

Engaging Absentee Landowners in Conservation



Potomac Conservancy

Joe Thompson

What we'll Cover Today

- Defining the Absentee Landowner
- Developing an outreach campaign
- Engaging Landowners
- Results, Challenges and Next Steps



What is an Absentee Landowner?

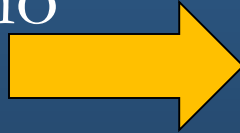
- Wikipedia: a landlord of real estate, who leases the property to tenants, but fails to ensure that proper maintenance is done on it



What is an Absentee Landowner?

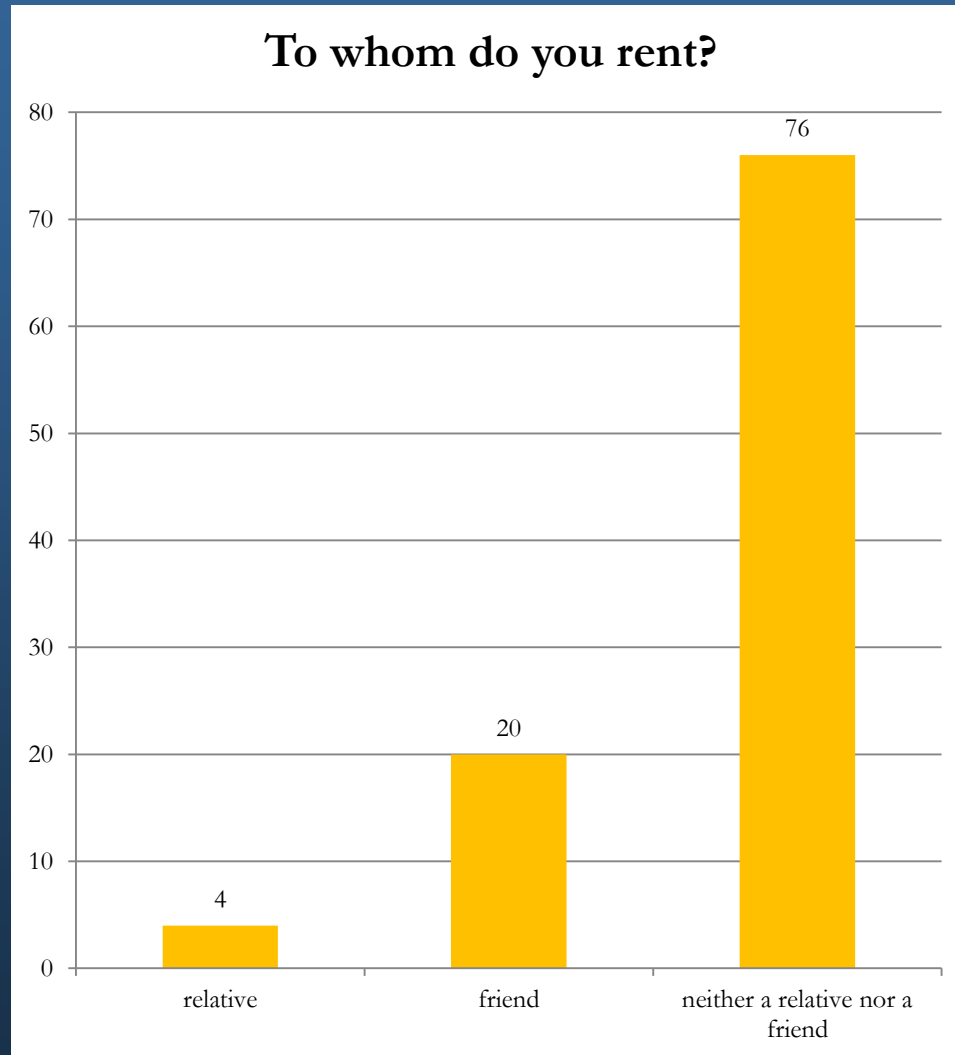
- Our Definition:

An owner of agricultural land who owns but does not operate the land themselves.

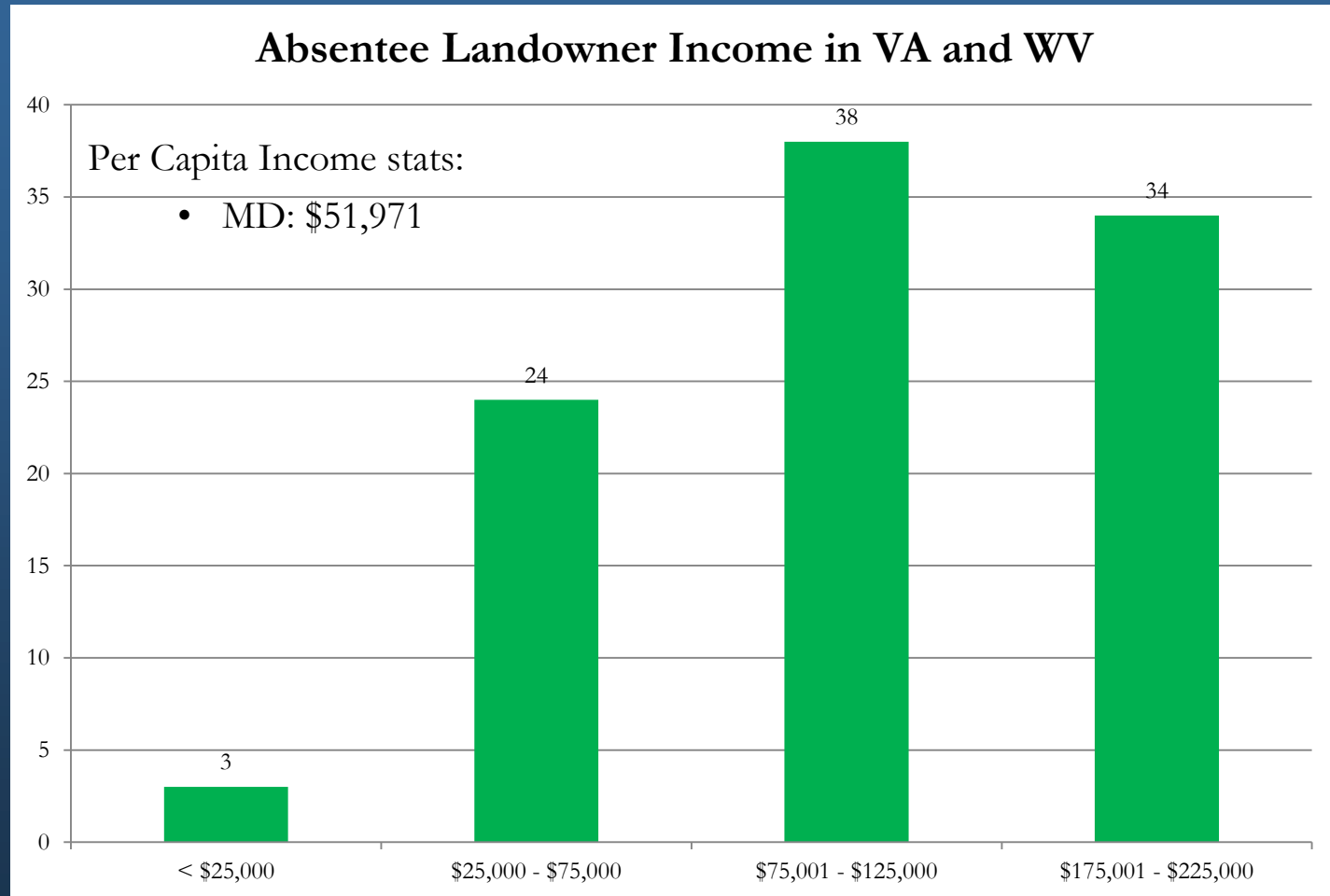


- **Purchased as an amenity or investment**
- **Inherited**
- Retired from the farm
- Acquired through marriage/divorce/gift

Who is an Absentee Landowner?



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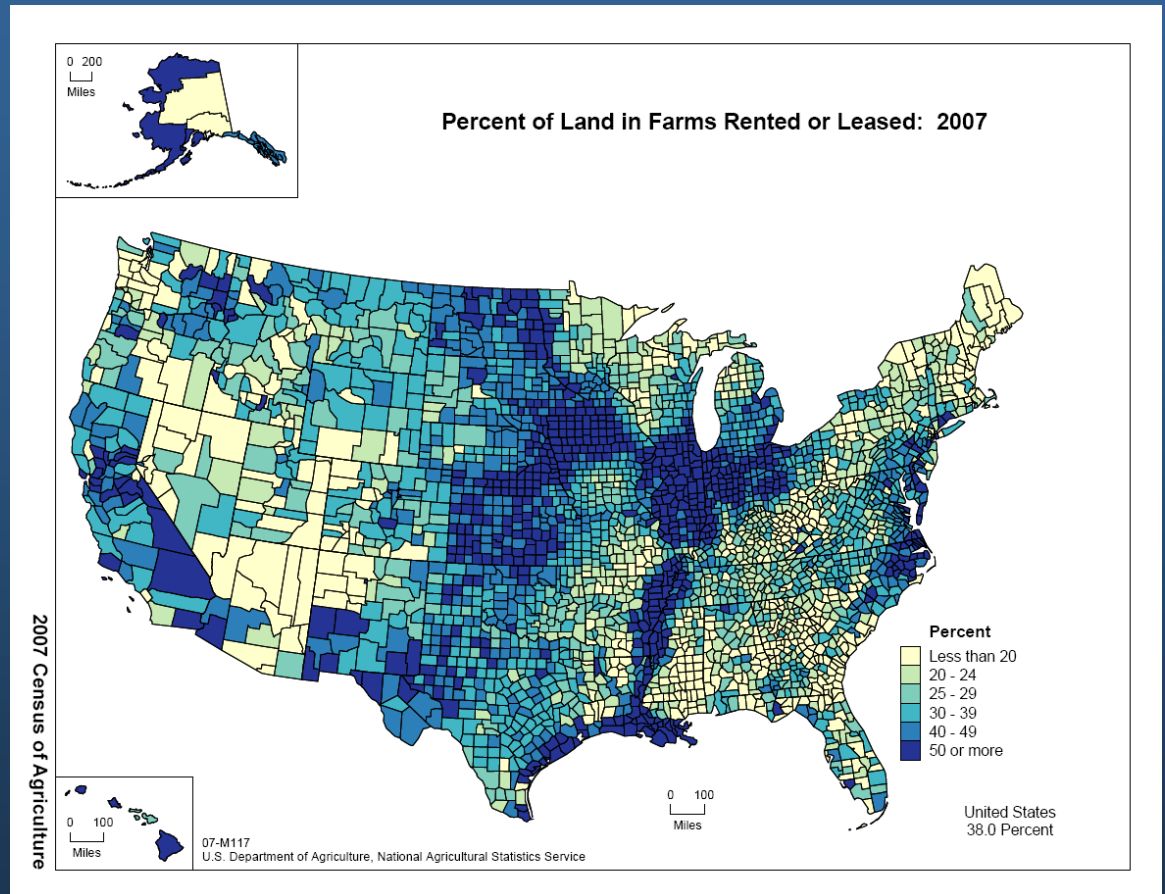


How much Land do they Own?

Absentee Landownership in the Chesapeake Bay watershed

	Absentee Landowner %	
	OWNERS	ACRES
Delaware	32%	73%
Maryland	51%	57%
New York	44%	33%
Virginia	42%	45%
Pennsylvania	44%	37%
West Virginia	35%	29%

1997 Census of Agriculture, Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey



What do they Value?

7. How important are the following aspects to you regarding your agricultural property?

	Not Important 1	A Little Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Very Important 4
Helping the operator make a living	20%	27%	18%	36%
Short term revenue from leases	30%	18%	34%	18%
Long term investment value	11%	9%	22%	57%
Pride of ownership	7%	9%	25%	59%
Feeling like a part of the community where the land is located	18%	20%	32%	30%
Maintaining a family asset	9%	11%	32%	48%
Recreational use (hunting, fishing, etc.)	39%	20%	25%	14%

What do they Value?

Intrinsic values are more important than income or tradition

19. To what extent do the following values or needs influence your decisions about your land?

	Not At All 1	A Little 2	Somewhat 3	A Good Deal 4
Need for income (n=124)	56%	21%	15%	7%
Concern for the environment (n=127)	5%	12%	36%	47%
The way things have traditionally been done (n=125)	24%	25%	42%	9%
Wildlife considerations (n=126)	6%	14%	38%	42%
Aesthetic considerations (n=124)	6%	10%	40%	43%

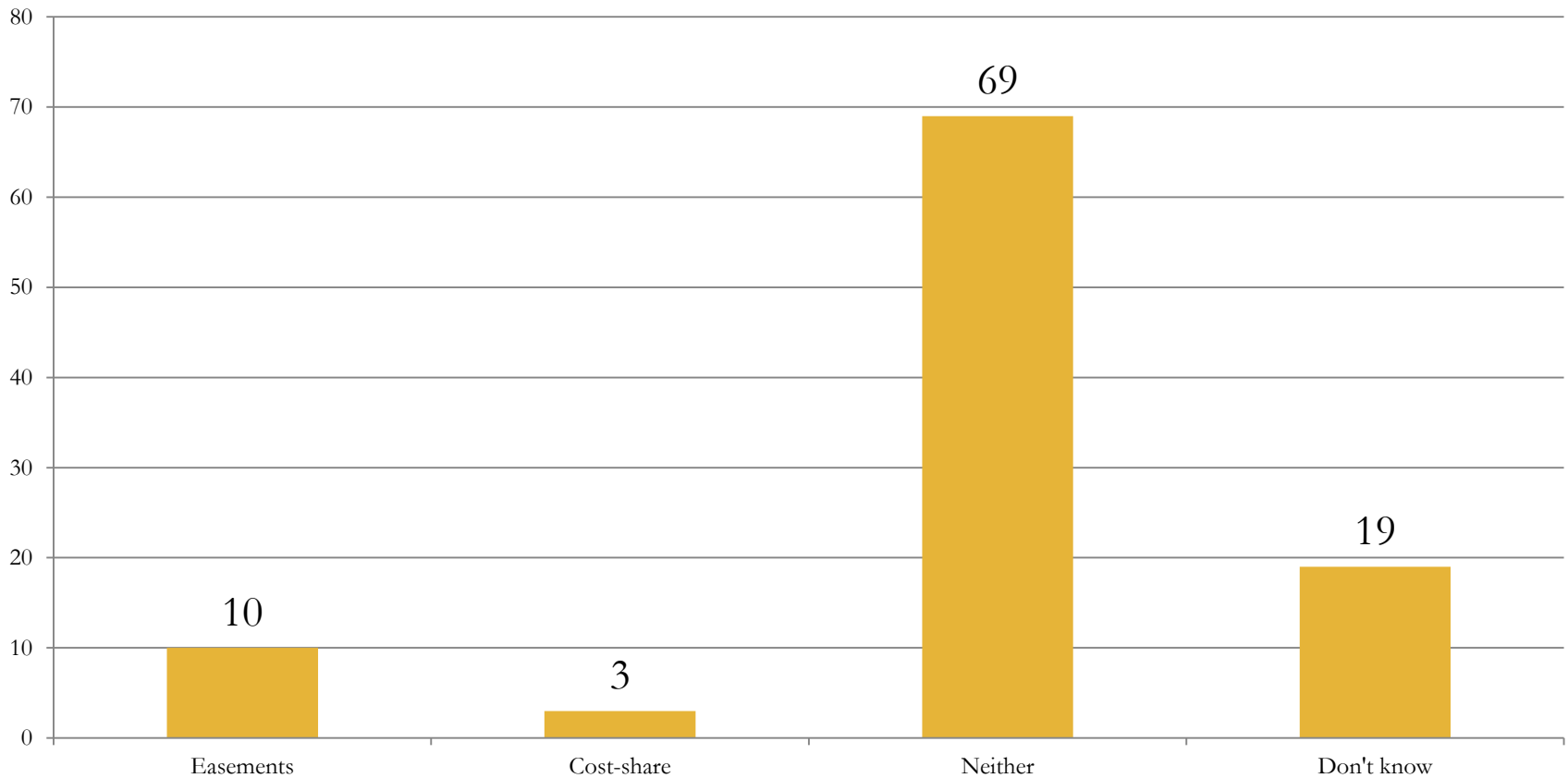
Relationship with Tenants

Most surveyed landowners:

- Rely on their tenant to make land-management decisions
- Are committed to their continuation as tenant
- Feel comfortable asking renters to use certain conservation practices BUT also feel they don't know enough about farming to participate in decision-making

How Engaged are they in Conservation?

Enrollment in State or Federal Conservation Programs



Landowners Uncertain about Assistance

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Uncertain 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Landowners need more help to improve the environmental performance of their land.	1%	5%	50%	34%	11%
Government agencies provide landowners with sufficient conservation assistance.	5%	6%	66%	23%	1%
It is difficult to find out information about government conservation programs.	4%	17%	56%	17%	5%
Short-term income needs often take precedence over long-term conservation needs.	11%	23%	38%	24%	4%
Landowners should take responsibility for ensuring that farming activities on their land do not harm the environment.	2%	0%	18%	50%	30%
Renters should take responsibility for ensuring that farming activities on rented land do not harm the environment.	2%	2%	14%	48%	34%

Summary

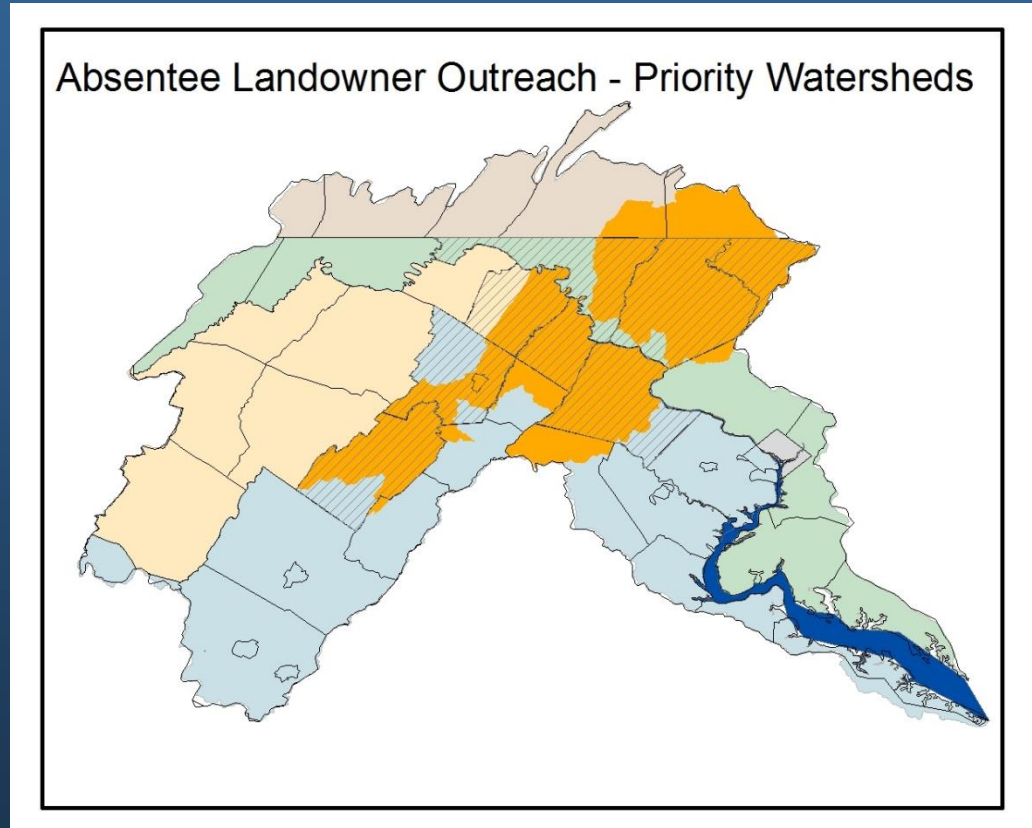


The Great Opportunity

- Conservation and long-term investment are important land values that can influence decision making
- Yet, participation in conservation programs is low – in part due to lack of knowledge
- Can participation be increased with an increase in knowledge?

Absentee Landowner Outreach Goals

- Identify and reach out to ~800 landowners
- Engage ~200 in conversations
- Enroll ~30 in cost-share programs



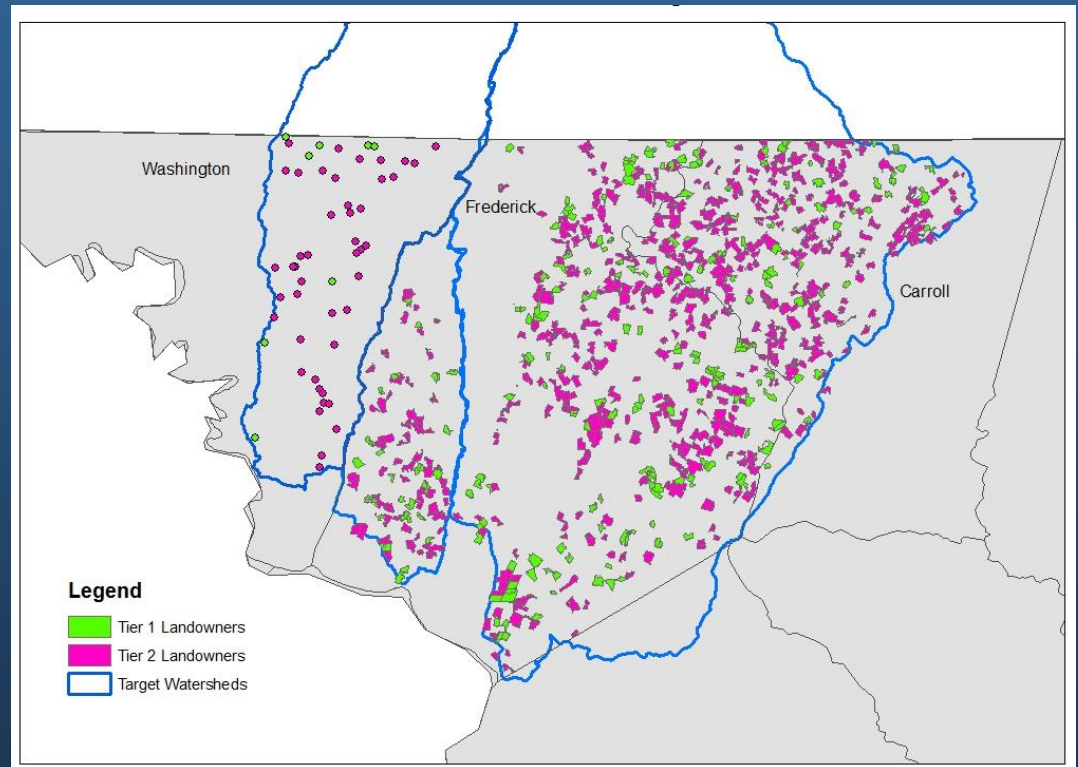
Identifying Absentees

- ID unbuffered stream parcels >25 ac
- ID ALs through zip code analysis
- $\sim 15,300$ names



Identifying Absentees

- Determine farm ownership
- Remove businesses & agencies
- Remove duplicates
- ~1300 names



Hire a Landowner Advisor



Establish Local Buy-in



We work with the people who work the land.



Create Outreach Materials



Create Outreach Materials

Now is the Time to Assess Your Land *(continued)*

NO BUFFER STRIPS ALONG STREAMS - Stream banks without vegetative cover intensify erosion and flooding, placing neighboring lands, pastures, and crops at risk of increased soil loss and damage. Buffers hold the soil in place and absorb runoff from fields, trapping and filtering sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other pollutants before they reach the stream.



An unstable bank cuts away at farmland.



A buffer of grass and trees keeps soils in place.

NO COVER CROP GROWTH - Cover crops are vegetation that is established on cropland each year during the fall. During the winter, cover crops recycle unused plant nutrients remaining in the soil from the previous summer crop, protect fields against wind and water erosion, provide habitat for beneficial insects and help improve the soil for the next year's crop.



A field with no vegetation is vulnerable to erosion.



A corn field in November, protected with a green cover crop blanket.

Now is the Time to Assess Your Land *(continued)*

CONSISTENTLY WET AREAS - If there's an area on your property that is consistently wet, it is a good indication that it previously was a wetland. By 1984, just over half of all wetlands in the United States had been drained or filled for development or agriculture. Wetlands are important to store floodwaters and filter pollutants, as well as provide wildlife habitat. If you have an area on your land that is consistently wet, consider restoring the area to its natural wetland condition.



Standing water and tire ruts mark a wet area in the field.



A restored wetland provides habitat and stores flood waters.

STREAM DEGRADATION - Stream quality, and therefore fish habitat, is reduced when buffers are absent and livestock are allowed access to the stream. Erosion causes stream widening and lack of buffer vegetation increases stream temperatures, eliminating habitat for native species like the eastern brook trout. Stream restoration activities can restore the natural behavior of a stream, improve water quality and create new habitat and upstream access for native fishes.



The stream channel is widened where it's been used as a vehicle crossing and banks lack woody vegetation, contributing to stream warming.



The restored stream has a narrow channel, a fence helps protect it from cattle access and stream side vegetation help cool and stabilize the stream channel.

Couple Outreach with Offers

- Call Joe
- Coffee Shop Visits
- Free Conservation Assessments
- ‘Tips’ for talking with your operator
- Money



Yes! I would like a free land assessment.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Property location/notes/concerns _____

8601 Georgia Ave. Ste. 612, Silver Spring, MD 20910
P: 540-903-8947 W: <http://tinyurl.com/PotomacLandowner>



Conservation Assessments



Landowner Response to MD Outreach

- Intro Newsletter - Call Joe  $n = 18$
- Coffee Shop Visits   $n = 2 + 2$
- Cold Calling - volunteer   $n = 2 + 2$
- Testimonial Letter  $n = 1 +$
- Newsletter - \$1M Investment;
Free Conservation Assessments  $n = 12$
- 'Tips' Sheet  $n = 16$
- Cold Calling – professional  $n = 10 + 16$
- Newsletter – BMPs and funding   $n = 2$
- Personal follow-up letter  $n = 5$

Personal Contact Works Best!

2. How helpful was the following information provided to you? *Circle one in each row.*

	<u>Did not receive/use</u> N/A	<u>Not helpful</u> 2	<u>Somewhat helpful</u> 3	<u>Very helpful</u> 4
Four-page “Conservation Connections” newsletter		0%	78%	22%
Coffee shop meeting with Joe Thompson, Landowner Advisor		0%	33%	66%
Flier “Tips for Getting Started Protecting Your Land Investment”		0%	83%	17%
Personal telephone call from Joe Thompson, Landowner Advisor		0%	42%	58%
One-on-one meeting/field visit with Joe Thompson		0%	11%	89%

But People also Need Money...

9. Assuming you *will not* change the way you manage your agricultural land in the next 12 months, please rate the level of importance of the following in your decision.

	Not Important 1	A Little Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Very Important 4
Busy with other things (n=19)	21%	26%	37%	16%
Upfront costs (n=24)	33%	13%	8%	46%
Not sure how to get started (n=21)	43%	14%	24%	19%
My operator will object (n=21)	67%	14%	14%	5%
My family will object (n=21)	67%	19%	5%	10%
Neighbors will object (n=20)	70%	15%	5%	10%

Landowners Taking Action

- Landowner 1: planted 13 acres (>8,800) new trees
- Landowner 2: invasives removal, wildlife and pollinator plantings
- Landowner 3: switched tenant; cover crops, nutrient mgmt, permanent cover on slopes
- Landowner 4: Convert cropland to permanent pasture, hedgerows, grassed waterways, CREP
- Landowner 5: enrolling up to 5,000' in CREP and 2 ac. ACEP-WREP
- Landowner 6: ~2 ac of trees, shrubs and pollinator habitat



Results Summary

Action

10 (2%)

Desire

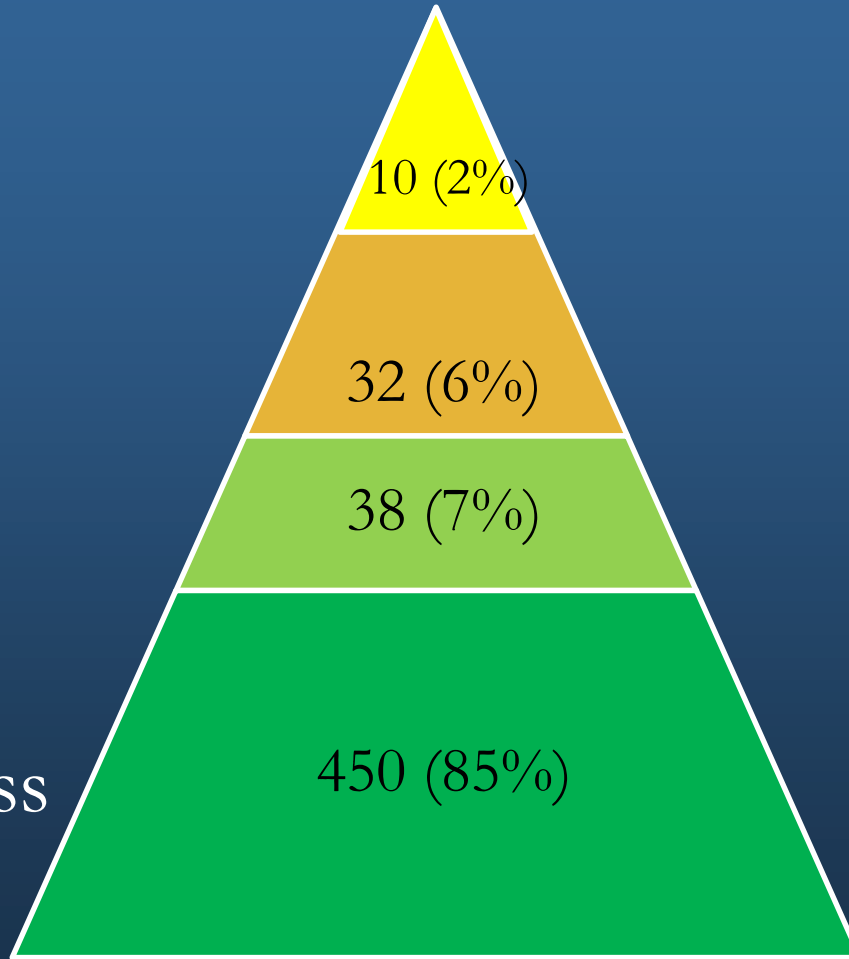
32 (6%)

Interest

38 (7%)

Awareness

450 (85%)

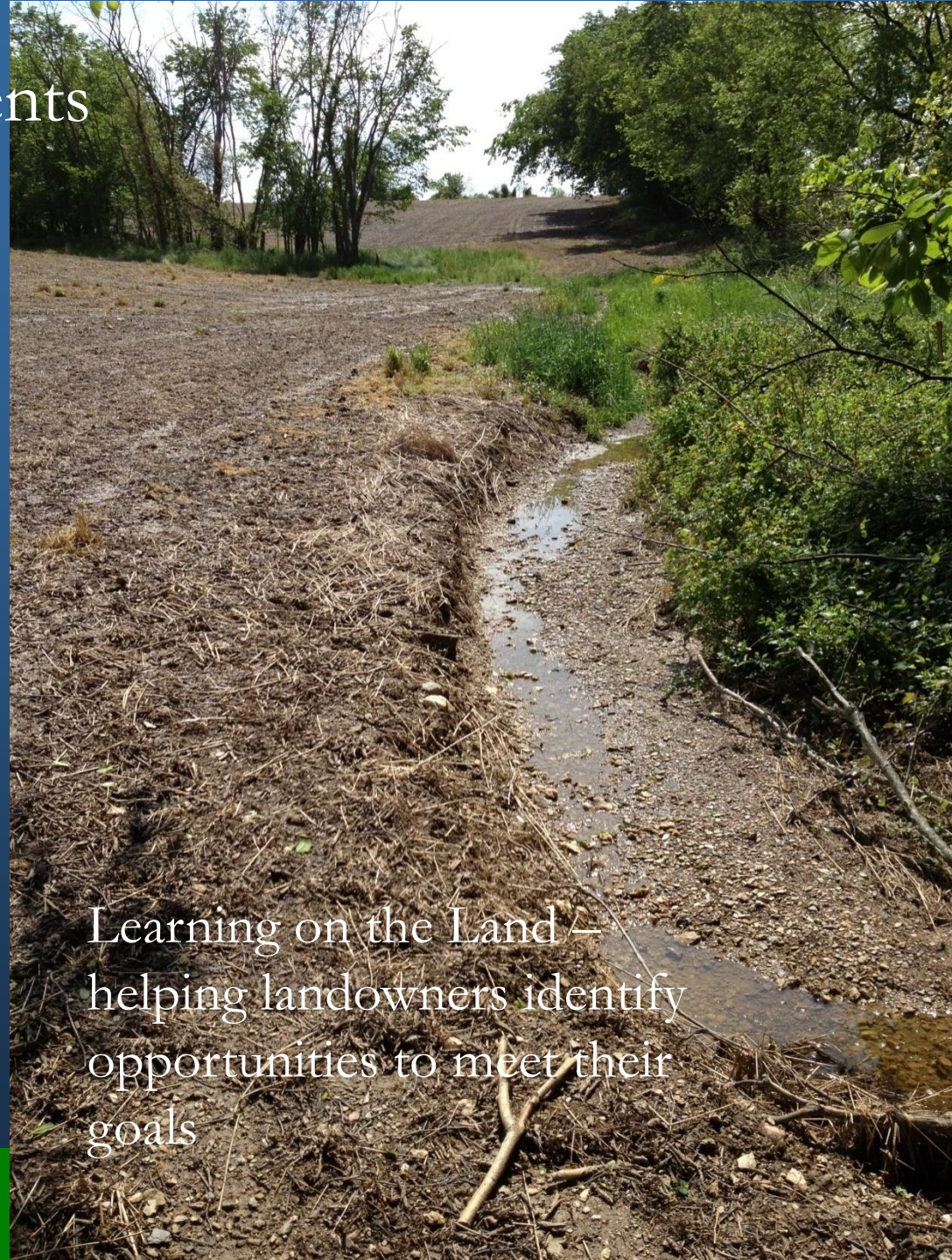


Lessons from the Field

Types of landowners we have worked with:

- Elderly
- Active professionals
- Business owners
- Physically Impaired

Conservation Assessments



Learning on the Land –
helping landowners identify
opportunities to meet their
goals

Lessons from Landowners

- Who has acted and what drove them to make a change?
- Why haven't more people acted?
- How do we encourage landowners to take the next step?





Ingenuity- Using what you've got

Satisfaction Survey Results

6. How likely are you to do the following in the next six months: *Circle one in each row.*

	Very unlikely 1	Somewhat unlikely 2	Somewhat likely 3	Very likely 4	Have already done this N/A
Request a land assessment from Joe Thompson, Landowner Advisor	13%	13%	11%	6%	56%
Talk with my operator regarding conservation on my land	7%	13%	13%	40%	33%
Install a new conservation practice or sign-up for a conservation program	29%	0%	43%	21%	7%

Next Steps

- Continue planning assistance until funds are expended
- Replicate successes in VA and WV





Questions?

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