
Introduction

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Nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) land represents approximately 48 percent of the forest land cover in the United States and has played an important role in meeting an increasing domestic wood demand (Smith *et al.* 2004). Conscientious stewardship of these forests is a perennial issue facing natural resource professionals due to the large number of owners and their diverse interests. Landowner assistance programs such as the American Tree Farm System, the Forest Stewardship Program, and woodland owner associations exist to stimulate forest management and reforestation on these ownerships through subsidies of money and materials.

Today, some entrepreneurial NIPF landowners are developing forest landowner cooperatives—an old idea that has re-emerged with the growing interest in forest certification and the allure of increased profit through the value-added processing of timber products. Forest landowner cooperatives are defined as “user-owned and user-controlled forestry-related businesses that distribute benefits to members on the basis of their use.” They generally share two characteristics: (1) they are jointly owned and managed by members who are NIPF landowners, and (2) members equitably share the costs and benefits of maintaining/operating the cooperative. Today’s forest landowner cooperatives, like those in the past, look to provide members with services otherwise unavailable, such as improved access to markets and increased revenue from forest management. Unlike prior efforts, these organizations also tend to foster sustainable forestry (e.g., forest certification), land protection, and ecological restoration.

In recent years, a number of regional nonprofit, government, and university organizations have begun to support and educate NIPF owners interested in forming cooperatives. However, many natural resource professionals have only cursory knowledge of the opportunities and barriers associated with cooperatives. Also, although cooperative development specialists are knowledgeable about cooperative formation, organizational structures, and management, they are generally not knowledgeable about forestry and NIPF landowners. Furthermore, natural resource professionals and cooperative development specialists know little about each other and the role they both can play in the development and support of forest landowner cooperatives.

The satellite conference “Forestry Cooperatives: What Today’s Resource Professionals Need to Know” was broadcast on November 18, 2003. It was the brainchild of the Local

A cooperative, something that brings more sensitive management to the land, is certainly appealing because we want to protect what’s here, we want to make it better, and we want to generate some income.

**Blue Ridge Forest Cooperative
Potential Member**

There are many potential benefits from a cooperative. Marketing, access to markets, being able to label your products, getting landowners to communicate and voice their opinions effectively are probably the largest ones.

**Lewis County, Washington,
Potential Cooperative Member**

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The satellite conference was designed to help natural resource professionals and cooperative development specialists to:

- Gain a better understanding of cooperatives and a deeper insight into some of the successes and challenges of cooperatives
- Evaluate whether the forestry cooperative model is right for a specific area and if so, how to further the discussion locally
- See how cooperatives can complement other landowner assistance programs such as Tree Farm, Forest Stewardship, and woodland owner associations
- Hear firsthand about the experiences of forestry cooperative initiatives from Massachusetts, Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Washington

This report summarizes much of the information presented during that satellite conference. It also includes a DVD of the case studies shown during the conference. We would like to thank the members of these cooperatives for sharing their stories with us and with our broader conference audience.

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Literature Cited

Smith, W.B.; Miles, P.D.; Vissage, J.S.; Pugh, S.A. 2004. Forest resources of the United States, 2002. Gen. Tech. Rep. NC-241. St. Paul, MN: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, North Central Research Station. 137 p.