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Beyond the Math: Case Studies of Black Forest Landowners in Georgia, United States

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ABSTRACT

Economic analyses of forest management options can help landowners make informed decisions. However, landowners make decisions in complex and nuanced ways that transcend economics. The history and legal status of their land, their emotional connections to it, their access to knowledge and capital, and their broader objectives are vital elements in their decision-making processes. We present case studies of four Black landowners in Georgia through a combination of economic analyses that compare their current revenue with potential increased revenue through active forest management and qualitative interviews that provide context for past management decisions and insights into why active forest management may – or may – not prove to be their ultimate goal. Together these two types of analysis present a range of goals and management options that consider both economic and non-economic valuations of forested lands, which can inform extension and outreach strategies for increasing engagement of Black landowners in sustainable forestry.

KEYWORDS

Black landowners; minority landowners; family landowners; forest management; forest values; heirs' property; taxes

Introduction

Black landowners in the southeastern United States have historically faced many challenges to land retention, profit maximization from forested and agricultural lands, and successful intergenerational transfer of family land (Christian et al., 2013; Dwivedi et al., 2016; Gan et al., 2005; Gan & Kolison, 1999; Gordon et al., 2013; Hitchner et al., 2019; Schelhas et al., 2017, 2021). These include exclusion from government-run land assistance programs, limited capital to invest in land improvement strategies, and insecure land title in the form of heirs' property, or land that is communally held – without clear title – by the descendants of the original owner (Dyer & Bailey, 2008; Goyke & Dwivedi, 2018; Schelhas & Hitchner, 2020). Studies have shown that a resolution of heirs' property issues and a shift to forest management that provides potential income are two key strategies that directly address Black land loss. They can also help recoup some of the opportunity costs associated with less economically productive management strategies that Black landowners are disproportionately more likely to employ across the southern United States. (Christian et al., 2013; Goyke et al., 2019b; Hitchner et al., 2021; Schelhas et al., 2021). Many Black forest

landowners lack the requisite knowledge about forest management strategies that can maximize income, which could, in turn, have the potential to help to retain land. They also lack experience with (and in some cases, trust in) federal and state programs and with natural resource professionals that can inform more intensive and economically productive forest management decisions. Landowners who are not forestry professionals are generally unable to perform an accurate and comprehensive accounting for different management strategies specific to their land. While they may (or may not) keep accurate records of the expenses and revenues generated by their current management choices, they may not know, for example, what other strategies would cost and generate over the life cycle of a forest. Having more detailed knowledge about the economic implications of various forest management strategies would help landowners better navigate their options.

However, while economic analyses of different forest management options can help landowners make informed decisions, we know that landowners make decisions in complex and nuanced ways that transcend economics (Goyke et al., 2019a; Howley et al., 2012; Workman et al., 2003). Forest landowners of all races have emotional connections to their land, diverse management objectives, and intentions to transfer land to future generations. For Black Americans, the history of their land, often enmeshed with the legacies of enslaved ancestors, deepens their sentimental attachment to the land. Their historical engagement with forested landscapes and their traditional methods of forest management differ from White landowners who are more likely to manage their forested landholdings in the manner of mainstream technical forestry, defined here as a production cycle that begins with site prep and ends in final harvest (Goyke et al., 2019a, Goyke, et al., 2019b; Schelhas et al., 2018). These differences are often overlooked by extension agents, foresters, and natural resource professionals. In addition, they are often misunderstood or seen as a problem to be overcome. In actuality, Black landowners have historically operated in a different framework, making decisions that are strategic within that framework. For example, they have often not had enough financial capital to implement technical forestry techniques on their land, even if they have knowledge of and access to cost-share programs, as well as clear title to their lands. As a result, they have instead relied on low- or no-cost forest management techniques, including hand planting pinecones or discarded tree seedlings or on natural regeneration after a tree harvest. While these methods are often discounted by forestry professionals, they do make sense when placed in context and may well continue to be the best option available for some forest landowners (Schelhas et al., 2021).

The complexities of the forest management strategies employed by Black forest landowners, which often deviate from technical forestry, are sometimes best illustrated through stories of particular landowners, using their words and their ways of structuring ideas, memories, and visions for the future. Using a grounded theory approach, in which themes and insights emerge from the data rather than being pre-determined by the researchers, we frame four such stories in a way that is useful to foresters, natural resource personnel, and others involved with outreach efforts to assist landowners with resolving heirs' property and achieving land management goals. Through a combination of economic analyses and qualitative interviews, we show how these four case studies of Black landowners in Georgia, United States, together represent a range of goals and management options as well as commonalities in non-economic valuations of the importance of forestland ownership. We then discuss the particularities of these four landowners in relation to the broader pool of forty landowners with whom we

conducted qualitative interviews in Georgia, and we conclude with recommendations for more targeted engagement with Black forest landowners by forestry professionals that acknowledges the complexities inherent in their current and potential future forest management strategies.

Methods

Two cultural anthropologists based in Georgia conducted qualitative interviews with forty Black forest landowners in central and southern Georgia between January 2018 and January 2020. Most of these forty landowners were identified during a research study conducted in collaboration with Fort Valley State University (FVSU), an 1890 Land Grant University and Historically Black University (HBCU) located in Fort Valley, Georgia that has a strong Extension program with a long history of engagement with Black landowners and farmers. Other interviewees were reached through our professional networks and by referrals from colleagues and previous research collaborators. We aimed to interview landowners that were diverse in terms of land ownership (i.e., size of landholding, present and previous engagement with professional land management programs, clear title or heirs' property, single or multiple owners) and personal attributes (age, gender, educational level, and socio-economic class) (see [Table 1](#)). We recognize that our primary reliance on HBCU Extension personnel for referrals likely resulted in a sample of landowners that were more engaged in active management and more likely to be farmers than the general population of Black landowners in Georgia. However, the diversity within this subset of Black landowners in Georgia is illustrative of larger patterns within the broader population of Black landowners in Georgia, as well as the southeastern United States as a region.

We conducted detailed interviews (ranging from one to two hours each) with each landowner using a semi-structured interview guide. These interviews were done on the land whenever possible, as physically being on the land helps to trigger memories and emotions (De Leon & Cohen, 2005; Hitchner et al., 2021). In some cases, we conducted interviews in family homes, in public spaces such as community centers or churches; when in-person interviews were not an option (such as with absentee landowners), we conducted interviews by phone. The interviews were transcribed in real time whenever possible or from detailed notes immediately following the interview. Interviews were conversational in nature, and while discussions were focused on landowner engagement with current forest management strategies and future management goals, we also asked broad questions that opened discussions about childhood memories of the land, sentimental attachments to the land, and family relationships that have impacts on land management (especially if the land is communally held by multiple family members as heirs' property). This approach resulted in rich qualitative data and a large sample of text on which to perform grounded textual analysis (Clarke et al., 2018; Deterding & Waters, 2021). We used NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify emergent themes that would not otherwise have been evident had we relied solely on surveys or formal structured interviews; these themes provide critical context for the economic analysis.

Table 1. Landowner attributes and forest management.

Landowner	Age	Education	Landowner type	Total forested acres	Management
1	56	4-year college degree	Out-of-state absentee	505	Hunting club
2	61	4-year college degree	In-state absentee	150	None
3	81	4-year college degree	Residential	219	None
4	77	2-year college degree	Residential	205	Silvopasture

Table 2. The LEV of forested property for Landowners 1–4.

Scenarios	Landowner 1	Landowner 2	Landowner 3	Landowner 4
LEV: BAU (w/o CUVA)	\$(42.5)	\$(206.2)	\$(116.5)	\$532.8
LEV: BAU (w/ CUVA)	\$168.5	\$(57.3)	\$105.2	\$683.3
LEV: AFM (w/o CUVA)	\$232.6	\$48.9	\$172.9	\$123.9
LEV: AFM (w/ CUVA)	\$446.5	\$198.5	\$394.6	\$314.9

For each case, LEV (Land expectation value, measured as \$/acre) is reported for the two scenarios. BAU is a business-as-usual scenario (no inputs during site preparation or tending treatments). AFM is active forest management (includes site preparation and tending treatments). Both scenarios are reported with and without CUVA enrollment, which reduces the tax burden and serves as a proxy for the presence or absence of heirs’ property. Note that for Landowner 4, BAU is agroforestry, a pine/silvopasture system. Negative values are in parentheses. For more details, please see Goyke and Dwivedi (2020).

In addition to the interviewers, two forest economists collaborated on this research, conducting the economic modeling that informs the quantitative analysis presented here for the four landowners selected as case studies. The economic analysis compared two management scenarios: business as usual (BAU), wherein landowners continue current management strategies (or lack thereof) and active forest management (AFM) intended to maximize profit from forested land holdings. We considered current and future enrollment in Conservation Use Value Assessment (CUVA), which reduces the tax burden on landowners, in these calculations. In this case, CUVA also serves as a proxy for the presence or absence of heirs’ property, since enrollment in CUVA requires clear land title. We used these calculations to derive LEV, or (Land Expectation Value, measured as \$/acre) of forested property under different management scenarios (see Table 2).

Previous publications by the authors provide more nuanced results of qualitative research undertaken with Black forest landowners in Georgia and other southern states (Hitchner et al., 2019, 2021; Schelhas & Hitchner, 2020, 2020; Schelhas et al., 2021, 2017) and the economic analyses of the case studies briefly described in this article (Goyke & Dwivedi, 2020; Goyke et al., 2019a, Goyke, et al., 2019b). Here we combine these analyses to show how qualitative data analysis can provide essential context to economic calculations. We selected landowners for our case studies based on two subjective criteria: ownership of forested land holdings of at least 50 acres (a common minimum acreage necessary for AFM) and landowner diversity in terms of management activity, future goals, absentee status, and heirs’ property status. These four landowners collectively demonstrate the diversity and variability in forest management goals, strategies, and challenges among Black forest landowners in Georgia. Elucidation of this diversity using qualitative analysis is key to understanding the context in which economic decisions regarding forestry are made. We have made deliberate editorial choices not to include any identifying details of each person’s location or situation, and we use the gender-neutral term “they” to further obscure the identity of each landowner.

Results: case studies

Landowner 1

Landowner 1 is 56 years old, and has a four-year college degree. They are an out-of-state absentee owner; they and a sibling have power of attorney over the property, which is still titled in their parents’ names. The landowner has been managing the property since 1981 when “Dad finally let me.” The family owns two tracts (505 acres and 50 acres), which are divided by a paved road. The property currently includes 61 pine acres, 105 mixed pine/

hardwood acres, and 219 hardwood acres, as well as 7–10 acres that are cleared under a power line that divides this property from another 20-acre tract owned by another family member. The land is in central Georgia.

The land was purchased by the landowner's great-grandfather in 1931, who was a soldier in World War I. He did not smoke and would sell his cigarettes and send the money back to his wife, who used the money to buy adjacent parcels of land for a farm. She told her grandson, the landowner's father, "never sell the land." Family retention of the land is important to the landowner; their granddaughter (now aged 12) will likely inherit and manage the land. The property holds many special memories for the landowner, who lived on the farm with their grandparents. The landowner related childhood memories of slaughtering chickens, dealing with mean bulls, bush-hogging with tractors, and chasing loose hogs. The family has been cutting timber since the 1940 s; they did not sell it but milled the wood themselves to build houses for family members.

The property is now used primarily by a hunting club whose dozen members pay an annual lease and maintain the property. People have been hunting on the property since 1972 through a verbal agreement. The landowner is happy with this arrangement and wants to maintain the unwritten contract with the hunters, in this case allowing access to the land and to wildlife in exchange for upkeep and for keeping other people off the land (which is difficult or impossible for an absentee landowner). The landowner plans to install a fishpond for the hunters and to plant food plots and fruit trees to attract additional wildlife.

There is no current forest management, although natural pine has been harvested. However, the landowner is concerned about good forest management and obtained a forest management plan from the Georgia Forestry Commission to "understand what to do and what not to do . . . Know where there are issues, so you can address it." The plan stated that the property is weedy and needs thinning. The landowner plans to implement this advice; however, they want to be present when the trees are cut and observe using drones so that "they don't take too many trees." The landowner is not enthusiastic about managing for timber; they said: "Timber has dropped in price dramatically . . . the only time it is any good is after a natural disaster." Nearby mills have closed, so the cost of transport reduces the amount paid to the landowner. "Fortunately," they said, "We don't depend on cutting timber to live or pay taxes . . . I don't need the money, so I don't cut the timber." They then suggested that leasing land for solar panels would generate more income, although this is an unlikely option given the detrimental effects on hunting.

The landowner mentioned the importance of gaining knowledge multiple times: "knowledge is the most important thing on the planet. You can have money, but [without] knowledge, you'll be broke." One piece of knowledge includes the potential profit from different management scenarios. The forestland is currently profitable due to the hunting lease and the enrollment of the land in CUVA. Although AFM would be more profitable (Table 2), the landowner is presently uninterested in adopting intensive timber management and prefers to allow the hunting club members to pay the property taxes and manage the property, with some guidance from a forest management plan. This case study demonstrates that forestland income can sustain a property without AFM and highlights the complex nature of forest ownership, especially for absentee landowners with sentimental attachments to land.

Landowner 2

This landowner is 61 years old and has a four-year college degree. They are a fourth generation, in-state owner of the property. The property, located in eastern Georgia, is divided into two tracts and totals about 150 acres, which includes 63 pine acres, 17 mixed pine/hardwood acres, and 52 hardwood acres. A highway splits the two tracts of the property. One tract was purchased by the landowner's great-grandfather (70–80 acres), and the other was purchased by the landowner's grandparents (66 acres). Both tracts were originally bought for farming, including subsistence gardening and commercial row cropping of cotton and corn. By the 1960 s, the landowner's grandfather was getting out of farming, and “a portion of it was in trees then.” The landowner lived on the farm with their grandparents and cousins during the week, and the landowner shared happy childhood memories, including exploring the woods, fishing, and making syrup from sugar cane.

The property includes a small lake and four residences (a family member and several tenants). There is a separate tract (3–4 acres) that the landowner's grandparents set aside as a family gathering place; it has a clear title and is deeded to an uncle of the landowner as a nonprofit. The two main tracts do not have clear title; they are owned as heirs' property. The 66-acre tract is owned by eight siblings, who each “own 8 acres . . . there are no acres specific to those acres, just an informal agreement.” The other tract is “a group thing.” The landowner said: “As generations come, that acreage becomes smaller and smaller. Someone might say, ‘I don't want anything to do with it because it's only a tenth of an acre’.”

The family is close, and they all contribute to the property taxes and consider the property to be “family land.” They have regular homecomings and monthly formal family meetings, often on the property. They are “united on keeping it in the family. We've incorporated, created an organization. We've hired an attorney to see what we can and can't do.” The family had considered partitioning the property into individually titled shares, but the landowner said that could cause problems if people want the same pieces; they would prefer to manage the land collectively as an LLC. It is important that the land is profitable, or at least to “pay for itself.” The family has discussed leasing the land for farming or for a solar farm, but they realize this would involve clearing it all and that trees are important for preventing erosion and maintaining topsoil. The landowner said: “It is an investment, but it's also land conservation.”

Presently there is no forest management plan. In the words of the landowner, “we don't really have a vision of what we want to do . . . just make sure the trees are growing.” A natural pine stand was harvested 20–25 years ago, and the heirs split the profits. They had planned to plant trees, with the assumption that they would get funding from USDA. They did get seedlings, but they received no planting assistance. So the trees were not planted, and pines regenerated naturally on the tract. They have discussed burning undergrowth to prevent a big fire, and one family member is investigating options for controlled burns now. The family is now feeling “stagnated” because they don't know what to do and feel they cannot make a long-term financial commitment until everyone in the family can agree about what to do. They are, however, all in agreement that they want to keep the land in the family and honor the memory of their grandparents. While they are trying to involve their children, parents have indicated that the children “are sort of indifferent” and that they have attended family meetings but do not have the same connection to the land because they did not grow up on it.

Currently, the land is not profitable at the property level, though it could become profitable if actively managed. If the property were enrolled in CUVA, it would still not be profitable without AFM (Table 2), due to the low proportion of marketable pine timber on the property. However, the combination of enrollment in CUVA and active management that includes tree planting would make the land profitable. The obstacle for this landowner is heirs' property; it effectively prevents enrollment in CUVA and complicates AFM, as having numerous heirs complicates decision making.

Landowner 3

The owner is 81 years old and has a four-year college degree. They are a residential owner. The property, located in central Georgia, is 219 acres, with 88 pine acres, 40 mixed pine/hardwood acres, and 22 hardwood acres. This landowner purchased their property in 1996. The property is bordered by a county road and is adjacent to two other parcels owned by the landowner: their residence and land leased for a cell tower. The landowner purchased the property "for a reasonable price" after a clear-cut. They explained the connection to this area, if not this particular parcel:

About 1826, a slave ship landed in Lowcountry South Carolina. On ship was a mother, father, young daughter. They were sold. Man sold to a different plantation. Mother and daughter sold to plantation in [county name] – great-great-great-great-great-grandmother. That's why I came back here. That's the point of origin . . . My great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother were all born here . . . I wanted the connection and also some peace and quiet. I was in the military, and I moved around a lot.

In addition to their own family legacy in this area, the landowner also values the land as a natural resource and source of security, saying that: "It's a natural resource. It's a recyclable. It'll regenerate and provide over and over again. It's defined as real property . . . it'll be a safe haven for people." It is also very important to the landowner that the next generation keep the land; in fact, they said, "I instructed my sons that if they ever sold it, I'll come back from my grave and get them."

The landowner does not currently actively manage the forestland, although they attempted to replant approximately 120 acres in pine after purchasing the land and received assistance from the state of Georgia. However, the regeneration failed because "the planter was not very good, so I lost 98–99% of them." Then a "decent stand" regenerated naturally. Currently, there are some areas that need thinning, and the land "has some marketable timber, [but] I'm not sure how to approach it." They asked for advice from a timber company, who said that it was not worth the effort to cut. So the landowner is not sure whether to thin the current stand or to clearcut the entire tract and start over.

The landowner is trying to understand the best path forward economically. The property is currently enrolled in CUVA, but without that, it would not remain profitable without AFM (Table 2). Because the property has a high percentage of acreage in naturally regenerated pine, active management would help achieve the landowner's goal to make the property profitable for future generations. The landowner also acknowledged the importance of keeping future generations involved in forest management, as continuity is

vital for the success of a long-term enterprise like forest management. This case study also highlights the risks inherent in investing in forest management, as the failed regeneration represents a loss in time, money, and faith in the system.

Landowner 4

The owner is 77 years old with an Associate degree. They are a residential owner, and they have a clear title to their land. The property is in southwest Georgia and consists of 205 acres with 43 mixed pine/hardwood acres and 71 hardwood acres. Fifty-seven acres are in pine/cattle silvopasture.

This property consists of four tracts that include family land purchased upon the death of the previous owner and land inherited from the current owner's in-laws. The two purchased properties are a few minutes from the residence and separated by a road. The inherited properties are adjacent to one another and are divided by an unpaved road. The landowner said, "One tract has special importance for my [spouse]. The rest are just tracts of land." The spouse grew up on the land, so it has sentimental value as family land.

The current management is a pine/cattle silvopasture system, an arrangement the landowner has no plans to change. The landowner plans to harvest timber and to thin regularly. They planned to replant 40 acres that were recently cut but more spaced out than usual to allow for cattle grazing. The landowner is managing for chip-n-saw, as well as sawtimber. Previously, they also were raking pine straw until "the hurricane [Hurricane Michael in October 2018] wiped that out." Now the landowner is trying to decide what to plant next; they said, "I'm at a crossroads. Should I go with loblolly or longleaf? I had good luck with selling pine straw."

The landowner was looking for ways to keep unwanted species (such as privet) from growing in between the pine trees, so they looked into silvopasture, calling it "one of the best-kept secrets." They did have a forest management plan done by the Georgia Forestry Commission, but the forester was not enthusiastic about silvopasture, so the landowner does not follow the plan. In their words, "I'm trying to maximize the cows I can run [on] it and maximize the trees I can grow on it. I don't see anything in the future that could beat this." They have worked with the same consultant and cutter for 40 years, and this person will cut it just as asked, in a way that works well for silvopasture.

Silvopasture is labor-intensive, and the landowner's heir, a grandson, does not live in the area and is unlikely to continue agroforestry management. The landowner has discussed future management with their heir, including proposing management for pine straw. The heir "doesn't have to live on it to manage it. He's not yet showing interest in it. I'm planning to let him know that money doesn't grow on trees, but you can grow trees to make money." It is important to the landowner that the land is kept in the family and believes future generations can profit from it.

The property is currently profitable through income from timber and cattle and enrollment in CUA; it would remain so even without enrollment (Table 2). Agroforestry is working for this landowner, although if the landowner's heir were to switch to a more traditional AFM scenario, income could be generated in a less labor-intensive way, helping to retain family land.

Discussion

First, we would like to place these four landowners within the context of the broader pool of interviewees in Georgia, all of whom were Black landowners with at least some forested land. All but one of the forty interviewees were over age 50, and thirteen were above the age of 70. About half of the interviewees (18) had a four-year college degree; of the ones that did not, twelve had attended some college, often part of a technical training program. Twelve of our interviews included a female landowner, either as the primary landowner or as part of a couple making joint decisions about land management. Almost half of the interviewees (19) had more than 100 acres of land, while six had between 50 and 100 acres. Five interviewees held between 20 and 50 acres, and five had less than 20 acres. While the majority (28) had clear title to their land, more than half (24) had inherited land, and twelve had heirs' property (two interviewees had both tracts with clear title and heirs' property). Only ten of the interviewees were profiting from their land at the time of the interview; the rest were either breaking even (16) or paying more in taxes than they earned from the land (16). Involvement in forestry was modest, with about one-third of the interviewees (14) having engaged in prescribed burning and the same proportion having planted trees. More than half (23) had previously sold timber through a thinning or other harvests in the past, and about half of the interviewees (18) had used some sort of conservation assistance program. Only ten had a forest management plan at the time of the interview. As noted, due to our primary collaboration with Extension agents, this pool of 40 interviewees was slightly more representative of landowners currently or previously engaged in agriculture compared to the entire population of Black landowners in Georgia.

The four landowners highlighted here are representative of this larger pool of interviewees, though in general, they have more education, larger acreages, and more experience with technical forestry than the others. They all have higher education degrees (three have a four-year college degree, and one has a two-year degree), and all four of them own at least 150 acres of land and have some experience with forestry. Two of the four (Landowners 2 and 4) have had a forest management plan done by professional foresters. One (Landowner 2) plans to implement the suggestions contained in their plans, while the other (Landowner 4) plans to harvest and thin trees but disregard advice to plant more intensively and instead maintain a pine/cattle silvopasture system. Two of the four interviewees (Landowners 1 and 3) have clear title to their property, while the other two (Landowners 2 and 4) have heirs' property. Three of the four landowners had inherited the land (Landowners 1, 2, and 4), and these same three landowners stressed the importance of their sentimental attachments to land and childhood memories for themselves and/or their spouses. The other interviewee (Landowner 3) purchased the land, but they chose that location because of family legacy in the area. All four landowners emphasized the importance of keeping land within the family and successfully passing it on to the next generation.

The various economic scenarios presented here provide insight into different ways that these landowners can make the land profitable, or at least to pay for itself, which can contribute to cross-generational land retention. When collating the economic data for the case studies of the four highlighted landowners, we found that while AFM is more profitable than BAU (see [Table 2](#)), both can be profitable and help to prevent Black land loss. Enrollment in CUVA, as shown in these analyses, has a positive impact on the profitability

of various land management options for all four landowners (see Table 2). As noted, enrollment in CUVA here is a proxy for the presence or absence of heirs' property, meaning that a shift from heirs' property status to clear title presents economic opportunities, including tax benefits, in addition to more management options and participation in more state and federal cost-share programs. Resolution of heirs' property also often removes some obstacles within families that can hinder plans to move into more active forest management.

Conclusion

As expected, the four case studies demonstrated that AFM is more profitable than current management strategies. This is consistent with the goals and strategies associated with mainstream technical forestry. However, we challenge the supposition that AFM is best for every landowner due to differences in landowner objectives and considerations like esthetic preferences, recreation preferences, willingness to invest time in the property, and family dynamics. We found that while current use strategies are sufficiently profitable for land retention for several landowners, this often hinges on tax programs that reduce landowner costs, which can be inaccessible for heirs' property owners. We also recognize that these case studies involve large acreages of timberland, which afford these landowners more opportunities than those with small landholdings or fewer trees. These case studies show that while heirs' property is an obstacle to profitability, it is not insurmountable. They also show the benefits of clearing cloudy title and promoting AFM for increased profitability for landowners who desire to go this route. Increased income from timberlands may not be the main objective. Still, it can help achieve other goals such as preserving the family legacy, diversifying income streams, and providing income opportunities for absentee landowners and future generations. These results indicate that outreach and extension strategies should focus on heirs' property management along with diverse approaches to sustainable forestry for ensuring the retention and sustainability of Black-owned forestlands in the southern United States.

Focus on these four case studies, placed in context within a larger population of Black forest landowners, further illustrates the diversity of land histories, current and past management strategies, and goals for future forest management strategies. It is critical for foresters and other natural resource professionals that work with the public to pay close attention to what landowners would like to try to achieve with their forested lands and which strategies they perceive as the best ways to meet these goals, even if these stray from mainstream technical forest management techniques. Also necessary are awareness of the specific obstacles that Black landowners have faced historically – and continue to face – and sensitivity when addressing these issues with landowners. We believe that the process of telling and retelling the stories of specific landowners, with a deeper view into their specific circumstances, is far more than anecdotal; instead, this process can help paint a fuller picture of landowners as people and encourage forest professionals to better understand why landowners do not always make the same decisions that they may otherwise encourage.

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