



Characterizing the profiles, motivations and behaviour of Quebec's forest owners



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ABSTRACT

In 2012, a survey was conducted of a random sample ($n = 2215$) of the roughly 130,000 non-industrial private forest owners in the province of Quebec (Canada), to characterize their profiles, motivations and activities. This study follows similar surveys of the same population in 1973 and 1985. The results show that woodlot management activities are strongly integrated into respondents' lifestyles, although respondents' socio-economic characteristics have changed over the last 40 years. A majority of respondents own a woodlot that is located near their residence; have owned it for more than 20 years; visit it several times a year; use it to carry out complementary activities, mainly for enjoyment; and plan to transfer it the next generation, thus keeping it in the family. A majority of respondents view generating an income from forest activities as a secondary objective. For most of them, timber harvesting and hunting do not conflict with their desire to protect their natural environment. These results confirm the existing literature emphasizing the primacy of intrinsically individual factors such as personal or family values over external incentives in order to explain landowners' degree of involvement in forest management activities.

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1. Introduction

Private forests in Quebec, which total 6.6 million ha, are owned by roughly 130,000 individuals, families and companies. The average size of these woodlots is 41 ha, but there are also a few large estates over 100,000 ha. Management activities in private forests are essential to several major industries in the rural economy, including the timber products, maple sugar, hunting and outdoor recreation industries. Moreover, these forests provide many environmental services for urban and rural communities, including protecting watersheds, landscapes and biodiversity. Therefore, the evolution of the profiles, values and behaviour of forest owners is of interest to policymakers.

Consequently, studies of private forest owners are regularly conducted in industrialized countries around the world (USDA, 2005; Toppan and Picard, 2011; Nadeau, 2011; Nadeau et al., 2012). In Quebec, surveys of woodlot owners were carried out in 1973, 1985 and 1999 (Brunelle, 1974; CROP, 1985; Nadeau et al., 2012). Such studies are useful in improving the relevance and impact of government programs, regulations and knowledge transfer measures for woodlot owners. Surveys can be employed, for example, to monitor woodlot owners' use of government programs targeting private forests.

2. Objective of the study

This study aims to characterize the profiles, values and behaviours of Quebec's forest owners in 2012 and to identify trends in variations in these profiles since 1973.

3. Literature review

According to the literature, there is no such thing as an average woodlot owner, but rather various categories of owners with individual motivations (i.e., thoughts) and behaviour (i.e., actions) when it comes to managing their properties (Häyrynen et al., 2015; Bengston et al., 2011).

For 20 years, researchers have tried to identify potential indicators for categorizing forest owners according to their motivations and behaviour in woodlot management. Some authors have attempted to explain or predict owners' behaviour through socioeconomic indicators such as occupation, age, income and education (Häyrynen et al., 2015; Boon and Meilby, 2007; Salmon et al., 2006; Birch, 1994). Other studies have explained the behaviour of woodlot owners through lifestyle indicators such as social norms, habits and personal and family values (Song et al., 2014; Bengston et al., 2011; Rickenbach et al., 2005; Ziegenspeck et al., 2004; Kendra, 2003). However, more research is required to clearly establish the correlations between these indicators (Erickson et al., 2002; Beach et al., 2005).

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Nevertheless, these studies do show that motivations for managing a woodlot fall into two broad categories:

- External motivations, such as income opportunities, financial assistance from government programs, the availability of consulting services and tax incentives;
- Internal motivations, such as the correspondence between the activity and the landowner's personal values, or the contribution of forest management to personal or family identity.

Internal motivations appear to be what basically drive landowners to manage their woodlots. External motivations have more influence on the extent of the work or the timeline for completing forest management projects (Bliss and Martin, 1989; Daniels et al., 2010).

External motivations seem to be largely influenced by evolving forestry policies by governments, which encourage or discourage certain types of behaviour through incentive programs, regulatory measures, and training or information activities. The natural resources on the woodlots, coupled with price conditions for these resources on the market, are also external motivations affecting forest owners' behaviour.

Internal motivations are influenced by several factors, such as a forest owner's ethnic background, family values, knowledge and personal values:

- "Ethnic background" refers to the culture of the country of origin of the woodlot owner or his or her family. Bliss and Martin (1989) observed in the United States, although they were not able to demonstrate a link, that farmers from a Scandinavian background seem to find it more natural to combine silvicultural and agricultural activities than those of British ancestry. This suggests that, in the case of the former, respect for the ancestral traditions in their country of origin fosters this productive complementarity.
- "Family values" refer to the role the forest plays in the family unit. A family's woodlot may be perceived as a source of family unity owing to the activities it generates (tapping maple trees in the spring or enjoying the fall foliage in autumn) or as a family legacy (pursuing the parents' vision of forestry or transmitting knowledge and customs to children and grandchildren) (Bliss and Martin, 1989). In fact, many studies now use the term "family forests" to refer to non-industrial private forests when their focus demonstrates a fundamental link with family or highlights the importance of family legacy (Bliss, 2003; Butler et al., 2007; Fischer and Charnley, 2010).
- "Personal values" refer to the preoccupations, interests, habits and beliefs that define a person's identity. For example, working in the woods can be therapeutic, allowing someone to forget his or her daily troubles; forest management may be perceived as a project and a personal challenge; and the woods can be an ideal workplace for those who prefer the great outdoors to office or factory work. In this respect, continuous exposure to a forest environment at a young age can be critical to the development of such interests and habits (Kendra and Hull, 2005).
- "Knowledge" refers to an individual's interactions with new subject matter, which influence his or her personal values and behaviour (Karppinen and Berghäll, 2015).

Since no single determining factor can predict the attitudes and behaviour of forest owners and these factors seem to instead be complementary, some researchers are now trying to predict woodlot owners' attitudes and behaviour by describing their lifestyle on the basis of their primary occupation, education, and personal and family values.

In short, it is a matter of understanding how forest management fits within the habits of woodlot owners. For example, woodlot owners who live and work in an urban environment do not integrate forest management into their daily activities, but rather into the free time remaining after their primary job. Forest management activities are carried out during periods reserved for relaxation, recreation or well-being, and harvesting wood is not necessarily a financial priority for those who

derive their incomes from their primary jobs. Conversely, forest owners who live near their woodlots are more likely to integrate forest management into their daily tasks (Ziegenspeck et al., 2004; Kendra and Hull, 2005; Rickenbach and Kittredge, 2009).

Indeed, several studies show that a lifestyle characterized by a thirst for freedom and independence, a desire to have control over their work, the pride derived from managing their natural heritage, and a will to preserve family traditions are motivations as important for forest owners as the income provided by exploiting the resources on their woodlots (Kingsley et al., 1988; Kendra and Hull, 2005).

In fact, according to previous surveys, two-thirds of Quebec landowners use their woodlots mainly for recreation or simple enjoyment, with only a third stating a second income as a reason for ownership (Nadeau, 2001). These results are consistent with several other surveys conducted in the United States (Baughman et al., 2001; Creighton et al., 2002; Hodgdon and Tyrrel, 2003; Butler, 2008; Rickenbach and Kittredge, 2009).

These findings suggest that owners' changing characteristics and lifestyles may have a significant impact on woodlot management decisions. Woodlot owners' age, occupation and educational level may have a direct influence on their general attitudes and behaviour and, consequently, on the management decisions they make about their forests.

The present study aims to clarify the evolution in woodlot owners, characteristics and lifestyles, particularly since forest owners are likely to react in different ways to a given government policy (Andersson and Gong, 2010).

4. Methodology

A telephone survey was conducted in 2012 of a representative sample of owners of woodlots of at least 4 ha in every region of Quebec. The results were then compared with the results of previous surveys of the same population in 1973 and 1985.

4.1. Developing the questionnaire

Several recent studies were used as models for developing the questionnaire. The first draft was improved based on feedback from the representatives of 30 organizations working closely with forest owners and the resulting draft was further improved by conducting a pretest in March 2012 of 26 randomly selected forest owners.

4.2. Drawing up a list of Quebec forest owners

Since there is no centralized list of Quebec forest owners, owners' contact information was obtained from three different types of sources: lists created by regional forest owners' associations, municipal real estate assessment rolls, and the database used by government agencies for managing a cost-share program for non-industrial forest owners. The final list, which was created by merging this information, contained the names and phone numbers of 113,966 forest owners, out of a total estimated population of 130,000 individuals, families and companies owning forests across Quebec.

4.3. The survey

A stratified random sample of 3603 owners of woodlots of 4 ha or more was selected from the above list. In order to avoid potential bias related to geographical differences, samples were randomly selected for each region according to the proportion that forest owners represent in each region's compared with the total population. In total, 2215 of the 3603 forest owners selected for this study with a valid phone number agreed to answer the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 61%. The telephone survey was conducted between March and June 2012. Forest owners were called up to five times in order to maximize the chances of reaching them, which contributed to our high response

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