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Conservation & the Absentee Landowner: Attitudes & Behavior

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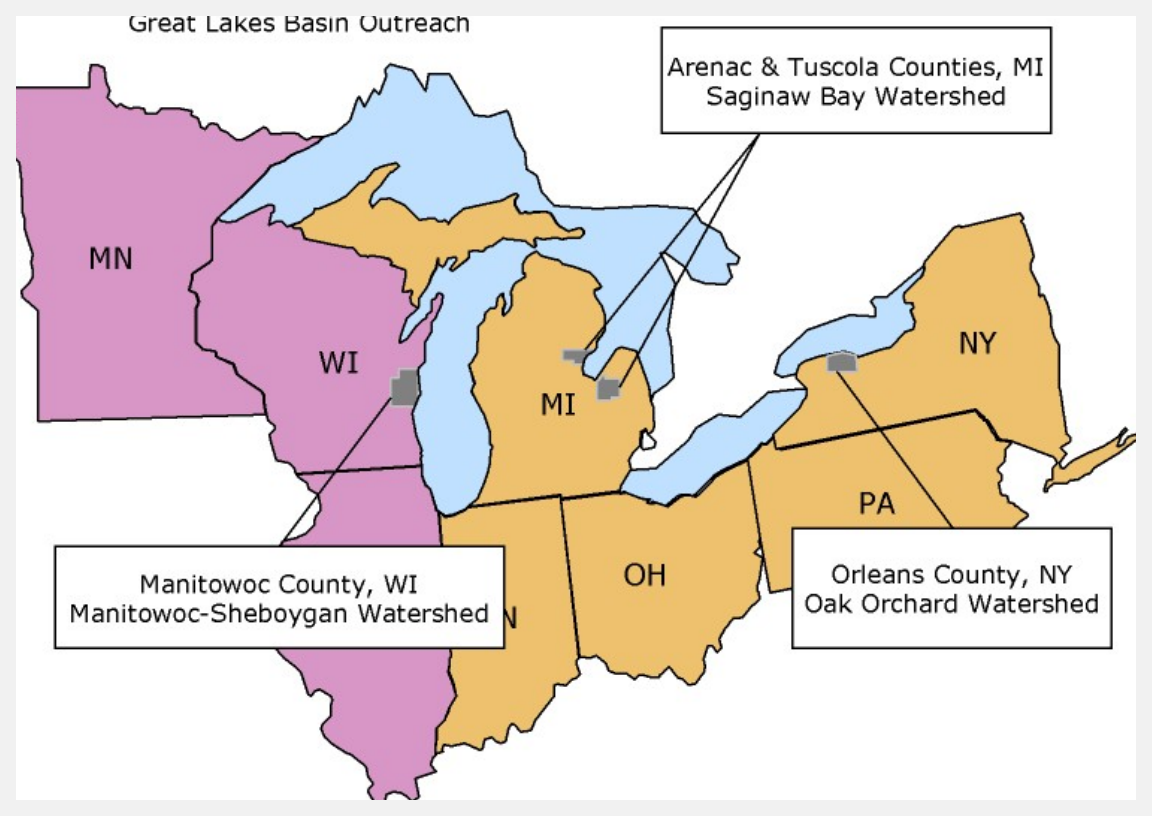
Innovating Outreach to Great Lakes Basin Absentee Landowners

- Non-point source pollution is the primary pollution threat facing Great Lakes with surface runoff a major factor impacting quality of the Great Lake Basin.

- Goals of Three-Year Project:
  - Reduce amount of nutrients & sediment entering the Great Lakes through installation of vegetative filter strips.
  - Improve ability of natural resource agencies in Great Lakes Basin to market conservation practices to absentee landowners.

Map of Study Sites



Survey Methods

- Conducted in Spring 2007

Response Rates

- Wisconsin - 67% response rate,

A Quick Introduction To the Data

Important Topics Regarding Land
(% indicating ‘yes’)

Soil/Land Conservation	77%
Wildlife Conservation	75%
Water Conservation	66%
Govt. Conservation Programs	52%

Influences Upon Decision-Making

(1=not at all to 4=a good deal)

Conservation/concern for environment	3.22
Recreational or wildlife value	3.21
Need for income	2.10

Level of Involvement in Conservation Programs

Currently or previously enrolled in state or federal conservation programs

Yes	24%
No	69%
Don't know	7%

If yes, type of programs (n=253)

Set aside (WRP/CRP)	58%
Cost share	14%
Both	6%
Don't Know	32%

Important Sources of Information

(1=not important to 4=very important)

SWCD	2.43
DNR	2.41
NRCS	2.34
Operator/Tenant	2.24
Spouse	2.17

Top-line Conclusions

- Low involvement in traditional conservation programs
- No natural resource agency ranks highly as an important information source for decisions

- Yet, conservation clearly important
  - As topics of importance to them regarding their land
  - As factors influencing their decision-making on the land.

Set-Aside (CRP/WRP) and Cost Share Program Involvement

A Closer Look ...

Table 1. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Participation in Set-Aside Programs (N=551)			
• ***Socio-Economic Characteristics***		Exp(B)	Sig.
Age	-.009	.991	.387
Acres (logged)	.913	2.491	.005**
Gender	-.142	.868	.672
Education	.335	1.398	.007**
Household Income	-.200	.819	.117
Distance live from land	.234	1.264	.394
Lease land	1.192	3.295	.000***
Farming Background	-.243	.785	.375
• ***Factors Influencing Decision-Making***			
Need for income	.261	1.298	.049*
Not enough knowledge	-.431	.650	.001***
• ***Information sources***			
Farm Service Agency	1.037	2.821	.000***
Natural Resources Conservation Service	-.123	.884	.464
Soil Water Conservation District	-.248	.781	.137
Intercept	-1.482	.227	.000
Pseudo R-Square	.320		
Log-likelihood	406.666		
df	13		
p	.000		
*p<.05, **p<.01,***p<.001			

Table 2. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Cost Share Participation (N=551)			
• ***Socio-economic Characteristics***		Exp(B)	Sig.
Age	-.001	.999	.945
Acres (logged)	.866	2.379	.069*
Gender	.030	1.030	.957
Education	.323	1.381	.084*
Household Income	-.111	.895	.551
Distance live from land	.173	1.189	.684
Lease land	-.186	.831	.693
Farming Background	-.724	.485	.094*
• ***Factors influencing decision making***			
Need for income	-.065	.937	.760
Not enough knowledge	-.243	.784	.231
• ***Information sources***			
Farm Service Agency	.344	1.410	.116
Natural Resources Conservation Service	.512	1.669	.066*
Soil Water Conservation District	-.100	.905	.690
Intercept	-2.855	.058	.000
Pseudo R-Square	.172		
Log-likelihood	199.326		
df	13		
p	.001		

Key Findings

- Larger landowners & those with higher levels of education are more likely to participate in conservation programs
- Not enough knowledge is a factor inhibiting participation in conservation programs

Conservation Decision-Making

A Closer Look…

Patterns in Land Ownership

- 42% of private agricultural land in the United States is farmed by someone other than the owner ("non-operator owner" AELOS 1999, p. 248)
- Many ag landowners no longer live on the land (or even in the state the land is located—Duffy 2008, p. 12)
  - Iowa landowners not living on owned farmland :
    - 37% in 1982
    - 44% in 2007
  - Iowa farmland owned by Iowa residents :
    - 94% in 1982
    - 79% in 2007

Patterns in Land Ownership

- Ownership of agricultural land by women is on the rise, particularly by older women (Duffy 2008, p. 14)

- Despite these changes :
  - We know very little about today's landowners
  - Even less about absentee landowners of agricultural land
  - Research which does exist seldom differentiates between male & female landowners.

Research Question

- For those absentee landowners who rent their land, what factors influence their involvement in conservation decisions ?

Involvement in Conservation Practices

- Who is the primary decision-maker (owner or tenant) regarding conservation practices used on land? (0=no involvement, 1=involvement)

- 20% of female & 32% of male landowners indicate they're the primary decision maker on conservation practices used on their land.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Participation in Conservation Decision-Making

	Female	Exp (B)	Male	Exp (B)
Age	-0.086*	0.918	-0.018	0.982
Land's importance as source of income	-0.898*	0.408	-0.108	0.898
Retired	-1.137*	0.321	-0.012	0.988
Acquired through inheritance	-0.823*	0.437	-0.044	0.957
Own land with sibling	-2.732*	0.065	0.226	1.253
Own land with spouse	1.826*	6.210	0.050	1.051
Land farmed by local farmer	-1.429*	0.240	-0.487**	0.614
R square	.261		.056	
*p<.05, **p<.01				

Additional Findings

- For both male & female landlords, when renting to a local farmer, less involved in conservation decision making on the land.

- In addition, older, retired women who have inherited the land & own it with siblings are less involved in conservation decision-making on their land. None of these factors appear to be obstacles for involvement of male landowners.

Conservation Implications

- Different approaches for outreach needed based on type of landowner.
- Should landowners, tenants, or both be the focus of outreach?
- Is conservation hindered by tenants' reluctance to conserve land they don't own? Or do landlords not want to disrupt relationship with tenants? Or both?

More Conservation Implications

- Little is known about absentee landowners' motivation to conserve - or the most effective messages & media to reach these landowners.
- Yet absentee landowners represent a significant opportunity to expand acres enrolled in conservation programs.
- Need for a successful Absentee Landowner Outreach & Enrollment Program