4.4 What Is an Audience Profile?

An audience profile is a "picture" of your target audience, developed specifically with a view to identifying features and attributes that you can tap to create your messages.

Audience profiles are grounded in data, but they are not simply a compilation of statistics. Think of a profile as a caricature of your landowner population, similar to a composite sketch developed by an artist based on the impressions of different people. When combined, seemingly disparate, incomplete, and biased bits of information can come together to create a pretty realistic image of the whole.

The more clear and concrete this picture is, the better your chance of identifying key motivators and presenting them in a way that is compelling for your target audience. The audience profile will also give you clues on where and how to reach target audience members—what channels to use, what sources or partners could enhance your credibility, where you should hold meetings and forums, etc.

Because each landowner is different (even within an audience), an audience profile is undoubtedly an overgeneralized picture that emphasizes certain dominant and prevalent attributes. The profile doesn't have to be 100 percent accurate to be useful. The idea is to combine what you do know about the people you're trying to influence, so you can understand the target behavior from their perspective—i.e., "get in their heads" for a bit.

Basic audience profiles tend to include information (or educated guesses) that answers the following questions:

- What values and ideas drive landowners' decisions about their land?

- How do landowners spend their time and how does this affect how (and how much) they interact with their woods?

- What do landowners currently know and think about the desired action?

- What knowledge and capacity do landowners have to implement the desired action?

It is also important to remember that woodland owners are simply people who own woods. Your audience profile will be even richer if it includes information about who your audience members are as people (and not just landowners). For example:

- What are the broad values and attitudes that underpin the culture of this community?

- Who lives in this community (demographic attributes) and how do they spend their time (lifestyle, pastimes, etc.)?

- What gets people's attention in this community? What do they talk about?

- Who do people listen to? What channels and sources of information are influential in this community?

A profile is a picture of your audience, which you create from multiple sources of information. It is a description, rather than a collection of data. Audience profiles include knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to the desired action, but go beyond that to understand what matters to audiences, how they are likely to make relevant decisions, and what will get their attention.