

# Landowner Outreach in the MassConn Region: Strategies and Lessons Learned



# Why Engage Landowners?

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We're forming RCP's and working to engage landowners with big goals in mind:

*Increasing the pace - and scale - of conservation*

And ultimately –

*Improving forest & ecological health of our  
New England landscape*

# The Context

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- Most of New England's forests owned by over 200K private landowners
- For decades, natural resource professionals have spent significant resources trying to reach landowners, YET...
- There is a Disconnect:  
Landowners unaware of resources available to help them make key decisions

# What does this mean?

- Conventional strategies largely ineffective
- We **MUST** do better!
- New research shedding light on landowner awareness, attitudes, social networking



# Heart of New England

- In support of the Wildlands & Woodlands vision and goal:

Conserve 30 million acres by 2060 – or 70% of New England to remain forested

- New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) initiative to reach forest landowners, their local land trusts and private foresters

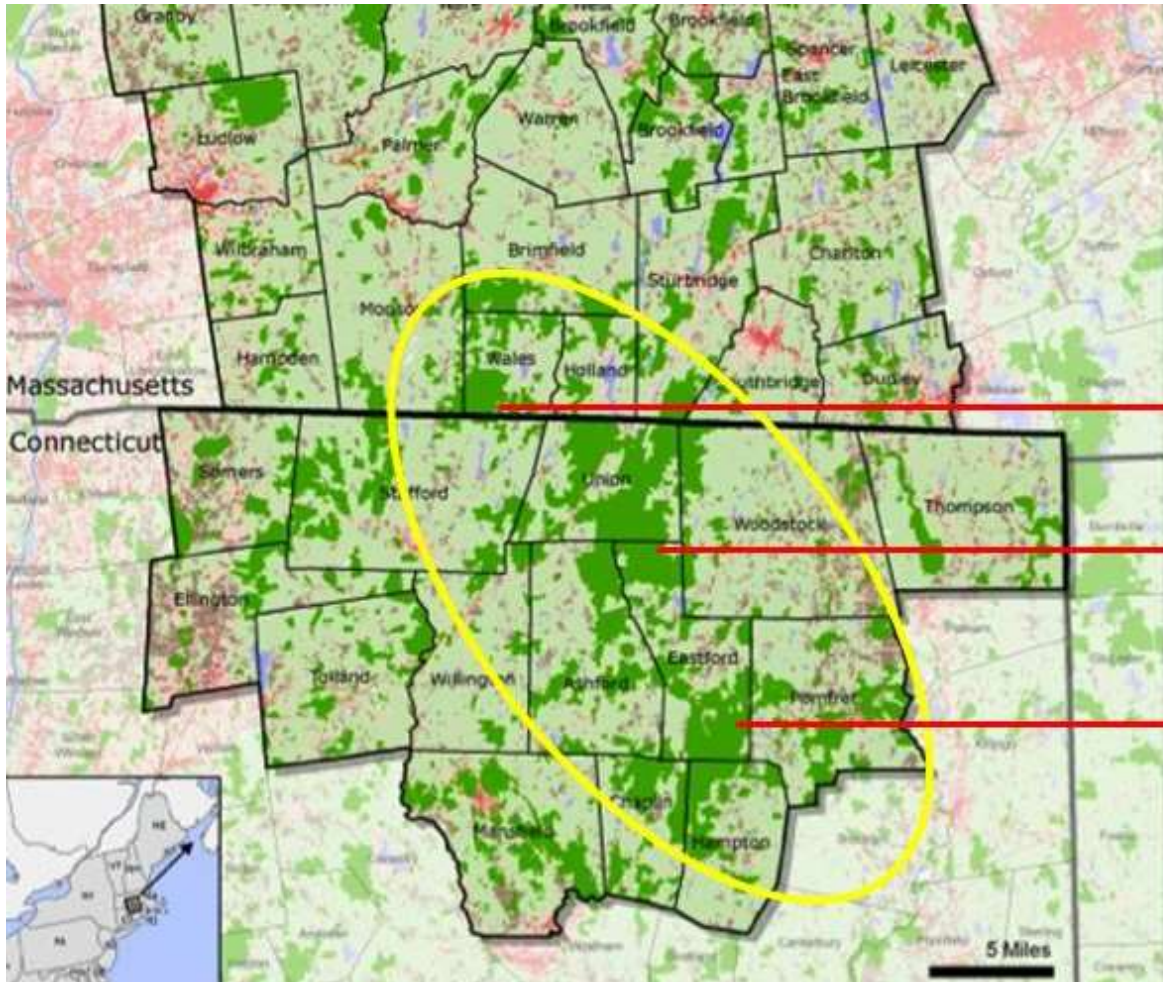
How do we get from here to there?



# Introduction to NEFF strategy



# Area of Focus: 'MassConn'



NEFF focusing  
on 10 towns within  
38-town region

Norcross Wildlife  
Sanctuary

Yale Myers Forest

Goodwin Forest

# Working with national partner

## American Forest Foundation

*On to something:*

- *Oak Hickory Region of Southwest WI*
- *Longleaf Pine Area in Southeast MS*



American Forest Foundation

### Piloting Approaches

- Social Marketing
- Audience Segmentation
  - Micro Targeting



# NEFF & AFF in New England

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- Audience = 3,000 woodland owners in the MASS-CONN 10-town area
- Research – focus groups/mail survey
- Determine desired action = our offers
- Strategy = Communication via multi-touch direct mail
- Implement and Evaluate

# How is this strategy different?

- Establishes baseline assessments of landowner attitudes & awareness of resources
- Incorporates use of sophisticated marketing data and message testing to identify prime prospects
- Establish comprehensive approach – bringing together stakeholders in conservation and forestry

*Develop tools that can be refined and tailored to other areas in New England*

# Strategies & Lessons Learned

1. Identify goals & audience
2. Establish baselines
3. Test messages & measure **results**



# 1. Identify goals & audience



# Who are your landowners?





# Identifying Goals & Audience

- ❑ What characteristics do they have? Who is your ideal landowner?
- ❑ Develop a profile for the types of landowners you want to reach
- ❑ Develop a strategy to reach them



## Segmentation Approach:

Breaks people into homogeneous groups and tailors programs and messages to each group

I have not found a trusted forester

We will participate if given a financial incentive

I don't have time to learn how to plant native tree species.....

None of my neighbors are growing it . . .

Approach: Provide list of foresters with testimonials

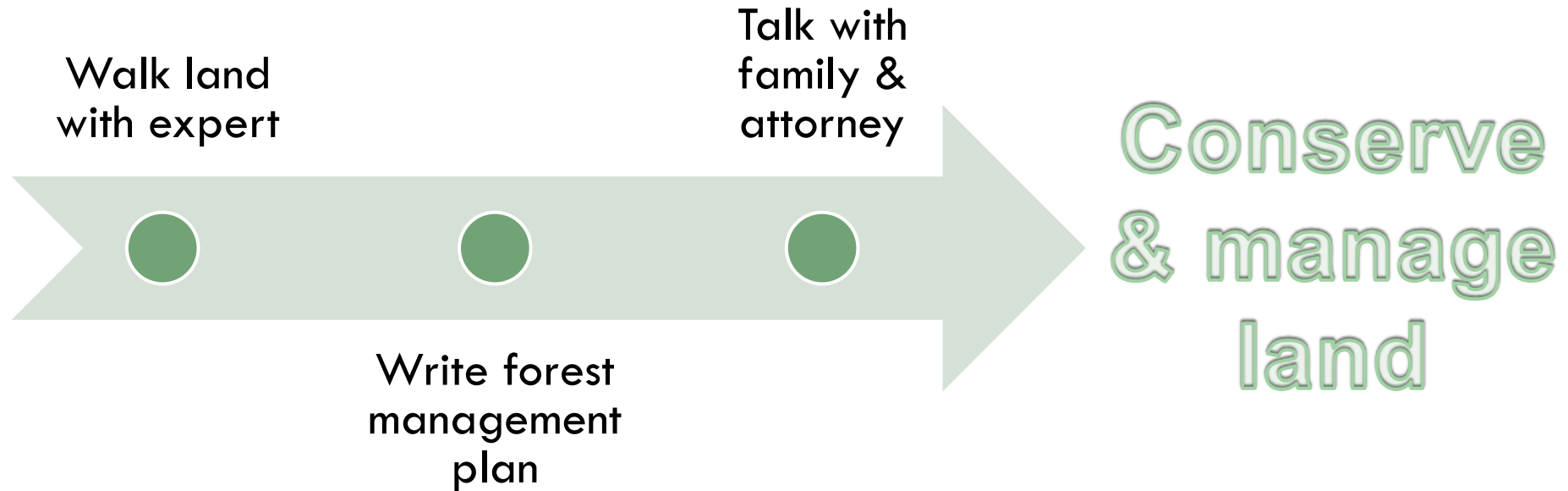
Approach: Provide info on various grants

Approach: Provide ready to do steps, templates, concrete examples

Approach: Have stories from other landowners that have grown it

# Engagement Continuum

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## 2. Establish Baselines



# Importance of Baselines

- What gets measured gets done
- How will we know if anything has changed if we don't know where we started?
- Inherent challenge is time, expense and staff capacity





# Summary of Baseline Tools

## □ **Measuring Landowner Attitudes**

### ■ *Conservation Awareness Index*

- Gauge awareness of resources and preparedness to make decisions (Mailings/data collected late 2013; 36.8% response rate)

### ■ *Barriers & Benefits survey*

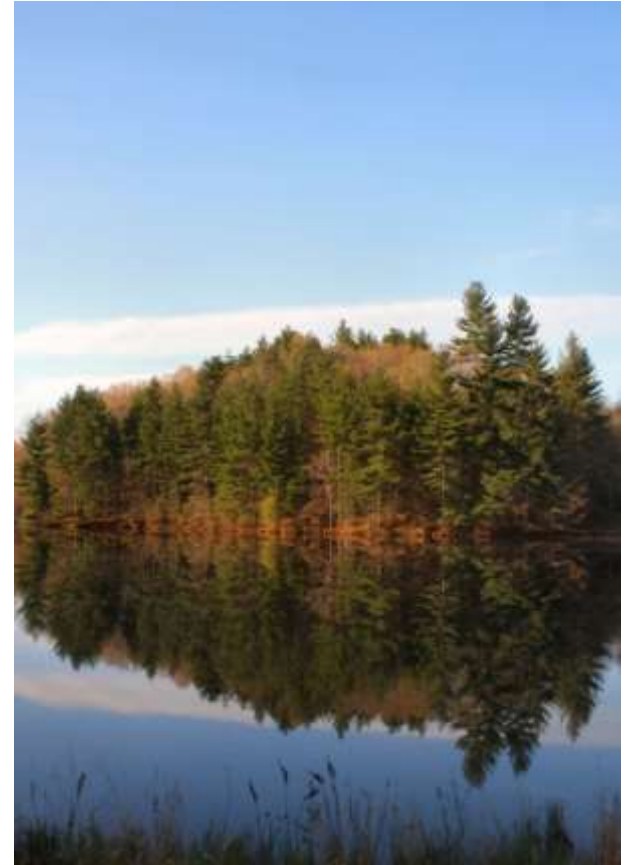
- Attitudes towards land ownership & barriers to action in harvesting, using a forester and conserving land (Focus groups January 2014 - Mailed survey March 2014)

## □ **Strategic Land/Conservation Planning**

- Mapping resources – existing easements, open space; priorities for conservation

# Conservation Awareness Index

- ❑ Chose only private landowners with 10+ acres
- ❑ Minimum of 80 landowners per town for statistical power
- ❑ Four sections, 16 points each for a total of 64 points
- ❑ Results: Awareness generally low: Average score 22.8 out of 64 points



# Who could they identify?



- ❑ Only 4.7% of respondents could identify a service forester correctly
- ❑ 30.6% could name a local land trust
- ❑ Only 5.4% could identify an estate planning professional

# CAI and Forestry

- Interestingly, 46.4% of respondents noted that they'd sold timber from their land
- HOWEVER.... only 19.9% of respondents could correctly identify a local private forester.



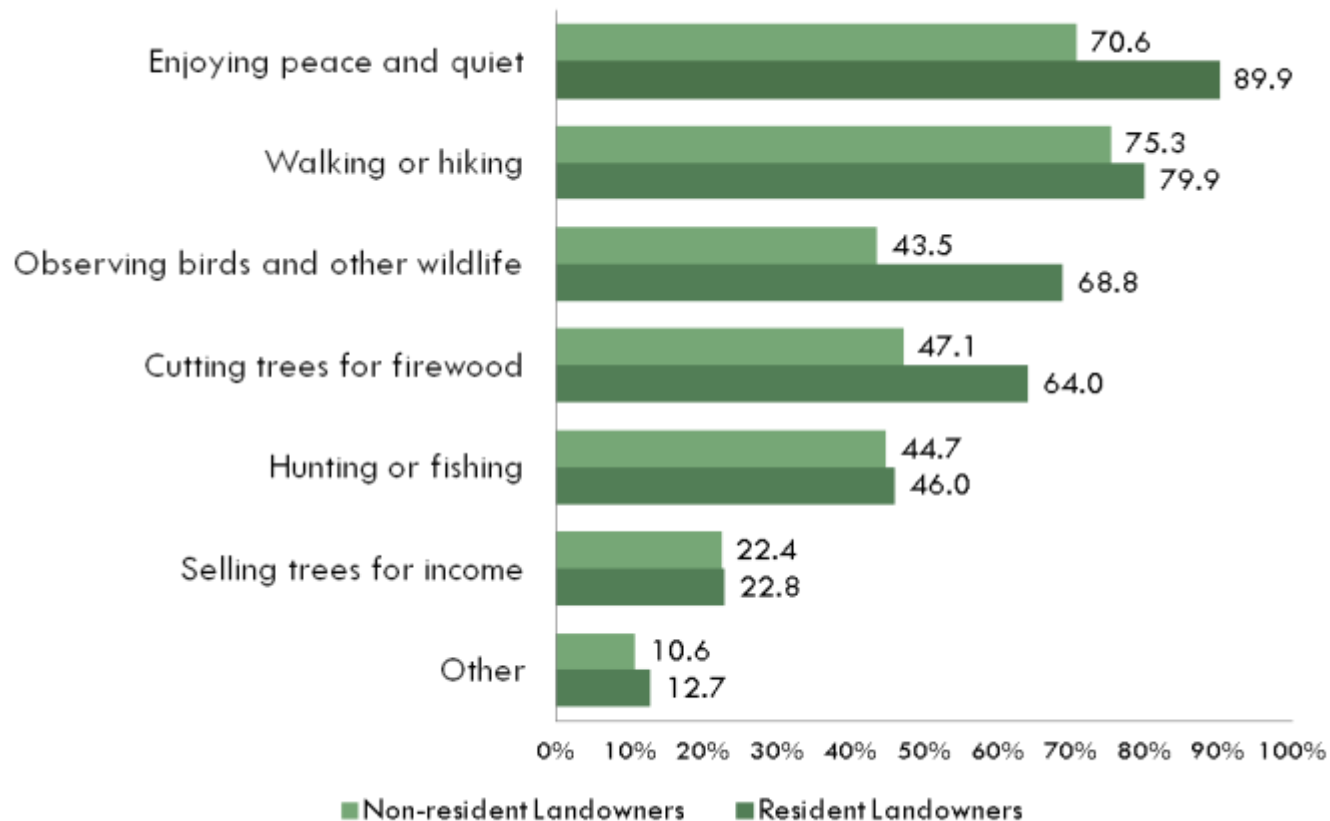
# Barriers and Benefits

- Removes guesswork, assumptions
- Identifies issues and attitudes of actual landowners

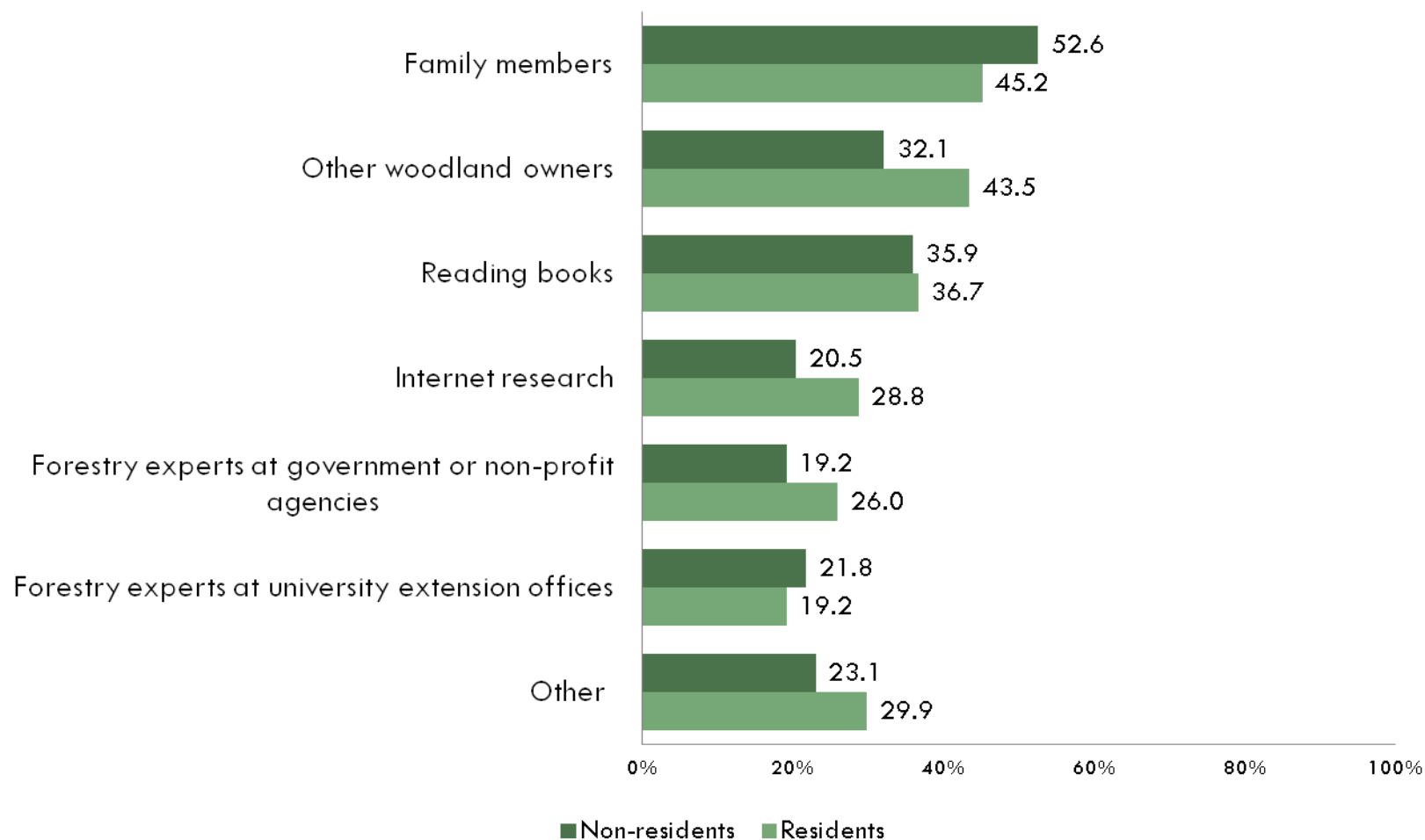




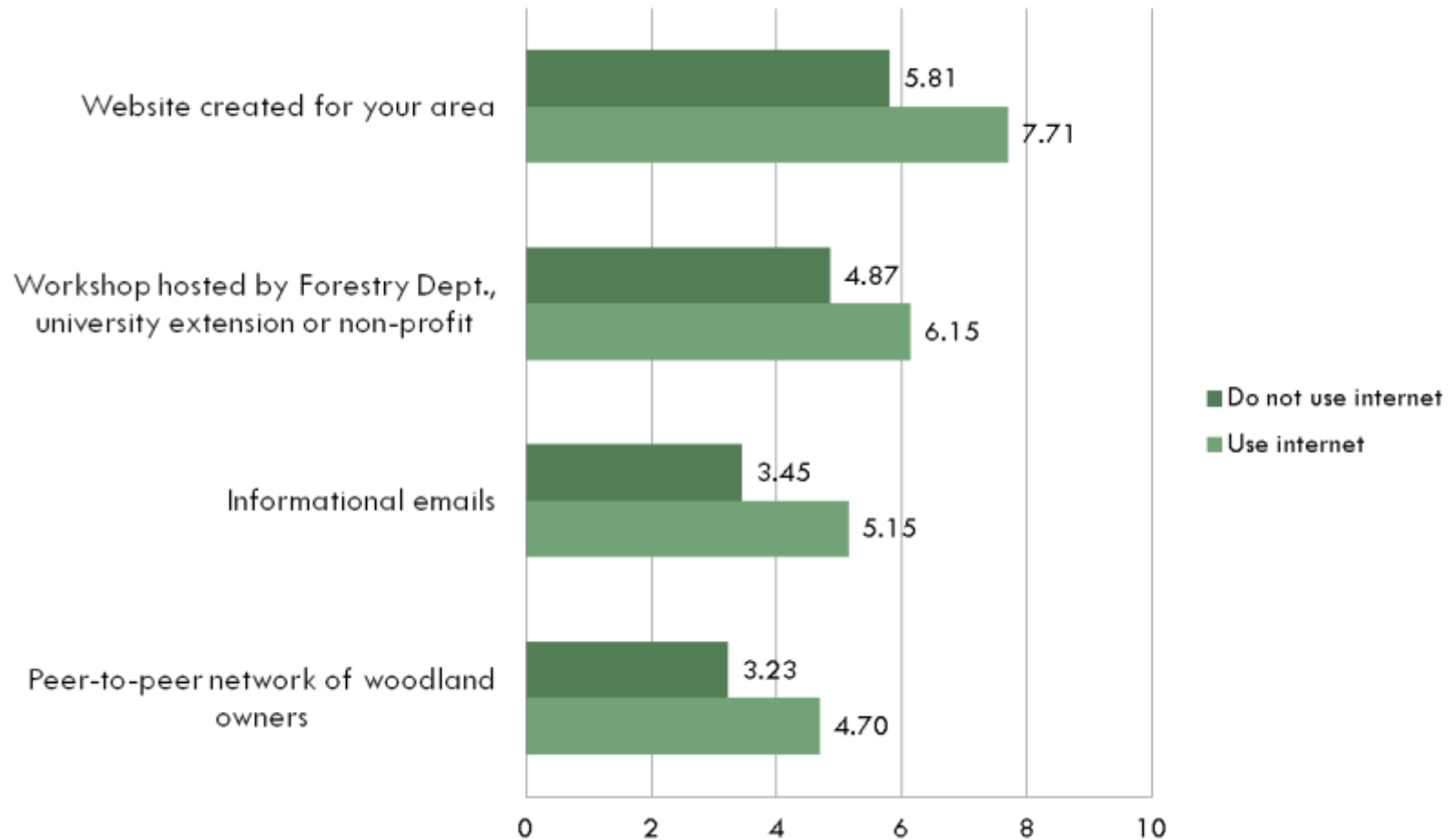
# How Landowners Use Their Land



# Sources of Information



# Preferred Communications



### 3. Message testing & audience segmentation

- Use baseline surveys to gauge gaps and concerns
- Test messages head-to-head
- Track & measure results
- Follow behavior – let landowners tell YOU who they are & what they want to know



# First Campaign

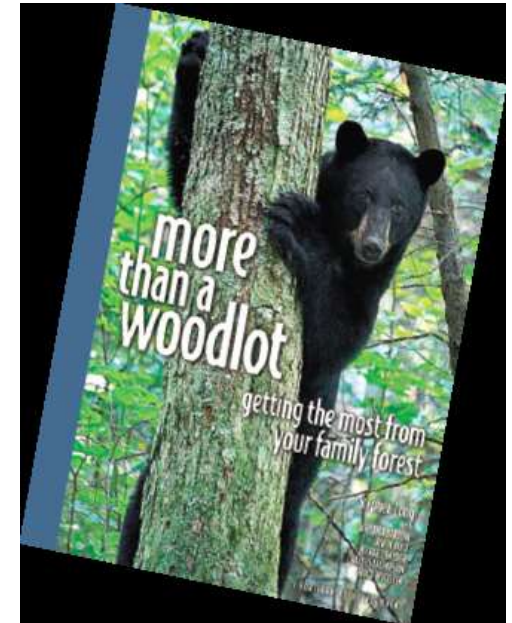
- ❑ Direct mail conducted Aug – Sept 2014
- ❑ Intro letter and 3 waves of post cards offering “More than a Woodlot” book on forest management
- ❑ Audience of about 930 landowners broken into two message groups, receiving same post card 3 times





# Initial results

- ❑ 107 landowners from focus area
- ❑ ~12% response rate
- ❑ 59 email addresses provided
- ❑ Respondents own 6073 acres, at average size of 57 acres



# Message Testing

## Wildlife Message

“...private woodlands have incredible value in supporting the wildlife you love...”

□ 13% response rate



## Conservation/Legacy Message

“...private woodlands have incredible value...they preserve our region’s “New England charm”... serve as a reminder of your family heritage...”

□ 10% response rate

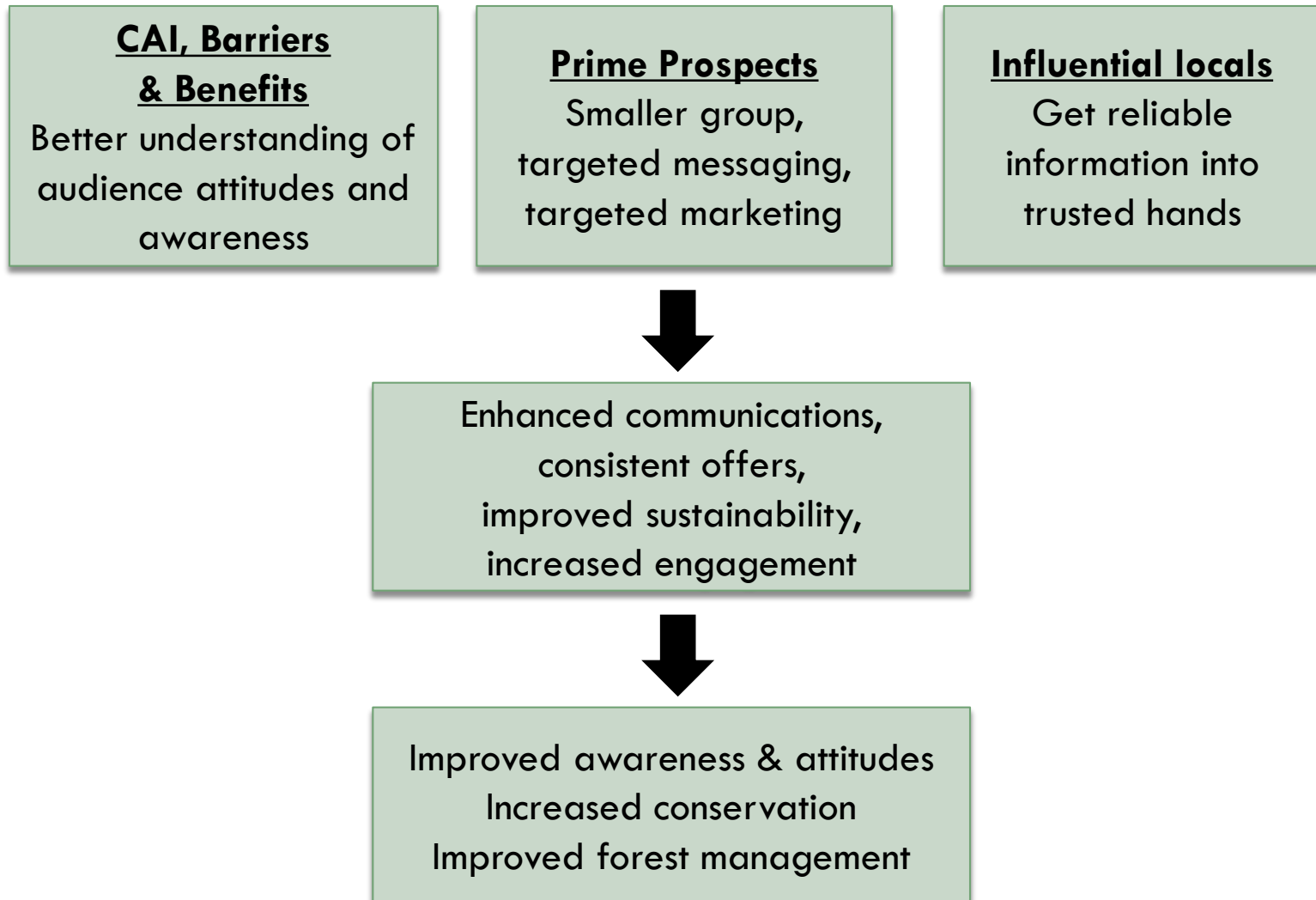


# Sustaining the Strategy

- Next steps...
- How to follow up with responders
  - E-newsletter updates
  - Event invitations
  - Referrals as needed
- Spring campaign
  - New offers
  - Additional message tests



# Pulling it all together



# Summary

1. Identify goals & audience
2. Establish baselines
3. Design appropriate strategy/messages to meet goals
4. Measure results; consider segmenting





# Lessons so far

1. Take inventory of your capacity
2. Choose geography wisely (regional identity/ branding)
3. Learn about barriers
4. Conduct multiple touches



# Questions?





New England  
Forestry Foundation

- Our mission: Conserve New England's working forests through conservation and ecologically sound management of privately owned forestlands
- Own & manage 140 community forests totaling more than 26,000 acres, and hold 150 conservation easements, demonstrating sustainable forestry for wood, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and education. Woodlands certified by American Tree Farm System® and Forest Stewardship Council™.

# Barriers & Benefits

## □ Conserving their land

- Most participants were familiar with Ch 61 /PA 490 and tax breaks, but less so with easements
- Concerns about lowering property value, limiting use, privacy and flexibility for heirs, money to support ongoing oversight
- Concern and confusion about how easements worked, how they differed from current use
- Benefits included lower taxes, stopping development, and control over future use