



Center for Nonprofit Strategies

Clear Actionable Advice.

CALL BEFORE YOU CUT CAMPAIGN: CREATIVE BRIEF FOR PUBLICITY MATERIALS (MARCH 2009)

1. What is the current challenge or opportunity?

Many woodland owners do not have enough information about how to harvest and sell timber to maximize the long-term value they get from their forest and the health of their woods. Important decisions like which trees to cut, determination of a price, buyer and logger, and the terms and parameters of the logging operations are made without sufficient information or consideration or relevant factors. By helping woodland owners understand the different aspects of managing their harvest and sale, and by connecting them to appropriate resources, state forestry divisions can help protect the interests of woodland owners and the health and vitality of the state's privately owned forest land.

2. What is the overall competitive and/or supporting environment?

Currently, landowners get most of the relevant information from loggers and other service providers, as well as their peers. Most have heard horror stories about landowners who got paid less than fair market value for their trees and/or lost a lot more trees than they had anticipated, because they did not manage the logging operation properly. Many have experienced these horror stories themselves. As a result, woodland owners are generally wary and mistrustful. They believe that their woods are a valuable asset and they want to manage them carefully; but they are uncertain about who to trust with these decisions. Although most of them seek information and advice, they take all advice with a grain of salt and believe they are best qualified to make decisions for their woods.

The state forestry divisions and state and extension foresters are considered the most credible source of information about how to keep woods healthy. However, they are not always thought to be equally informed about timber markets and/or not very forthcoming about providing assistance with the actual sale of the trees. Most landowners handle this part themselves; a few turn to consulting foresters, but many balk at having to pay these professionals a fee (about 10-15% of the timber sale price).

3. What is/are the communication objective(s)?

The main communication objective is to persuade woodland owners who are looking to harvest their trees to call the toll-free campaign number to seek information and guidance.

The broader program objective includes the next step—i.e. providing appropriate informational materials and guidance to the woodland owners who call for assistance. This includes creating an informational packet (see campaign strategy document for content and style recommendations), developing a plan for answering

the toll-free line and filling requests, and determining when people need to be referred to service or consulting foresters.

4. Who is the target audience?

This campaign targets a subset of woodland owners called *Working the Land* (or *WTL*) owners. WTL owners believe that their land is a valuable asset and they are intensely interested in maximizing the long-term value of this asset. They want to generate income from their woods, but they also want to maintain the health of their woods and enjoy them for privacy and recreation. Even though not all WTLs are farmers, they share a traditional farming philosophy of valuing the land, working it respectfully, and using it to the fullest.

These are outdoorsy people, who enjoy working and playing on their land, have an emotional attachment to their woods, and derive enormous satisfaction from owning woodland. They know their woods well, and are constantly seeking more knowledge on how to keep them healthy. They are very concerned about threats to their trees, everything from pests and diseases to ATVs and trespassers.

Many of them are sensitive to environmental concerns, although they would balk at being called environmentalists and they have nothing but scorn for the “greenies.” Theirs is a macho, unsentimental and practical (almost utilitarian) version of environmentalism.

They are very independent and protective of their right to make decisions about their woodland. They believe they are best-qualified to make these decisions—they are open to hearing others’ opinions, but reserve the right to make up their own mind. They trust their own experience, and that of their peers, more than the opinion of any “expert”.

[For more details on WTLs, see section 2 of the CBYC Strategy Document.]

5. What is the main message we are trying to communicate?

The goal of the communication is to position information and guidance from the CBYC campaign as tool to help landowners harvest trees in a way that maximizes the long-term value they get from their woods. Thus, the central theme of the campaign is:

“If you’re thinking of harvesting your trees, call the CBYC number to get all the information you need and understand what resources are available to you. This will help you get the best value from your woods, now and in the future.”

6. What are the key ideas to be conveyed?

1. *Do Right by Yourself and Your Family:* You can only cut a tree once. So plan your harvests carefully to get the best value from your woodland.
2. *Enjoy your woods:* Good decisions at harvest time will keep your woods healthy and productive for you and your family to enjoy. You don’t have to choose between harvesting timber and enjoying your woods.



3. *Do Right by the Land*: Your woods are valuable; take care of them and they will serve you and your family well for many years to come.
4. *Be Woodwise*:¹ The CBYC provides all the information you need to help you make good decisions for your land and your family and connects you with services and resources in your community.

7. What action/response do we want our target audience to take?

We want woodland owners to believe that the CBYC campaign is the best place for comprehensive and credible information and resources related to harvesting trees. We want them to:

- Call the campaign number or visit the website to access information if they are thinking of harvesting their trees
- Store the number and/or website address away for future use if they are not currently thinking of harvesting their trees
- Share this number and/or website address with their peers who are thinking of harvesting their trees

8. Suggested Materials

- A poster for use at community sites and events
- A trifold for people to read more about the campaign, what it provides and whom it is designed to help
- A contact card for people to store
- A campaign web site
- A presentation for use in community setting

9. Mandatory inclusions

- The materials must be customizable as each state will want to include its own information and logos.
- Besides the state DNRs, there should also be room to include partner logos.

10. Tone and Language

- Peer-to-peer, non-preachy tone that validates audience members' love of their land, applauds their wish to do right by their land, and acknowledges their right to make decisions about their land.
- Simple and direct language; conveys that CBYC is about offering practical advice for the decisions they have to make. This is not about "educating" landowners; it is about giving them the information they need to make good decisions.
- The language should be colloquial and reflect traditional knowledge, folklore and idioms. Audience members do use many industry terms (like tree stand, logging, select-cutting, clear-cutting etc.) but they may have varying definitions of these terms. Industry terms can be used, so long as they are defined clearly, but technical forestry language should be avoided.

¹ If *Be Woodwise* cannot be used, an alternative message is: Get Informed.



- Anecdotes, testimonials, analogies and parables are especially effective for persuading this target audience. They are less impressed with statistics or “expert” recommendations.
- Negative language and scare tactics will not work well. But WTLs are a cautious group, and messages that appeal to their wish to make good, thoughtful decisions and avoid mistakes are likely to be well received.
- This audience is very sensitive to hype. They recognize that if something is too good to be true, it probably is. They are wary of being misled by marketing and believe that there is a “catch” to most good offers. They also realize that land management decisions involve trade-offs. Therefore, CBYC materials should be careful not to over-promise or exaggerate, and should sound truthful and authentic.
- Tips on specific words/phrases:

(Words/phrase in green are preferred over those in red.)

- Use **woods** over **forest**. *Woods* (or sometimes *woodland* and *woodlot*) are words that WTLs use to describe their wooded land, and the term evokes a nice, warm feeling for them. *Forest* implies larger tracts of land, mostly owned by government or organizations. In Iowa they also used the term “timber” to describe their woods (as in “it’s a good piece of timber”) or even a single tree.
- Use **landowner** or **woodland owner** over **forest owner** or **family forest owner**. Most people own a combination of wooded and cleared land, and they think of both types of land together; therefore the term **landowner** is particularly appropriate.
- WTLs believe in **harvesting** trees. They also use the words *cut* and, less frequently, *log*; but *harvest* implies a more thoughtful and planned cut of mature trees, with long-term forest health in mind.
- To this audience, **healthy woods** are very important. **Beautiful woods** is a vague concept to them, because different people can have different ideas about what that means; to them, keeping the woods healthy is what counts.
- Although these people try to be good stewards of their land, the term **stewardship** is not one that they would use to describe their approach. Neither are **sustainable land management** and **forest conservation**. They see themselves as: **respecting the land, loving the land, and taking care of the land**.
- In CBYC focus groups, **forester** was used interchangeably with forestry expert, with many people preferring the term forester because it was more familiar. However, the term needs some clarification:



- Most people immediately thought of their service or extension foresters upon hearing the word forester. They are not as familiar with the idea of private/consulting foresters.
 - A few focus groups participants also used the word forester to mean a landowner who is actively managing his/her woodland (like a farmer who actively manages his farm).
- Use the term **wildlife** or **critters**, but avoid mentioning any specific animals or birds (especially **deer**). There is a lot of variance in which critters people regard as desirable and which they see as pests. Also, there are differences in whether or not people choose to manage wildlife populations by hunting.

11. Visuals

To WTLs, love of the land is a given, as is the enjoyment and emotional satisfaction they get from owning woods and spending time there. These are very practical, unsentimental people and they don't spend a lot of time talking about how much they love trees, nature and wildlife; but it is obvious that their attachment to the land goes way beyond its monetary value.

To reflect their unsentimental approach, the CBYC campaign should use very simple, practical, and direct language. However, the visuals of this campaign should balance our utilitarian and pragmatic language by evoking the deep emotions that tie people to their land. Appropriate visuals would therefore include: healthy trees and forests, woodland streams, images of wildlife (especially birds, and not deer), families and children enjoying the woods together, families working the woods together, etc.

The recommended style for the artwork is simple, realistic, outdoor images, in a 1950s Americana style. The current style of the CBYC materials conforms to this vision and can be extended into the next phase of the campaign.

