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## Peer Influence of Non-Industrial Private Forest Owners in the Western Upper Peninsula of Michigan

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### Author(s)

Jillian R. Schubert, Audrey L. Mayer

### ABSTRACT

Understanding how non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners gain and share information regarding the management of their property is very important to policy makers, yet our knowledge regarding how and to what degree this information flows over privately owned landscapes is limited. The work described here seeks to address this shortfall. Widely administered surveys with close-ended questions may not adequately capture this information flow within NIPF owner communities. This study used open-ended questions in interviews of clusters of NIPF owners to determine whether and to what extent owners influence each other directly (through conversations or referrals to sources of advice) or indirectly (through observation of management). We obtained data from thirty-four telephone interviews with owners of NIPF properties in the Western Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and analyzed the data using open coding. Roughly half of the forest owners we interviewed were influenced either directly or indirectly by other members of their NIPF communities. Reasons for owning forests (such as privacy, hunting and nature recreation, and economics) also influenced owners' management behaviors and goals. This peer-to-peer flow of information (whether direct or indirect) has significant implications for how to distribute management and programmatic information throughout NIPF owner communities, and how amenable these communities may be to cooperative or cross-boundary programs to achieve ecosystem and landscapescale goals.

### KEYWORDS

Communication; Information; Management; Landowners; Opinion Leader; Policy

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