
Achieving Cooperative Success¹

Kimberly Zeuli²

Success of a cooperative depends on the foundation built during its organization.

Successful businesses are not started overnight. Careful and deliberate planning must be started long before the co-op opens its doors. This chapter begins with an outline of six fundamental steps that should be followed when organizing any cooperative. From initial concept to the start of operations, this process may take anywhere from 6 months to several years. This outline is followed by excerpts from interviews with three forestry cooperative resource professionals: Paul Catanzaro, Katie Fernholz, and E.G. Nadeau. They share their insights into the roles such professionals play in forestry co-op development. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of the lessons they have learned in establishing successful cooperatives.

Steps for Organizing a Cooperative

Step 1: Determine the Need for the Co-op

The first step is the most essential. Co-ops should be organized only in response to a specific problem or an opportunity identified by a group. Viable cooperatives are usually initiated by a small group of people who share a common problem or see some opportunity they can capture by working together. They jointly decide what the cooperative will do. Often this group becomes the co-op's steering committee. The steering committee puts in a lot of time and effort in developing the co-op committee. The committee has four general responsibilities:

1. Direct the preparation of a feasibility study
 - Find a reputable and experienced person or firm to prepare the study
 - Compare business models
2. Prepare a business plan that defines the co-op's operations and requirements for success
 - Find a reputable and experienced person or firm to prepare the plan
3. Present results from the feasibility study and business plan to other potential members
4. Determine whether to proceed or not with the co-op development

¹ The author wishes to thank Margaret Bau, a Cooperative Development Specialist at USDA Rural Development in Wisconsin, for her insightful comments.

² Agriculture and Applied Economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison, zeuli@aae.wisc.edu

A cooperative would provide a good opportunity for area landowners to have control over the resources that they haven't had control over in the past—their woods—to preserve them as well as make some profit off them—it's the way we can keep our land, by making some profit.

**Blue Ridge Cooperative
Member**

Step 2: Hold an Exploratory Meeting

If group members are able to decide on a joint business idea, they need to hold an exploratory meeting with other potential members to gauge their interest in the idea. Is there sufficient interest? If not, the organizational efforts may stop here. Perhaps the group can look into other business models such as LLCs or Partnerships that require less support. The advantages and disadvantages of the cooperative model should be discussed at this meeting. Co-ops require time and money from each member. At this meeting the typical member should learn what will be expected from him or her, both in the short term and well into the future.

A great way to ensure member commitment is to ask the participants for their time and for some seed money to help with the ongoing organizational effort. Some people at the meeting also should be willing to serve on a steering committee to help bring the idea to the next level.

Step 3: Determine If the Co-op Is a Feasible Business Idea

Feasibility studies, no matter how good, are only expectations. They do not guarantee success. If the study is positive, the steering committee then proceeds to create a business plan. Typically, it takes 1.5-2 years to organize a cooperative. Researching and writing a feasibility study and business plan are by far the most time consuming tasks in co-op development. Often, people feel projects lose their momentum at this stage. But it is critical for potential co-ops to do their homework before asking members to invest hard-earned money and resources.

Step 4: Incorporate

If, after completing the feasibility study and business plan, the steering committee members decide to proceed, they need to incorporate their business. This is an appropriate time to consult a lawyer, if one hasn't already been consulted. All businesses need to incorporate with their state. If the organization is a co-op, the co-op typically has to write the bylaws, essentially an owner's manual for the co-op. Bylaws state how the co-op will be governed and how it will conduct business.

Step 5: Raise Sufficient Capital

The most challenging step for businesses is usually raising adequate capital. This can be more of a challenge for cooperatives because, as mentioned by Sagor, the members provide a substantial amount of the capital. For capital-intensive ventures, this may be sufficient reason for a group to choose a different business structure. For example, if the group decides it wants to build a timber mill, which costs a few million dollars, it may not be able to finance that solely with member capital and bank loans. It may decide to become an LLC or a publicly traded company to access some venture capital. If a group

wants less capital-intensive services, such as forest management or education, raising member equity is less of an issue.

Step 6: Get Started!

A few things need to get done to get the co-op off and running on the right track. At the first meeting, the members approve the co-op bylaws and elect a board of directors.

Finding great board members is really essential. Finding the right initial manager is also critical. Then there are the details of finding the right facilities, of the manager hiring other staff, and getting operations under way.

The Role of the Resource Professional: Discussions with Paul Catanzaro, Katie Fernholz, and E.G. Nadeau

There is much to learn from people who have experience in organizing and running a forest landowner cooperative. We interviewed three resource professionals who have worked in the area for a number of years. Paul Catanzaro is a service forester in the Bureau of Forestry under the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and in that capacity he provides technical assistance to private landowners and land trust towns. He is also a regulator and implements the Massachusetts Forest Cutting Practices Act as well as the State's current use program (Chapter 61).

Katie Fernholz is a forester at the Community Forestry Resource Center (CFRC), a program of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) in Minneapolis, MN.³ Katie has worked at CFRC since 1999 and has helped support the development of more than a dozen landowner groups and cooperatives in the Upper Midwest. Katie also has helped facilitate co-op development in other parts of the country through sharing her experiences and the lessons learned in the Midwest. Katie's specific tasks with cooperative development efforts have primarily been related to helping landowners realize their forest management goals. By arranging educational opportunities, field days, and workshops, Katie has helped co-op members learn more about land management options and tools they can use to achieve their goals. Katie also has helped many of the groups with their goal of having their forests certified. Katie helped establish CFRC's Umbrella Certification Program that provides co-op members and other family forests in the Upper Midwest access to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification through an innovative group certification structure and enrollment process.

E.G. Nadeau is the director of research, planning and development for Cooperative Development Services (CDS). E.G. has more than 20 years of cooperative development experience, including 7 years working with forestry co-ops and associations. He is the

I wish we had fought the temptation to stay in business on money that was really intended to build capital.

Sustainable Woods Cooperative Member

³ Katie left CFRC in June 2004 and is now at Dovetail Partners in White Bear Lake, MN.

national coordinator of WoodWorks, a network of seven cooperative development centers interested in forest owner cooperation.

We start with Paul and move on to learn from Katie and E.G.

How did you originally get involved with the Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative?

Paul: I originally got involved with the Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative because of a need I identified in my daily routine as a service forester. It became increasingly difficult to watch landowners implement management which did not achieve their goals. Either the work they were getting wasn't up to their standards or they were making resource decisions based on misinformation. This has huge implications when the landscapes are dominated by nonindustrial private landowners. It jeopardizes the public good that flows from these lands. In response, several other resource professionals and I decided to get together and propose the forestry co-op idea to several landowners in the area as a way of helping landowners achieve their goals while at the same time raising the standard of management in the area and protecting the public benefits that private forests provide.

In the summer of 1999 I had conversations with the state's extension forester, Dave Kittredge, as well as another professor at U Mass, Paul Barten, about the idea of gathering some landowners together to take a look at getting the group certified. Was it even possible? Paul Barten and I talked to other resource professionals in the fall of 1999, and we all threw into the hat the names of landowners we knew that may be open to exploring this idea. We organized a meeting of landowners and resource professionals in October 1999. The landowners expressed interest in pursuing the idea. We then began meeting every month for approximately 3 or 4 years.

My involvement with the cooperative in its startup phases moved very quickly from one of being an organizer to one of being a resource professional giving technical assistance. Originally, it was a group of resource professionals that organized the first several meetings, identified some key landowners in our target area, and invited them to a meeting and presented them with the co-op idea. We all agreed that for this initiative to be successful, it needed to be landowner driven with support from resource professionals. Unlike many traditional forestry programs where landowners are passive participants, we all felt that one of the important outcomes would be a group of empowered landowners. It was important to move from leader to technical support as quickly as possible. Indeed, within two to three meetings, landowners were comfortable and excited enough to start running the meetings and provide direction for the cooperative.

At our original meeting, we invited 20 to 25 landowners and by the second or third meeting we had probably close to 15; several had dropped out but several new landowners had heard of the meeting and really wanted to attend. So we have been working primarily with somewhere around 15 dedicated landowners.

Today, the group has formally organized legally as an LLC with cooperative bylaws. The LLC has obtained Green Certification through FSC and is in the process of developing a business plan.

So what is your role today? How much time do you still devote to this project?

Paul: Early in the process we received a \$40,000 grant from the Forest Service through its Focus Funding Project, which we used as seed money to help with this initiative. As part of that grant, I used a portion of my time as a match (an in-kind contribution), devoting an average of 5 hours a week for the 2-year life of the grant. My match for the grant was spent providing technical assistance for the fledgling effort. The cooperative is now at a point where I'm giving approximately 5 hours a month, and I have moved from being an organizer to primarily working with the landowners on their FSC Green Certification.

One of the things, especially early on, that I found very helpful in my work with the cooperative was being able to provide some stability during the fits and the starts of the startup phase as landowners got tired or something discouraging happened. In the future, I envision my role as one of continued technical assistance and support.

And what about you, Katie and E.G., what experiences have you had with forestry cooperatives?

Katie: I think the role of anyone who's trying to assist in co-op development, whatever their background experience might be, is to facilitate and empower the local group, to help them articulate and pursue whatever their ideas are. So it's a very delicate process because even if the development specialist has a lot of experience and can see all of the things that the group should be doing and whatnot, it's very important that they go only at the pace that the group is capable of. You have to step back and let the local people who are the members of the co-op run the show and you step in when they really need help, when they are kind of getting bogged down in something or when they ask for help, but not lead it, not push it, and not force it to be something that it doesn't want to be. The strength of any co-op project is the local ownership, the local investment. That's what will keep the project going when the co-op development specialists go away.

E.G.: We do a whole range of things to help existing co-ops and to work with people who are interested in forming co-ops. We do everything from facilitating initial planning meetings, to writing business plans, to doing market studies, to helping groups secure financing for their projects.

When do you generally get involved in the process?

Katie: Co-op development specialists or assistants can come in at a variety of stages throughout a project. Some communities have a culture that says right from the beginning they want to pull in as many people as possible so they'll invite a wide range of people to the very first visioning meetings. Other communities have a culture that says no, we

Well, the benefit of having loggers, foresters, processors, and landowners come together in a co-op is one of basic familiarity. When people come together over and over and over again, they get to know each other, and they understand and respect each other.

**Massachusetts Woodland
Cooperative Member**

first have to get our own footing and identify for ourselves what our boundaries are and our goals are, and once we're secure in that then we will bring in other people when we get to specific questions or needs. So, in my experience, it depends on the culture of the community.

E.G.: Cooperative development specialists can be brought into a co-op development process at a variety of different stages. We can be involved at the very first organizing meeting where a co-op idea is being discussed all the way to working with a co-op that has been in existence for 50 years and assisting the leadership to carry out a strategic planning review.

How do you measure the interest of potential cooperative members?

Katie: The interest level for co-op development in a community or among potential members can be measured very formally through surveys. I think every group I've been involved with has done an initial survey of landowners within their region. They usually identify a watershed or a county or a multiple county area and get a list of the various landowners and just do a blanket mailing. The response to that gives some indication of what the interest level is.

More informally, interest level can be gauged just by how enthusiastically the people respond to the idea. I mean, most groups do have a first meeting and at the end of that first meeting you'll have kind of a show of hands of who thinks we should keep going with this. I remember one meeting I was at, it was a broad informational meeting; people were going to present on co-op experiences from other groups and it was a pretty full room, maybe 100 or a 150 landowners from a couple of counties in that area. It was really hard to tell during that meeting what was going to happen because there weren't a lot of questions; the audience was kind of tight-lipped and arms were crossed and you weren't quite sure if they were into it or not. But at the end of the meeting, they were asked whether they thought this was a good idea. Every hand went up. Sometimes you've just got to ask.

E.G.: A professional consultant like me can't really determine for a group whether or not they have a good idea for a co-op. We can work with a group or with a co-op and explore together whether it makes sense to proceed with a business based on their idea. One thing that can be very useful is to do a survey of potential members of a local co-op. In the forestry co-ops that we've been working with around the Midwest, one of the steps that we almost always recommend is to contact local landowners who might be interested in joining the co-op. Ask them if they are interested in receiving forestry services from the co-op. If so, what kinds of services do they want? This should be a key initial decision-making point on whether or not to proceed with the development of the co-op.

If you don't do a member survey when a co-op or association is being formed, the organizing group can head off in a direction that is different from what potential members want. In fact, I can think of one critical example where the organizers did do a membership survey and then didn't follow it. The membership survey showed that people were very interested in education and in receiving forest management services, and not very interested in marketing their timber or creating value-added products. And yet, the co-op leaders made value-added wood processing their priority activity. So it's not just a matter of doing the survey, you also have to pay attention to the results.

How do you initially get members involved?

Katie: To get members involved in the beginning, one of the best strategies I've seen is to simply do a field day, a workshop, or a walk in the woods that is focused around what is perceived to be an important issue in the area. Holding an informal workshop and inviting people from the area helps identify what people have in common and who might be the leaders in that community.

E.G.: There's no magic formula for how to start one of these things. There are some cautions about what not to do, though. One caution is that you don't just keep having open-ended meetings. You have maybe one open-ended meeting. Then you pick a steering committee. Then the steering committee creates an action plan and follows the action plan. If you have a series of open-ended meetings and anybody who wants to can come and talk about whatever they want, it becomes like the movie "Groundhog Day." Every meeting is a variation on the same theme that is played out again and again and again. People get discouraged and think they are wasting their time and stop coming.

What about bringing in other resource professionals?

Katie: Co-ops in early development stages can benefit from bringing in outside financial expertise at a variety of stages. Some groups worry about the numbers and the dollar signs very early in the process, and they really want to get down into the financial nitty-gritty as soon as possible. But I think the financial expertise can be brought in at a variety of stages. I do think that finance is one area where external expertise is the most important. When it comes to really having enough experience with the numbers, unless the board members are personally experienced in their other lives at doing business planning or financial forecasts, it is an area where outside third parties and financial experts become critical.

All kinds of different experts can blend information and experience at the various co-op development stages. For any co-op, every time a question comes up in a meeting, it's appropriate to say, 'is there someone else that would know more about this?' They should make sure that it is someone that they trust, that they trust to both provide them good information and also to be respectful of any requests they have for privacy about

Forestry is getting to be a very complex business these days. You've got to have foresters, you've got to have business people, you need to have money people, legal people, biologists, "-ologists," the whole ball of wax. I really think that one of the strengths of a cooperative is being able to draw together a very wide, diverse professional set of resource professionals to make the whole thing work.

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

their process and about the debates they are having. Various forestry co-ops have certainly benefited from the engagement of resource managers, foresters, ecologists, and loggers—all kinds of people working through the whole range of the forest products industry.

E.G.: It's very important to talk to a lawyer when you are developing your bylaws and deciding on the kind of business you want to form. One thing that you have to be careful of though is not to bring an attorney in too quickly. Attorneys are expensive. So, my advice is to get a pretty good idea of the direction you want to go with your organization and then consult an attorney and find out if there are any major reasons why you should or should not go in the direction you have decided. If you follow that approach, you can get good legal advice without having to invest a lot of money in it.

A number of very good forestry professionals can be helpful at different stages in the formation of a forest co-op or association. They include State foresters, and forestry staff located around States. They include private consulting foresters, loggers, extension staff, and staff of local resource conservation and development districts. All these people are potentially valuable resource people in forming an organization. In some cases, groups bring in a variety of forestry professionals at a very early stage. They bring them in to give presentations or to be part of the audience and ask good questions and provide a reality check on what might work or what might not work.

Lessons Learned

Our forestry cooperative experts were asked if they had any pearls of wisdom they would pass on to others interested in starting a forestry cooperative. Their answers follow.

Gather the Right Group of People

Paul: The time commitment landowners have to devote to this type of project is tremendous. My suggestion would be to make sure you work with a dedicated core group of landowners that are committed to this idea. Active, engaged landowners may be the greatest product that cooperatives produce.

The Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative has 25 members now and more than 3,000 acres. Of those 25 members, around 15 are very active, each of them bringing unique talent to the group. We have a gentleman who is retired that has done a lot of professional organization and grant writing in his day and has brought that to the table. We have people that run a portable sawmill, a landowner who brings that to the table, we have a professor who teaches design work at a local college who has been very helpful in designing logos and so forth. And so, each landowner really does bring kind of a unique gift and talent to the group. And capitalizing on that, I think, allows the stakeholders to really take ownership of it. Foresters are constantly trying to bring

landowners into active forest management on our terms, usually based on growing timber. The co-op model allows people to engage their properties, while helping the greater cause of forestry, on their terms, be it grant writing, graphic design, or wood processing.

Katie: In my opinion, if you have at least three people in that area who want to do something, you've got plenty of interest. You don't need 100; you don't need 200. Sometimes it's better to start small because it's very difficult early on to know what you can promise people. If you have a dozen, that's a real nice number because there are a lot of different people there that can volunteer for different things and cover a lot of bases. As long as you have a handful, you have a place to start because a handful of people have a lot of friends and sit around a lot of kitchen tables and coffee tables and coffee shops and can talk it up plenty. If there's really no interest, if there's only one person in the community that likes this and everyone thinks they're crazy, then I say just wait. Just wait and see if there's something else you can do besides a formal co-op.

I think that one of the biggest keys to success for a co-op project is the leadership. It's a very challenging thing for co-ops to balance leadership roles because a co-op, by nature, is very democratic. But every organization needs someone to spearhead change and to spearhead new ideas to make progress. I think one of the things that I've seen co-ops benefit from a great deal is board training—training people in effective communication and meeting management to help the group stay on task and stay focused on the things that need to get done.

E.G.: Without good local leaders—volunteer steering committee members, board members, and paid staff—a lot of good co-op ideas are likely to fail or have a difficult time getting off the ground. Without mentioning the name of the co-op, one story illustrates this point. The co-op's first coordinator turned out not to be very committed to the job. He didn't do much for about nine months. Then the board decided to hire a replacement. He had the right skills, but, for whatever reason, never really got focused on the project and quit after a few months. Then the board hired a third coordinator. He's been there for over three years and is doing a superb job. The co-op is now operating effectively. So, launching a successful co-op has a whole lot to do with finding the right coordinator or manager and having a board of directors committed to what they are doing.

I wouldn't be discouraged about low attendance at initial meetings. Bringing in a large number of landowner-members can occur at some later stage. It doesn't need to happen in the early stages. I think the time to be discouraged though is if the steering committee goes through a lot of work, develops a basic plan for the organization, does a lot of promotion and advertising, and then very few people show up to a potential member meeting; that would be a time to be concerned. You'd need to either look back

One of the areas which I think led to our demise was the fact that we did not have that one individual, that entrepreneurial individual that would take the leadership of the co-op.

Sustainable Woods Cooperative Member

and see whether or not you did an adequate job of promoting the event, or you may have to conclude that there just isn't enough interest in what you are trying to do.

Keep the Members Informed

Katie: The steering committee and the co-op board need to constantly get feedback from their membership. With co-ops, the annual meetings should be very open and allow for some element of discussion. One co-op I work with does a very good job of having their board meetings very well publicized so that the members are able to attend all of those board meetings and get input to the board continually, not just once a year at the annual meeting. To get people to board meetings the little things count, like having them in the evenings, having them on Saturdays or having them followed-up or started by an education walk in the woods or an informational event so that there's motivation for members to come to those meetings. Co-ops are member organizations, and they rely on member support and member enthusiasm.

Have a Clear Mission

Katie: Many times communities come together around an idea in response to community turmoil or stress. Maybe it's that some major wood industry is failing, or they don't feel that their land is being managed well. But it is important that whatever inspires the co-op is sustaining and is positive and becomes something that the community can really gather around and rally around for the long term. What is our co-op trying to do? What are we trying to address? What are we trying to create change around?

Co-ops sometimes are initiated with a couple of friends, a couple of neighbors or people that have been in the community a long time and have seen things change and say 'you know, we've got to do something about this and I think a co-op might help; I think a landowner group might help us address our forest management concerns, might help us address our marketing constraints.' It's important to get from that informal idea into a structured formalized process in a timely manner. It doesn't have to happen instantly; you don't have to make everything formal at the first meeting. It's important to have an informal environment where all kinds of different ideas are drawn out.

But if you don't formalize a mission statement, it's difficult for people to understand their role and how to participate. When it's formalized, when there's a formal process for nominating people for the board or for the steering committee, when there's a formal process for when and where meetings are held, when all of these things are formalized in a reliable structured way, it's much more predictable and people have a more understandable way of engaging. It's much more transparent and the community can understand the process that's going on.

The most important step in my experience of co-op development is early in the process, doing a really good job with the visioning and the mission statement goals. It's important early in the process to spend a lot of time on that. Too many groups, I think, try and just quickly get something down on paper and make it real broad and general, but it's really an opportunity to articulate what's unique about your group and to be very specific about what your group will do.

Be Sure To Have a Business Plan

Katie: If a co-op is aiming to do some kind of business venture, a business plan becomes very important. Business plans are a critical way of working through all kinds of issues in a structured manner: what are we trying to do, how much do we need to do to afford this, and what are our priorities for staff or for expenditures and whatnot. It helps get everything out on the table and organized.

I think it's also important that business plans be very fluid, and very flexible and that they are constantly revisited. So every 3 months, every 6 months, the board or the steering committee takes out this document, revises it, adds another chapter or updates it in some way, keep notes in the margin, whatever it might be, so that it stays current and stays relevant and doesn't collect dust because if a business plan is done right, it should be a working document.

E.G.: Here are some recipes for disaster:

- If your business plan says that you need \$100,000 to launch your co-op and you get \$50,000 and you say, 'Oh well, we can muddle through and start with 50.'
- If your business plan says you need to have a competent manager who knows something about the forest industry and you have a nice, friendly manager who doesn't have the background in the industry and you say, 'Oh well, we can make it work with that.'
- If your business plan says you have to identify solid markets where you have signed agreements for products and instead you have a vague sense that maybe this or that company will buy your products and 'It'll work out.'

Make Sure You Choose the Right Business Model

Paul: I would encourage resource managers looking at this to realize that every group of landowners and that every landscape they are trying this in is very different from those in which other cooperatives exist. I would highly recommend taking a look at other business models in the country and take the best from these models and leave the mistakes behind. I have found it very useful to contact people from other cooperatives; everybody has been very open about sharing information. I would encourage you then if

you do get one up and going to maintain that openness and share your mistakes and your successes. Lessons can and should be learned from other groups, but ultimately you need to tailor the effort to your particular landscape.

Katie: You can do some things under a co-op that you can or cannot do under an LLC that you can or cannot do as a nonprofit. So some of the debate is about what is this group trying to do, what are our priorities, what are our goals? When you incorporate as a co-op, it limits you in some ways that other structures don't. And one of the innovative approaches that I see increasingly used is to have both a co-op as the business arm of the landowner group and a nonprofit arm that partners with that co-op so that the nonprofit can get funding to hold workshops and educational events. By keeping some of the education and member services a little bit separate from the business operations, they don't compete and bury each other. You're able to divert resources equally.

Is it Worth the Effort?

Paul: As a service forester, what I hoped from the beginning is that the cooperative would help raise the bar in our project area for the quality of work being done so that other landowners could see that it is possible to achieve your objectives, to manage the forest sustainably in an ecologically sensitive way, to add value to forest products, and to keep wood locally and help the local economy. Those are fairly lofty goals, and I would say that in 3 or 4 years, we haven't achieved all of those, but we've seen glimpses of success enough to keep us going.

I'm charged, as I mentioned earlier, with technical assistance and education outreach, and having a group of landowners such as this makes my job much more efficient; being able to deliver the information to one group of landowners, 25 sitting in a room as opposed to running around to 24 different properties, again, makes my job much easier. Likewise, cooperatives provide an economy of scale for technology transfer. For example, most consulting foresters cannot afford to invest the time and money into GIS. Through the co-op, we hope to make technology available to landowner consultants so that they can make the best management decisions for their clients. The same goes for the regulatory portion of my job. Instead of meeting a State minimum under the Forest Cutting Practices Act, we now have a group of landowners achieving FSC Certification Standards, which by far exceed the State minimums.

This has been a very rewarding experience for me professionally in terms of my growth and development, the opportunity to write grants, to work with diverse people on a complex project. It has really been the joy of my professional career so far. Being involved with a project that starts taking a look at some concepts that I only read about in college, landscape level management and so forth, in a predominantly private landowner landscape is very exciting and I'm thrilled to be a part of this.

Katie: Co-ops can really be a way to reach landowners more effectively and more efficiently. They are a group all in one spot, a captive audience, and so you can deliver your message to that group as a whole rather than each landowner individually. And certainly my experience with co-ops shows that the landowners that are members of co-ops tend to be very interested in taking a part—taking a hands-on role in their forest management and so as foresters, that empowers us to do things on the land that maybe otherwise it'd be really tedious, time consuming and economically infeasible to accomplish. That would allow us to do things like the little timber stand improvement projects, small-scale planting projects, some of the invasive species control projects that no one has enough time and money to tackle.

Co-ops can be very challenging for resource managers, for foresters because they are social organizations; it's another kind of a bureaucracy, it's another meeting, another group, and another organization when already we all have so many organizations to deal with. But they have a unique role to play because they are landowner members and they are very local. Resource managers should find ways to work with these groups because they are trying to do something that has the potential to effect change.

E.G.: Working with local forest landowner groups, whether they are co-ops or nonprofit associations, can be frustrating sometimes. But what keeps me coming back is that I really believe there's a need for these kinds of organizations. The vast majority of non-industrial private forest land in the United States is not managed. I firmly believe that getting local landowners together to learn more about their woods, to access services, to work together to improve their forests can be a viable supplement to the other ways in which government and private organizations are trying to assist private landowners. So, that keeps me coming back. The need is there and somehow we have to figure out a good way to meet it.