

Forest Stewardship Education Newsletter September 2025

Before You Buy Forestland, Part 1

Greetings from UC ANR

The Forest Stewardship Team is collaborating with the UC ANR Fire Network to host a 3-part webinar series this fall titled "Before You Buy Forestland". Our goals for this series are to provide prospective landowners with tools and resources that they can use *before they buy* forestland, in order to help them make an informed and thoughtful purchasing decision. Of course, these tools and resources can also be helpful to all forest landowners!

The series will consist of three sessions: Forest Stewardship Considerations (October 2nd) ; Fire on the Landscape (November 13th); and Financial Practicalities of Owning Forestland (December 11th). We will be addressing issues that we only lightly touch on during our other education programs. Registration for the webinar series is now open at: <https://surveys.ucanr.edu/survey.cfm?surveynumber=46897>.

A big 'Thank You' to all of the Forest Stewardship participants who helped us identify and prioritize the content of these sessions, and to those landowners who will be panelists during the webinars. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

In addition to the webinars, we will be producing newsletters, blogs, and 2-page fact sheets to provide additional resources. This newsletter will be focusing on Forest Stewardship Considerations.

Cheers,
Kim Ingram, Forest Stewardship Education Coordinator



Forest stewardship is a family affair. Photo by Susie Kocher, UC ANR

62% of Forest Stewardship workshop participants site 'passing land on to their children' as very important or important

Motivations for purchasing forestland

When it comes to WHY someone purchases forestland, the reasons are many and diverse. Management needs on forest land can also change over time in response to events and you may need to take actions which run counter to your original ownership motivations. For example, if your trees die from drought or pests, do you have access to safely remove them? If wildfire severely impacts your forest, do you have the ability and means to replant, and are you prepared to live with a very different forest for many decades?

From surveys taken by our Forest Stewardship Workshop participants take, we categorize responses to questions around WHY someone owns forestland into two categories: aesthetic and utilitarian. Aesthetic reasons (which consistently rank higher than utilitarian) include responses such as: 'To enjoy beauty or scenery', 'To protect nature or biological diversity', 'To protect or improve wildlife habitat', and 'To protect water resources'. Utilitarian reasons include responses such as: 'For firewood', 'For forest products other than timber', 'For timber products', and 'For hunting'. Though these utilitarian reasons may rank lower, they are still an important motivation for many landowners, and prospective landowners may want to consider the feasibility of these activities when looking to purchase forestland.

California forest landowners aren't that different in their ownership motivations than landowners in other parts of the U.S. [The National](#)

Woodland Owners Survey, implemented by the Family Forest Research Center, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, queries forest landowners across the U.S. on various forestry topics, including ownership reasons/motivation. This resource is helpful in order to see yourself as part of a larger group. Managing forestland can be very challenging, but it is helpful to know that you are not alone, and that there is a large community of landowners, managers, and resource professionals available to assist you.

Articulating your motivations for owning forestland is an important first step towards deciding your next steps. The October 2nd Before You Buy webinar will host a panel of landowners who will talk about their reasons for owning forestland, what kinds of management activities they engage in, and practicalities to consider before moving to the woods.



Providing wildlife habitat. Photo by Forest Stewardship Workshop Participant

Ties to the Land:
Succession planning
for forest landowners;
Oregon State
University

Economic
Contribution of
California's Forestry
and Forest-Products
Sectors (Standiford,
et al, 2020)

The Influence of Multiple
Ownership Interests and
Decision-making Networks on
the Management of Family
Forest Lands (Snyder and
Kilgore, 2017)

Forest conditions

Living in a forest can be very rewarding, and no two forest parcels are exactly alike. The current condition of the forest is a result of physical and biological factors as well as past management. Before you make the investment in forestland, assessing the forest's current condition or health, is an important step.

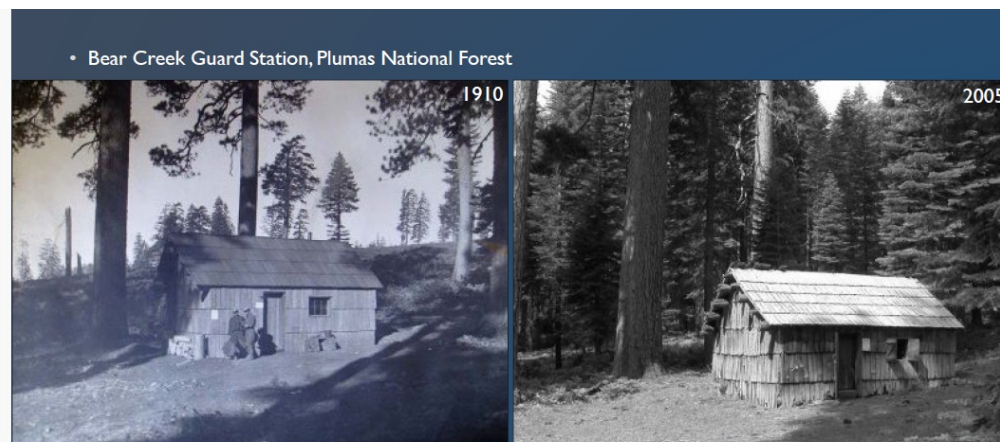
In the Forest Stewardship Program, we talk a lot about forest resistance and resilience. Resistance is a measure of persistence when exposed to a particular stress such as high intensity fire. Resistance focuses on management activities that minimize forest change to when that stress occurs. Resilience includes resistance mechanisms, but measures adaptability and focuses on an ecosystems essential structure and composition to a range of stresses. Additionally, understanding tree density (the number of trees growing in an area) and fuel load (how much standing and downed woody and herbaceous material is in an area) help us determine how the trees will grow, their overall health and resistance to pests and disease, and how fire will behave on the landscape. Land that is overly dense and carries a high fuel load is more susceptible to high severity fire and mortality due to pests and disease.

Forests in California are fire adapted, meaning they evolved to withstand frequent, low to moderate fire disturbances. Native Californians were highly skilled at using low intensity fire to promote new plant growth, to create a mosaic of habitats for wildlife, to destroy disease organisms, and to reduce fuel loads. Fire frequency does vary depending on the forest type, but when fire occurs, it removes woody debris, small seedlings and other vegetation allowing for a more open forest canopy, 'clumps and gaps' between trees, and lower tree density. This creates a more resilient forest.

Fire suppression has played a large part in the condition of today's forests resulting in dense forests with high fuel loads. Other activities such as mining, over-grazing and clear-cutting, as well as drought, pests and diseases, and climate change, also effect forest conditions.

As you walk through the forest, take note of tree density and fuel load, look for signs of pests and diseases, and impacts from timber harvesting, fire or mining. Many of these issues can be addressed to improve forest health, but it takes time and resources. The October 2nd Before You Buy webinar will include discussions around a new 'Before You Buy' checklist potential landowners can use as they walk the woods with their realtor.

Want to learn how to conduct your own forest inventory? Check out our [Forest Inventory](#) YouTube Series.



What is forest resilience and how do we measure it? (North, et al, 2022)

Collapse and restoration of mature forest habitat in California (Jones, et al, 2025)

Forest Stewardship Series: For the management and enjoyment of forestland



Avenza base map. Photo by Forest Stewardship Workshop Participant

Living in the woods

57% of Forest Stewardship Workshop participants have a residence on or within a mile of their forested land. 93% tell us they 'strongly agree or agree' that they want their wooded land to stay wooded. 87% 'strongly agree or agree' that they have a strong emotional attachment to their wooded land. Living in the woods is a big deal! However, only 62% of participants 'strongly agree or agree' that they know their wooded land very well, and only 51% have received information or advice about forest management.

Start by identifying what you have and then consider what you want and need. Mapping your forest is an excellent place to start. Whether through a paper map, or a digital map such as Avenza, identify key components such as structures, roads and culverts, water courses, areas of the forest impacted by disturbance, archaeological sites, and your favorite trees. [Learn more about Avenza by watching our 4-part tutorial.](#)

Once you have a better idea of what you have, consider what you want. How do you want to live in your forest? Are you wanting to put in roads or trails for better access? Do you need to reforest areas impacted by fire? Is there a viewshed that you would like to improve? Are you interested in utilizing grazing for income or vegetation management? Will you continue working from home or start a new business on your land? These considerations are your **goals**, and your **objectives** (needs) will drive how you reach your goals.

You will need planning tools, resource tools and actual physical tools to implement your objectives. Be realistic about your physical, mental, and financial abilities and resources. Are you wanting to do the work yourself? How much time and money can you commit to forest management before it impacts the other areas of your life?

Consider developing a forest management plan which will list your goals and objectives and describe how you will go about getting to your desired

forest conditions. It can be a formal or informal document; it will help you stay on track, and be a valuable resource for future generations. Formal management plans can assist you in receiving cost-share funding to help pay for management activities. A plan should also include property ownership information and history; current forest conditions; and maps. Plan information and examples can be found [here](#). Click on [Intro to Forest Management](#) and [Forest Planning Guides](#) for more information.

Living safely and well in the forest means taking into consideration issues around the built environment (home, outbuildings, roads, etc.) as well as the forest. Learn from our forest landowner panel on their lessons learned from living in the woods during the Oct. 2nd webinar. Webinars 2 and 3 will address in more detail the built environment and the business and financial aspects to owning forestland. Enjoy your woods!



Forest property outbuildings. Photo by Forest Stewardship Workshop Participant

Additional Forest Stewardship Resources

- ["Succession Planning", Forestland Steward, Spring 2011](#)
- ["Benefits of Conservation Planning", NRCS \(2013\)](#)
- ["Small-Parcel Landowner's Guide to](#)



Pile burning. Photo by Forest Stewardship Participant

[Woodland Management", McCreary and Nader, \(2007\)](#)

- [Forest Roads Management webinar \(2025\)](#)
- [Forest Management Plans for Private Forest Landowners factsheet \(2023\)](#)
- [Hand Tools for Vegetation Management factsheet \(2024\)](#)

"Before you buy is the exact right time to evaluate the property, identify priority home hardening actions, and cost those out so that you can negotiate that cost with the seller." - Marty Walters

A quick interview with a Plumas County Landowner

Marty Walters attended the UCCE Post-Fire Resilience Workshop in April 2025. As a homeowner in the small town of Quincy, a community impacted by the 2020 North Complex fire and 2021 Dixie fire, she works hard to stay informed about post-fire forestry management and recovery. Marty works as a consultant to aid prospective buyers in understanding environmental risks of properties and also works with the Plumas Fire Safe Council.

Q: If you were going to buy land or a new home today, are there things you'd do differently than the first time?

A: When I bought my house in 2006, I was so naive! I was focused on the beauty; the big maple tree, valley views, and open space. I still love those things, but now I recognize the risks; living in a flood zone, being exposed to wildfire, and needing constant vegetation management. A changing climate means I relate to my property very differently today than when I first bought it.

Q: How has your perspective changed since 2006, when you first purchased your property?

A: Maintaining vegetation for fire safety is ongoing, and what once felt charming, like my wooden fence, now feels like a fire risk. With college expenses for my kids, I can't yet afford major upgrades like siding or windows. But that's okay, life isn't perfect! I have worked on integrating climate resilience alongside other priorities. I always recommend checking to see if Firewise is in your community. Connecting with neighbors, and planning together, as I believe disaster response and preparedness are strongest when supported by community.

Q: What do you think are hazards, considerations, or due diligence that the average person doesn't think about prior to buying land or a home in the forest?

A: When you are looking for a house, keep in mind that rectangular footprints and simple roof configurations are going to be easier to defend than a house with a bunch of wings and additions and complicated rooflines.

With land purchases, topography and fuel are most important to consider. Sometimes we over-focus on one hazard when we're buying a house, but it's a really good idea to obtain a climate property resilience assessment that tells you about all the key natural hazards that might affect the property. I suggest people go to the Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptation website [here](#)

We don't usually see brand new hazards pop up out of nowhere, but we do expect existing hazards to get more intense as weather patterns change. The good news is that there are many retrofit options to reduce risks from fires, floods, earthquakes, and wind. ***Before you buy is the exact right time to evaluate the property, identify priority home hardening actions, and cost those out so that you can negotiate that cost with the seller.*** We are starting to see more homeowners pay for climate inspections, which are different than a normal home inspection, but contact your local Fire Safe Council or a resilience professional (like me!) to do this analysis. You can strategize about costs and timing to make the biggest impact within your budget. Find an insurance agent to give you feedback about insurance costs before you make an offer, or include a contingency in your offer so that you can back out if insurance is not available or affordable.

Q: What are some questions you'd suggest someone ask before they purchase a home in a wildfire prone area?

A: What is the current owner paying for home insurance, and is that insurance being purchased from the FAIR plan or from a commercial insurer? Are there any purchase price incentives that reflect an insurance premium offset? Has the home been inspected for compliance with defensible space requirements and has a disclosure been prepared showing non-compliant areas have been addressed?

This interview was conducted by Katie Reidy, the Post-Fire Forest Stewardship Coordinator. Marty Walters can be reached via her consulting website: www.recoveryrisk.com or through the [Plumas Fire Safe Council](#) for additional questions or information.

Other Stewardship program items of note...

- **Have you had your initial site visit yet? Don't delay!**The Forest Stewardship Education Program currently has funding to continue the program through June 30, 2027. This means you still have time for your initial site visit with an RPF, Burn Boss or Certified Range Manager. The new deadline for all site visits is May 1, 2027. No matter which workshop you participated in (even back in 2020!), if you completed the workshop, you are eligible. You DO NOT need to complete your forest management plan before your site visit, just having your management goals thought out is good enough! Need to make up a session in order to qualify for your free site visit, we can arrange that. Contact Kim Ingram at kcingram@ucanr.edu for more details.
- Keep up to date with new forestry information by following us on our [Forest Research & Outreach blog](#), [FaceBook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Check out the new stories on our [Forest Stewardship Story Map](#)
Read what your fellow forest landowners and workshop participants

are up to. Connect with your local natural resource professionals. Interested in having your story added to our map? Please contact our Forest Stewardship Communications Specialist Grace Dean at gndean@ucanr.edu



*Forest Stewardship Yuba-Nevada Co-hort participants and their CA Tree Sticks
Photo by Ricky Satomi, UC ANR*

For more information on the workshops, and to share with a friend, please visit:

Stewardship:
<https://ucanr.edu/site/forest-research-and-outreach/forest-stewardship-workshops>

Post-fire:
<https://ucanr.edu/site/forest-research-and-outreach/post-fire-forest-resilience>



*Speakers at the Caldor Fire Post-fire Forest Resilience Workshop field day.
Photo by Kim Ingram, UC ANR*

Upcoming Forest Stewardship Workshops and Field Days:

- [Before You Buy Forestland Webinar Series](#), Thursdays online, October 2nd, November 13th and December 11th
- [Forest Stewardship Contra Costa Co-hort](#), Tuesdays online and in-person, October 7th - December 16th
- [Managing Forest Roads Field Day](#), November 1st, El Dorado County



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