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Abstract

Changing forest ownership and challenges for forest policy implementation – case Finland

About 70% of the land area of Finland is forested and 60% of this area is owned by private, small-scale owners. These Finnish non-industrial private forest owners (NIPFs) supply about 80% of the industrial roundwood. Thus, private forests and forestry are important for the national economy and the government has supported private forestry by providing informational and extension services, and subsidies for sustainable forest management (SFM).

The structure of private forest ownership has been changing during the last 20 years, and the trends seem to continue for this decade. Quantitative research indicates the following trends among NIPF owners in Finland: aging, increasing urbanization, fewer farmers – more wage earners, and increasing distance between place of residence and forest property. Research also indicates that the motives for forest ownership are changing rapidly resulting in increasingly differing needs regarding information and services.

The latest research scanning the future development of private forest ownership in Finland indicates that in 2030 many of the current trends will turn. The most distinct changes include that the average age of forest owners will decrease and employees will form the largest occupational group instead of pensioners. The trend of increasing share of city-dwellers and distant NIPFs will continue. Future NIPFs will emphasize intangible values as motives for forest ownership even more than the forest owners today, though economic benefits will remain important.

The trends in forest ownership are a major challenge for forest policy implementation supporting sustainable forest management (SFM). It is likely that the need for services in forest management and roundwood trade will increase. Thus, forest policy must support new entrepreneurship in the field. As segments in forest ownership become more diversified, there is need for better data on forest owners for developing and supplying targeted services and information.