

Oregon Forest Tax Symposium

Survey Findings

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BACKGROUND

A survey was conducted May 12th – August 3rd 2015 of attendees of the January 2015 Oregon Forest Tax Symposium to achieve the following objectives:

1. gain feedback on the symposium itself to inform future events,
2. learn more about Oregon landowners behaviors and activities on their land,
3. understand the educational needs of Oregon landowners, and
4. understand what the policy implications are from the survey findings.

All 285 individuals registered for the symposium were surveyed, of those 282 had valid contact information in the form of either an email or physical address listed on the registration information. Of these 257 were contacted via email with an invite from symposium sponsors requesting participation in the survey through a live survey link hosted by SurveyGizmo, of these 28 bounced and 78 responded. Two additional email reminders were sent to non-responders. The 25 individuals who did not have an email address were sent a letter in the mail with a link and survey code they could type into the computer to complete the survey, or if they preferred contact the Aldo Leopold Foundation to request a paper copy, of these 2 responded.

Following the electronic survey a paper copy was mailed to 118 of the 179 non-responders. Addresses were not required on the registration form and could not be located for 61 attendees. Surveys were mailed from mid-June through July 1, 2015 as addresses could be procured for those who had initially been contacted via email, and the survey was closed as of August 3rd with 116 total responses, with 38 of these coming in following the mailing of the paper survey, and 3 being returned as undeliverable.

In total 78 people responded electronically, 38 through mail totaling 116 completed surveys.

- The response rate for the electronic survey alone would be 34% (78 respondents/(257 emailed – 28 bounced))
- The response rate for the paper survey alone would be 26% (38 respondents/(143 with addresses – 3 returned))
- However because some of the respondents that bounced in the e-survey were able to be contacted by mail, and those that didn't have an physical address that could be located could be contacted by email it is more appropriate to look at the response rate as 116/274 – the total number that was contacted by at least one method resulting in 42%. This accounts for all duplicates and incompletes being removed.

All figures in the report are based on the number and percentage of responders for a given question.

FINDINGS

SYMPOSIUM FEEDBACK

Who attended the symposium?

96% of respondents (n=111) attended 4% (n=5) were not able to attend, of those who attended:

- **Gender:** 69% (n=72) were male 31% (n=32) female
- **Age:** Nearly 80% (n=82) were 55 years of age or older with 43% being 65 years of age or older.
- **Education:** 86% had a bachelor's degree or greater (n=90 of 105).
- **Participant Category:** Private landowners represented 82% of the respondents (n=89), conservation resource professionals represented just over 9% of the respondents, with tax and legal professionals, university faculty, and students also in attendance. In some cases the primary capacity in which a person attended was their professional capacity, yet they indicated in the comments that they also owned land, and in some cases responded to the landowner questions as well.
- **Learned about Symposium:** Almost half (54%) (n=107) of the participants learned about the symposium from the Oregon Small Woodland Owners Association (OSWA) and/or a newsletter or mailing. The Northwest Magazine was also a popular source (22%), in addition about 10% heard about it through either an extension agent, the Oregon Department of forestry, or another "other" source. Some indicated more than one source.

How did participants identify themselves?

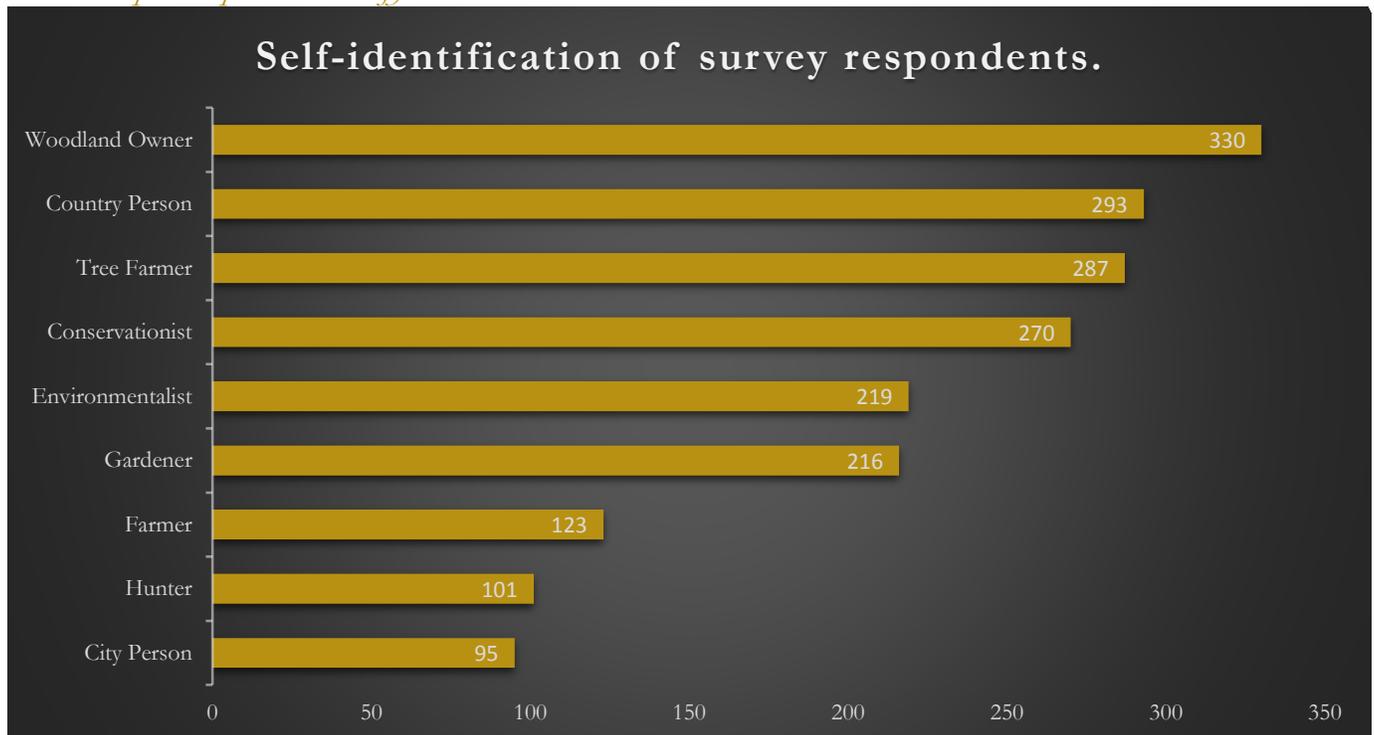


Figure 1: Self-Description. Participants described their level of self-identification with the indicated descriptive labels on a scale of not at all to thoroughly. This was transformed into a composite score for each category based on the number of individuals at each rating level.

Where did respondents spend time during their youth?

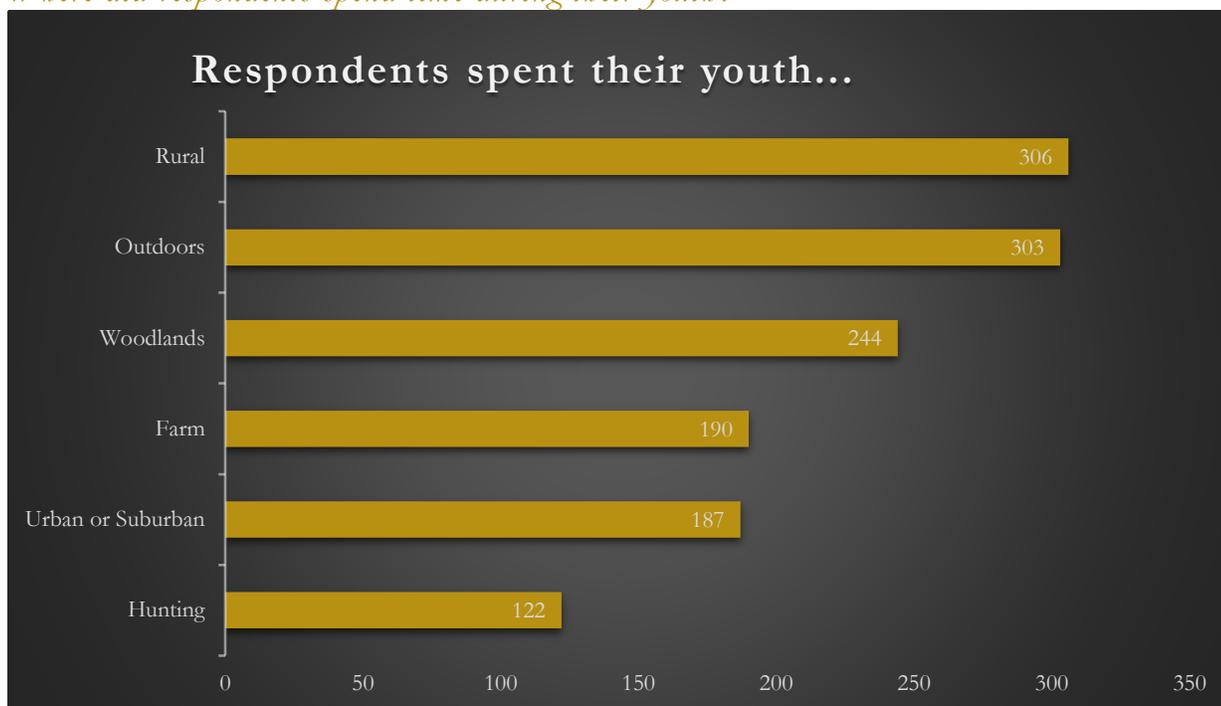


Figure 2: Developmental Experiences. Participants were asked to rate their level of time spent while growing up on a scale of none to most in each of the indicated categories. This was transformed into a composite score for each category based on the number of individuals at each rating level.

How satisfied were attendees (i.e. accountants, attorneys, foresters, landowners, students) with the symposium?

- **90% (n=88) were pleased with the symposium with 33% satisfied and 56% very satisfied.** Comments indicate many felt it was well organized and the information was helpful in making decisions. Additionally, the speakers addressed questions they had after the symposium. The comments below provide some insight into the reasons participants were satisfied.

“Worth the time and cost -- please hold more symposia on differing forestland topics!!”

“Thank you very much for the tax symposium! I really appreciated learning more about the business side of our forest!”

“I thought the symposium was very good. I watched the videos of two of the talks I missed. I contacted Tamara Cushing by email after they symposium and she sent me information on income taxes. It was very helpful.”

“This symposium was a well-organized and enjoyable affair. Many interesting topics that I was not able to attend all that I wanted to.”

What aspects of the program or logistics could be improved?

About 10% were less than satisfied with 8% (n=8) indicating a neutral view and 2% (n=2) indicating a level of dissatisfaction with the symposium. Comments suggest that these individuals found the content to be a review of what they already knew or on the other hand there was too much information, and/or the format didn't allow for them to attend all the sessions they had hoped to given the concurrent schedule. One person was looking for specific resources to be shared at or following the event.

"Information presented was pretty basic; beginner level."

"Lots of information."

"I wanted to attend a class but couldn't because two classes that I was interested in were going on at the same time."

"If I would have known the level the income tax portion was going to be presented at, I would have chosen a different segment to attend. So for me, the income tax portion was a waste of time. The estate tax portion was interesting, but not very organized. I think it was probably too complicated for most people and not applicable to most situations."

"Great symposium. I look forward to the next one. It would be helpful to access a list of CPAs and attorneys who specialize in timber and woodland issues."

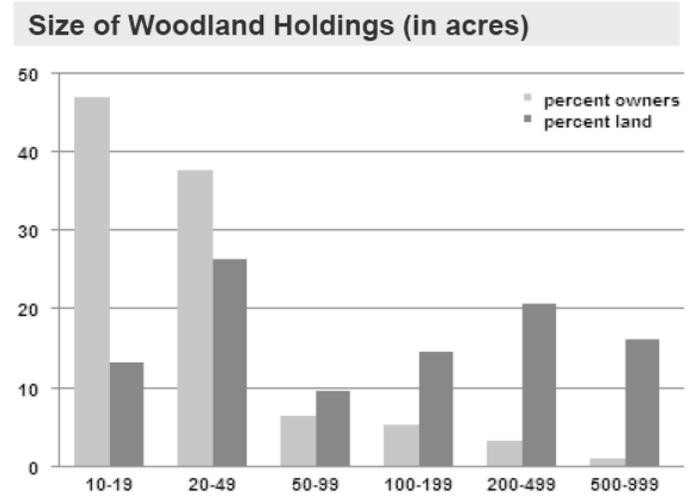
What aspects of the program were valuable and helpful to prepare landowners to take action (n=85)?

- Handouts 80% (n=68)
- Time for asking questions of presenters 60% (n=51)
- Discussion time with other participants 53% (n=45)
- Contacts with Forestry, Business, and Tax professionals 44% (n=37)
- Online resources 32% (n=27)
- Videos of symposium talks 26% (n=22)
- Other 6% (n=5)

OREGON LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

*What do we know about the owners that attended the symposium?**

Size of Holding:* The average land holding was just over 1600 woodland acres and the median holding size was 125 acre.



Figures 3 & 4: Size of woodland holdings. Landowners who attended the symposium own land in the indicated distribution (left). This differs from a similar graph depicting land holding patterns identified by the Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively, data from National Woodland Owner Survey Oregon profile (right).*

Table 1: Acreage distribution. Landowners indicated how much land they own and how many wooded acres they own. This was broken up by size class.*

Acres of Woodland Range	Number of parcels	Number of Acres	% of owners	% of land
0-19	7	98	10%	1%
20-49	16	502	24%	5%
50-99	9	655	13%	6%
100-199	18	2372	27%	23%
200-499	12	3515	18%	34%
500-999	5	3267	7%	31%
Total	67	10409	1	1

Tenure:* Respondents averaged 28.2 years of ownership with a median of 23 years. Answers ranged from 3 to 136 years which included two parcels that indicated the land had been in their family for generations. These two parcels increased the average years owned by 2.6

Table 2: Years of Ownership.*

	Average	Median	Mode
% Land Ownership Woodland	85%	91%	91%
Total Acres	1622.3	125	125
Wooded Acres	1536.7	100	100
Years Owned	28.2	23	23

Distance from property: 42% (n= 89) of respondents live on or beside their woodlands and the other 58% are absentee with 26% living 50 or more miles away, 26% living 11-50 miles from their woodlands, with only 7% live 10 or fewer miles away but not on or beside their woodlands.

Cabin or home: of the 58% of respondents that are absentee, 25% indicated having a second home or cabin on or beside their wooded property.

Frequency of time spent there: At the time of the survey almost half (49%) of respondents indicated that they had spent time in their woodlands in the last week, while another third (33%) indicated having spent time there in the last month. 17% of respondents indicated spending time in their woodlands every few months or once or twice a year and only 1% indicated not having spent any time in their woodlands in the last year.

*Since each participant was asked to complete the survey, duplicates resulted from partners filling out two copies. We sorted out these duplicates and calculated statistics with the cleaned data for the items marked with an asterisk. Duplicates were identified by matching year of purchase and acreage. This helps determine a more accurate representation of acre and number of properties represented at the symposium.

What planning or stewardship actions were landowners taking prior to the symposium?

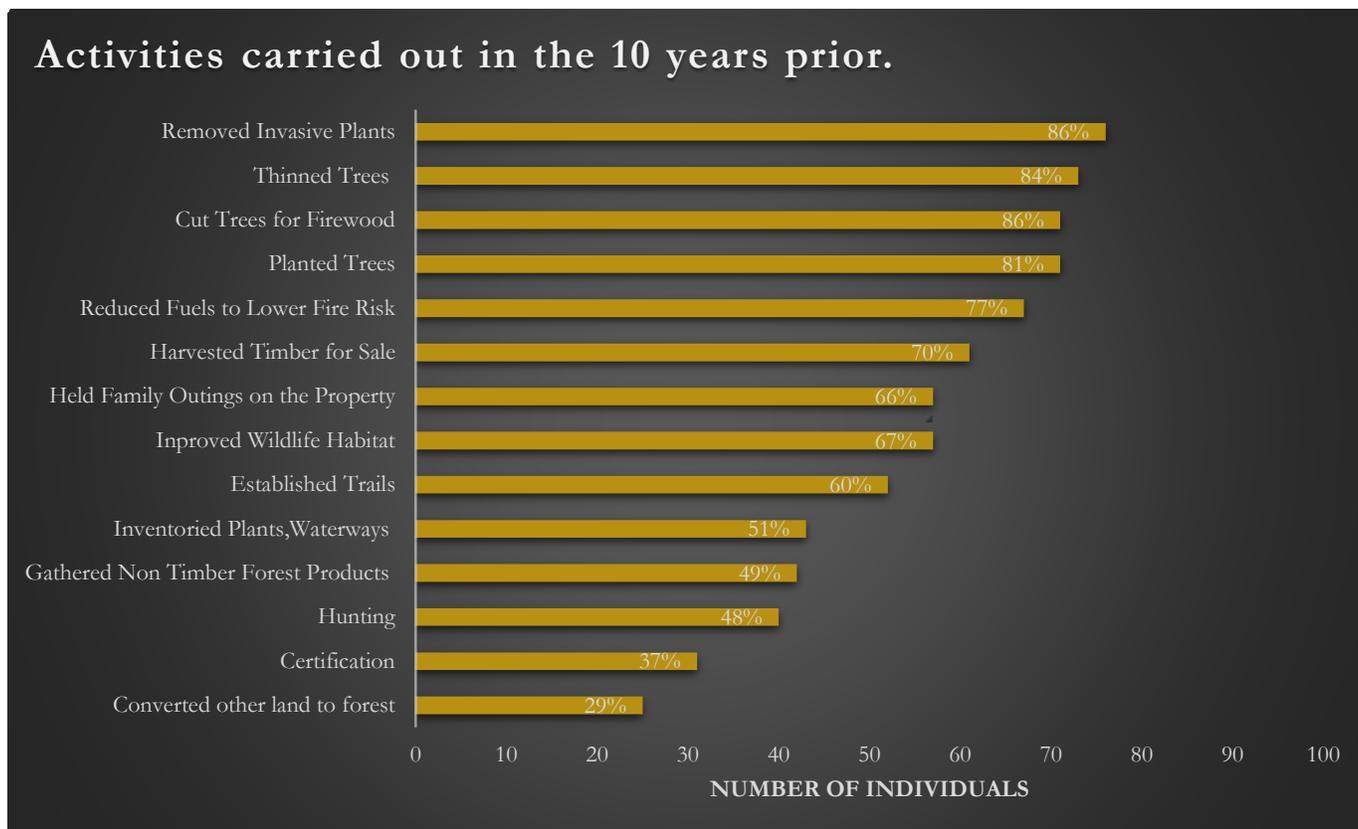


Figure 5: Landowners were asked to indicate which activities they had carried out in the 10 years prior to the symposium. Bars indicate the number of individuals who carried out the activity and are labeled as a percentage of the individuals who answered the question.

Landowners in attendance at the symposium indicated a fairly high level of engagement with their property having completed on average 6.7 activities in the past 10 years, including:

- Many landowners commonly engaged in activities to remove invasive plants, thin trees, plant trees, and cut firewood.
- Some landowners actively reduced the fuel load on their property, harvested timber, established trails, and focused on improving wildlife habitat.
- Fewer landowners yet did things like hunting, seeking certification for their forest products, and converting land to forest.

What actions were landowners taking related to cost-share programming prior to and following the symposium?

- *8% of those not previously engaged with EQIP are planning to enroll following the symposium.*
- *17% of those not previously engaged with ODF reported either planning (9%) on or have enrolled (8%) in the program since the tax symposium.*

Table 3: Participation in cost share programs. Participants were asked to indicate if they have participated in cost share, or tax incentive programming in the last ten years.

Government programs that provide cost-share or tax incentive participation in the prior 10 years...	Yes Count, %	No Count, %
ODF Stewardship Planning	15, 19%	65, 81%
Other	13, 22%	45, 78%
NRCS EQIP	12, 15%	66, 85%
USDA CRP	9, 12%	69, 88%
NRCS WHIP	5, 6%	73, 94%

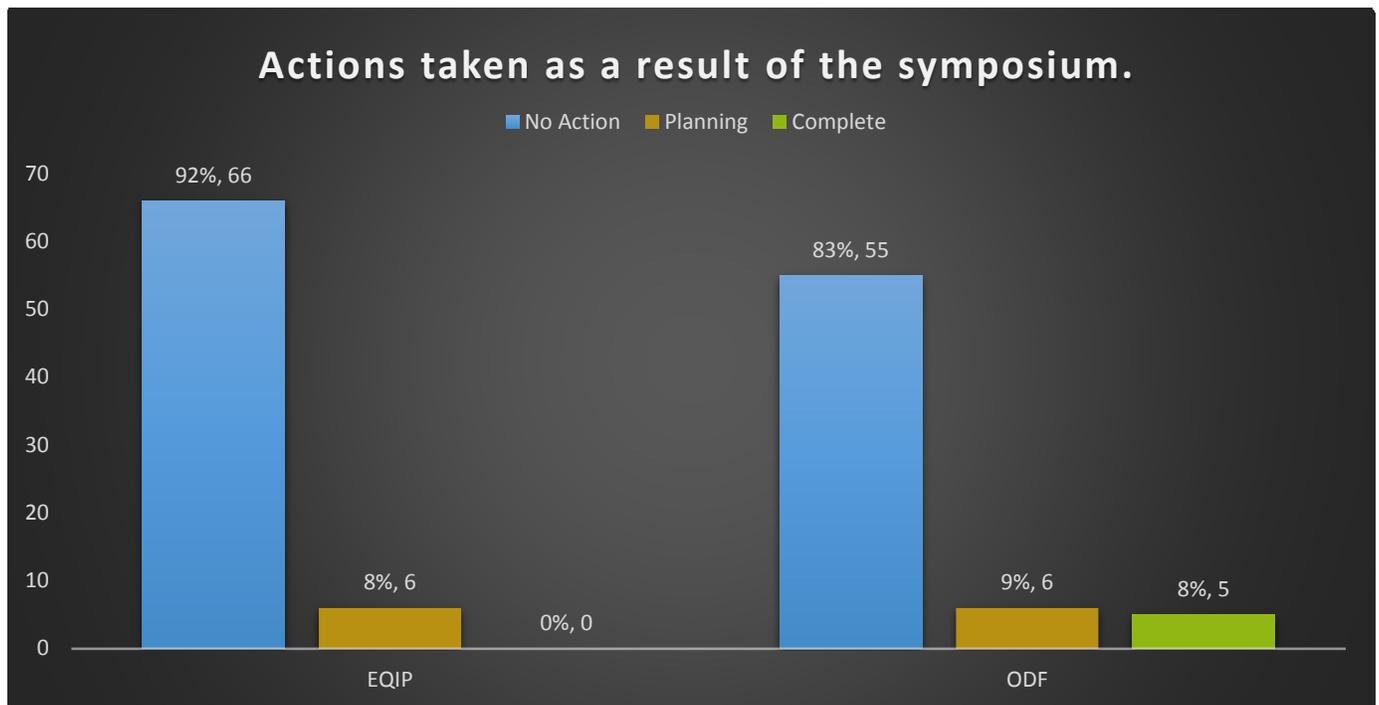


Figure 6: Cost sharing actions taken as a result of the tax symposium.

Table 4: Satisfaction with management activities taken prior to the symposium. Landowners were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the selected management practices on a scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Like ratings have been grouped together for ease of viewing.

Level of satisfaction with activities taken in prior 10 years...	Satisfied Count, %	Neutral Count, %	Dissatisfied Count, %	Not Done Count, %
Established basis for your woodlands	24, 35%	12, 18%	0, 0%	32, 47%
Established a record keeping system	32, 46%	15, 22%	1, 1%	21, 30%
Consulted a tax professional	31, 48%	6, 9%	1, 2%	26, 41%
Discussed the property with an accountant	26, 28%	10, 15%	0, 0 %	32, 47%
Walked the property with a forester	39, 56%	6, 9%	0, 0%	25, 36%
Established a management plan	35, 56%	6, 10%	1, 2%	21, 33%
Explored estate planning options	29, 43%	17, 25%	3, 4%	18, 27%
Talked with heirs about future of the property	32, 49%	15, 23%	2, 3%	16, 25%
Explored conservation easement options	7, 9%	20, 25%	4, 5%	48, 61%

What planning or stewardship actions are landowners taking following and as a result of the symposium?

- **50-75% of those who previously not engaged in tax and business planning items are now taking action.** Establishing basis for your woodlands, establishing a record keeping system, consulting a tax professional, and discussing the property with an accountant were the actions considered to be tax and business planning related. Prior to the tax symposium 25-50% of attendees had not engaged in these practices, of those 50-75% have either completed the action or are in the planning state and intend to complete it.
- Exploring conservation easements was the action least taken prior to the event, and had the lowest conversion to action following the event.
- Approximately half of the landowners who had taken action prior to the symposium were satisfied with their experience, with the exception of exploring estate planning options, establishing basis, discussing property with a consultant, and exploring conservation easement options in which owners were often indifferent and occasionally dissatisfied.

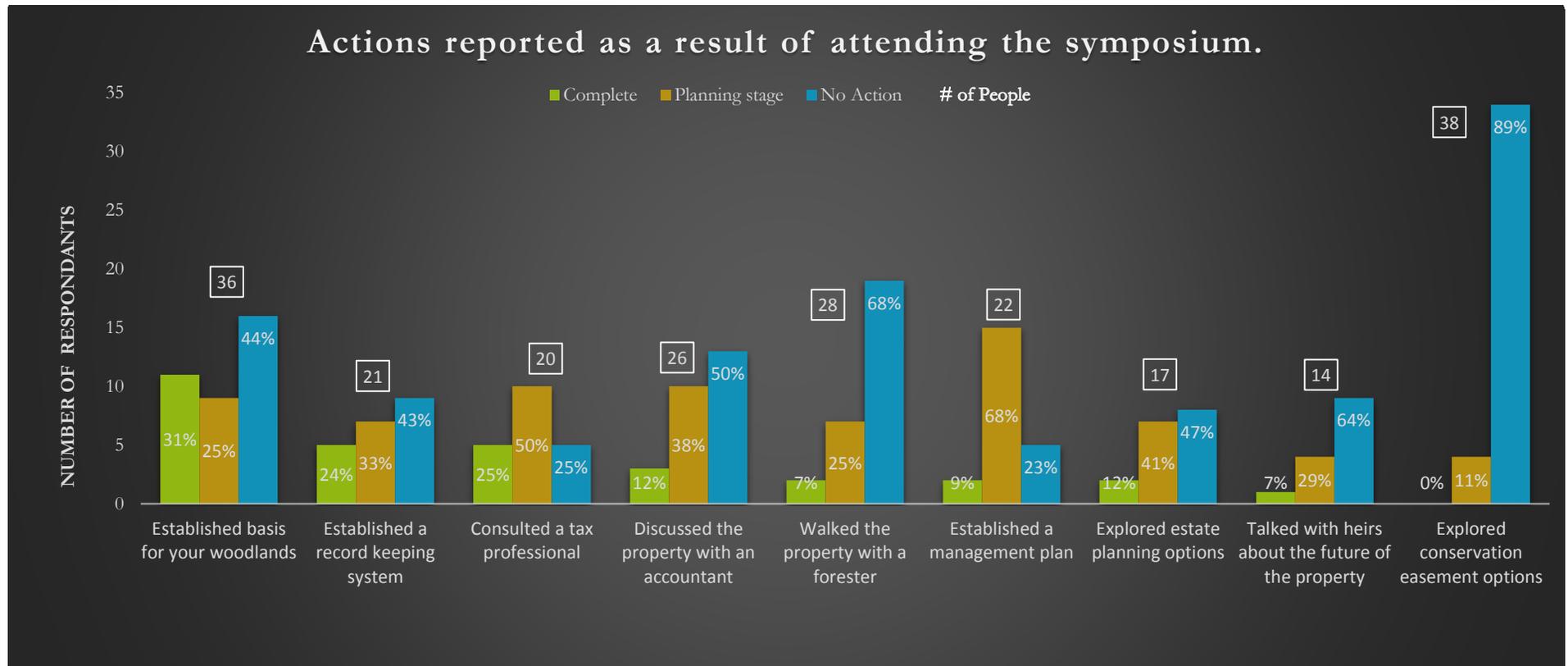


Figure 7: Actions reported as a result of attending the symposium. The white boxed number indicates the total number of respondents that had not explored each option prior to the symposium. The bars for each category represent the percent of that total that indicated that stage of activity. For example of the 36 people who had not established basis, as a result of the symposium 44% still hadn't, 25% were planning to establish basis, and 31% had established basis.

What barriers did landowners face when implementing actions following the symposium?

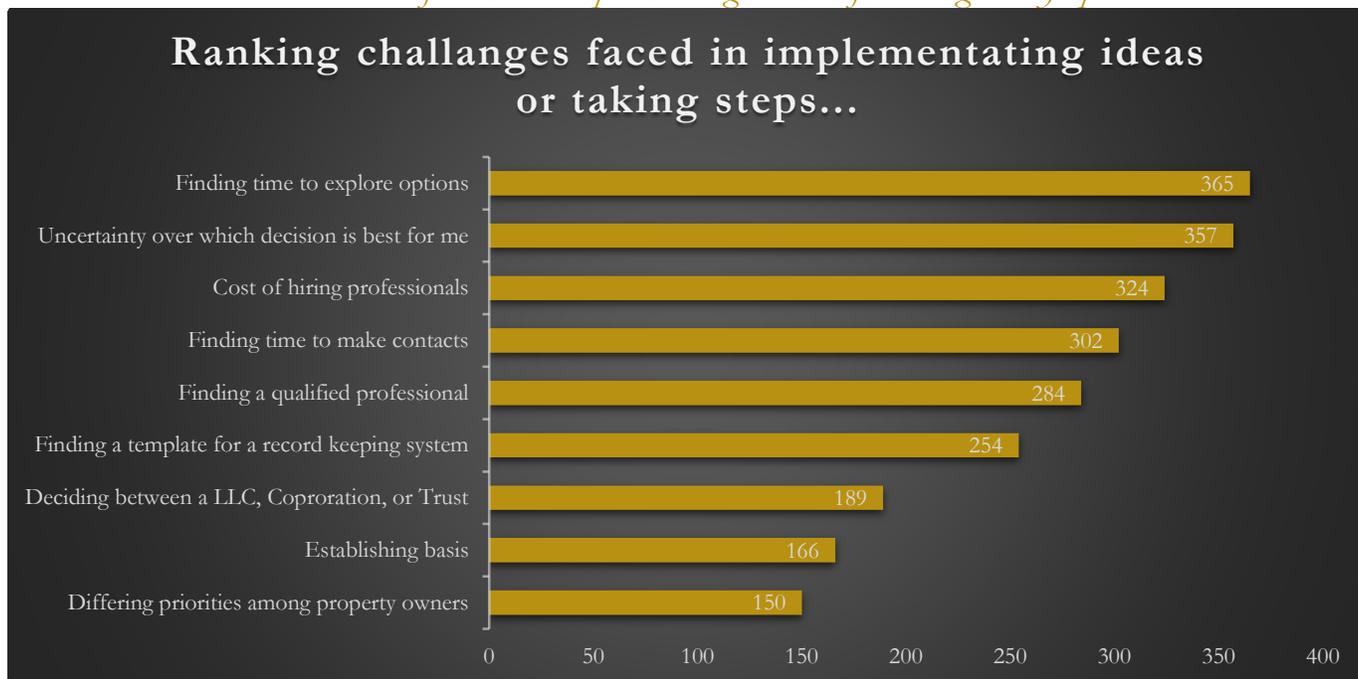


Figure 8: Challenges to implementation. Landowners were asked to rank challenges faced while attempting to implement activities, or take steps toward implementation.

LANDOWNER EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

What outcomes can be expected from a program of this nature?

80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they left the symposium with a **greater commitment to stay more aware of tax information** and also **new ideas** to help them in planning.

Table 5: Outcomes. Participants were asked to rank their how they felt desired outcomes of the symposium were met on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Outcome of the symposium...	Agree-Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree-Strongly Disagree
A greater commitment to stay more aware of tax information. (n=99)	84%	15%	1%
New ideas to improve planning for my/our tax situation. (n=98)	79%	16%	1%
New professional contacts. (n=102)	53%	35%	9%
New contacts with landowners. (n=104)	46%	42%	9%
A feeling of inspiration. (n=103)	39%	48%	8%
A feeling of reduced anxiety. (n=103)	33%	52%	3%
A feeling of empowerment. (n=103)	31%	51%	9%

What additional information and topics are landowners most interested in?

Table 6: Topics of interest to Landowners. Landowners were asked to rate how interested they were in select topics on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Topic	Agree-Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree-Strongly Disagree
Income taxes (n=95)	86%	14%	0%
Estate planning (n=92)	80%	14%	2%
Estate taxes (n=91)	78%	18%	2%
Forest product harvest taxes (n=101)	70%	23%	6%
Business planning (n=99)	68%	26%	2%
Inter-generational succession planning (n=92)	67%	27%	1%
Financial assistance/incentive programs (n=100)	67%	24%	7%
Form of business (LLC, Corporation, Trusts) (n=95)	57%	32%	9%
Contracts with loggers, etc. (n=93)	43%	44%	9%
Conservation easements (n=95)*	40%	40%	18%

*Only topic of the list not mentioned in the write-in options for additional topics.

Conservation Topics

- Financial assistance programs (e.g., what is available, where to apply, considerations for each)
- Reforestation programs & logistics (e.g., how to do site prep, where to get trees and equipment)
- Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program (e.g., general actions to improve wildlife habitat)
- Contracts with loggers (e.g., how to know if the contract is fair, prices are fair)
- Landowner cooperative (e.g., interest in seeing where and how to share equipment)
- Permitting for activities (i.e. township, county, state, federal, archeology)
- DIY vs Hiring (e.g., what options are available, what to consider)

Planning Topics

- In addition to those already listed in the table, people specifically asked about how to deal with more descendants getting added with each generation and how to account for that in your planning.

Business & Tax Topics

- Appraisals & Valuation
- Forest Tax Deferral
- Tax Form Filing (Schedule F, C, Form T Forest Activities, Harvest Tax, Fire taxes...)
- Finding tax consultants & accountants – specific ask for names of consultants.
- Theft prevention & insurance or forest land/timber
- Buying & Selling land (i.e. how to go about the process, tax implications)
- Selling timber/marketing
- Impacts of regulation/changes/proposed changes

Participants found it very desirable to:

- 76% Be confident in how to account for the land practices on my taxes.
- 72% Have a clearly articulated a vision for my property in the future.
- 65% Have an accountant familiar with forest land issues.
- 65% Have an organized record keeping system.
- 62% Have a plan in place for heirs to work from if something should happened to me.
- 55% Locating planning information, resources, and tools for private landowners.
- 49% Seeing my land as a business.

Next 5 year actions: Participants indicated in the next 5 years they were quite a bit to a lot likely to take the following actions (n= total number of question respondents):

- 81% Attend additional workshops or conferences (n=58)
 - 62% Engage family or heirs in planning (n=55)
 - 50% Seek professional assistance for planning (n=58)
 - 45% Explore planning options (n=55)
 - 40% Share ideas with other owners (n=57)
 - 30% Join a landowner organization (n=61) – many responders selected “NA” for this action and a few commented that they already are a member. With the data we can’t discern the difference between those that aren’t likely because they already area member and those that don’t feel it is a relevant option for them.
- Over **80% of respondents** selected symposia or conferences, local workshops, and publication as the methods they agreed or strongly agreed are their preferred method to learn.

Table 7: Preferred Learning Opportunities. Landowners were asked to rate their preferred avenues for education on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Educational Opportunity	Agree-Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree-Strongly Disagree
Symposia or conferences (n=96)	88%	10%	1%
Local workshops (n=92)	85%	10%	4%
Publications (n=95)	84%	7%	6%
Websites (n=92)	56%	29%	14%
Pro Fairs (n=96)	38%	44%	15%
Online videos (n=90)	31%	47%	20%

*The remaining percentage to total 100% fell into the “not applicable” category.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Further explore profiles of landowners by gender, age, identity, engagement, etc. if there is interest in targeting workshops and educational opportunities to meet their specific needs of this audience?
2. Take into consideration the barriers participants identified in developing future programming. Many of the top barriers included references to lack of time to explore options and make contacts. Time is not something resource professionals can provide, but perhaps structured time can be dedicated at future education programming to specifically give landowners time and opportunity to interact one-on-one with professionals to get personalized questions answered at a separate time from Q & A at the end of a concurrent session.
3. Explore what opportunities are there for creating programming and support to help encourage landowner to follow through with their 5 year intentions?
 - 80% plan to attend a conference again in the next 5 years with over 50% intending to talk to heirs and explore planning options.
 - Symposia, conferences, local workshops, and publications are the preferred methods for learning according to the survey participants.
 - Oregon Small Woodland Owners Association is viewed by the most people in this audience, with the Northwest Woodland Magazine being the next most popular choice for advertising.
4. Decide what actions if any the tax symposium planning committee can take to further support those owners who are in the preplanning or planning contemplation stages to help ensure they overcome barriers to implementing the specific action.
5. Use the information (e.g., key words, phrases, and statements) from the identity questions, symposium outcomes, and the desirability of certain actions to target your marketing and set expectations for both presenters and participants about what the goals of future tax symposium or other workshops are.
6. Develop a system to track participants at coordinated events to allow for easier contact in the event of follow-up evaluation and/or to have a known audience in which you can target follow-up workshops towards.
7. Discuss what resources are in place amongst partners to coordinate existing/future outreach efforts on tax and business planning topics and facilitate processes to minimize redundancy and encourage sequencing of events for greater efficiency.
8. Inventory existing and explore additional options to keep landowners, resource professionals, and accountants up to date on new laws, rulings, and regulations that have tax implications for private landowners.
9. Explore options to create a network of tax professionals who are familiar with forest tax and other topics relevant to private lands, and pilot ways to get them in connected to private landowners.

NEXT STEPS

- Disseminate findings reports and review them.
- Specifically, what finding support or affirm observations and anecdotal information you have on landowners? Which findings were surprising and why?
- Do any of these educational needs provide greater opportunity to involve more of the partners or utilize more of the collective assets?
- Discuss the implications of this information and how it can be used to inform future programming?
- What additional evaluation questions come to mind, that could be noted for future work?