

# Cooperative Partnerships and the Role of Private Landowners

T. Bently Wigley<sup>1</sup> and James M. Sweeney<sup>2</sup>

---

**Abstract** — Because most land, including forest land, in the United States is privately owned, it is clear the private sector should be a major cooperator in "Partners in Flight" efforts to conserve neotropical migratory birds. The "private sector" is more than forest landowners, whether corporate or noncorporate; it includes agricultural landowners, mining interests, housing and commercial land developers, and others. The private sector also includes the general public as users of products generated from private lands and as stockholders in corporate landowners. Private landowners are extremely diverse and vary considerably in their land ownership objectives. With that diversity comes a unique opportunity for cooperation in addressing natural resource issues, or controversy and conflict. We present a case study of one successful cooperative partnership, the Black Bear Conservation Committee, and identify reasons it has succeeded. Examples of other successful partnerships between private landowners and other non-governmental organizations, state agencies, and federal agencies are described. Successful partnerships will require all partners leave "hidden agendas" behind, respect the objectives of each other, and contribute something to the partnership. We propose that the challenge to Partners in Flight members is to help private landowners define their role in neotropical migratory bird conservation within the context of their land ownership and management objectives, and help them fulfill that role.

---

Most efforts to conserve neotropical migratory birds have focused on federal agencies and federal lands. Most land, however, is not owned by federal, state, or local government. Rather, it is owned by private individuals, partnerships, and corporations, much of it in small parcels. About 66% of all land in the United States is owned by families and individuals; nonfamily corporations and partnerships own another 13% of all land (Gustafson 1982). Half of all land is owned in parcels smaller than 500 acres and about 20% is in parcels larger than 5,000 acres. The average landholding is 40 acres (Gustafson 1982).

Forested land is important to many species of neotropical migrants. The United States is about 21% forested (Table 1); the Northeast region is most heavily forested, followed by the

South, North Central, and West. Most forested land also is owned by noncorporate individuals or families (Table 2). Nationally, noncorporate private landowners own almost 3 times more forested land than the public owns through the federal government. The forest products industry owns about 15% of all forested land, or roughly 3/4 as much as is owned by federal agencies.

The potential importance of private forest lands to neotropical migrants is particularly salient in the eastern United States. In the Northeast and South, corporate and noncorporate private landowners own about 90% of all forested lands. Federal ownership is % in the Northeast, and % in the South. Thus, few efforts to enhance habitat for neotropical migrants, particularly those associated with forests, will be complete without involving private landowners. The Departments of Interior and Agriculture recently acknowledged that "because they own the majority of the U.S., the involvement of millions of private parties and landowners is critical to the overall success of conservation efforts" (Goklany 1992).

---

<sup>1</sup>T. Bently Wigley, National Council of the Paper Industry for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc., Department of Aquaculture, Fisheries, and Wildlife, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-0362.

<sup>2</sup>James M. Sweeney, National Forest Products Association, 1250 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036

**Table 1. — Total and forested land area (1,000 acres) in the United States (after Waddell et al. 1989).**

Land area	Region				United States
	Northwest	South	North Central	West	
Total land	103,621	557,298	480,284	1,116,413	2,257,616
Forested land	63,453	210,033	78,113	129,720	483,319
Percent forested	63.2	37.7	16.3	11.6	21.4

<sup>1</sup>*Northeast includes: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. South includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. North Central includes: Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. West includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.*

**Table 2. — Percentage of forested land by landowner type (after Waddell et al. 1989).**

Landowner type	Region				United States
	Northeast	South	North Central	West	
Federal	2.8	8.1	11.5	53.3	20.1
State	8.1	1.6	9.8	8.0	5.5
County and municipal	1.3	0.4	6.3	0.4	1.5
Indian	0.2	0.1	1.2	3.4	1.2
Forest products	17.4	18.8	5.6	11.9	14.6
Noncorporate private	70.1	71.1	65.7	23.0	57.2

<sup>1</sup>*Northeast includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. North Central includes Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. West includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.*

## LANDOWNER OBJECTIVES

Private noncorporate landowners represent a cross-section of occupations, interests, and reasons for owning land (Shaw 1981), thus they vary considerably in their ownership objectives. Most noncorporate private landowners have multiple reasons for owning their land. And, ownership objectives are constantly changing because annual turnover in ownership of private noncorporate land is about 12% (Shaw 1981).

In Mississippi, Nabi et al. (1983) found that 63% of nonindustrial private landowners had "multiple-use" as the goal of owning their forestland. However, timber production was the most important of the multiple uses, followed by wildlife, residence, and grazing. Likewise, 28% of private landowners in South Carolina owned their land (43% of the private land) for timber production purposes (Marsinko et al. 1987). Other uses in rank order were investment, part of farm, place of residence, no plans yet, aesthetics, future farming, recreation, and hunting. In New England, private landowners primarily use their forests for woodlot, open-space, recreation, scenery, wildlife habitat, part of farm, hunting, and privacy (Alexander 1986). Fuelwood cutting is the most important commodity use of private

noncorporate forest land in New England, but landowners value their land primarily for intangible benefits and satisfactions associated with scenery, open-space, and pride-in-ownership. Despite interest in wildlife and commodity uses, few noncorporate landowners actively manage their lands to enhance habitat suitability (Alexander 1986) or timber production (Greene and Blatner 1987). Rather, they tend to harvest when income or fuelwood is needed.

The forest products industry is an equally diverse group of landowners. It is composed of small to large corporate landowners. Some corporations are owned by individuals or families; others are owned by stockholders. Some corporations own and operate on their own lands. Others are dependent in part or whole on timber from public lands. Most companies differ in products they make from timber they harvest. For example, they may emphasize glossy magazine paper, dimension products such as lumber or poles; paper cups, towels, and napkins; some combination of these products; or something entirely different. The products a company makes influences how they will manage their forests. For example, pulp/paper companies may be on a shorter rotation than producers of timber, and they may emphasize different tree species.

Despite their differences, there are at least 3 factors that corporate landowners have in common. One is they hold their lands to provide the company's owners with a return on their investment. Many forest products companies are owned by stockholders who purchased their stock in anticipation of a reasonable return for their investment. A second commonality is they harvest timber because there is demand for forest products. And, that demand is projected to increase. By the year 2040, annual lumber consumption is expected to increase by 23% to 70 billion board feet, consumption of plywood is expected to increase by 50%, and consumption of paper and allied products is expected to double (Schallau 1991). A third factor companies have in common is they compete with each other. By law, no company monopolizes any market. But, the most efficient company will often acquire the largest market share for which it is competing. Thus, the ability of companies to alter forest management activities for noncommodity reasons is usually tempered by the competitive nature of American industry.

### **WORKING WITH PRIVATE LANDOWNERS**

Despite these constraints, companies within the forest products industry have historically worked on their own and through cooperative partnerships with many other organizations and agencies to promote responsible stewardship of forest resources (Owen and Heissenbuttel 1990). In a speech to the 56th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in March 1991, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Turner called for such public and private sector partnerships and involvement in making resource management decisions. Turner suggested that "partnerships may be the best and surest vehicle yet to carry forth a full and rich biological community into the 21st century" (Bullock 1992).

#### **The Black Bear Conservation Committee: A Case Study**

There are a variety of ways in which cooperative partnerships may be formed. The most important commonalities in partnerships seem to be a mutual interest in some issue and a desire to work together in a positive, cooperative manner. One excellent case study of a successful cooperative partnership is the Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC). Although the BBCC does not focus on neotropical migrants, the management practices they advocate also will enhance habitat for many neotropical migrants. Additionally, the BBCC provides some powerful lessons for developing partnerships; similar partnerships also may work for neotropical migrants.

Declining numbers of the Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) throughout Mississippi, Louisiana, and east Texas was the impetus for forming the BBCC. The Louisiana Forestry Association arranged the initial meeting of organizations, agencies, and individuals interested in status of

bear populations in the tri-state area, and invited Dr. Michael R. Pelton of the University of Tennessee as a speaker. Dr. Pelton captured thoughts of those present when he said "The primary responsibility for insuring the future survival and viability of present black bear numbers in the Southeast Coastal Plain, and Louisiana specifically, shall fall on a number of public and private agencies that control the lands containing black bear habitat or potential habitat." Although some Louisiana black bears are on federally owned lands, most bears are on private lands (Nielsen 1992). Thus, participation of private landowners is critical to bear recovery. To date, 37 organizations have signed the memorandum of understanding committing them to the goals of the BBCC. Members include forest products companies, forestry and agricultural trade associations, federal and state natural resource agencies, local chapters of environmental groups, and universities.

Through the BBCC, these entities have come together to address management and restoration of a wildlife species. Some BBCC accomplishments include increasing awareness of the public in Mississippi, Louisiana, and east Texas about the black bear and its status; securing funding for a full-time coordinator who serves in administrative and extension capacities; coordinating research on black bear and helping secure over \$500,000 in research funds; and developing management guidelines for landowners. At the time of this writing, the BBCC is approaching completion of its "Restoration Plan" for the black bear in the tri-state area. The BBCC was honored by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation as its choice for 1991 Conservation Organization of the Year.

We attribute the BBCC's success to several things. First, the BBCC requires that all members of the partnership "leave-at-the-door" any agendas except that of restoring the bear. This helps BBCC members focus on their common goal. Second, there has been mutual respect among BBCC members for objectives of each individual partner. Partners have allowed each other to contribute what they can within the limits of their organization's objectives and capabilities. Third, all BBCC partners make some contribution to the partnership's efforts. Contributing only opinions and demands to a partnership will quickly destroy trust and respect. In the BBCC no organization gives the same thing or same amount, but they all give something. This truly qualifies them as "partners" and makes their fellow partners much more willing to communicate about issues. Fourth, BBCC partners began by cooperating in a positive way on issues where there was much common ground. This "good start" helped them learn about each other and develop mutual trust. Using this solid foundation, the BBCC has begun successfully dealing with issues that sometimes divided groups such as industry and environmental organizations. Fifth, the BBCC has provided an environment in which its members can informally socialize and come to know each other as individuals. It is much easier to communicate, find common ground, and work together when partners know each other personally. Finally, the BBCC has relied on the "best" available, scientifically-derived information as an arbiter.

## Other Types of Partnerships

These same principles can work equally well for smaller partnerships such as those between individual companies and state wildlife agencies. These partnerships are virtually unknown outside the South where state wildlife agencies often have agreements with forest products companies to provide public access on their lands (Owen and Heissenbuttel 1990). In Tennessee, for example, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) has signed agreements with 5 forest products companies, giving hunters access to 600,000 acres. The landowner sets and collects permit fees and TWRA enforces the rules and regulations governing the lands. In Arkansas, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) pays landowners a flat per-acre fee for lands enrolled in an access program. The state then sells access permits to the public. To be successful, such partnerships call for a close working relationship between partners.

Sometimes partnerships can involve companies and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, Mead Corporation and Menasha Corporation have joined the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation (MWHF) and Ruffed Grouse Society to encourage private landowners to place their woodlands under professional management by emphasizing the wildlife benefits of forest management (Owen and Heissenbuttel 1990). A wildlife biologist has been hired by MWHF to administer the project in the 14-county area. He prepares management plans that incorporate landowner objectives, and actual forest management work is provided by a private consultant or a forest products company.

In Louisiana, International Paper Company and The Nature Conservancy have formed a cooperative partnership to maintain a unique Black Hills ecosystem owned by the company. International Paper Company has restricted human and livestock access to the area and has modified their timber management activities; the Nature Conservancy advises the company regarding activities necessary to maintain the ecosystem, such as prescribed burning. In Florida, Champion International Corporation has entered a cooperative agreement with The Nature Conservancy to protect a population of a rare perennial herb.

Private landowners also can form cooperative partnerships with federal agencies; sometimes these are quite informal. For example, Georgia-Pacific Corporation supplied the expertise, equipment, and manpower to conduct a prescribed burn on 100 acres of the Congaree National Monument in South Carolina. The goal was to reduce hardwood midstory and improve habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*). In North Carolina, the Weyerhaeuser Company used their heavy equipment to help construct dikes on the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Such informal partnerships usually are the result of personal working relationships between local landowners (or their employees) and agency personnel.

More formal relationships between private landowners and agencies also can exist. In 1989, Scott Paper Company executed the first major private landowner agreement under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Under the agreement, Scott has altered forest management practices on 27,000 acres of Mobile River delta in south Alabama to benefit waterfowl. And, Scott has donated lumber for constructing wood duck nesting boxes. In California, Simpson Timber Company and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs operate a fish hatchery on company lands. Each year, they release 500,000 young fish into Cappell Creek. Simpson Timber Company also is very close to completing a Habitat Conservation Plan for the management of northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) on their lands.

There is perhaps no better example of cooperative partnerships than those focused on research. Over the decade of the 1980's, the forest products industry spent more than \$100 million on wildlife and environmental research (Owen and Heissenbuttel 1990). Much of that funding went to support cooperative research; and that trend continues. For example, through the National Council of the Paper Industry for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc. (NCASI) and with matching funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the forest products industry is partially funding Manomet Bird Observatory (MBO) to conduct a study of neotropical migratory birds in Maine. Three forest products companies also are participating in the study by allowing MBO and the U.S. Forest Service access to their lands, and by providing Geographic Information System and stand inventory data to the researchers. In the Pacific Northwest, NCASI has developed several cooperative partnerships individually with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to conduct research on northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and elk (*Cervus canadensis*). Each partner provides about one-half of the funding and shares equally in the research responsibilities such as data collection. Weyerhaeuser Company and the U.S. Forest Service are partners in funding and conducting a project in Arkansas to investigate bird and small mammal use of streamside management zones. Anderson-Tully Company is cooperating with the Tennessee Conservation League and the USDA Forest Service in a study of cerulean warblers (*Dendroica cerulea*) by providing study sites and helping with data collection.

## Cooperation Versus Regulation

To private landowners, cooperation is almost always a more desirable approach than regulation for addressing natural resource issues. Agencies and NGOs can work cooperatively with private landowners through mechanisms such as informal agreements, memoranda-of-understanding, and leases. Each of these mechanisms, however, requires personal contact between partners and mutual respect; a good relationship does not happen by itself.

Land exchanges are sometimes viewed as cooperation. However, they are not always desirable from the private landowner's viewpoint. Usually, the landowner needs the land and its associated resources to meet his/her objectives. Often, property offered for exchange is not strategically located for the private landowner or of comparable quality. And, exchanges may not be the best long-term solution to resource issues. Ironically, the unique plant and animal communities on private land being sought in exchanges are usually there as a result of past management practices by the owners. Yet, private lands are sometimes categorized as "at-risk" or "unprotected." In reality, private ownership does not mean "at-risk," and simply transferring ownership of private lands to a governmental agency will not ensure that they will be categorically "protected."

### Incentive Programs

Sometimes, *de facto* cooperative partnerships can be developed through incentives. There are a number of incentive programs offered through state and federal natural resource agencies for owners of private lands. The programs can be used to encourage landowners to enhance habitat for neotropical migrants. For example, state forestry agencies administer the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP), authorized by the 1990 Farm Bill. The FSP offers technical assistance to private landowners in developing multiple-use management plans for their forests. Cost-sharing for management activities recommended through FSP is possible through the Forest Stewardship Incentive Program and some state incentive programs. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service administers a number of incentive programs including the Conservation Reserve Program, the Wetland Reserve Program, the Agricultural Conservation Program, and the Forestry Incentives Program (commonly known as FIP). Each of these programs offers some form of incentive to enhance wildlife habitat on lands now in agricultural production.

### CONCLUSIONS

Many private landowners already are involved in Partners in Flight. Landowners within the forest products industry are charter members of Partners in Flight and actively participate in all working groups. Wherever possible, they are supporting research and considering the needs of neotropical migrants in their management strategies. For example, member companies of the American Paper Institute have adopted a comprehensive set of environmental and forestry principles which require a commitment to integrating the growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees with conservation of habitat for wildlife (McMahon 1992), including neotropical migrants.

Many other private landowners, however, such as noncorporate individuals and small commercial operators are not involved in Partners in Flight and they rarely belong to trade

associations such as the American Paper Institute. Organizations such as the Cooperative Extension Service and the U.S. Forest Service State and Private Forestry often are the best mechanisms for assisting these diverse landowners. The challenge for all Partners in Flight members is to help these private landowners define their role in neotropical migrant conservation within the context of their land ownership and management objectives, and help them fulfill that role.

Agencies and NGOs should not expect private landowners to dramatically alter their ownership objectives to accommodate neotropical migrants. For example, the provision of extensive areas of late-successional stands is economically unfeasible on many industrial lands (Rochelle and Hicks 1992). However, forest products companies often are able to provide some characteristics of older forests such as snags, dead and down wood, and leave-trees. Likewise, a farmer should not be expected to abandon agriculture on his lands. Instead, through cooperation, farmers may be encouraged to modify certain practices, reforest a portion of his/her farm, or provide grassland or shrubland habitat.

Private landowners may have particularly useful contributions they can make to neotropical migrant conservation through research. Successful neotropical migratory bird conservation will require developing an understanding of how to accommodate these species in managed landscapes; obviously, there is a limit to the amount of land that can be reserved from management. Understanding how neotropical migrants can be conserved in managed landscapes will require including private lands in landscape-scale research that applies principles of adaptive management (Walters 1986, Walters and Holling 1990).

Building cooperative partnerships with private landowners, though, requires that an agency or NGO contribute something to the partnership. Too often, landowners are asked to give something and receive nothing in exchange. Individuals and companies usually perceive such one-sided offers of cooperation as demands. Agencies and NGOs also can enhance partnerships by demonstrating an acceptance of the landowner's objectives and a willingness to work within that framework. Built on such mutual respect, cooperative partnerships can indeed be the conservation vehicles that carry us into the 21st century.

### LITERATURE CITED

- Alexander, L. 1986. Timber-wildlife management from the forest landowner's perspective. Pages 269-279 in J. A. Bissonette, ed. Is good forestry good wildlife management? Maine Agric. Exp. Sta. Misc. Publ. No. 689.
- Bullock, J. 1992. Working together for the resource: the Black Bear Conservation Committee. *TreeTalk* (Winter):4-6,20.
- Goklany, I. 1992. America's biodiversity strategy: actions to conserve species and habitats (fact sheet). USDI Office of Program Analysis and USDA Natur. Resour. and Manage. Washington, D.C.

- Greene, J. L., and K. A. Blatner. 1987. Woodland owner characteristics associated with timber management. *Ark. Farm Res.* 36(1):11.
- Gustafson, G. C. 1982. Who owns the land? A state and regional summary of landownership in the United States. USDA Econ. Res. Serv. Staff Rep. No. AGES830405. 46pp.
- Marsinko, A., H. Stevens, and S. Nodine. 1987. Nonindustrial private forest lands and landowners in South Carolina. Clemson Univ. Dept. For., For. Res. Series No. 43. 36pp.
- McMahon, J. P. 1992. Forest industry's commitment to the public. *J. For.* 90(10):38-40.
- Nabi, D. H., D. C. Gynn, Jr., T. B. Wigley, and S. P. Mott. 1983. Forest resource values of Mississippi nonindustrial private forest landowners. Pages 338-342 in J. P. Royer and C. D. Risbrudt, eds. *Nonindustrial private forests: a review of economic and policy studies.* Duke Univ. Sch. For. and Env. Studies. Durham, N.C.
- Nielsen, B. 1992. Swamp bear. *Wildl. Conserv.* 95(4):7.
- Owen, C. and J. Heissenbuttel. 1990. Wise use of the forest resource: the conservation record of the forest products industry. Am. For. Found., Washington, D.C. 39pp.
- Rochelle, J. A., and L. L. Hicks. 1992. The role of private industrial forestlands in the management of biological diversity. *Biodiversity in managed landscapes: theory and practice.* USDA For. Serv. Gen. Tech. Rep. In press.
- Schallau, C. H. 1991. "Where are we in the carbon cycle?" and related questions. Pages 259-266 in *Environmental Conference, TAPPI, Technology Park, Atlanta, Ga.*
- Shaw, S. P. 1981. Wildlife management on private nonindustrial forestlands. Pages 36-41 in R. T. Dumke, G. V. Burger, and J. R. March, eds., *Proc. symp. wildl. manage. on private lands.* Wisc. Chapt. of The Wildl. Soc., Madison, Wisc.
- Waddell, K. L., D. D. Oswald, and D. S. Powell. 1989. *Forest statistics of the United States, 1987.* USDA For. Serv. Resour. Bull. PNW-RB-168. 106pp.
- Walters, C. J. 1986. *Adaptive management of renewable resources.* MacMillan Publishing Company, New York. 374pp.
- Walters, C. J., and C. S. Holling. 1990. Large-scale management experiments and learning by doing. *Ecology* 71:2060-2068.