

Expanding Conservation Opportunities with Sustainable Forestry in Underserved Communities



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Executive Summary

This project was developed to address the scarcity of conservation resources flowing to the African American landowners in the project area. Historical, social, and economic factors have shaped patterns of attitude and behavior that prevented full participation by minorities in conservation programs in the South. This project took concerted and significant initial steps to develop a community-based outreach and assistance approach that could deliver conservation benefits to underserved landowners and provide a replicable model for use in other areas.



This goal, of creating a grassroots outreach strategy, was met, and a significant number of landowners benefitted from it.

The project was massively undermined by the collapse of the Chicago Climate Exchange as a commodity market for carbon credits, as carbon offset payments were an integral part of our strategy. Project partners were granted an extension, significantly adjusted the approach, leveraged other resources, and were able to overcome this barrier and produce important outcomes which are being looked at as a model by state NRCS offices, the US Forest Endowment and others.

Highlights from the project include:

- Participation of over 1000 African American landowners in over 30 outreach meetings, field days, technical assistance and other education and support activities
- Establishment of a corps of 20 African American leaders serving as Landowner Ambassadors
- Over 100 African American landowners applied for NRCS EQIP
- Educational and outreach videos for underserved landowners on the EQIP enrollment process, management plans, and other topics
- Establishment of the Limited Resources Landowner Education and Assistance Network (LRLEAN) as an active and successful grassroots outreach partner



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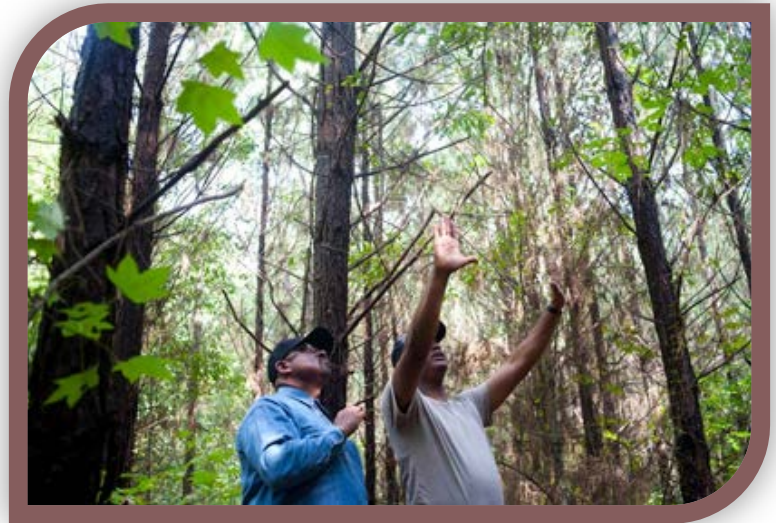


Project Activities

Landowner Ambassadors

The core strategy of the project was the establishment of local “Landowner Ambassadors” who served as grassroots outreach fellows throughout the project.

These local leaders were forest landowners who were recruited because they have a special passion for community improvement and outreach and/or were recognized “leaders of opinion” in their local communities.



This model was best demonstrated in Alabama, working with the nascent Limited-Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network (LRELAN). Our collaboration in Alabama involved “train the trainer” meetings and a 2-day field trip, and resulted in enrollment of dozens of landowners in EQIP programs.

The “charge” of the ambassadors was to identify landowners in their area who might be interested in EQIP, or other USDA programs, and to identify what mechanisms would be most useful in their community to support these landowners in moving forward. In some communities larger meetings were held (EG 50 landowners), in some areas small meetings were held with NRCS District staff, and in some places ambassadors worked one-on-one with landowners, including bringing landowners into the office to sign up!

The process was a creative and experimental one. It helped us clarify which landowner ambassadors were more effective and which were not able to get traction. We also identified the need to have a larger number of Ambassador Mentors. For example, one ambassador, Robert Turner, conducted some activities but did not get a lot of results. Our Ambassador Mentor, Jerry Lacey, who is more experienced with outreach and education activities, worked with him in the last year, and was able to help him get to a level of confidence and experience where he could organize and facilitate outreach workshops that he had not been comfortable with in the past. In addition to the project deliverables for this year we feel we have begun to cultivate a network of partners who can conduct future outreach and education activities.

Originally we planned to train 60 ambassadors but we backed that number down to 30, given the more intensive support ambassadors needed. We had Ambassador training with as many as 50 involved but the number of viable ambassadors ended up being much lower. This still comprised a significant basis of training and capacity building, yielding 20 ambassadors we plan to work with in the future as opportunities arise.



Workshops

Over 1000 minority landowners were involved in over 30 workshops, field days, outreach meetings, and other organized education and outreach activities. These were organized by NNFP, Ambassadors, or project partners. This represented a significant base of landowners who had never been involved in active forest management, did not have management plans, and had never participated in EQIP or other relevant programs.

The workshops, being organized by African American Ambassadors, project staff, or partners, were a great source of interest and enthusiasm. The reluctance landowners often show at workshops was overcome by excellent work by the ambassadors and project team. Workshops were facilitated to be much more highly interactive, and targeted to the audience. While the occasional workshop ended up being the NRCS “laundry list” of programs, most of them were focused more on the learners and their level of knowledge and interest. The level of questions asked at the workshops was much higher than in most “outreach” workshops without the community-based outreach element.

Workshops included:

Date	#	Town	County	State	Type
6/25/2011	16	Millry	Washington	AL	Outreach
6/29/2011	20	Ariton	Dale	AL	Outreach
7/1/2011	7		Ellmore	AL	Outreach/Mgmt
7/14/2011	10	Mendenhall	Simpson	MS	Outreach
7/14/2011	41	Collins	Covington		Outreach/Mgmt
7/24/2011	50	Paulding	Jasper	MS	Outreach
7/24/2011	10			MS	Mgmt
July, 2011	25		Barbour	AL	Outreach
July, 2011	30		Monroe	AL	Outreach
8/15/2011		Tuskegee	Macon	AL	Outreach
8/20/2011	20	Waynesboro	Wayne	MS	Outreach/Mgmt
9/2/2011			Monroe	AL	Outreach
9/7/2011		Union Springs	Bullock	AL	Outreach
9/10/2011	8		Ellmore	AL	Outreach/Mgmt
9/15/2011	25		Macon	AL	Outreach
9/25/2011			Bullock	AL	Outreach
9/26/2011	20		Bullock	AL	Outreach
9/27/2011	40		Bullock	AL	Outreach
10/27/2011	18	Bolivar	Hardeman	TN	Outreach
11/3/2011	15	Waynesboro	Wayne	MS	Management
11/29/2011	41	Thomaston	Marengo	AL	Outreach/Mgmt

1/28/2012	14	Union Springs	Bullock	AL	Mgmt
2/25/2012	36	Evergreen	Conecuh	AL	Outreach
3/7/2012	14	Castleberry	Conecuh	AL	Outreach
3/17/2012	16	Eclectic	Elmore	AL	Outreach
4/5/2012	51	Selma	Wilcox	AL	Train the Trainer
4/14/2012	40	Boligee	Greene/Sumter	AL	Outreach
4/21/2012	24	Uniontown	Perry	AL	Outreach
5/17/2012	37	Louisville	Winston	MS	Mgmt/Outreach
5/19/2012	33	Nichburg	Conecuh	AL	Outreach
5/24-26/2012	15	Bolivar	Hardeman	TN	Management
5/31/2012	30	Aliceville	Pickens	AL	Outreach
6/7/2012	6	Camden	Wilcox	AL	Outreach
6/12/2012	64	Eutaw	Green	AL	Outreach
6/13/2012	18	Hurtsboro	Russell	AL	Outreach
6/26/2012	22	Florence	Rankin	MS	Outreach
8/27/2012	7	Brookhaven	Lincoln	MS	Outreach

823 on sign-in sheets (plus 3 events we don't have sign-in sheets (minimum 15) plus estimated 123 (15%) who didn't sign the sign-in sheets)= estimated 1001 total. This does not include outreach at African Methodist Episcopal convention in Nashville where we talked to hundreds of landowning families, 63 of whom asked for more specific follow-up, and other events.

The numbers in the table above are just the names on the sign-in sheets. We found that an average of 10-20% of landowners did not sign in on the sheet (sometimes only one spouse or family member signed in, sometimes new participants weren't comfortable putting their name and information down, sometimes the logistics didn't permit everyone getting a chance to sign in when they arrived, and some names were not legible).

Overall we had over 1000 landowners participating in SEFLO workshops and other events.



Field trips and small “walks in the woods” were the preferred educational tools.



While many sessions were “classroom” sessions, the level of interaction and engagement among landowners was higher than most. Speakers Jerry Lacey and Sandra Jones share information about cost-share and how their property needs to be resolved to qualify.





In some areas, such as Greene County AL, landowners were hungry for information and participation far exceeded our expectations for local community workshops.



Sessions were held in various community facilities, depending on what was available locally.





Often the most productive part of workshops was the one-on-one conversations with resource persons and other landowners



Boots on the Ground

One need we underestimated when we proposed the project was that of direct follow-up assistance for landowners. NRCS and forestry commissions have been through hard financial times, so NNFP ended up picking up a greater degree of direct technical assistance activities.

This gave us “street cred” with landowners as we were able to demonstrate our team’s knowledge and capacity, but we ended up deploying more contract resources for work with landowners than anticipated. Site visits by John Fenderson (forester and NNFP program director), James Ford (retired NRCS, NNFP outreach specialist), Andrew Williams (retired NRCS), Freddy Davis (forester), and Perry Brumfield (retired Extension) provided foundational educational and relationship-developing activities, but were more labor intensive than the original project plan.



Forester and NNFP Program Director provides forestry TA for landowner Edward Davis interested in establishing his land as a demonstration farm.





Providing more in-depth assistance for a better-established forest landowner who was having difficulty accessing USDA resources.

Materials

Originally the project materials were focused on direct-mail and print materials. As a result of our work with underserved landowners through the project period we developed more of a focus on video as a medium. We still mailed out to two thousand landowners as part of the carbon outreach, but because of the market collapse that turned into a dead-end.

Building on this project and our Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers project we produced a series of videos, which have been useful to project partners including Landowner Ambassadors who showed them at outreach workshops, the AL Forestry Commission, and NRCS. The 3 most useful were:

1. **EQIP Application Process:**
www.tinyurl.com/NNFPEQIPVIDEO
2. **Forest Management Plans**
www.tinyurl.com/NNFPALMGMT
3. **Woodland Ambassador Educational Bus Tour**
www.tinyurl.com/NNFPALBUS12

We also produced some USDA in Plain English fact sheets, which are attached.

The other innovative communications tool that we piloted (mostly with other funds) was our outreach fans (attached). These were distributed at a 30,000-person AME church convention in



Nashville, distributed at some workshops, and will be used for distribution to congregations in focus counties.

Carbon Credits

Far and away the most difficult thing we had to deal with in this project is the collapse of the carbon markets.

At the end of 2008, when we made application to NRCS CIG we had a well-developed carbon credit program ready to roll out on a large scale. This system, in partnership with Dogwood Carbon, was based on the Chicago Climate Exchange being used as a place to sell commodity credits.

The economic downturn dashed hopes of climate legislation, and carbon markets collapsed. The CCX ceased to function as a viable market, and our project was basically destroyed.

Not ones to give up we looked at other options for carbon trading, and bootstrapped a project in a very short time. We entered into a partnership with an equity partner prepared to finance initial landowner payments, inventory and modeling, FSC certification, and verification with the intent to sell “premium” credits when markets returned.

After some good initial outreach work in Tennessee, and plans to roll out the program across the project region the financial backer pulled the plug. Markets were still down, cap-and-trade legislation on the federal level seemed impossible, and financial markets were constricting.

So, finally, we turned to a more specific “niche” credit approach for the voluntary market. After initial feasibility work, and market research we determined that it would be feasible to undertake a Longleaf Pine carbon credit program, incentivizing Longleaf restoration and appealing to environmentally-minded voluntary customers. Unfortunately the financial requirements were beyond what was available in the CIG budget as most funds had been directed to landowner outreach focused on USDA programs, and the private capital was not available for a third carbon initiative. We hope to explore this for the future, but it was simply not possible during this project period given the market collapse.

We feel we adjusted well and conducted a robust and effective outreach program for conservation programs. Unfortunately the 15,000 acres that were to be enrolled in the carbon program (and certified FSC as part of this) were not enrolled. That being said, given the total collapse of both CCX and the private equity market the project could have been at total flop. We reoriented and continued the community-based forest landowner outreach effort with very good results.

Ancillary Benefits

The project had many ancillary benefits, too numerous to list here. Some highlights include:



Building LRLEAN Capacity

LRLEAN had been an informal group of landowner leaders umbrella-ed under Alabama Treasure Forest Association. Prior to the project period LRLEAN had become inactive, despite an existing CCPI project which provided for set-aside EQIP funds. As part of this project NNFP provided support to NNFP staff for outreach activities. This increased organizational activity revitalized LRLEAN and they have formed a new board with additional leadership and are pursuing grants such as the US Forest Endowment. LRLEAN's momentum should produce many conservation and community benefits beyond the project period.

Piloting LLCs for Heir Property

In our more in-depth technical assistance approach we came across the perennial issue of heir property. While this grant does not deal with heir property, it opened doors for us to pilot work with 4 families who are establishing LLCs to operate their farms, freeing them up to be able to receive cost-share and other financial assistance.

Building a Community-Based Outreach Network

Beyond the Ambassadors we worked with through this project we have started developing a network across the South. This network, if cultivated, would have the potential to engage tens of thousands of minority landowners across the South. The challenge will be transitioning the robust network of "baby boomer" leaders we have in place to a more diverse network involving young people as apprentices and emerging leaders mentored by the elder members of the team.

Showcasing the Work

The project work was shared at a number of conferences, including a wealth-creation meeting of the Ford Foundation. Proper credit was not always given for NNFP and CIG support, so we need to do better with helping our local partners recognize the support that they have received. The work was showcased to the US Endowment for Forests and Communities, and to other audiences. We attended SWCS, SAF, and NASF meetings, but the work was not far enough advanced to present formally. Informal information sharing was done with various stakeholders.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The community-based outreach approach appears to be a very effective way of engaging landowners who are otherwise reluctant to interact with government programs and personnel. We found that in most cases landowners were well received, and treated fairly by agency staff, but some key elements helped with this. Factors that contributed to landowner comfort and success with NRCS programs:

1. Workshops addressing NRCS programs and their requirements, held by Landowner Ambassadors, and tailored to "new" audiences
2. The step-by-step walk-through the EQIP Process video provided



3. Follow-up to workshops and office visits by project staff and landowner ambassadors
4. Expert “troubleshooting” resource persons such as the two people on our team retired with 60+ years of experience from NRCS. They knew the system from top to bottom, with experience from ground-level technician to 10 years as State Conservationist
5. A Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) allocation in Alabama which increased the likelihood of landowner success

The workshops were effective for a few reasons:

1. Landowner ambassadors tailored them to the audience, working with agency staff to explain acronyms and try not to cover too much.
2. Experienced presenters like Jerry Lacey and Andrew Williams who were very expert at making a crowd comfortable and putting them at ease (with more personal remarks, humor, etc.)
3. Ample opportunity for questions and answers
4. Field time whenever feasible
5. Follow-up with landowners after the workshops, so it was an “entry point” to a process of involvement rather than an “interesting experience”.

We feel there is ample interest among landowners, and need for these services to recommend another outreach project modeled on this one, either deepening impact from the networks established in the target states, or deploying the model in another location. The impacts would be greater to deploy it in an area where networks are being developed, with slow expansion into new states rather than over-reaching and spreading resources too thinly.

Things we feel are important for success of a project such as this:

1. Have project staffing in place earlier. We had to wait for a key person to become available from his previous job, and waiting for the carbon markets to settle out, but we lost a lot of time. Having to hire someone cold would have been very difficult.
2. Plan for greater investment in TA. There is a real need for more “boots on the ground” time with landowners to move things forward. Plan for this, so staff don’t get too stretched.
3. Hold more field days and smaller “walks in the woods”. Timing, and weather, doesn’t always work out, but they are golden when they work.
4. Develop the Landowner Ambassadors as an intentional network to promote greater information sharing and reflection. Include more young people for the “next generation” leadership.
5. Have financial assistance dollars in place. CCPI was a VERY important part of this project. We greatly hope Outreach will be a priority for the Partnerships program in the new Farm Bill (Sec. 2401 in Senate version), though it currently seems absent.

NNFP is planning with project partners to look at how to build on this important work, and hope to more fully develop this innovative approach, to improve its efficiency and produce more documentation and analysis of best practice.

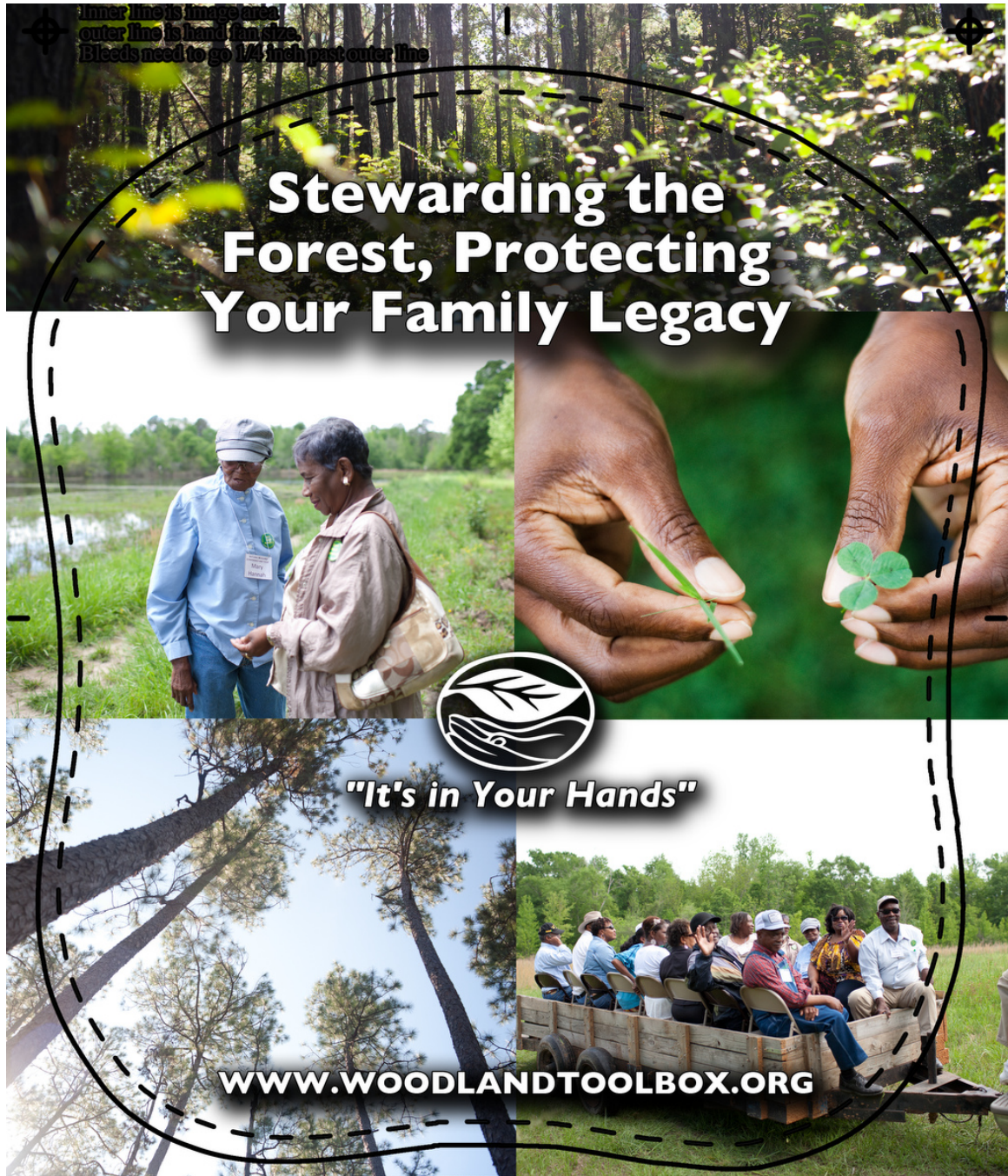


Attachments

1. Forestry Fan
2. Carbon sequestration modeling for Longleaf Pine (confidential, do not distribute)
3. USDA in Plain English Fact Sheets (4 primary fact sheets, 3 simple brochures)

Note: carbon offset market analysis is not included as it is proprietary.





Inner line is finger size.
outer line is hand fan size.
Bleeds need to go 1/4 inch past outer line

Stewarding the Forest, Protecting Your Family Legacy



"It's in Your Hands"

WWW.WOODLANDTOOLBOX.ORG

**Dotted lines are for imprint area only and will not print on final product.
Actual size of fonts accurately represented here.**



Helping Your Woodlands Help You

Money Can Grow on Trees

Managed woodlands can give you income when you harvest, but also create wealth for future generations.

A forest management plan will help you steward your land and legacy. Call NNFP for information on how to receive a management plan in your state.

Financial Assistance Can Help

USDA has a new priority to help minority landowners. We can help you prepare and access financial assistance programs which may help pay land management costs, up to 90% or even pay you to thin your woods. Apply by September 30 for best results from EQIP.

Link: www.tinyurl.com/bl8d8f2

Heir Property and Land Loss

Do you have an Estate Plan?
Do you have a Will?
What is HEIR PROPERTY?

African American families lost more than half of their land between 1910 and 1997, about 10 million acres. Land in "Heir Property" was a main reason for this. Learn answers that will help you keep the family land.

Contact NNFP or our partners, to help safeguard your family's land and legacy. **The future is in your hands.**

For free assistance, call NNFP at: 1-877-255-6069 ext. 703, or go to WWW.WOODLANDTOOLBOX.ORG



national network of forest practitioners

The United Christian Community Association



LRLEAN - Limited Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network

Protect Your Family Land and Legacy

What are the rights/responsibilities of Heir Property co-owners?
What do I OWN, as a co-owner?
What is fractional interest/unconditional interest?
How do I protect the Heir Property of my Family? What is a Tax Sale?
What is an Agreed Sale?
What is a Partition Sale?

For free assistance, contact the Black Family Land Trust at 919-683-5263, or go to WWW.BFLT.ORG



www.blackfamilylandtrust.com