Merck Forest & Farmland Center Landscape Conservation and Neighboring Landowner Engagement

Prepared for Rob Terry

Prepared by Haley Holland, Anne Mullin, Kenan Van Vranken

Presented on December 12, 2018
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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the great variety of community partners, professionals, and stakeholders that took time out of their schedules to give us technical assistance, complete our survey, or guide us in the right direction. In particular, we would like to thank Bridget Butler (Cold Hollow to Canada), Donald Campbell (Vermont Land Trust), Brian Voigt (UVM GIS Professor), Rob Terry (Executive Director: Merck Forest and Farmland Center), Dan Cottle (NR 206 TA) and Zac Ispa-Landa (NR 206 Professor) for their unwavering guidance throughout this project. Without all these generous people, the project could not have been completed.
Abstract

Merck Forest and Farmland Center (MFFC) is a 3,400-acre parcel in Rupert, Vermont situated within one of the largest intact broadleaf forests in the world. Habitat fragmentation poses a major threat to the biodiversity and ecosystem quality of this forest. While MFFC practices highly sustainable land management, the value of the forest is highly dependent upon the management practices of the surrounding private landowners. To address the lack of communication among private landowners and MFFC regarding current and future land management, we implemented an outreach strategy which included a cover letter and short survey. This package was sent to landowners with greater than 45 acres of property as indicated by the grand list from the Rupert Town Hall, which included residents of Rupert and surrounding towns. The survey included questions regarding current and future land management, individual’s values and interest in attending a community meeting event. This survey had a 65% response rate, with 60% of respondents indicating interest in attending an event. This survey was an initial step towards creating a community of landowners with the goal of alleviating land management challenges for individuals and educating landowners on the importance of sustainable land management.
Introduction

Our group of three worked in conjunction with Merck Forest and Farmland Center (MFFC), primarily Executive Director Rob Terry. MFFC is a nonprofit educational organization with a mission to demonstrate the benefits of innovative, sustainable management of forest and farmland to visitors. Starting in the 1940s George Merck began acquiring the parcels in Rupert, VT that now make up the MFFC and ushered in a new era of sustainable forest management.

MFFC is a 3,400-acre parcel that sits at the Northern tip of one of the largest intact broadleaf forests in the world. The continuity of this forest is remarkable considering the increasing rate of urban sprawl. In the future, landowner change, habitat loss, development of roads, land clearing for logging and agriculture, and the introduction of invasive species all pose a threat to the cohesiveness of this incredible intact forest.

After hearing Rob Terry’s perspective on the “problem” it became clear that MFFC was interested in establishing better communication with their neighboring landowners to work together on collaborative projects such as habitat conservation, sustainable logging techniques, and carbon sequestration efforts. We wanted to help bring awareness to the surrounding landowners about MFFC’s interest in collaborative projects while also beginning to better understand their individual beliefs and needs.

Methods

In order to establish communication with landowners surrounding MFFC, we collected mailing addresses from the grand list located in the Rupert Town Hall. This list was 113 pages long with five properties per page. We photographed the list during our initial visit and subsequently transcribed it into an excel spreadsheet. With the help of Donald Campbell, the Southwest Director of the Vermont Land Trust, and Rob Terry, we identified a high-value forest plot that surrounded MFFC to target for outreach. After seeking out GIS parcel maps of the area, it was determined to be too difficult to match mailing addresses from the grand list with corresponding parcels in our previously identified high-value plot. As a group, we decided it would be best to reach out to any landowner in the area with greater than 45 acres of property.

With the help of Bridget Butler of the Cold Hollow to Canada organization, we drafted a cover letter for our initial outreach. Additionally, we formed a short survey to attach after discussions with Rob concerning information we hoped to extract from the community. Our survey was sent by mail to landowners with a prepaid return envelope, and the option to respond by phone or an online form. This outreach was financially supported by MFFC.

The measure of success for this outreach was determined based on the response rate and interest in attending an event. The main objective of this project was to establish communication between MFFC and surrounding landowners and determine if their values align with those of MFFC. The theory of change behind this is to ultimately create a community to share resources and experiences regarding land management and educate landowners on the importance of their land in the broader landscape. This project was the first step to building this network.
Results

Our sample consisted of 66 landowners that were broken down into three mailing groups: 37 mailed from Burlington, 12 sent in a package to Rob to be hand delivered, and 17 withheld to compare grand list information with MFFC’s internal database. Of the 37 mailed from Burlington, we received a 65% response rate, 35% higher than our target response rate. Another measure of success was interest in attending an event at MFFC, 60% of landowners responded “yes” to this question (Figure 1). This was one of the questions Rob was most interested in; conversations with Bridget Butler emphasized the importance of holding an event to build this community.

According to survey responses, 86.7% indicated that they have a land management plan, 6.7% indicated that they do not, and 6.7% indicated that they would prefer to not answer (Figure 2). Due to the small sample size and the qualitative nature of this survey we were unable to analyze the results statistically. Refer to Appendix I for a visual representation of survey responses. Refer to Appendix II for the results of the individual surveys.

Figure 1. Landowner response to the survey question regarding interest in an event at MFFC.
Discussion

Though the results of the administered survey only scratch the surface of the complex human variables involved in the surrounding land ownership, they can help MFFC begin to understand who is interested in collaborative work. The responses allow us to gauge the viability of starting a community built on conservation, pilot the use of the Rupert grand list to connect with landowners and begin to develop a directory of landowners interested in collaboration. An additional benefit was simultaneously gaining a broad understanding of each individual's personal experience.

The results of the survey were both interesting and unexpected. Surprisingly, the highest rated land use characteristic was timber. Though it is hard to speak for all landowners, this is an interesting perspective on what some of the neighbors’ value highly. The variety of land visitation patterns offer insight into the in-state and out-of-state dichotomy common in the Rupert area. Similarly, the variation in the frequency of land visits was something that stood out to us.

This survey is the first step towards developing a comprehensive network beyond the scope of this semester’s work. In the interest of time and funding, we reduced the sample size which may have narrowed landowner perspective that could have brought interesting results.

Moving forward, a greater scale community engagement program would be necessary to get truly in-depth results, including landowners with smaller sized properties. Additionally, a focus group or meeting is needed to better understand shared values and issues within the community; certain issues could not be conveyed through our brief survey. As updated GIS parcel shapefiles for towns of Vermont become available, targeting specific landowners based off location will become easier. We also hope to see collaboration between MFFC and
surrounding conservation groups like Smokey House Center to expand our network beyond Rupert.

We have been lucky to work with such an incredible community partner in MFFC and feel happy to have received such a strong response rate among the delivered surveys. We hope to see future NR 206 groups build off our progress and continue towards a more connected community of landowners surrounding MFFC.
References
Appendices
Appendix I.

Supplemental Figure 1. State of the mailing address of the respondent.

Supplemental Figure 2. The frequency the landowner visits their land parcel.
Supplemental Figure 3. Landowner response to the survey question regarding activities participated in at MFFC.

Supplemental Figure 4. Landowner response to the survey question regarding visitation to MFFC.
Appendix II.

Greetings!

We are a group of three seniors at The University of Vermont writing to you today in collaboration with Rob Terry, Executive Director of Merck Forest and Farmland Center. As seniors in the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, we have chosen a capstone project this year with the hopes of starting a discussion about one of the most undisturbed forest blocks in the state of Vermont, in which your land happens to sit. In fact, Rupert and the surrounding communities are within the boundaries of the world’s largest intact temperate broadleaf forest! A truly remarkable and special place.

As relatively undisturbed forest blocks are becoming increasingly rare, our group hopes to set an example of how inter-landowner communication can improve forest management. Our goal is to gauge our neighbor’s interests and values and begin a conversation that we hope will deepen in the seasons to come. We’re interested in your ideas and opinions about what you value in the surrounding forest, voluntary incentives that could be provided to private landowners to encourage stewardship, and issues you have faced as a landowner. We do not aim to persuade any alterations to individual property goals, but rather to open a conversation that may ultimately enhance the management of the greater forest landscape through collaboration around our shared values.

We are particularly interested in forest services like carbon sequestration, water & air purification, recreation, and timber management. Additionally, your land is high priority wildlife habitat. Animals such as chestnut-sided warbler, ruffed grouse and snowshoe hare may be able to find all their habitat needs within relatively smaller plots, but others such as black bear, fisher, otter, and bobcat require expansive unfragmented forest zones that stretch across property lines, another reason we are hoping to encourage landowners to think about land use within the context of a broader landscape.

If you have any interest in collaborating with Merck Forest and your surrounding neighbors to manage, protect, and maintain this special piece of Taconic broadleaf forest, we would love to hear from you! We have attached a short survey below that will help us get to know you better. If you would prefer, the survey is available online at: https://goo.gl/forms/WPW8E6b6oprz6gIV2 or you may call (603) 534-4279 and leave a voicemail with your responses.

Please contact us if you have questions. We would greatly appreciate if you could return your survey no later than November 30th.

Sincerely,

Anne, Haley, Kenan, and Rob

Sounds like a great project. Unfortunately this property was sold September 17, 2018. (House & 60 acres on Terrick Brook Road)

Good luck!
Ams Family Trust
Name: \[\text{[Name]}\]
Address: \[\text{[Address]}\]

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other \[\text{[Other]}\]

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   7. Timber
   6. Fuel
   5. Carbon Sequestration
   4. Water and Air Purification
   3. Wildlife Habitat
   2. Recreation
   1. Spirituality
   0. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. (Yes)
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   
   Yes but not at the moment, sorry, a bit of a busy time.

9) Any other comments?
   
   Thank you for doing this and good luck with everything!
Name: Michael George
Address: 64 Lakeshore Dr, Malta, NY 12020
        In Forest block: Watrous Rd, Rupert VT

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped/Cabin
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least
   important to 8-most important
   1. Timber
   2. Fuel
   3. Carbon Sequestration
   4. Water and Air Purification
   5. Wildlife Habitat (Biodiversity)
   6. Recreation
   7. Spirituality
   8. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. (Yes)
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. (Yes)
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   Time
   Neighbors
   Exotic species

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   We recently bought our land, which was once used as woods on 2 sides. A key consideration in buying the land was that it stretched almost unbroken 1.5 miles to Stringfellow's farm.

9) Any other comments?
   Very glad you are doing this let me know if I can help in any way.

   Mike
Merck Forest & Farmland Center Neighbor Survey

Thank you for your response! Feel free to skip any questions and as always, any other comments or stories are greatly appreciated!

Name and address *

David Ives, 1150 Nichols Hill Rd., Dorset, VT 05251

Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center

- Yes
- No

If yes, have you...

- Camped
- Hiked
- Attended events or workshops
- Worked
- Volunteered
- I have not visited
- Other:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1NBlu6HmyNZ2RlputMaYHAAGStxTAv/9fIPdM-hqfttuqJ/edit#response=ACYDBNjLQtpTMjE4vNvbcgjN-B-+JQ5RvqkNjw7YwO3k... 1/3
Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important

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</tbody>
</table>

How often do you visit your land?

- [ ] Daily
- [ ] Monthly
- [ ] 6-12 times a year
- [ ] 1-5 times a year
- [ ] Less than once per year
Do you have a forest management plan in place

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not answer

Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?

- Yes
- No

What are some challenges you've faced in managing your land?

Do you have any stories you would like to share about what your land means to you?

Any other comments?
1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   1. Dairy Farming
   2. Timber
   3. Fuel
   4. Carbon Sequestration
   5. Water and Air Purification
   6. Wildlife Habitat
   7. Recreation
   8. Spirituality
   9. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   - Regulations
   - Low milk price
   - Low timber price

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   7th generation farmer/landowner
   Farm has been in the family since before the Revolutionary War

9) Any other comments?
Wayne Lillie
12315 State Road 674 Lithia, FL 33547
Voicemail 11/14/2018

“Hi this is Wayne Lillie, you sent me a letter about the Merck Forest and Farmland Center, I guess you’re the University of Vermont, but I just want to let you know that I do not live in the state of Massachusetts anymore, I own the land up there: 99 acres in Pawlet/Rupert area, which I am going to sell, you know if someone’s interested and if you need me for any other information, if someone wants to buy the land or not, my address is 12315 State Road 674 and within the co-op it is lot 12 and that’s Lithia, Florida zip 33547 and if you want to call me and talk to me personally its 413-441-1175, thanks”
Name: Dave Wince
Address: 217 Holloway Dr, Shaftsbury VT 05262

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   1. Timber
   2. Fuel
   3. Carbon Sequestration
   4. Water and Air Purification
   5. Wildlife Habitat
   6. Recreation
   7. Spirituality
   8. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   
   - Beech bark disease
   - Challenging access due to steep grades

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   
   We've owned it for 35 years. My now adult children have very fond memories of growing up with hunting & camping trips to our Rupert camp.

9) Any other comments?
   
   I fully support the goal of conserving our land and other large blocks of timberland as long as it stays part of the "working landscape" and not a hands-off preserve.
Name: Armand Jean Patraude
Address: SS Bank St N Bennington, VT 05257

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other ____________

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   8. Timber
   7. Fuel
   6. Carbon Sequestration
   4. Water and Air Purification
   6. Wildlife Habitat
   5. Recreation
   1. Spirituality
   5. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
   Once a week
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you've faced in managing your land?

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   Our land is primarily used for hunting. We have a small camp and use it for recreational weekends, deer hunting and turkey hunting. We also dedicate 4 fields to haying for livestock for our son's small farm.

9) Any other comments?
Name: Bob 
Address: 152 Metnungs Park Dr. Naples, FL 34105

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other  

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   1. Timber
   2. Fuel
   3. Carbon Sequestration
   4. Water and Air Purification
   5. Wildlife Habitat
   6. Recreation
   7. Spirituality
   8. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   Thanks to the wonderful work of John LaRae, who has managed the land for us since we bought just about... No challenges.

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you? My husband and I went fishing thru Vermont and NH in the early 70s and we discovered Pawlet, Rupert, Rupert Road and the Waites and the Donbiers on that trip. We fell in love with the area and it spoke to us of peace and civility at a time of war and assassinations. We bought half of Bob Waites farm and his grandchildren now tap our maple trees! I am an environmentalist and gardener and lover of all of nature. This refuge in Vermont is my small contribution to Mother Earth’s survival. My grandchildren, ages 14-19, were introduced to it two years ago. The beat goes on. 😊 Good luck!
Name:  **Jack Peterson**  
Address:  **4212 W. McCourt Rd, Dans Repus, NY 12522**

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?  
   a. Yes  
   b. **No**

2) If yes, have you  
   a. Camped  
   b. Hiked  
   c. Attended events or workshops  
   d. Worked  
   e. Volunteered  
   f. Other ________

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important  
   7. Timber  
   6. Fuel  
   5. Carbon Sequestration  
   4. Water and Air Purification  
   3. Wildlife Habitat  
   2. Recreation  
   1. Spirituality  
   8. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?  
   a. Daily  
   b. Monthly  
   c. 6-12 times a year  
   d. 1-5 times a year  
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   [written answer: "Nothing significant"]

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?

9) Any other comments?
Name: SHEPARD
Address: 201 South Road, West Rupert, VT 05776

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes  
   b. No 

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped 
   b. Hiked 
   c. Attended events or workshops 
   d. Worked 
   e. Volunteered 
   f. Other  

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   6. Timber 
   7. Fuel 
   3. Carbon Sequestration 
   4. Water and Air Purification 
   8. Wildlife Habitat 
   5. Recreation 
   1. Spirituality 
   7. Bird habitat 

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily 
   b. Monthly 
   c. 6-12 times a year 
   d. 1-5 times a year 
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   None

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?

9) Any other comments?
Name: [Redacted]

Address: 21138 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98168

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes ☐
   b. No ☐

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped ☐
   b. Hiked ☐
   c. Attended events or workshops ☐
   d. Worked ☐
   e. Volunteered ☐
   f. Other ☐

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   1. Timber
   2. Fuel
   3. Carbon Sequestration
   4. Water and Air Purification
   5. Wildlife Habitat
   6. Recreation
   7. Spirituality
   8. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily ☐
   b. Monthly ☐
   c. 6-12 times a year ☐
   d. 1-5 times a year ☐
   e. Less than once per year ☐
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   Hunters

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   Sure - but, not in a short space here...
   I will say that I’ve only owned this land for a few years, and it feels as though it is part of me, even though it was once a farm,
   and in three orchards, two still produce apples, though failing into neglect. Now, I am remembering the old farm... it is
   lovely, with the old fruits, not so much new.

9) Any other comments?
   [Handwritten: Mark Forest]
Name: STEPHEN SPARKES
Address: 682 6TH AVE, ART 5 NY NY 10310

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   8. Timber
   7. Fuel
   6. Carbon Sequestration
   5. Water and Air Purification
   2. Wildlife Habitat
   1. Recreation
   4. Spirituality
   2. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?
   We have tried to use a conservation easement with the VLT but a prior landowner didn’t adequately discharge a mortgage 40 years ago which is preventing that from happening. Despite many efforts they have been unresponsive.

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?
   We live and work in Manhattan. I travel a lot for short business trips. Having a place in VT gives our family a place to regroup and recharge, and we have enjoyed many great extended family occasions in the woods at all times of the year.

9) Any other comments?
   We once thought of our time in VT as a luxury—now it is a necessity for all of us.

   Best wishes with your study.

   Steve.

Name: Harold Vickery
Address: 4035 Kent Hollow Rd West Rupert

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
   8. Timber
   6. Fuel
   5. Carbon Sequestration
   7. Water and Air Purification
   8. Wildlife Habitat
   1. Recreation
   3. Spirituality
   4. Bird habitat

4) How often do you visit your land?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. 6-12 times a year
   d. 1-5 times a year
   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other
   forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land? 
   Payment, Taxes, Time, Access

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land
   means to you? My children have grown up enjoying this great forest and one year witnessed red
   Tails Fledge!

9) Any other comments? Peace
Name: [Handwritten]
Address: 15 Forest Lane, Greenwich, CT 06830

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other

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   ___ Timber
   ___ Fuel
   ___ Carbon Sequestration
   ___ Water and Air Purification
   ___ Wildlife Habitat
   ___ Recreation
   ___ Spirituality
   ___ Bird habitat

   [Handwritten: Not ranked]

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   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you’ve faced in managing your land?

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?

   [Handwritten text]

9) Any other comments?

   [Handwritten text]
John Westney
Westney's Westview Farm LLC
28 Broadacres Rd
Queensbury NY 12804

John@Westney.net

I am typing this in response to the survey that you mailed to me. I don’t fill out forms in long-hand. Typing is quicker and more forgiving, and you will not have to decipher my handwriting.

Question #1

Yes, I have visited Merck Forest. My family has been in Rupert and Pawlet since circa 1964 so we remember the early days of Merck Forest. My most recent visit was last Spring when I drove 10 students and their teacher to Merck for an overnight in a cabin. From Saratoga Independent School. I took that opportunity to catch up with our “neighbors” in the Merck front office. I chatted with a two different women, and one man — I think it was Rob.

Question #2

I have “hiked”, or maybe “strolled”8. I have wanted to attend a border collie dog show where the dogs herd sheep, but have not yet succeeded in making that work with the calendar. I attended a workshop by the Skidmore professor who is trying to use mushrooms to make farm waste in to packaging material (instead of styrofoam). Part of the Ecovative Corporation that started in Green Island NY. I would love to volunteer at Merck, but I don’t even have the time to keep up with my own land.

Question #3

I suppose I could try to rank the land-management goals. But in my mind I don’t “rank” those goals. The goals don’t usually compete with one another.

1) The main thing that we do with the land is we leave it alone: trees and animals do quite well without me actively doing anything.
2) The next thing that we do is try to pay the taxes. We generate some revenue by making maple syrup. In a good year this covers 1/4 of the property tax bill. The rest of the taxes come out of our pocket. We work hard in our “day jobs” earning money to cover the taxes. Ironically, this limits the time that we can spend on stewardship and/or enjoyment of the land.
3) We pasture some beef in an effort to keep some of the land (about 20%) in grass. We feel like having some part of the land in grass. It has been grass since colonial times and having some grassland among the forest increases biodiversity.
4) We love the wildlife habitat. Ironically, hunters help us to maintain the wildlife habitat as follows: If our land were not “Posted” then anyone could hunt without permission. This is according to Vermont law. And “posted” signs must be updated every year. This is also according to Vermont Law. To solve this problem we have five families who maintain posted signs around the whole perimeter. In exchange we give them permission to hunt. We grant permission-to-hunt (with written permission cards) to about five different families. Each family must maintain at least one mile of posted signs. Without those hunters there would be no posted signs and the hunting would be uncontrolled.
5) Carbon sequestration is a great goal. But when I talk about Carbon Sequestration I look at the arithmetic. Trees absorb carbon, but when trees or leaves decay they release the
carbon. If they decay anaerobically then they can will create powerful green house gases such as methane. For several years we harvested firewood as a sustainable biofuel. This clearly reduce a carbon footprint. I ended this when we entered the current use program because it required paperwork and documentation that added to my workload.

6) I believe in harvesting timber as a way of thinning the forest and improving the timber stand. I would harvest more timber but I won’t do it unless I can personally pay attention to how it is done, and I don’t have time for that.

7) Water and air purification are good goals. And the forest slows runoff to provide a more steady flow of water downstream. This is a good thing. It does not compete in any material way with other land management “priorities”.

So I am sorry to blow-off your request to rank strategies in order of priority. I don’t find that these “strategies” usually compete with each other. Rather, in managing our land, I look for opportunities to improve on any of these parameters in a way that I can actually carry-out.

Question #4

Sometimes we are there for a week at a time. Sometimes we are not there for a whole month. Like most people we have family and professional commitments. For a number of years we have gone to Burlington whenever we were not working, in order to care for a family member.

Question #5.

The current use program requires that we have a land management plan. So, yes, technically we do. I think you can see from the paragraphs that I have already written the broad strokes of how we manage the land.

Question #6.

I would try to make time to attend an event at Merck. I could perhaps be a resource to others. There could be some opportunities to cooperate/ collaborate, though there are other ways to collaborate/ network/ cooperate that are probably just as effective.

Question #7

It is disappointing and perhaps frustrating that one must do so much just to pay taxes on the land. The land does not generate the revenue to pay the taxes. So owning land and being a good steward is expensive and time-consuming.

A local family raises beef on our land. I am annoyed and frustrated that he builds fences where he wants them, not where I want them. It might come to the point that I stop letting him graze his cows. It is annoying that I must resort to such brinkmanship.

I find that I can often accomplish more of my environmental agenda in the city than I can do on our land in Rupert. It is annoying that so many people want to be part of the tribe of “environmentalists”, but so few people seem to grasp the simple wiring skills that are required to convert buildings from fluorescent to LED. This is not rocket science folks, yet some people persist in writing pieces for the newspaper or other “activism” while being absolutely clueless about their own carbon foot print nor how they can dramatically reduce it with little pain. So I spend a lot of my time doing, advocating, and teaching. But I cannot do this and manage my land at the same time.

Question #8
You did not mention the historic value of the land. We have lovingly restored a house that was originally built before 1800. It amazes me to look at the timbers that were cut, from local trees, over 200 years ago. When I look at the structure I imagine pioneers using a pit-saw to hew local trees in to timbers and then build them in to a house. As a boy I learned some history of our property and our town. It was upon this interest that I now study history from around the world.

Question #9

I wish you “Group of Seniors” much adventure and much learning as you work on your capstone project. I have provided my email address, though it often takes me a day or more to get to my email.
Name: **DAVID E. WILLIAMSON**
Address: **1930 CUSHING RD, FRANKLIN, MA 02038**

1) Have you visited Merck Forest & Farmland Center?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) If yes, have you
   a. Camped
   b. Hiked
   c. Attended events or workshops
   d. Worked
   e. Volunteered
   f. Other ______________________

3) Rank the importance of the following land management strategies from 1-least important to 8-most important
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   6. Recreation
   7. Spirituality
   8. Bird habitat

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   e. Less than once per year
5) Do you have a land management plan?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6) Would you be interested in attending an event at Merck to get to know other forest landowners in Rupert?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) What are some challenges you've faced in managing your land?
   Difficulty in managing land due to living in Florida and not having any local contacts in VT.

8) Do you have any stories that you would like to share about what your land means to you?

9) Any other comments?