

What Would You Do?

Objective: Students will work in “family” groups to set goals and decide how to manage a hypothetical piece of forest land.

Standards of Learning: Science 6.7, 6.9, LS.11, ES.6, BIO.8
(Also 4.5 and 4.9, but lesson is designed for grades 6+)

Materials:

Chart paper or poster board (one per group)
Markers

Background:

Nearly two thirds of Virginia (15.8 million acres) is forested. Most of this land (63%) is privately owned, by individuals and families. About 18% of the forestland is owned by local, state, or federal governments. These public lands include the large George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in western Virginia, Shenandoah National Park in northwestern Virginia, and many smaller State Forests, State Parks, wildlife refuges, game lands, military bases, and local parks. About 19% of forestland is owned by businesses, mainly real estate investment trusts and timber investment management organizations. Only a small portion of land (<1%) is owned by forest products companies.

It is up to the landowner to decide how – or if - forestland is managed. A professional forester can help owners learn more about their forestland, discuss their goals, and create a plan to help them meet those goals. Some owners choose a “leave it alone” strategy. They may live far away from their forestland; they may have inherited the land and have little interest in it; they may not be aware of ways to manage their forest or who to ask for help; or they may simply believe that leaving the land “natural” is best. Other landowners have goals for their land. Examples include improving wildlife habitat, making money by growing and selling timber or other products, protecting water quality, or creating trails for hiking and other recreation. Whether or not the land is managed, Virginia landowners must pay taxes on their forestland each year. Often, people must sell their land because the tax bills are too high. Others choose to sell forest products or lease hunting rights, making enough money from the land to pay the taxes and maybe even generate extra income.

Activity:

Divide students into groups of 4; each group will represent a family. Each family has a 500 acre, square-shaped piece of forested land in the Virginia Piedmont. A stream runs through the middle of the property. The site had a long history of use as farm and pasture land. Currently, the entire site is forested with hardwoods (mainly oak, hickory, beech, and maple) about 60 years old. Most of the slopes are gentle, but in some areas, old erosion gullies can be seen. The land has been in the family for many generations, and they feel it is important to keep it in the family.

The group should discuss their goals for managing the land. They may decide on different strategies for different parts of the property, or choose to treat the whole property as one unit. The group should draw the land parcel and stream on chart paper, then label different sections

according to management goals. Each group will present their management goals to the class, giving reasons for their choices. If a group chooses not to manage the land, they should also give reasons for their choice.

Questions for discussion:

Did your “family” agree from the beginning on how to use the land? What decisions required you to come to consensus? How did you do this?

Are all of the goals you selected realistic on all properties? What factors determine the land’s suitability for different uses?

What other information would you need to know to make management decisions for a real piece of property?

How will your family make the tax payments on their land?

Lesson Plan Developed by Ellen Powell, Virginia Dept. of Forestry