UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FORESTRY:
A General Overview and a Closer Look at Female Forest Landowners in the U.S.

Introduction

This paper is meant to inform a broad discussion of the many ways in which forests have affected women's personal lives and professional aspirations. The first section presents a broad overview of the current literature on women's status as both land caretakers and professional foresters in the U.S. and abroad. It is intended to call attention to the challenges women face in the context of forestry, and also to highlight areas of study that merit closer examination.

The second section gives a more detailed account of one organization's efforts to educate and engage women landowners. This analysis recalls many of the issues introduced in Section 1, and presents them in the context of the rural U.S. South. Finally, this section presents a few possibilities for ways in which those who work in community forestry might begin to address some of the obstacles that women landowners face in that specific context.

What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis, nor is it intended to serve as a blueprint for future policy recommendations. Instead, the authors hope that this discussion might help establish a framework for an informed dialogue on women in forestry.

Section 1: The Gender Politics of Forestry

Generally speaking, forestry is not an anthropocentric field – it is about trees. Yet, the experiences of women in relation to forestry have been markedly different from those of their male counterparts, making gender issues pertinent to forestry. In comparison to men, women have often been slighted in terms of the types of jobs they are hired for and their access to and/or influence on forest policy decisions. While there is hard evidence to back these claims, women face an uphill battle in raising their concerns because, as a general rule, "forestry is not [and has not been] particularly responsive to social equity issues, including those pertaining to gender" (FAO/Williams).

Some of the issues women are confronted with relate directly to the manner in which forestry is defined. While forestry can be defined beyond the limits of timber extraction, it is often equated with logging, which has historically been considered "men's work" (IUFRO; FAO/Williams). A study conducted by Teeter *et al.* (1990) indicated that the majority (59%) of the female Society of American Foresters members in the southeastern United States thought that the perception of forestry as a 'male profession' is a primary reason why more women are not pursuing a career in forestry (Kuhns *et al.* 2002). Such a characterization not only shuts some women out of jobs they are willing to undertake but are not afforded the opportunity, but also discourages others from even considering forestry as a profession in the first place.

If some of forestry's other attributes, such as sustainability and ecological stewardship, were more commonly articulated, more women might surface as supporters and/or career professionals in the field (IUFRO; Kuhns *et al*. 2002). Such a portrayal might lead to a more positive impression of forestry among the general public, too – painting a picture of forestry as being about more than just cutting down trees, to which not everyone who has an interest in forests can relate (IUFRO). One recommendation the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) made to its member countries at a symposium on the topic of women in forestry illustrates this point: "Efforts should be made early to

reach both male and female school children with the message that forestry has a stewardship function, and that it welcomes women as employees, owners and users of the forest and generates a positive attitude."

Related to this recommendation are the results of a survey conducted in 1996, which indicated that women exhibit higher general regard for the environment than men. In part, it was this conclusion that suggested to the U.S. Forest Service that women specifically might be helpful in shifting the agency away from a traditional forestry multiple-use/sustained yield model to a more holistic one of ecosystem management (Brown and Harris 2001).

Developing a Body of Knowledge

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a noticeable lack of research on issues facing women in forestry; however, certain individuals and institutions are taking steps to remedy to this situation. In response to this information need, several publications specific to issues pertaining to women in forestry have emerged. One is *Women in Natural Resources* (published by the University of Idaho's College of Natural Resources). The other is *Women in Forestry: A Journal for Professionals in the Natural and Related Culture Resource Fields*. This journal, which has been in existence since 1983, is published by the College of Forestry, Wildlife, and Range Sciences and the Laboratory of Anthropology of the University of Idaho.

Gatherings of various kinds to discuss women in forestry have also been convened. In April 2001, the IUFRO, under the auspices of the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)/International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training, hosted a seminar in Portugal on "Women in Forestry." Then, in August 2004, the Second World Wide Symposium on Gender and Forestry was held in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, specifically focusing on "Challenges to Sustainable Livelihoods and Forestry Management."

Women and Forestry in Parts of the Developing World

Women in the developing world often assume the role of "care taker" – for their families as well as for the other people and things around them. In some parts of the world, women rely on forest-related resources for the well-being of all who fall under their care. This effort typically involves the gathering of forest products for such purposes as fuel, fencing, food for the family, and fodder for the livestock (IUCN). Some examples of the specific relationship between women and forests are highlighted below.

- In Zimbabwe: "Over half of the 800,000 farm families living in communal areas are headed by women. In these areas, women's groups manage forest resources and development projects through woodlot ownership, tree planting, nursery development, and woodlot management" (IUCN).
- In Uttar Pradesh, India: "A study showed that women obtained 33-45% of their income from forests and common land, compared with only 13% in the case of men" (IUCN).

Even given this reality, though, women are often ignored when it comes to developing policies for forest management. The following example is indicative of this plight:

In East Kalimantan, Indonesia, "women's concern to supply their families with sufficient rice for subsistence was a major factor in family decisions about how much forest to clear each year. Yet the idea that women's views and activities might be of relevance was alien…to the foresters" (FAO/Colfer). Situations such as this seemingly contradict claims that public participation is necessary to the development of truly sustainable forestry policies because women – a major segment of the public – are excluded from policy development or implementation. This is problematic for a number of reasons,

including the recognition that "when gender is paid attention to in regards to sustainable forest management, the effectiveness of policies is enhanced, food security is increased, potential conflicts among forest users are decreased, and women have equal access to land ownership (IUCN).

Women and Forestry in the U.S.

Women were a presence at the first American Forest Congress held in 1905 in Washington, D.C. In part, they were represented by Lydia Phillips, the chair of the forestry committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. At that time, the Federation had 800,000 members and its own magazine, which were both notable accomplishments. In addressing members of the Congress, Ms. Phillips described the various clubs' activities, which included the promotion of tree planting, forest preservation, and irrigation.

In 1910, the controversy over the construction of the Hetch Hetchy Dam in California served to divide the community of people with environmental interests – including women that were involved in the activities of organizations like the Women's Clubs. The Hetch Hetchy dispute split the environmentalists of the time into "the Sierra Club and preservationists versus the Forest Service and conservationists" ('Women's Clubs'). For various reasons, the preservationists were not in favor of dam construction but the conservationists were. According to one article written about this situation, "many women tended to feel more akin to the values of preservation of parks and wildlife and joined those movements ('Women's Clubs'). Since the conservationists were aligned with the Forest Service at the time, this event may have served as an early point of "separation" between women and forestry in the United States.

Although it was almost 60 years later, in 1967 the U.S. government established the Federal Women's Program (FWP), which attempted to help narrow gaps in federal agencies such as the one that may have existed between women and forestry. The program was established through Executive Order because of the recognition that women face special problems in employment and career advancement as a result of "stereotypes and myths" (FAO/Albertson). Two of the FWP's goals have been to place women in jobs beyond those in which they have typically been employed and to analyze barriers to women's advancement in the workplace.

In the 1980s and 1990s, federal agencies in the U.S. increased the numbers of women they employed; however, the organizational cultures of agencies like the Forest Service remained "overwhelmingly paternalistic and authoritarian" (Apple 2002). Whether or not this served to deter women from entering forestry as a profession, particularly in the public realm, cannot be claimed with certainty, but in 1995, only 10% of the national SAF membership was women (SAF 1995; Kuhns *et al*. 2002); likewise, in 1997, only 39% of the U.S. Forest Service workforce was female, and many of those women were employed in "non-professional, non-forestry, non-leadership" positions (Thomas and Mohai 1995; USDA 1997; Kuhns *et al*. 2002).

Women in the Forestry Profession in the U.S., Canada, and Australia

Typically, women have not been offered the same job opportunities within the realm of forestry as men have – even in the "developed" world. In the 1970s, the U.S. Pacific Northwest was an area particularly active in forestry, but women were not hired for many of the forestry jobs available because of the characterization of forestry as a dangerous profession. Prejudices like this have persisted, which particularly frustrates those women who have demonstrated capabilities in working in the field and undertaking "male jobs," such as fire fighting and logging (IUFRO).

Women in forestry in Canada and Australia have felt related frustrations. Many women in the forestry profession in Australia express feelings of needing to prove themselves over and over again in the workplace. As one woman as part of a study conducted in December 2001 stated, "You have little margin

for error, you have to be much better at your work than the boys" (Buchy 2001). Similarly, female foresters in Canada have conveyed a sense of having to work twice as hard to prove themselves in the forestry workplace; and some of these women point specifically to "perseverance and a willingness to take risks" as necessary steps towards advancing their careers (Pacific Forestry Centre 2001).

In terms of the types of jobs women in forestry are hired for, it has not been an equal playing field with their male peers. Based on some of the reasons discussed earlier, some women trying to forge careers in forestry in Australia have felt a "gentle push" towards desk/office jobs rather than field forestry (Buchy 2001). A similar trend is noticeable in U.S. forestry, in that, in general, career advancements made by women in the Forest Service have largely been in administrative support positions (Mohai and Thomas 1995). This situation is changing, though, as more women are applying for, and being promoted to, the highest levels of the Forest Service. A prime example is Sally Collins, who is second in command at the agency in her role as Associate Chief (Apple 2002).

However, women like Ms. Collins seem to be the exception, for women around the world are generally not well represented in forest management and decision-making positions. Some feel that this situation is one of the greatest contributors to the lack of sympathy for/concern for/interest in women's issues within the realm of forestry, and could also be a major reason why women continue to face obstacles in advancement along their chosen career paths (FAO/Williams).

The Importance of Mentors and Networks

At the same time, mentors and professional networks for women working in forestry have emerged as positive influences in terms of career choice and advancement (IUFRO). Mentors or role models have been incredibly important to supporting and encouraging women in forestry. Female foresters have been particularly critical role models because they demonstrate that forestry is an appropriate career choice for women (FAO/Molnar)

Among Canadian women in forestry, mentorship (which is purely voluntary) was cited as the most appreciated factor in career planning, according to a study conducted by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations on the role of women in the forestry sector in Europe and North America. In fact, mentors have been ranked equal to continuing education as the most significant factor in career advancement among Canadian female foresters (Pacific Forestry Centre 2001).

Australian women in forestry also point to mentors and supportive managers or a supportive team as key to their professional development (Buchy 2001). Similarly, an emphasis on mentors specifically aimed at advising professional women is present in the U.S. In a way, the FWP, discussed earlier, was set up to be a sort of "mandated" or "government-supported" mentoring for women. The program aims to "increase employment and advancement opportunities for women," and, as such, it encourages federal agencies to provide services such as career counseling, mentoring and assertiveness training to women (FAO/Albertson).

Networks of women working in the forestry profession have also proven to be very valuable in terms of career advancement. In some countries, such networks have proven the "strength in numbers" philosophy by helping women overcome barriers to entering and pushing through the forestry profession (IUFRO). At the same time, though, some women have not had the time to commit to these networks, which are largely extracurricular, because of personal commitments (to family, for example) and, therefore, have not garnered many of the benefits they have to offer (Pacific Forestry Centre 2001).

For those women who have been able to utilize networking and/or professional associations, those resources have proven valuable because they "break down the sense of isolation, inspire younger women in their career and personal development, and reinforce self-esteem" (Buchy 2001). Examples of existing

networks include IUFRO's World Wide Women in Forestry Network and a U.S. effort called WILMA (Women in Land Management Agencies).

Section 2: A Profile of Women in Land Ownership

While all landowners certainly deserve access to educational resources and professional contacts, research has shown that the challenges of landownership, especially for new landowners, are more significant for women than they are for men. According to a nationwide survey of private forest landowners conducted in 2005 by Pinchot Institute Senior Fellow Catherine Mater, women landowners who had inherited their lands were less likely than their male counterparts to have been involved in the management of the land before it was passed on to them (Mater 2005). Furthermore, women landowners in the study cited a "lack of knowledge" as the second biggest challenge (after tax issues) to owning a family forest. Among male landowners, this was not a primary concern. A second survey, this one involving only Alabama landowners, analyzed landowner perceptions of a specific land management tool: forest certification. Similarly, these researchers found that "men were more likely than women to have heard of certification prior to the survey" (Newsom, Cashore, Auld, and Granskog 2003). Somehow, somewhere along the line, many women are being left out of the loop.

A comparison of men and women landowners' goals for their lands reveals another gender split. Mater's landowner survey found that male respondents were more likely than their female counterparts to express interest in earning an income off their land. And of those landowners looking to turn a profit, men were more likely than women to indicate that they wanted that income to come from timber harvest. Though such gender differences may be subtle, they provide strong evidence that WiLO's focus on the education of women landowners is not at all off the mark.

An Introduction to WiLO

Carolyn Pickett knows what it feels like to be an uninformed landowner: when she inherited her family's forestland a few years back, she had no idea how to go about managing it, nor did she know whom she could contact for help. Frustrated but determined to educate herself, Pickett sought out resources in her hometown of Selma, Alabama, but was disappointed with the little information she was able to find. So she took it upon herself to conduct her own research and build her own professional networks.

Today, after several years of networking and organizing, Pickett's efforts have turned into a full-time career: she is now the general manager of an organization whose mission is to educate and support women landowners like herself. The group, Women in Land Ownership, LLC (WiLO), seeks to teach its members how to become active and effective managers of their land, whether that land is farm, forest, or wetland. Through its educational efforts, the organization connects its members with potential mentors whom they might not otherwise have the chance to meet.

While WiLO is open to working with all landowners, the group targets its efforts toward women (most of WiLO's members are single females), especially those who may be under-skilled or under-educated. Many of WiLO's members work full time and thus do not have the chance to seek out educational resources themselves. Although the majority of WiLO's members are committed to holding on to their family's land—even in the face of strong financial pressures to sell—Pickett says that most members do not come to the organization with any particular knowledge of, or even interest in, land stewardship. In fact, some members have already cleared parts of their land to pay off medical bills or college loans, or simply to supplement their income. For many members, WiLO's educational programs serve as their first exposure to the concept of forest stewardship.

What WiLO Provides

WiLO engages its members primarily through workshops, which the organization holds approximately twice a year. These sessions allow participants to meet and learn from a variety of experts, such as professional foresters, legal specialists, and officials from state departments of forestry and agriculture. During the workshops, these guests teach the landowners the intricacies of such complicated matters as land law, land retention, and estate planning.

About 25 landowners came to WiLO's last workshop in 2005, which featured visits to private forests, agricultural lands, and areas reserved for cattle grazing. Through such field trips, WiLO endeavors to get landowners out onto the land, to expose them to different land management practices, and ultimately to help them feel comfortable in the outdoors. Moreover, the organization seeks to help its members understand that they can make use of their land in a variety of ways, such as harvesting timber, growing crops, raising livestock, or creating opportunities for recreation, teaching, or gardening.

WiLO's next workshop, which will be held in March or April 2006, will focus on land stewardship, an issue that Pickett thinks deserves to be more widely discussed. At the upcoming workshop, or perhaps at another event further down the road, Pickett would like to bring in landowners, preferably women, from across the country who have successfully managed their lands for various purposes (teaching, timber harvesting, reforestation, gardening/botanical activities, recreation, etc.). Pickett imagines that such women might serve as positive role models, or even mentors, for WiLO's members.

One issue of concern for Pickett is that many women landowners in Alabama do not trust the experts who have the knowledge and experience to help them learn to manage their lands. In fact, a wariness of outsiders is fairly widespread in the region: even when Pickett, an Alabama native, tried to conduct a straightforward survey of area landowners, she met with resistance from many who were unwilling to share even the most basic information about their land holdings.

Why this lack of trust? According to Pickett, many women landowners fear that an inquiring outsider might somehow trick them into paying more taxes on their land—or even selling it entirely. A similar sentiment was documented in the 2003 survey of Alabama landowners; those respondents rated non-governmental organizations and the federal government among the least trustworthy of all types of groups (Newsom, Cashore, Auld, and Granskog 2003).

Through its workshops, WiLO is confronting this lack of trust by building lasting relationships between landowners and the experts who can advise them. And perhaps because WiLO is locally run and well established in Alabama, outside experts who are presented as the organization's invited guests may be met with less suspicion than those who come in on their own. By playing the critical role of the trusted intermediary, WiLO can facilitate the dissemination of the land management tools and information that landowners need.

Research suggests that, simply because WiLO has put landowners in contact with professional foresters, the organization may already have made great strides toward improving landowner education and increasing the likelihood that WiLO's members will be open to learning about sustainable forestry practices. The 2003 survey of Alabama landowners found that those respondents who were in regular contact with forestry professionals were more likely to (1) view forest certification as a way for them to improve the management of their forests, (2) adopt sustainability guidelines, and (3) indicate a desire to stay informed about developments in forestry practices and techniques (Newsome, Cashore, Auld, and Granskog 2003).

Section 3: The Bigger Picture

At this point, let's briefly consider how we might learn from WiLO's experiences, build on the organization's efforts, and share its lessons with similar groups. In making these considerations, we should keep in mind that the ultimate goals of such efforts are to give women landowners the information they need to be active managers of their land, and to encourage them to engage in responsible, forward-looking stewardship.

Networking

A logical next step would be to seek out other organizations that target women landowners, find out what kinds of work they are doing, and, where appropriate, put those organizations in contact with one another. However, because women-focused organizations are probably fairly rare, we should also consider drawing other groups into the discussion. The survey of Alabama landowners cited above found that respondents were *most* likely to have faith in landowner associations, professional foresters, and the state government (Newsom, Cashore, Auld, and Granskog 2003). Therefore, it might be relatively easy to incorporate these groups or individuals in future projects. Such an expansion of support networks for women landowners would allow them to interact with people who can encourage them to engage in sustainable land management.

Outreach and Workshops

Outreach efforts should be carefully targeted to women landowners, who currently are not being reached as successfully as men. As suggested by the researchers who conducted the survey of Alabama landowners, private certification programs might be able to design special outreach efforts for women, "since existing communication channels leave this demographic group less informed about certification than male landowners (Newsom, Cashore, Auld, and Granskog 2003). At this point, however, more research needs to be done to determine which outreach methods generate the most response from women landowners.

Once we have women landowners' attention, we need to ensure that the workshops and trainings that we invite them to are designed to make them comfortable enough to ask questions and participate in discussions. Based on her own experience, Pickett stresses that the most effective workshops get women outside and directly expose them to various landscapes and land management options. Perhaps a few organizations could coordinate a series of women-only trainings, which would allow the participants to get to know one another over time, and which would preclude the possibility of the sessions being dominated by men.

Conclusion

Overall, women landowners are less informed about land management than their male peers; moreover, there is evidence that women and men have different land management. We need to work to ensure that women have access to the resources they need to achieve their own goals on their lands. In the future, we must continue to track developments in research and keep tabs on the on-the-ground experiences of partner organizations. Ultimately, this new knowledge will help us fine tune our outreach strategies and training sessions so that they readily engage women landowners and teach them to become active and responsible stewards of their land.

References

Apple, Daina Dravnieks. Interview with Sally Collins, Associate Chief, U.S. Forest Service. *Women in Natural Resources*. Vol. 23 Number 3. 2002

International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO). Report from a seminar on the role of women in the forestry sector in Europe and North America.

Brown, G. and C.C. Harris. A Longitudinal Study of Environmental Attitudes of Women and Gender Diversification in the U.S. Forest Service 1990-1996. *Forest Science*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 246-257. Bethesda: Society of American Foresters. May 1, 2001.

Buchy, M. Listening to Women's Voices in the Australian Forestry Workforce: You Learn to Cope and Get On with Things. Australian National University Forestry Occasional Paper 1:2001/ISSN: 1441-0028. Australian National University, Canberra. 2001.

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). Gender and Forestry: Challenges to Sustainable Livelihoods and Forestry Management. Proceedings from the Second World Wide Symposium on Gender and Forestry. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. August 1-10, 2004.

FAO. Perspectives. No date.
Includes:
Augusta Molnar. "Involving Women in Forestry Projects."
Paula J. Williams. "Integrating Women into Forestry Development."
Carol J. Pierce Colfer. "An Anthropologist Among Foresters."

FAO. Women's Progress in Forestry: Examples from the Philippines and the United States. No date.
Includes:
Mary H. Albertson. "Women in the USDA Forest Service."

FAO Forest Conservation, Research and Education Service. Women's Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming in Participatory Upland Conservation and Development. May 1999.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Gender Makes the Difference (forestry pamphlet). No date.

Kuhns, Michael R., Hope A. Bragg, and Dale J. Blahna. Involvement of Women and Minorities in the Urban Forestry Profession. *Journal of Arboriculture*: 28(1), pp.27-34. January 2002.

Mater, Catherine. "Family Forests: What will the next generation do?" Presented at the National Association of State Foresters Annual Meeting, Madison, WI. October 2005. Available at www.pinchot.org/policy_change/offspring_presentation_2005.pdf.

Mohai, Paul and Jennifer C. Thomas. Racial, Gender and Professional Diversification in the Forest Service from 1983 to 1992. *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 23. 1995.

Newsom, Deanna, Ben Cashore, Graeme Auld, and James Granskog. Forest Certification in the Heart of Dixie: A Survey Of Alabama Landowners. In Larry Teeter, Ben Cashore, and Daowei Zhang (eds.), Forest Policy for Private Forestry. New York: CABI Press. 2002.

Pacific Forestry Centre. Journey to the Top: Experiences of Canadian Women in the Forest Sector.

December 2001.

Telephone interview with Caroline Pickett, Women in Land Ownership. December 29, 2005.

Rocheleau, Dianne and David Edmunds. Women, Men and Trees: Gender, Power and Property in Forest and Agrarian Landscapes. *World Development*, Vol. 25, No.8, pp.1351-1371. Great Britain: Elsevier Science Ltd. 1997.

"The View from Women in Natural Resources: Life Experiences and Advocacy for Gender Equity Fill the Pages." *Women in Natural Resources*. Vol. 24, Number 3, 2003-4.

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of State. *National Report to the Fifth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.* May 2005.

University of Maine. Women and the Woods Program (series of workshops to help women woodland owners learn about stewardship, assessing resources and working with foresters).

"Women's Clubs and Conservation."