that shape both landscape and owner. This blurring of the divisions between the natural and built features of home places further challenges the archetype of family forests as woodlots owned and managed primarily as financial assets, an assumption that has been eroded by audience segmentation studies informed by social marketing (Butler et al., 2007; Finley & Kittredge, 2006). Our research suggests that for some individuals, planning for the future of woodlands is inextricably wrapped up with planning for the future of home, a place imbued with layers of meaning beyond the value of timber stock.

Furthermore, this analysis contributes to understanding of connections between embodied practice and the formation of relationships to place. In describing how individuals cultivate proprietary feelings towards woodlands, Lähdesmäki & Matilainen (2014) write, “The more information and better knowledge an individual has about the object, the deeper the relationship is between the self and the object, and hence the stronger the feeling of ownership is toward it” (p. 102-103). For FFOs, this education often takes the form of learning by doing, whether through activities traditionally thought of as leisure such as hunting, horseback riding, or hiking, or projects that manipulate the landscape towards particular goals, such as clearing ski trails, cutting brush, removing invasive weeds, or harvesting timber to manage for wildlife. This echoes Morse et al.’s (2014) observation that the act of partaking in physical work yields an intimate knowledge of place that enhances feelings of “relatedness” to a particular piece of ground.

While such activities heighten participants' sense of connection, embodied knowledge is difficult to transmit in full to others (Morse et al. 2014). Significantly, these bonds are forged through engagements with specific places at particular times, as illustrated in the personal stories showcased in this paper. It was *this pond* where Franklin shared knowledge with his granddaughters, *this property* where Julie's divorce occurred, walking *this stream* that gave Sam a sense of escape, and *this forest* that Nadia's father cherished. This specificity renders family woodlands unique places not easily substituted for lands with comparable amenities. Our study suggests that the task of transferring embodied knowledge constitutes a key challenge to FFO efforts to pass on both property and a set of relationships to the land to the next generation.

### **3.10.2. The Role of Emotion in Succession Planning**

The personal testimony presented in this study illuminates the centrality of emotion in these owners' relationships with woodlands, and the ways in which the succession planning process can bring affect to the forefront. Woodland owners' accounts of planning for the future were awash in references to emotional flashpoints, as they detailed what the land meant to them, their hopes for future use and ownership, and the challenges of channeling these preferences into formal planning tools. Planning for the future of woodlands (and for many FFOs, for home) is often an emotionally fraught experience.

These cases lend support to Ahmed's (2004) claim that emotions can compel action or hold individuals in patterns of inaction and demonstrate the potential for emotion to act as a propellant or friction to planning (Figure 6). Prior work has emphasized attachment as a motivational resource facilitating pro-environmental behavior (Walker & Ryan, 2008).

Our research suggests that a broad array of positive emotions such as pride, joy, serenity and awe can be similarly leveraged into conservation-oriented action. However, protective instincts may be triggered even more intensely by threats of development or forced liquidation (Kearns & Collins, 2012). Such pressures tap into the depths of emotional connection to place by eliciting potent feelings of loss and distress. Ambivalence in the presence of competing emotions can add layers of complexity for landowners weighing options regarding the future of their land. This can manifest in stagnation of the planning process, or a reluctance to abandon even places tainted by painful memories. In some instances, this internal conflict represented a tension between the owners' preferences and respect for the autonomy of future generations. Such concerns were frequently voiced as a barrier to the adoption of permanent measures such as conservation easements. Other woodland owners appeared daunted or overwhelmed by the prospect of negotiating the series of emotionally charged decisions involved in formalizing a plan for their land.

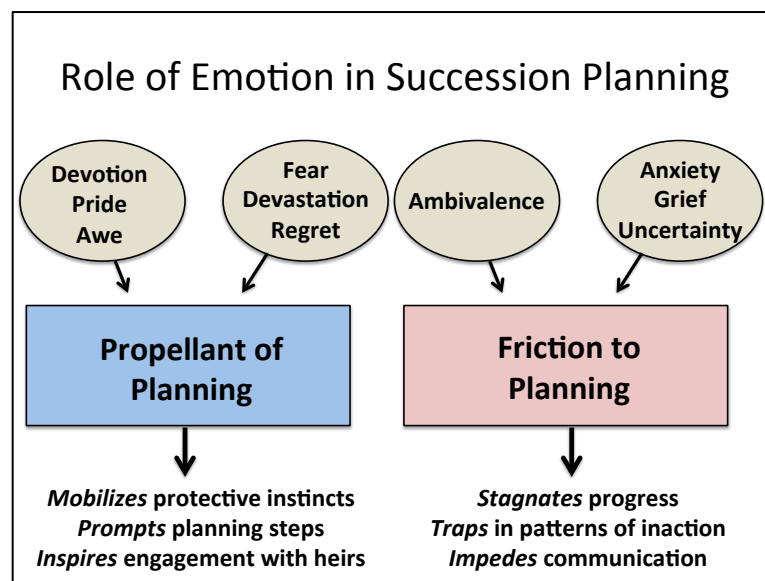


Figure 6. The Role of Emotion in Woodland Succession Planning

Interpersonal relationships and family dynamics also bring emotions into the succession planning process. When owners sense disconnect between their values and those of heirs, a lack of trust can impair the ability to communicate effectively. In several instances, woodland owners had avoided initiating conversations with family members, out of fear of dredging up painful topics or fomenting new conflict. Anticipation of these unpleasant negotiations can stall momentum and obstruct enactment of formal planning tools. As Gruver et al. (2017) point out, such avoidant tendencies can give rise to expedient arrangements with unintended consequences (i.e. an unwanted subdivision spurred by the decision to deed the family property to multiple heirs). The stakes of these decisions are high, both in terms of their impacts on relationships and their potential to shape future landscapes.

### **3.11. Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to examine the role of emotion in woodland succession planning. Our findings advance the discussion of FFOs' relationships to place by offering an evocative set of descriptors capturing the ways landowners express attachment bonds. Recognition of the varied interpretive lenses that FFOs use to articulate and demonstrate emotional commitments to woodlands could be useful to natural resource professionals seeking to understand how and why landowners are motivated to act, as well as the barriers that thwart the realization of these goals. We demonstrate that attachment represents just one cluster of affective engagements with woodlands, and that a fuller accounting of the succession planning process must include emotional highs and lows that act as propellants and friction to decision making in complex ways. Such awareness

should guide the development of education and outreach designed to support FFOs through the succession planning process. In highlighting the emotional geographies of woodland succession planning, we suggest that emotion should be viewed not as an obstacle to rational planning, but as an important source of guidance that can direct landowners to solutions that meet their needs and objectives. Succession planning that engages with the emotional dimensions of ownership can inform more honest conversations with heirs and planning professionals and ultimately facilitate better outcomes.

Our interviews with FFOs in the northeastern United States relied on verbal accounts to illuminate owners' emotional connections with place. Participants' words affixed personal significance to particular features of woodlands, and revealed the meanings embedded within a property by virtue of individual or family history. Future research on this topic would benefit from the use of spatially engaged methods such as the mobile interviewing techniques described by Riley (2010) to prompt memory and elicit location-specific accounts. Human geography offers a wealth of inspiration for visualizing emotio-spatial information. In Harris et al.'s (2013) investigation of suburban lawn management practices, homeowners indicated areas of heightened emotional resonance by mapping narrative onto physical space as they moved throughout the yard during the interview. Similarly, Bell et al. (2015) used activity monitors and GPS technologies to create "personalized geo-narrative maps" of participants' movements over the course of a week, and used these images as prompts for interviews exploring the therapeutic qualities of



place. Such methods could serve to uncover a deeper understanding of FFOs' emotional relationships with place.

It is important to note that while these interviews captured only a snapshot in time within extended trajectories of ownership, emotions are dynamic and can be brought to the fore in moments when landowners are triggered to act. FFOs do not always get to choose their ideal planning timeline and circumstances. The need to act swiftly can stem from exogenous factors such as a sudden illness or change in financial situation (Markowski-Lindsay, Catanzaro, Millman, et al., 2016). Given these realities, natural resource professionals have an important role to play in supporting landowners with tools and resources to make informed decisions when these critical moments arrive.

In particular, several areas of need are illuminated in the accounts offered in this study. Many landowners have concerns about financing land ownership both in the short and long-terms. Promoting options such as current use taxation, landowner assistance programs, and conservation easements could help allay acute financial pressure that may lead to unwanted subdivision or sale. For landowners who wish to transfer land to family members, initiating conversations with heirs about such sensitive topics as mortality, fairness, and finances can be daunting, particularly when there are concerns about existing family tensions. Professional mediation can help diffuse this anxiety by facilitating conversations in which all stakeholders are afforded a chance to express their views. For landowners intending to sell, finding the right individual or organization to steward a beloved property can be a source of apprehension. Many states have programs

to connect aspiring farmers with individuals who have land to sell or lease. A similar model applied in a forest context could serve the needs of landowners concerned about the fate of their woodland after they no longer own it. Finally, our research suggests that many landowners could benefit from clearer guidance on how common estate planning documents and structures can be tailored to achieve goals for the land. Outreach should therefore acknowledge the unique challenges of planning for woodlands, and elucidate the strengths and vulnerabilities of various planning approaches.

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## **APPENDIX A: EXTENDED METHODS DESCRIPTION**

### **Research Context**

This thesis provides an analysis of data collected in the second phase of a larger research project titled “Understanding Family Forest Owner Decisions about Land Transfer,” a collaboration between teams at the Universities of Massachusetts, Maine, Cornell, and Vermont, funded by the Agriculture Economics and Rural Communities program of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). This mixed-methods integrated research and Extension project was designed to learn about the succession planning behavior of private woodland owners in the northeastern United States through two rounds of mail surveys and one cycle of qualitative interviews. The project informs outreach efforts in the four participating states. This thesis focuses on the analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews conducted in Maine, New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont between August 2015 and March 2016 as part of this grant.

Most of the available information about family forest owners (including who they are, what they value, the actions they have taken, and their intentions for the future) comes from survey studies, including the nationally representative National Woodland Owner Survey administered by the USDA Forest Service (Butler, Leatherberry, & Williams, 2005). While quantitative surveys represent a relatively cost-effective and efficient means to obtain generalizable information about a population, this method has limitations. When studying topics about which little is known, the fixed-answer categories generated by disciplinary experts may not capture the words and experiences of respondents (Schuman

& Presser, 1981). The use of in-depth interviews in this project offers a fresh look at family forest owner decision-making. It invites the identification of emergent themes to inform new practical understandings as well as future research questions. Qualitative methods are especially well suited to answering questions about process and uncovering meaning that participants assign to phenomena under study (Maxwell, 2005).

### **Sample Selection**

A mail questionnaire administered in Phase I of the NIFA project in the spring of 2015 provided a means of screening and recruiting candidates for subsequent semi-structured interviews (Markowski-Lindsay et al. in review). In order to concentrate the impact of Extension efforts, the research team identified priority landscapes in the four states as target populations for research and outreach. Priority landscapes for the project were identified with input from *Forests on the Edge*, a USDA Forest Service publication containing projections of watersheds expected to see high or medium increases in housing density (Stein et al., 2005). Project leads in each state then selected two priority areas based on further conversations with key stakeholders and assessment of ecological value. In cases where watersheds identified in *Forests on the Edge* occupied too large an area, priority areas were delineated at the county scale (Figure 6; Table 4).

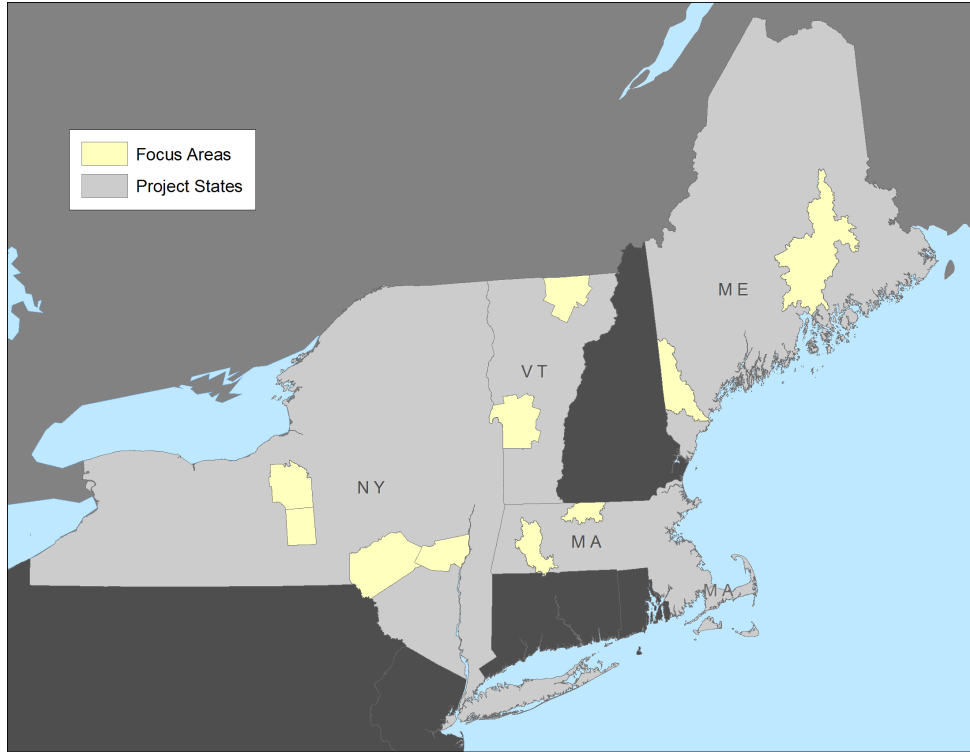


Figure 7. Map of Study Area and Priority Landscapes

Table 4. Priority Landscapes by State

State	Priority Landscapes	
Maine	Lower Penobscot River Watershed	Saco Watershed
Massachusetts	Millers Watershed	Westfield Watershed
New York	Cortland/Onondaga Counties	Delaware/Greene Counties
Vermont	Orleans County	Rutland County

Towns falling 50% or more within a priority area were retained in the sample. The sample frame for the screener survey was generated by isolating forested parcels of 10 acres or larger from publically available tax assessor's data in the four states. From this list, industrial, commercial, and public ownerships were removed. For the purpose of the survey, family forests were identified as private ownerships excluding lands owned by

churches, sportsman clubs, or listed under names containing the words “realty, realtor, logging, lumber, timber” or other phrases suggesting a business. To reduce issues associated with the presence of more than one parcel owned by the same individual, multiple records corresponding to a given owner were collapsed into a single entry, making the ownership, rather than the parcel, the unit of selection.

Given the project’s interest in the economic and ecological value of intact forests, the sample was further stratified to ensure the inclusion of larger parcels. The average parcel size for family forest owners within the four states under study is 18 acres, but over 50% of the ownerships in each of these states fall between 1-9 acres (Butler, 2008). As the succession of large properties will have a disproportionate impact on the future of forests in this region, it was important to have sufficient representation of these holdings in the sample. Informed by McDonald et al. (2006), who determined 40 acres to be the average holding size for properties that had undergone commercial harvest in Massachusetts, half of the final sample was comprised of parcels above this threshold. A total of 625 landowners from each state (split evenly between the priority areas) were randomly selected for participation.

A four-wave contact strategy adapted from the Dillman Tailored Design Method was employed for the survey administration (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Participants received a pre-notice postcard followed by a cover letter providing an overview of the study, a copy of the survey instrument, and a pre-paid return envelope. Subsequent contacts included a postcard reminder and a second letter of reminder accompanied by a



replacement questionnaire and postage-paid envelope. Of 2,500 surveys sent, 2,360 were deliverable, and 789 returned, for a response rate of 34%. Five-percent of non-respondents were contacted by phone to determine if this group differed from respondents in terms of acreage, year of land acquisition, age, educational attainment, and whether they had developed a will. While T-tests indicted no significant difference in acreage, age, gender, or developing a will, non-respondents had slightly lower educational attainment and had owned their land an average of four years longer than respondents. A comparison of early (first quartile) and late (last quartile) responders conducted as a second measure of non-response bias found minimal differences between the groups (early respondents were slightly more likely to be male and have a will, than late responders), but nothing significant enough to warrant adjustments to the data (Markowski-Lindsay et al. in review). Forty-two percent of respondents to the screener survey provided additional contact information and indicated willingness to follow up with an in-person conversation with a researcher.

### **Recruitment of Interview Participants**

Respondents who agreed to be contacted for an interview were classified into one of six planning or action stages based on their answers to the screener survey regarding anticipated or realized estate planning actions. Landowners were categorized into beginning, intermediate, or advanced planning or action groups (Table 5). In order to capture a wide range of experience and scenarios across the study area, eight individuals representing a variety of planning and action stages were selected from each state to

participate in an interview. Due to the low number of interview candidates classified as beginning planning or action, all individuals who fit this description were contacted.

Table 5. Participant Classification Matrix for Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview Sampling Frame from TTM Questions			
Land Planning Option	Level of Activity	TTM Stage	Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have conversations with family or friends about the future of my land</li> <li>Talk with a professional (for example: lawyer, accountant, land trust).</li> <li>Gather information about my options.</li> <li>Go through process of deciding between my options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thought about doing but haven't done it</li> <li>Plan to do it in the next year</li> </ul>	<b>Beginning Planning</b>	These landowners have not qualified themselves for any other category except this one.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am doing this now</li> <li>Have already done this</li> </ul>	<b>Beginning Action</b>	These landowners may have checked <i>Beginning Planning</i> boxes as well but no <i>Intermediate</i> or <i>Advanced</i> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a Will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thought about doing but haven't done it</li> <li>Plan to do it in the next year</li> </ul>	<b>Intermediate Planning</b>	These landowners may have checked some <i>Beginning</i> options but no <i>Intermediate</i> or <i>Advanced</i> .
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am doing this now</li> <li>Have already done this</li> </ul>	<b>Intermediate Action</b>	These landowners may have checked <i>Beginning</i> options or <i>Intermediate Planning</i> options, but no <i>Advanced</i> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up a trust.</li> <li>Create an LLC, LLP, or Family Partnership.</li> <li>Set up a corporation</li> <li>Place a Conservation easement or restriction on my land.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thought about doing but haven't done it</li> <li>Plan to do it in the next year</li> </ul>	<b>Advanced Planning</b>	These landowners may have checked <i>Beginning</i> or <i>Intermediate</i> options, but no <i>Advanced Action</i> options.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am doing this now</li> <li>Have already done this</li> </ul>	<b>Advanced Action</b>	These landowners may have checked anything else, but they are in this category because they have completed some sort of <i>Advanced Action</i> .

*Developed by NIFA Research Team, 2015*

The remaining participants were randomly selected from the intermediate and advanced groups, alternating between the two priority areas in each state. Participants were recruited by phone to take part in a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview at a

convenient date and time. Interviews were conducted in-person, in the respondent's home or in a neutral location such as a public library or community center. Respondents were compensated for their time with a half-gallon of maple syrup.

### **Interview Procedures**

Semi-structured interviews allow for some of the flexibility of open-ended interviews while providing a measure of consistency and comparability across cases (Wilson, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the research team generated a set of *a priori* questions based on a review of the literature, and pilot-tested them with landowners in Massachusetts during the summer of 2015. Following limited revisions, interviews were conducted across the participants in each state according to a pre-determined guide that included a standard introductory script outlining the background and purpose of the project, a list of questions, and suggested prompts (Appendix B). Interviewers asked follow-up questions to clarify participant statements and request elaboration. The semi-structured format permitted a deeper exploration of a complex set of issues, while remaining sensitive to the development of emergent or unanticipated themes. Interviewers asked participants to share what they liked most about their land, describe their preferences for future use and ownership, and outline the steps necessary to realize their goals. A significant portion of the interview was devoted to questions about process, with prompts designed to explore how participants came to choose particular planning tools, gather information, mobilize resources, and work towards the achievement of their objectives. The protocol also included questions about fairness, confidence, and the feelings evoked by the planning process.

The interviews were overseen by lead researchers in each state and administered by a small team of trained individuals. The common interview framework ensured that the same topics were explored with each participant. Prior to the start of the interviews, landowners were provided a written consent form outlining the study and potential risks to participation, according to IRB standards at each of the four sponsoring universities (Appendix C). Conversations were audio recorded and transcribed by a transcription service.

### **Analytic Approach**

To analyze interview data, this study employed a thematic analysis approach, allowing for the identification of repeated patterns, or themes, across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts were analyzed with the aid of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (NVivo). This study embraced what Saldaña called an “emergent conceptual framework” in that it adjusted and adapted as the research design was refined through ongoing analysis and engagement with the literature (Saldaña 2016: 71).

Prior to coding, I reviewed the 32 transcripts in full to gain a holistic understanding of the data corpus, and a second time to record notes about key elements. In this study, codes consisted of descriptive words or phrases used to label segments of text to facilitate retrieval, pattern generation, and analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Code generation was both inductive and deductive, shaped by review of the family forest literature and research objectives, as well as emergent features of the dataset.

Codes were defined in a codebook to aid consistent application across the full set of interview transcripts.

## **Coding**

Following Saldaña (2016), coding proceeded by way of iterative cycles of moving back and forth from the literature to the transcripts themselves, allowing for adjustments and refinement of codes as needed. The first cycle coding scheme was intentionally broad and mirrored many of the categories identified in prior literature on family forest owners including factors serving as barriers or facilitators of succession planning, internal and external triggers, physical engagement, and emotional attachment. This first pass through coding the transcripts reflected immediate needs to organize and catalogue the dataset into manageable units, and was therefore dominated by “descriptive” codes which capture the essential topic of a passage without getting too deep into interpretation (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive codes were extended with “sub” or “secondary” codes that added an additional layer of specificity. For instance, the descriptive code BARRIERS was further broken down into subcodes that characterized the nature of the obstruction, including BA:FINANCES, BA: FAMILY CONFLICT, and BA: COMMUNICATION. A smaller subset of the initial code list included “concept” codes that captured an idea slightly more abstract in nature. Concept codes such as INTERGENERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT and EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT demanded a higher degree of interpretation. A final layer of analysis within the first cycle was the application of “attribute” codes which catalogued participants, rather than passages, according to demographic characteristics like age, state, educational attainment, acreage, and planning

stage (Saldaña, 2016). Taken together, the choice to combine several distinct strategies at once can be considered an example of “eclectic” coding, commonly employed as an exploratory technique within emergent research designs (Saldaña, 2016).

Second-cycle coding entailed several methods for revisiting the codes generated in the first cycle with an eye towards refining distinctions and relationships and eliminating redundancies (Saldaña, 2016). Two of the chief strategies in this cluster of methods are “focused” coding and “pattern” coding, which gather similarly coded fragments and tweak or condense in an effort to generate higher order categories. This stage provided an opportunity to cycle back to evaluate the integrity of first cycle codes. Qualitative software enabled me to call up all of the fragments tagged with like codes and examine these excerpts in isolation from their parent source material to assess how well the examples represented the construct of interest. Through this process, several codes were eliminated for being overly specific, merged with similar terms to minimize redundancy, or further differentiated into two or more distinct constructs. Where necessary, fragments were recoded to correct inconsistent application of terms. For this project, second cycle coding entailed cleaning, complicating, and mapping out links between codes.

One of the codes that emerged from the first cycle as most intriguing was EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, which had not been assigned sub-codes. In order to understand this phenomenon more fully, I revisited the fragments flagged with emotional attachment and generated new descriptive and conceptual codes to represent the essence of each instance of attachment. This process illuminated variants of attachment, which were winnowed to

10 distinct dimensions and re-applied to the transcripts. This sequence illustrates the value of an iterative approach to coding. Expanding a general construct into constituent parts yielded a more nuanced set of descriptors that reflected the unique properties of the dataset and enabled detection of emotional attachment that had been missed in the coarse filter of first cycle coding.

### **Methodological Justification**

Several methodological traditions were drawn on in this thesis: narrative analysis comprised of content and thematic analysis in Chapter 2, and thematic analysis in Chapter 3. I discuss the use and justification for each below.

#### **Narrative Analysis**

One of the emergent findings of preliminary coding efforts was the frequency with which interviewees referenced the planning experiences of others when describing how they arrived at decisions about their own land or articulating future intentions. As these other voices were typically brought into the conversation through short stories and anecdotes, narrative analysis was the appropriate analytic tool to investigate the impact of this information on participants.

Although *narrative* and *story* are often treated as synonymous terms in common parlance, narrative theorists have drawn the distinction in various ways. Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, and Horner (2004) propose that stories illustrate claims made within the “grand conception” of a broader narrative. Under this interpretation stories are treated as

episodes that exemplify a higher order theme. While I selected stories as the unit of study, the analysis did not divorce these episodes from the encompassing narratives of the source interviews.

I first needed to determine what qualified as a story. (Franzosi, 1998) emphasizes the need for a shift from some reference point to instigate a story. In Franzosi's words, "the events in the story must disrupt an initial state of equilibrium that sets in motion an inversion of situation, a change of fortunes—from good to bad, from bad to good, or no such reversal of polarity, just an 'after' different from the 'before,' but not necessarily better or worse." (1998, p. 521). Bruner (2002) traces a similar position back to Aristotle's *peripeteia*, which he characterizes as a "sudden reversal in circumstances" that transforms ordinary events into a story (p. 5). We adopted Labov's (1972, 1982; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) criteria (as cited in Frank 2012), to delineate basic stories, requiring segments of speech to contain some kind of complicating action (one or more notable events that prompts a reaction) and a resolution. To aid in the recognition of story boundaries, I sought to identify what Riessman (1993) called "entrance and exit talk" (p. 58) after Jefferson (1979). Phrases such as "and just to show you what we're talking about" or "this feeds well into your story" signaled the speaker's intention to commence storytelling, often to illustrate a claim or provide an example. Speakers often indicated the end of a story with a summative statement that might include a moral or a reflection on what the incident meant.



Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) described a matrix of approaches to narrative analysis organized according to the strategy's orientation towards two dimensions related to the unit of analysis (holistic vs. categorical), and primary analytic concern (content vs. form). The methods employed in this study most closely align with a "categorical-content" or content analysis, by virtue of the research interest in individual stories, over complete narratives, and matters of substance and meaning over structural features of the texts.

Once delineated, stories were categorized to determine source (whose planning the speaker referenced), action (what kind of planning was undertaken), outcome (what happened as a result of planning), and impact (how the speaker understands or derives lessons from the episode). Based on evaluation of the entire segment, each story was classified by genre as an exemplar of successful planning (success story), a warning about pitfalls (cautionary tale), a fortunate outcome despite notable risks (success with caveats), or a chiefly informative resource (informational) (Table 6). The stories in each genre category were tallied in a ranked frequency table, which informed the decision to conduct closer analysis on stories framed as cautionary tales. This type of emergent analytic framework directed by close reading of materials rather than *a priori* hypotheses is often employed in narrative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify recurring storylines within cautionary tales, and characterize the ways these stories exerted influence on interviewees. These themes are presented first as composites of multiple interviews, and then illustrated through individual cases and relevant quotations excerpted from interview transcripts.

Table 6. Classification of Succession Story Genre

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Count</b>
Cautionary	Stories of failed or unsatisfactory outcomes offering warnings about tactics to avoid or alternatives to consider	32
Success	Stories featuring tactics or strategies that achieved desired outcomes	10
Informational	Stories that call attention to available tools or options or otherwise educate about planning process	8
Success with Caveats	Stories highlighting risks or threats present despite satisfactory outcome	5
Unclear	The function/impact of the story cannot be determined	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>58</b>

### **Thematic Analysis**

While thematic analysis was employed as a component of the narrative method described in the methodology for the study in Chapter 2, thematic analysis constituted the primary analytic tool for the study outlined in Chapter 3.

A general lack of consensus surrounding the classification and use of thematic analysis is apparent in a review of the qualitative literature. Some researchers consider theme generation a basic skill or building block utilized across qualitative analytic traditions rather than a distinct method (Boyatzis, 1998; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In contrast, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue for the recognition of thematic analysis as a flexible and pragmatic method appropriate for use in a variety of research contexts. In essence, thematic analysis is about interpretation of patterns within data.

My application of thematic analysis mirrored the method described by Braun and Clark (2006), which included a period of familiarization with the dataset, multiple cycles of iterative code generation and refinement, and distillation key patterns into themes. Tables, data displays, and matrices functioned as heuristic devices to explore patterns within the data (Miles et al., 2014). Relationships between groups of codes were visually mapped as a way of coalescing categories into initial themes and subthemes. Prospective themes were evaluated using Patton's criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, which dictate that themes should be both clearly defined and distinct from one another (Patton, 1990). The themes that remained salient after this recursive review process served as the basis for in-depth written analysis and interpretation in the final report. Relevant excerpts from the transcripts were included in the write-up to elucidate themes, support the study's analytic claims, and showcase participants' voices. Throughout the analytic process, emerging connections, themes, and reflections were documented and explored through analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016).

The method of thematic analysis described above was employed in Chapter 3 to move from coding for emotional attachment to 10 themes or dimensions of attachment describing how FFOs form connections with woodlands.

## **Limitations**

The reliance on semi-structured interviews for insight into FFO succession planning activity raises issues of single-method and self-reporting bias. The primary source of data for this study is personal testimony elicited through a contrived interaction directed by a priori research objectives. Alternative research designs might have attempted to triangulate participant accounts with relevant legal documents, corroboration with professional advisors, or long-term observation. While beyond the scope of the present study, such methods suggest rich opportunities for future research. The emphasis on landowner accounts in this study is justified given its intended focus on participants' perceptions and experience of their own planning process. This study is less concerned with evaluating the veracity of claims made by woodland owners or quantifying the frequency that certain planning tools are used.

The double opt-in recruitment procedure used to select interview participants raises the concern of self-selection bias within the interview sample. To be eligible for selection for an in-person interview, individuals needed first to respond to the screener survey, and then consent to follow up with a researcher. Given the modest response rate to the screener survey and the fact that fewer than half of respondents volunteered for further participation, the landowners chosen likely represent a highly motivated segment of the target population. As evidenced in several interviews, some landowners agreed to participate because they interpreted the meeting as an opportunity to obtain professional advice. Due to the small sample size and recruitment method, participants cannot be considered representative of the population of woodland owners in the focus areas, but

this caveat does not diminish the value of conducting in-depth interviews with landowners representing a range of planning and action stages. While this study makes no claims of generalizability to a broader population, in-depth analysis of the 32 individuals will yield information that is transferable to work with woodland owners in other regions.

### **Assessing Quality: Credibility, Dependability, Transferability, and Confirmability**

To evaluate the quality of the research presented in this thesis, I look to criteria defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and widely used to judge the rigor of qualitative methods: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility roughly equates to the “truth-value” of a project as assessed by readers and participants, as well as the researcher (Yilmaz, 2013). Credibility is often achieved through rich, “thick” description, triangulation of methods or sources, member-checking, and an active search for rival explanations and negative cases (Miles et al., 2014). This study addresses the issue of credibility through source triangulation, an adaptive model of coding, comparison and revision, and a commitment to thick description. Source triangulation was achieved by interviewing 32 woodland owners to gather evidence for an emergent theory of emotional attachment to woodlands (Patton, 1999). The credibility of these dimensions was strengthened by the systematic analytic process described previously, entailing cycles of code generation, verification against existing theory, and if necessary, revision. The final write up is infused with vivid detail and excerpts of

participants' voices, to allow evaluators to come to their own conclusions, creating what Miles et al. (2014) have termed a "vicarious presence" for the reader (p. 313).

### **Dependability**

Dependability reflects the extent to which study procedures are consistent or stable over time or across multiple researchers (Yilmaz, 2013). Miles et al. (2014) offer practical suggestions for addressing concerns about dependability and auditability that include measures related to researcher reflexivity and transparency. Such measures might take the form of disclosing the researcher's background and bias, standardizing data collection protocols across multiple researchers, or instituting peer review practices. The dependability of this study was bolstered through peer review and debriefing, external auditing, and clarification of bias. Lead researchers at the University of Massachusetts monitored the submission of interview transcripts from the four participating states to evaluate adherence to a consistent methodological framework. Likewise, content was vetted in a debriefing session containing the full research team in March of 2016, where findings were checked against the field experience of a room of subject matter experts, and trends from the National Woodland Owner Survey. Members of my advising team at the University of Vermont reviewed the evolving coding and analysis scheme at multiple points throughout the process as a measure of external auditing. Monitoring my own preconceived notions and biases was an ongoing process addressed through analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016). Due to the time and labor-intensive nature of the coding process, this study did not have the benefit of multiple coders or the ability to publish values for

inter-coder reliability, often reported as a check against the subjectivity of a single analyst.

### **Transferability & Confirmability**

While the small sample sizes and purposive sampling methods typically used in qualitative studies typically prevent statistical representativeness or generalizability to a larger population, they do not necessarily preclude the *transferability* of findings to other contexts or populations. Yilmaz (2013) asserts that a study's transferability can be enhanced through detailed descriptions of the individuals and settings presented in the research to allow for comparisons. Based on what we know about regional differences in economic pressures, markets, and ownership patterns across the United States from the vast body of family forest literature, I expect the findings of this study to be most transferrable to other states in New England or the northeastern states. For example, Creighton et al. (2016) reported that forest owners in Western Washington were thwarted in attempted generational transfers in part by regulatory uncertainty. Given the high timber value of forestlands in the Pacific Northwest region, families in this context likely face different stressors related to succession planning than peers in the Northeast.

A study's *confirmability* is dependent on the ability to trace conclusions back to empirical data, and follow the analyst's process from tangible evidence to interpretation and the final presentation. Confirmability, as dependability, can be bolstered through an external auditing process, but work can also be judged on the basis of its logic or utility in explaining the phenomenon under study (Yilmaz, 2013). I satisfy the need to demonstrate

confirmability by presenting a clear and detailed account of the methods used to generate emergent themes, and including key excerpts from the dataset along side my interpretation to provide a traceable and transparent account.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects at the four partner institutions involved in data collection. Prior to the start of interviews, participants were provided a description of the research containing information about risks and benefits of involvement, data protection procedures, and a statement of confidentiality. Participants were then afforded an opportunity to ask questions of the interviewer and informed that they could decline to answer questions or halt the interview at any time. Informed consent was obtained by all interviewees before the start of the recorded conversation in accordance to the policies outlined by participating Universities. To protect the confidentiality of interview participants, first names only were recorded on transcripts, and pseudonyms were used when representing individuals in the final manuscript. Other identifying information was omitted or anonymized for inclusion in the write-up. Hard copies for any materials containing identifiable information were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Interview transcripts were stored in a password-protected file within the qualitative analysis program. Computer files containing identifiable information will be destroyed after four years.



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## APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Introduction - 10 MINUTES:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I'm looking forward to hearing about your experiences in planning for the future ownership of your land.

Before we get started, I have a little University housekeeping to do. This form tells you the details of our project, what our goals are, how your personal information will be protected, and where to go if you have questions. If you could read and fill out this form before we continue, that would be great. [IRB PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT FORM]

Ok {PARTICIPANT'S NAME}, thank you for helping us with our research.

As we move through the conversation I'll be asking you a series of questions. I'll also be using a device to record our conversation. Just so you know, we are RECORDING the session so we can go back and review the discussion. This record will *not* be used for any other purpose than informing our study. We will not be sharing this audio information with anybody, and your statements will remain CONFIDENTIAL. Our conversation should last between 1 and 1 and ½ hours. {DON'T START RECORDING YET.}

For the following questions that I'll be asking, please respond specifically for your land located in {A CERTAIN TOWN}.

I want to share with you some background and context for why I'm asking these specific questions. First off, the majority of the forested land in {YOUR STATE} is owned by private landowners such as yourself. Past research and surveys, much like the one you filled out earlier this year, have indicated that the majority of these landowners are at or above retirement age. This means that within the next 20 years or so much of the forested land in the {YOUR STATE} will be changing hands. How and in what form the land changes hands will largely determine what our landscape looks like and functions as in the future. What I'm hoping to learn is how current landowners are making decisions about the future of their land.

By "future of their land" I'm referring to the land after you no longer own it – who do you want to own it, how do you want it be used, and what steps do you need to take in order to see those things happen. This can be anything from giving the land to one's children in a will, to selling the land, to permanently protecting it through a Conservation Easement.

By understanding how and why these decisions are made, as well as any obstacles that may keep landowners from completing their original plans, we can develop

better outreach and informational materials to assist landowners in completing their plans for the future of their land in the way that meets their goals .

We're interested in hearing from landowners in all stages of the decision-making process, from just beginning to think about the future of their land to those having made final long-term plans, so no matter where you are in the process, hearing about your plans and experiences will be very helpful.

Did anything I said seem confusing or do you have any questions about it?

SECTION 1 – 10 MINUTES:

{TURN ON RECORDER}

OK, for the record, my name is {INSERT YOUR NAME} and I want to thank you {INSERT PARTICIPANT'S FIRST NAME ONLY} for agreeing to talk with me.

I'd like to start off by learning more about your land.

**1.1 Could you share with me how long you've owned your land and how you came to own it?**

**1.2 Does anyone else own the land with you? If so, who?**

**1.3 *If it doesn't come out in the above answers – What do you like most about your land? It can be anything.***

SECTION 2 – 15 MINUTES:

**2.1** Now I would like to learn more about your goals for the future ownership and use of the land? **Can you tell me what you would like to see happen to your land after you no longer own it?**

*If it doesn't come up in the answer*

**Who would you like to see own your land?**

*Examples: land trust, public ownership, private ownership, your family*

**Are there ways you would like to see the land used or ways you wouldn't want the land used?**

**What steps do you think are necessary in order to see your future goals for the ownership and use of the land realized?**

SECTION 3 – 20 MINUTES:

I see from the survey that you filled out that you have {INSERT THE PLANNING AND/OR ACTION THE LANDOWNER HAS DONE}. I'm very interested to know more about how this happened.

**3.1 Can you please tell me the story of how you decided to do this and how you actually made it happen/or plan to actually make it happen?**

**3.2 Can you share with me what prompted you to take these steps?**

*If they mention age, ask them what events are associated with getting older that prompt decisions or actions*

**3.3 Who did you speak with or gather information from while thinking through your options?**

*Examples: friends, family, professionals, web, spouse*

**3.4 Thinking back to the time before you [INSERT TTM STAGE AND ENGAGEMENT LEVEL], when you were still planning, how confident were you that moving forward with {INSERT ACTION/TOOL} was the right decision?**

*Prompt: you knew the options available to you, you chose the best steps to go forward , who to work with, in moving through any barriers identified,*

**3.5 Now that you have done {INSERT ACTION/TOOL}, how confident are you that it will achieve your goal of {INSERT SUMMARY OF GOAL(S)} for the land?**

**3.6 Tell me more about what the process of planning your land's future felt like as you were going through it.**

**3.7 Did you run into any challenges when you {INSERT TTM STAGE AND ENGAGEMENT LEVEL}**

*If finances aren't mentioned, ask if finances were an obstacle or consideration  
If professionals aren't mentioned, ask about them – which types of professionals, finding them, communicating with them, recount experiences*

**3.8 Besides {INSERT TTM STAGE AND ENGAGEMENT LEVEL}, will you be taking any other steps to achieve your goals for your land's future?**

*If they will be doing something else, ask about:*

*1. their timeline and triggers for doing this next step if they don't mention it.*

*If they mention **age**, ask them what events are associated with getting older that prompt decisions or actions*

*2. How this additional step will help with their goals*

*3. Any challenges they have run into or expect to face when taking this next step.*



4. Did they consider any other options besides these? What was the deciding factor(s) in choosing?

If they *aren't* going to do something, ask why they aren't taking any more steps to plan the future of their land. And ask if they considered other options than those they took. What was the deciding factor(s) in choosing?

Prompt: Satisfied with what they have? Finances? Confidence?

**SECTION 4 – 20 MINUTES:**

**4.1 We just discussed that you have { INSERT TTM STAGE AND ENGAGEMENT LEVEL}. You also mentioned that you own your land with {LANDOWNER NAMED ABOVE}. Describe the type of conversations or discussions about the future of the land with {LANDOWNER NAMED ABOVE}.**

*Prompt: How often? When do you have them? Are they explicitly about the future of the land itself?*

**4.2 Do you share the same vision with {LANDOWNER NAMED ABOVE} about the long-term future of the land?**

*If IN AGREEMENT:* **Have you always shared the same vision? How did get to be in agreement with each other?**

*If DIFFERENCES:* **In what ways do your visions or goals for the future ownership and use of your land differ? Do you need to have the same visions or goals to move forward? If so, what do you think is necessary to reach agreement with each other?**

*If not mentioned:* Information? Facilitation/mediation?

**4.3 Besides, {INSERT THE OTHER OWNER MENTIONED ABOVE} I'd like to spend some time hearing about other conversations you may have about the future of your land. Describe the kinds of conversations you may have had with your family when making decisions about the future of your land?**

*If NO,* skip to Question 4.4.

*If YES HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH FAMILY:*

**In what ways have family been included?**

**In what ways have those conversations been helpful?**

**In what ways have those conversations been difficult?**

*If they have children or heirs and fairness doesn't come up, ask*

**4.4 Are there other people you had conversations with about the future of your land?**

*If it doesn't come up: friends, neighbors, professionals*

**4.5 How has being fair shaped your decision?**

*Prompt: What does fairness mean to you?*

**4.6 When you were having these conversations with {INSERT FAMILY MEMBERS OR OTHERS} that we talked about, **What, if any, information would have improved those conversations?****

SECTION 5 – 5 MINUTES:

**5.1 Are there any other thoughts you have about the future of your land that I didn't ask or that you'd like to share?**

Thank you very much for your time and for sharing these aspects of your life with me. I really appreciate it.

Let them know that you would be glad to share the generalized results of this study. Ask for a mailing address or email address where you can send results at the conclusion of this project.

## APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Research Information for Participation in a Research Study University of Vermont  
Mary Sisock  
Understanding Family Forest Owner Decisions of Land Transfer  
USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research.

### 2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Family forest owners who are interested in sharing their thoughts and opinions in an in-person discussion setting.

### 3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to better understand how landowners make decisions regarding ownership and management of their land, and to gain a better understanding of the timing and influence of bequest decisions made by family forest owners. It will also help us to design a mail survey that will go out in the future to select woodland owners in the region, and it will help us to design informational materials and workshops for other family forest owners regarding estate planning.

### 4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

This study will take place in a mutually-agreed upon place and at a time convenient for you. You will be asked to engage in one 90-minute session and will not be contacted again in the future.

### 5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one 90-minute in-person discussion. You will be asked to take a brief survey and engage in a discussion regarding your answers to the survey questions and your perspectives related to being a woodland owner. You will be asked to share your experience, beliefs and opinions regarding estate planning and bequest decision-making regarding your land. This discussion will be audio recorded; however the recording will not be shared beyond the immediate research team.

### 6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, you may find satisfaction in sharing your experience and perspective with researchers who value your input or from contributing to a research study. We hope that your participation in the interview will provide us with an improved understanding of the challenges and opportunities families face with respect to estate planning, and eventually benefit northeast family forest owners by helping to improve efforts to educate and empower family forest owners to make land decisions that satisfy their needs and goals.

## 7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

We believe there are no possible risks related to your physical, psychological, economic or social well-being. Your responses will be kept completely private and secured to prevent an accidental breach of confidentiality. The voluntary nature of the interviews will allow you to divulge only the information you are comfortable providing.

## 8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records and of audio recordings. The researchers will keep all study records in a locking file cabinet. The records and audio recordings will be destroyed four (4) years after study completion. All electronic files (databases, digital audio recordings, transcripts etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations. The transcriptions of these interviews will not contain any identifiable information. Thus, should it be necessary to share the transcriptions across the four participating Universities (University of Massachusetts – Amherst, Cornell University, University of Maine, and University of Vermont) in order to develop the summary report, confidentiality will be maintained because none of your personal, identifiable information will be shared across institutions.

## 9. WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

You will be provided a half-gallon of maple syrup (valued at approximately \$50) as an honorarium for taking part in the 90 minute discussion. You will receive this after the discussion comes to a close. Only one person per interview is eligible for this honorarium.

## 10. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researchers by email at [msisock@uvm.edu](mailto:msisock@uvm.edu) or phone at (802) 656-1721. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Director of the University of Vermont Protections Office at (802) 656-5040.

## 11. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

## 12. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

You have been given a summary of this research study. You have had a chance to read this research information form, have had the opportunity to ask questions and have receive satisfactory answers. You can withdraw at any time. Your verbal consent to take part in this study will be recorded in your research record if you agree to participate.