

Open conversations: finding ways to improve communication between family forest landowners and consulting foresters

Of Alabama's 23 million acres of forestland, an estimated 13.7 million acres are owned by family forest landowners. Therefore, family forest landowners play a pivotal role in the health, resiliency, and productivity of forests in Alabama. However, less than 30 percent of family forest landowners have used a professional forester, and less than 10 percent have a written management plan. The primary goal of this research is to improve communication between landowners and consulting foresters to increase landowners' awareness and usage of professional forest management.

More information is needed to understand why landowners are hesitant to employ consulting foresters and how satisfied landowners are with services provided by consulting foresters. Concurrently, feedback from practicing consulting foresters can give insight into their services and what landowners can do to help foresters better meet their needs. Therefore, the objectives of face-to-face interviews and web-based surveys are to collect consulting forester perceptions of their professional work, the forestry profession, and management and communication needs. Secondly, collect landowner perceptions of their management and communication needs and quality of service provided by consulting foresters with which they work. Results will provide insight into the consulting forester-landowner, dynamic and aid in reconnecting these parties through improved communication. Developing a better understanding of this relationship dynamic is crucial for navigating these issues. Consulting foresters are essential to the adoption of forestry practices by landowners. A mutual understanding between consulting foresters and landowners is needed in sustaining these crucial open conversations.



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Jace McCauley is a graduate research assistant working on his master's degree at Auburn University. Jace's research is focused on how to improve communication between consulting foresters and landowners to increase engagement. Jace developed the understanding that effective communication was the key to engagement through his various leadership roles within Auburn University and the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences while pursuing his Bachelor of Science in Forestry from Auburn University, which he received in 2021. Before college, Jace held various positions within his high school's FFA program, and at the church he attends in Jasper, Alabama, where he is from.