

Management Challenges of the Small Timberland Owners of East Texas

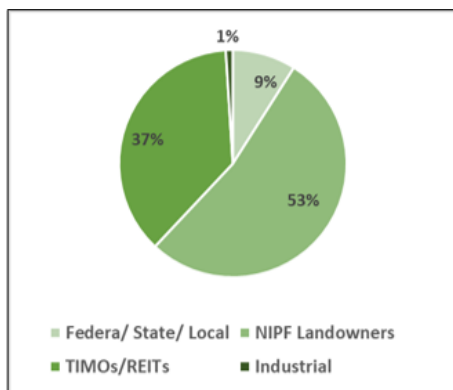
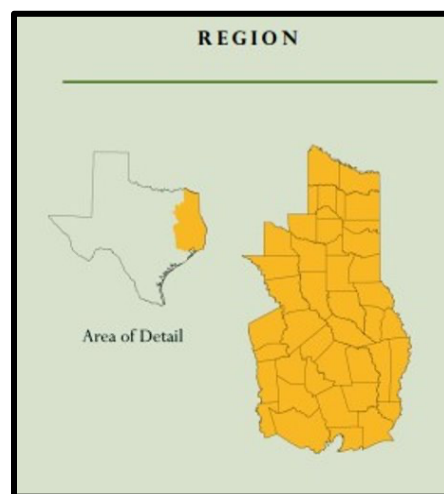
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Introduction

East Texas is comprised of 22.4 million acres of land, and 12.1 million acres are classified as forestland. Most of this land is privately owned by non-industrial private forest landowners (NIPF), timber investment management organizations (TIMOs), real estate investment trusts (REITs), or other private groups and organizations. Texas' working forests have an annual impact of 21-billion-dollars on the Texas economy (TAMFS 2021). Fragmentation of East Texas forestlands has been a trend for the last several decades. It has changed the composition and continuity of the once vast tracts of industrial timberlands that once dominated the landscape. Increasing urbanization, land usage, and ownership changes have modified the landscape of the forest communities of the eastern United States. This same fragmentation can be seen across East Texas utilizing National Land Cover Database (NLCD) and historic satellite imagery. This



fragmentation is one of many challenges being faced by the small timberland owners. Forestland management activities take place on a wide array of property sizes and have varying management goals. Many of these forest landowners are looking at the non-timber aspects of forestland ownership, while few have the option to focus on the intensive silvicultural processes to maximize dollar-per-acre income. As Lawrence C. Walker puts it in his 1988 landowner guide, “commonly called *small timberland owners*, this group of people includes farmers living on the land and a large array- lawyers, physicians, merchants, and farmers- of the absentee landowners.”

This diverse group of people living on the property and the absentee category will have many different opinions, views, and values of the land. Whatever the goals of the landowner, property size, or timber type, a property's distance to mills, and loggers' ability to harvest, all play a role in determining realistic management options on these smaller tracts. The small timberland owners of east Texas are continuing to change as are the sizes of the property they are trying to manage. The costs associated with forest management have risen to a point that small timberland owners may find it challenging to conduct management activities, without securing cost-share

funding. The challenges of the small private forestland owner since a 1960 thesis study (Miller 1960) have dramatically changed and an assessment of these and current issues across east Texas is needed.

Methods

We will utilize Miller's study as a baseline to identify changes in issues over time. This project will develop an updated survey to better understand perspectives of small forestland owners. The National Woodland Ownership Survey will serve as a base template for developing questions and format that will be modified to fit the small scale, East Texas, we are focusing on. This survey will be offered in multiple formats, digitally via Microsoft Forms or similar platforms and on paper, to target the multi-generational responses I expect across my survey area. Surveys will target small timberland owners, owning fifty acres or less across our survey area to limit any large acreage data. This survey will collect data on:

- General demographic information
- Resident or absentee landowner
- Length of property ownership
- Acreage of forestland owned
- Location (county or nearest city/ town)
- Forest type (hardwood/ pine/ mixed), (natural/planted)
- Past management activities conducted
- Current & future Management goals

It will be important to capture as much landowner diversity in our survey demographic as possible, as I hypothesize this is one of the major factors leading to the large variation in forestland management activities. The diversity of the survey will encompass the general forest type as described by National Land Cover Database (NLCD), which will be gathered utilizing remote sensing techniques. Landowner diversity will be defined by each landowner's unique experience and knowledge of forest management on their property.

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