



Leaves OF *Change*



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Introduction

Cultural Issues in Forest Management

EXTENSION PROGRAMS and forest management assistance plans have traditionally had difficulty reaching most forest landowners. In many cases, the same group of engaged and motivated landowners show up for all extension and outreach events and meetings. Minority forest landowners and forest landowners with limited resources have been especially underserved by extension programs and forest management assistance plans. Recent changes in forest ownership—including smaller tracts of forest land, urban and exurban development, and declines in the proportion of farmers among forest landowners—have made it even more difficult to reach forest landowners.

However, social science research can help us increase our understanding of the diverse values and practices of forest landowners, ultimately helping us to improve our ability to engage and communicate with a wider audience. In this issue, we highlight a research project headed by John Schelhas (SRS-4952 natural resource sociologist) that is helping to describe social networks among African American forest landowners as well as forest and land values and identities, forest practices, and forest histories. The findings of this project are helping to illuminate a crucial disconnect in forestry and extension efforts, and have subsequently led to outreach efforts designed specifically to connect with underserved landowner groups.

Research

Why Social Networks Matter in Forest Management

JOHN SCHELHAS (SRS-4952 natural resource sociologist) has been conducting research on issues of cultural diversity in forestry since 1999 when he was stationed at Tuskegee University to support the Tuskegee University Forestry and Natural Resource Program. Over the past decade, Schelhas's research has touched on topics critical for understanding the state of forest ownership among African Americans and other underserved landowners, including forest values, forest management information exchange, inheritance of property and estate planning, spatial segregation of minority landowners, small-scale forest landownership, use of cost-share programs, and economic relationships between national forests and nearby minority communities. Forestry extension and outreach have always struggled to reach the vast majority of landowners, and Schelhas's research is addressing that disconnect by helping to fill the gaps in the understanding of values, motivations, and practices for a more diverse set of forest landowners.

African Americans have histories of land ownership and access to extension services and programs that are significantly different from those of white landowners and, obviously, those differences shape approaches to land and forest management. In a survey of landowners in Macon County, Alabama, Schelhas and his colleagues found that 48

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Highlighted Conferences

National Green Infrastructure Conference 2011

The first national conference on green infrastructure was held in February at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV. The conference was organized and hosted by the Conservation Fund and the Green Infrastructure Community of Practice.

Conference speakers presented case studies and green infrastructure activities that spanned national, regional, and local scales and represented a range of organizations, including the Department of Defense, federal

and state highway administrations, corporations, local governments, and local and regional nongovernmental organizations. There were two presentations from the southern region: one on the Longleaf Restoration Initiative by Tom Darden and the other on green infrastructure planning in northwest Arkansas by Barbara Boland, which was awarded the National Green Infrastructure Implementation Award for Stakeholder Engagement. The presentations are available online at www.greeninfrastructure.net/GIC2011

10th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth: Building Safe, Healthy, and Livable Communities

The 2011 New Partners conference took place in February in Charlotte, NC and was attended by local elected officials, city and county staff, planners, transportation professionals, public health professionals, urban foresters, and others committed to building safer, healthier, and more livable communities. The conference presentations focused on providing insights, valuable tools, and strategies for making smart growth a success in communities. Some specific topics included adapting to climate

change, Latinos and smart growth, successfully engaging diverse audiences in regional planning, how disasters can create smart growth opportunities, and much more. The next New Partners for Smart Growth conference will be held February 2–4, 2012 in San Diego, CA. The presentations are available online as pdf files at www.newpartners.org/program.html.

2011 Government Web and New Media Conference

In March, more than 500 government web managers, new media specialists, content writers, public affairs specialists, and other government employees attended this annual conference sponsored by the Web Manager University in Washington, DC. The conference agenda included topics such as building a successful social media performance strategy, mobile strategies for government, reaching global audiences, how to use challenges and prizes for citizen-driven solutions, Twitter for government, and much more. Most of the conference presentations are available online at www.usa.gov/webcontent/wmu/conference/2011/presentations.shtml.

John Schelhas, the newest member of SRS-4952

John Schelhas

has been a research forester with the Southern Research Station (SRS) since 1999, when he was first stationed at Tuskegee University. He joined SRS-4952's team of researchers and science delivery experts in 2009. His research is focused primarily on private forest landowners, including land use decision making, forest values, forest-based rural development, and relationships between protected forests and their neighbors.

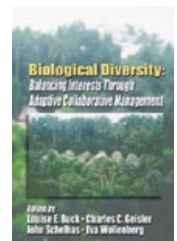


John has conducted research with rural landowners in Central America and with African American forest landowners in the southern United States. Before working with SRS, he was a researcher at Cornell University and at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. He has also worked for the U.S. National Park Service and served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala. In 2010, he received the Forest Service Southern Research Station Director's Multicultural Organization Award for his work with minority forest landowners.

Recommended Resources

Balancing Interests through Adaptive Collaborative Management

By Luis Buck, Charles Geisler, John Schelhas, Eva Wollenberg, CRC Press, 2001. Price: \$113.95. This book examines the potential of adaptive collaborative management in reconciling a protected area's competing demands for biodiversity conservation, local livelihood support, and broader based regional development. The book is available online from CRC Press at www.crcpress.com by searching for the book's title.



InterfaceSouth is now on Twitter!

We are now using Twitter, tweeting about topics such as fire in the wildland-urban interface, biomass and bioenergy, kids in the woods, ecosystem services, urban forestry, tips for social media use by natural resource agencies, and much more! Follow us today at www.twitter.com/InterfaceSouth.



Research: Why Social Networks Matter in Forest Management

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percent of white landowners used professional consulting foresters as their most important source of information, while 72 percent of African American landowners reported family members as their most important source of forest management information. In addition, the survey found that 70 percent of white landowners were aware of cost-share programs and 46 percent made use of them, but only 36 percent of African American landowners were aware of the programs and only 20 percent participated. These findings verified what many natural resource professionals have long known—that African American landowners are not plugged into forestry extension and outreach programs and that they could benefit from more information and education regarding land and forest management.

A lack of forest management information can make landowners vulnerable to exploitation. During interviews in Dallas County, Alabama, the researchers heard of one logger who would drive around and give \$5,000 checks to landowners. The logger would tell the landowners that if they ever wanted to sell their timber, they should go ahead and cash the check. Of course, the value of the timber was likely to be much higher than \$5,000, but for landowners without access to consulting foresters or other professional advice, the offer could be tempting.

“It is well known that if you put your timber up for bid and get a professional forester to cruise it, you can get two to three times what someone who knocks on your door will offer,” says Schelhas. “Being tied into the right networks can help people in making good decisions about their land.”

Along with his colleagues Robert Zabawa of Tuskegee University and Rory Fraser of Alabama A&M, Schelhas has been working on a project for the past several years using social network analysis to describe how forest management information is obtained and shared in communities that are not well tied into the forestry extension system. Social network research involves “mapping” the network—identifying how information flows in a community, and identifying the “nodes” (that is, the individuals) that are central to the network and through which much of the information flows. “A network is basically the people you talk to about certain things. Everyone has multiple networks, and we were specifically interested in how people obtained information for their forest management decisions,” says Schelhas.

In many cases, traditional forestry extension and outreach efforts have been designed to transfer information to individuals who are making decisions about their land. However, research on the social networks of forest landowners focuses on relationships within communities rather than solely on individual decision making, and, in so doing, can point the way to new forestry outreach and extension approaches that could potentially reach more landowners. According to Schelhas, “We need to know how diverse groups of



Photo courtesy of: John Schelhas

African Americans rely much more on social networks of family and friends for advice on forest management decisions than on professional consulting foresters or extension personnel.

landowners differ in their values and practices related to forest management because fundamentally decisions regarding streamside management zones, best management practices, wildlife, forest health, or biodiversity conservation are questions of values. One-size-fits-all management will not be productive for forest management nor will it provide benefits across all segments of society.”

The social network research is being used as the foundation for a series of community-based workshops organized by Alabama A&M; these workshops were specifically designed to reach landowners underserved by traditional forestry outreach efforts. Working in counties with some of the highest rates of African American landownership, the workshops’ organizers identified local landowners who were most interested in forestry in the community (nodes in the network), then brought them together with other interested landowners in the places that they frequented: churches, community centers, and so forth. “Meeting on their turf was important to generate interest and trust,” says Schelhas. “These meetings actually expanded and strengthened the existing networks and tied them into the extension system.” The community-based workshop model is now being replicated elsewhere across the South with successful programs in Georgia and several other states.*

Schelhas says that he hopes that his research makes African American forest landowners more visible. “You would be surprised at how often people say, ‘African American landowners? Are there any?’” says Schelhas. “Just because African American landowners haven’t been involved in the extension system doesn’t mean that they are not there.”

To find out more about this research, contact John Schelhas, jschelhas@fs.fed.us, www.humanandnaturalsystems.org/about/employees/john-schelhas/.

—Article written by Josh McDaniel

*See case study “Community-Based Forest Management Training” for more information.

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Upcoming Events			
Date	Description	Location	Contact
June 20–24, 2011	Urban Forest Strike Team Workshop	Tulsa, OK	Dudley Hartel, 706-559-4236, dhartel@fs.fed.us
July 20, 2011	The Carbon Impact of Forest Products	Webinar	http://www.forestrywebinars.net/webinars/the-carbon-impact-of-forest-products/
July 24-28, 2011	Small-Scale Forestry: Synergies and Conflicts in Social, Ecological, and Economic Interactions	Freiburg, Germany	http://www.fva-bw.de/termine/veranstaltungen/smallscaleforestry/index.php?site=0
October 27–29, 2011	2011 Backyards and Beyond Conference	Denver, CO	www.nfpa.org/backyardsandbeyond



This issue can be found online at: www.interfacesouth.org/swuinet/files/LeavesofChangeIssue9.pdf

InterfaceSouth and Urban Forestry South are the technology transfer centers of the USFS Southern Research Station work unit, SRS-4952: *Integrating Human and Natural Systems in Urban and Urbanizing Environments* (www.humanandnaturalsystems.org) and are collectively called the Centers for Urban and Interface Forestry. InterfaceSouth focuses on wildland-urban interface issues while Urban Forestry South focuses on urban forestry issues.