

PATTERNS OF FOREST LAND OWNER PARTICIPATION IN THE WEST VIRGINIA FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

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West Virginia is the Nation's third most forested State in terms of percent forest cover with at least 80 percent of its land forested. Despite this wealth of timber, in the late 19th and early 20th century the State was almost completely cut over with 30 billion board feet being harvested between 1870 and 1920. Currently, there are numerous second growth stands that are approaching 100 years in age. This maturing timber and strong hardwood stump-age prices have given good reason for the forest industry to procure timber and private woodland owners to be enthusiastic about the potential uses of West Virginia's forests.

Anecdotal evidence and preliminary inventory figures suggest that the rate of cutting in the last decade has increased substantially. This situation of strong prices and strong demand leave non-industrial private forest land owners with good negotiating options. However, in order to take advantage of this opportunity landowners must make wise management and marketing decisions. Under the West Virginia Forest Stewardship Program (FSP), landowners have the opportunity to obtain cost-share dollars to support long-term forest management planning on their forested properties. In this research note we describe patterns of participation in the West Virginia Forest Stewardship Program over its first decade.

We used standard graphical methods and summary statistics to describe the forest stewardship properties in the State of West Virginia. The program is slightly over 10 years old, but we have restricted our analyses to the first decade only.

The Forest Stewardship Program began its initial operation in the central portion of the State. It was established in four central counties on a trial basis in order to assess landowner

interest. In the first year over 31 thousand acres enrolled in the program. Such high enrollment confirmed a positive reception by landowners in West Virginia. As a result of this successful trial period, the FSP was made available to the entire State.

During the first decade of the program, 558 thousand acres were enrolled throughout West Virginia. Following 1991 annual enrollment increased through the first 5 years and peaked in 1996 when a total of approximately 105 thousand acres were added to the program. A comparison of the six districts that make up the State show that the Eastern Panhandle District accounts for 32 percent of the enrolled acres (fig. 1). The Central District contains the second largest amount with 20 percent of the total acres, followed closely by the Southwest District with 19 percent of the total acres enrolled.

We are currently investigating the relationship between property taxes, urbanization, and FSP enrollment. The Eastern Panhandle District is often considered a "bedroom community" of the Baltimore/DC metropolis, hence it is important to examine the seemingly significant relationship between FSP acreage and urbanization in this district. The acreages enrolled in the FSP are owned mostly by West Virginia residents (81 percent), but 19 percent of plan acres are owned by out-of-state residents. Records indicate that there are over 100 thousand acres enrolled in the FSP by out-of-state property owners (table 1). Nearly 50 thousand acres in forest stewardship plans are located in the Eastern Panhandle region. Maryland and Virginia residents account for the majority of out-of-state owners enrolled in the program. Surprisingly, FSP participants with mailing addresses in Florida rank third in enrolled acres.

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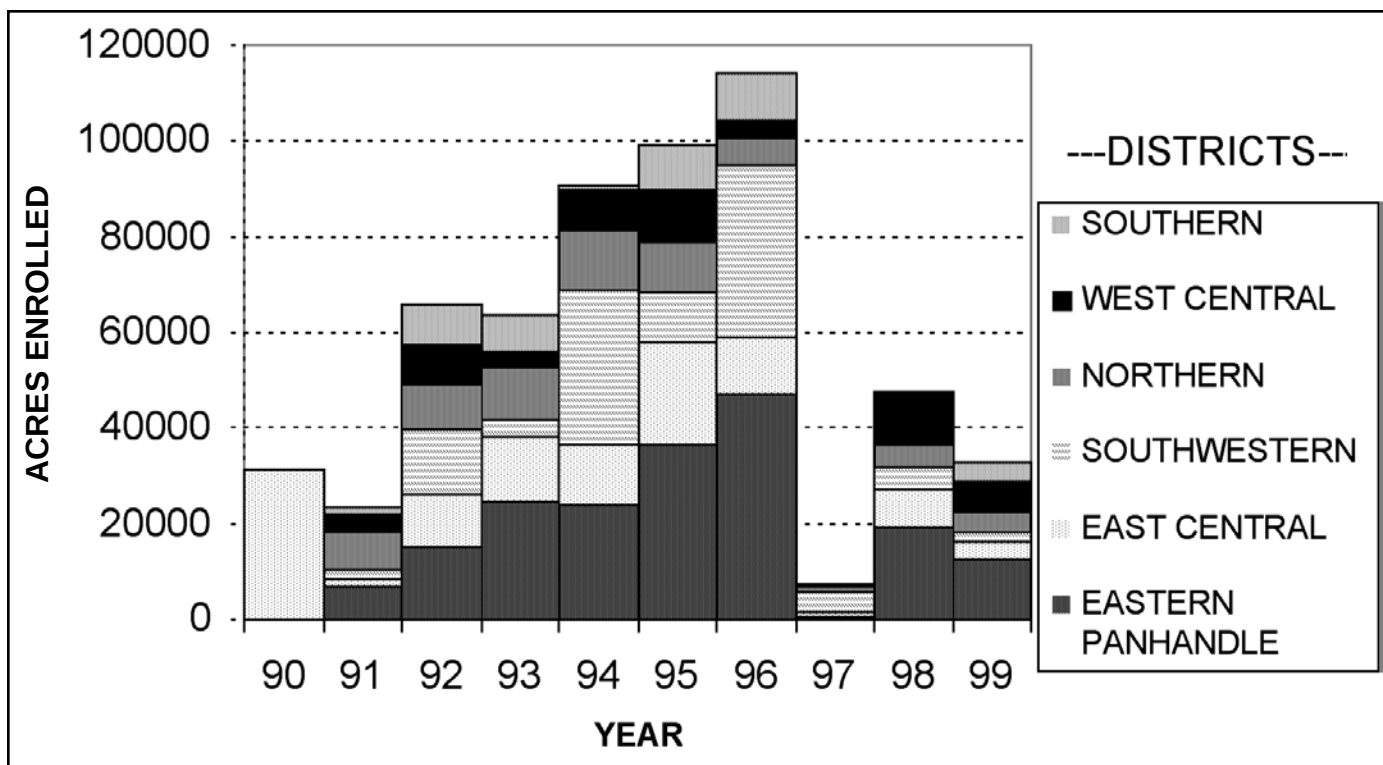


Figure 1.—Ten-year pattern of the number of acres enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program by District.

Table 1.—Total acreage of out-of-state landowners enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program by district over the first decade. Acreages represent properties of program participants with mailing addresses outside of West Virginia. Districts correspond to West Virginia Division of Forestry administrative units. States are sorted by total acreage. States listed are those with residents with total ownership greater than 7,000 acres in the Forest Stewardship Program.

State	DISTRICTS						Total
	Northern	Eastern Panhandle	East Central	Southern	South Western	West Central	
MD	4,232	24,328	3,342	916	54	3,076	35,947
VA	1,640	14,853	2,657	4,578	172	1,381	25,280
Other	2,565	4,243	4,456	3,157	1,797	5,740	21,958
FL	164	0	3,071	294	2,850	1,594	7,972
OH	450	1,850	1,302	621	970	2,482	7,675
PA	203	3,320	351	394	1,410	1,503	7,180
Total	9,253	48,594	15,178	9,960	7,253	15,775	106,014