

2001 *VIP*-COVERTS Survey

Summary



June 2001

Brief Summary

The 2001 survey shows that *VIP-COVERTS* volunteers are actively working to promote forest stewardship in their communities. Many said that they had talked to neighbors and other woodland owners about forest stewardship in the past year. Many are active members and supporters of local woodland owner associations. The survey also shows that the volunteers are contributing many more hours of service than they agreed to when they initially enrolled in the program.

Survey Methods

We sent a survey form to all of the *VIPs* in our database. We sent a second survey form to those who did not complete the first form by the deadline. Then, we telephoned each person who did not respond to either mailed survey. When we were able to contact non-respondents, we asked them the survey questions over the telephone. If we were unable to talk to the *VIP*, we left a message asking them to call us back.

Two hundred sixty five *VIPs* have been trained since the program's inception; however, 24 dropped out of the program before the survey. Although we made no attempt to contact people who were no longer involved in the program before the survey began, we do know that we have lost some *VIPs* over the years when they moved out of state, sold their forestland, suffered from deteriorating health, or passed away.

Results and Discussion

Response Rate

Of the 241 *VIPs* in the program at the beginning of the survey period, 193 provided survey information (80.1% response rate).

Current Status

The survey asked *VIPs* to indicate their volunteer status: active in the past 12 months; inactive in the past 12 months, but wish to remain in the program; and no longer interested (see Table 1). Eighteen (7.5%) indicated that they were no longer interested in the program. The reasons given for no longer being interested included moving out of Pennsylvania, selling their forestland, work responsibilities, and health problems. Thirty-seven (15.4%) indicated that they were currently inactive but were still interested in remaining in the program. Many of the inactive volunteers cited time limitations and health factors as reasons, but hoped to become active again in the future. One hundred thirty-eight (57.3%) said they were currently active, and 48 (19.9%) people did not respond to either the written surveys or telephone calls.

Table 1: Status

Status	Number	Percent
Active	138	57.3
Inactive	37	15.4
Did Not Respond	48	19.9
No Longer Interested	18	7.5
Total	241	100

Volunteer Hours

The survey also measured *VIP* volunteer hours (see Table 2). *VIPs* were asked to provide hours for two categories: 1) number of hours volunteered in all Forest Stewardship activities during the past 12 months; and 2) number of hours working with others to promote Forest Stewardship in the past 12 months. Of the 138 active *VIPs*, 108 provided complete quantitative information, so the total hours is almost certainly a low estimate. In addition, it is likely that some of the 48 nonrespondents also had volunteer hours that went unreported.

Table 2: Number of Hours Volunteered in Past 12 Months (108 Complete Surveys)

Activity	Number of Hours	Average Number of Hours
All Forest Stewardship Activities	12,172*	112.7
Working With Others To Promote Forest Stewardship	5562	51.5

* Greater than 6 full-time employees at (40 hours per week for 50 weeks)

Nonetheless, the *VIPs* who did provide quantitative information collectively reported 12,172 volunteer hours in all Forest Stewardship activities (112.7 hours each) and 5562 hours working with others to promote Forest Stewardship (51.5 hours each). These numbers indicate a very high rate of involvement in light of the initial agreement *VIPs* make at the time of training. Their commitment is limited to 40 volunteer hours in the 12 months after training; no further commitment is required. However, the active volunteers averaged over 112 hours of service in the past year alone, and many of these volunteers went through the initial training years ago.

Stewardship Activities

The survey also asked *VIPs* to list their Stewardship activities. One primary objective of training Forest Stewardship volunteers is to provide them with the tools they need to effectively encourage their friends and neighbors to become good stewards of their own lands. The most frequent *VIP* activity was talking to neighbors about Forest Stewardship (see Table 3). Fifty *VIPs* made such contact in the past year.

The other common outreach activities were making presentations to adults (29 *VIPs*), leading woodland tours (26 *VIPs*), planning workshops and conferences (22 *VIPs*), supporting a local woodland owners' group (21 *VIPs*), and working with children (20 *VIPs*).

The most commonly cited stewardship activities that *VIPs* implemented on their own properties included planting trees (20 *VIPs*); timber stand improvement (14 *VIPs*); working to control deer through fences, censuses, or hunting (13 *VIPs*); and removing invasive and competing vegetation (8 *VIPs*).

Table 3: Forest Stewardship Activities in the Previous 12-Months

Activity	Number of VIPs
Talking with neighbors and other woodland owners	50
Presentations to adult groups	29
Leading woodland tours	26
Planning workshops and conferences	22
Working to support a woodland owner group	21
Planting trees	20
Working with children/schools	20
Providing input to elected representatives and government agencies	17
Writing newspaper articles/books	16
Timber stand improvement	14
Assisting service forester	14
Deer fencing/census/control	13
Distributing Forest Stewardship information	10
Working to start new woodland owner group	9
Maintaining trails/roads	9
Removing competing vegetation/invasive plants	8
General wildlife enhancement	8
Riparian buffer/water quality enhancement	8
Staffing forestry exhibits	6
Attended national forestry conference	6
Community tree projects	5
Volunteer in a state forest	3
Gypsy moth spraying	3
Timber sale	2

Local Woodland Owner Associations

Local woodland owner groups are important catalysts for promoting Forest Stewardship in Pennsylvania. Each group is independent, and most sponsor education programs, woodland tours, and newsletters to provide woodland owners with information about managing their forestlands.

Seventy-four *VIPs* are members woodland owner associations in Pennsylvania (see Table 4 on next page). *VIPs* use their training and experience to strengthen the associations and promote forest stewardship with fellow woodland owners. In fact, many *VIPs* are founding members of county and regional landowner associations, and twenty *VIPs* are currently board members. Nine *VIPs* said they are working to start new woodland owner associations, because their area of the state currently has no such association.

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Table 4: Local Woodland Owner Association Memberships

Name of Local Association	Number of <i>VIP</i> Members
Woodland Owners of the Southern Alleghenies	13
Bradford Sullivan Forest Landowners' Association	10
North Central Forest Landowners Association	10
Central Susquehanna Woodland Owners Association	7
Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association	7
Lycoming County Woodland Owners' Association	6
Susquehanna County Forest Landowners Association	6
Woodland Owners of Centre County	5
Northwest Pennsylvania Woodland Association	4
Butler County Woodland Owners Association	2
Clarion County Forest Stewardship Council	2
Mercer County Woodland Owners Association	2

Other Associations and Memberships

VIPs are active in many other organizations (see Table 5 on next page). Sixty *VIPs* said they are members of the Pennsylvania Forestry Association (PFA), while six belonged to similar organizations in other states including Ohio, New York, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. During this reporting period, the PFA began sending representatives to local woodland owner association meetings. PFAs goal is to discover what issues are most important to association members. PFA plans to report its findings to the associations and take steps to better represent private forest landowners in the future.

Table 5: Other Memberships and Affiliations Related to Forest Stewardship

Organization	Number of VIPs
American Chestnut Foundation	17
Tree Farm System	16
Land conservancies	12
National Arbor Day Foundation	8
Community tree commissions/councils	6
County conservation district boards	6
County Cooperative Extension boards	6
Wildlife conservation organizations	6
PA Stewardship Steering Committee	6
American Forest Foundation	5
Sustainable Forestry Initiative sm	5
Watershed protection organizations	4
Nut growers organization	3
Farm Bureau forestry committee	3
Church-based environmental stewardship committee	2
PA Lumber Museum Association	1
Township environmental action committee	1

VIPs were active in other organizations related to forest stewardship. Common affiliations included the American Chestnut Foundation (17 *VIPs*), American Tree Farm System (16 *VIPs*), various land conservancies (12 *VIPs*), and the National Arbor Day Foundation (8 *VIPs*).

VIPs served in leadership positions on various local organizations, including community tree commissions/councils (6 *VIPs*), county conservation district boards (6 *VIPs*), Cooperative Extension boards (6 *VIPs*), and Farm Bureau forestry committees (3 *VIPs*).

Six *VIPs* serve as representatives on Pennsylvania's Forest Stewardship Steering Committee, including the chairperson, George Freeman. Mr. Freeman is also the Chairperson for the Pennsylvania Tree Farm Committee.