

W O W



featuring
**FOREST
STEWARDS
GUILD-
NORTHEAST**



SUCCESS SERIES

In the early 2000s, outreach foresters in Maine and New Hampshire saw a need to better serve women woodland owners. State agencies teamed up to launch Women and their Woods programs to better meet the needs of women landowners. This is their success story.

WRITTEN BY ESMÉ CADIENTE AND AMANDA MAHAFFEY, FOREST STEWARDS GUILD. FEATURING FOREST STEWARDS GUILD WOMEN OWNING WOODLANDS NORTHEAST NETWORK. IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SUSTAINING FAMILY FORESTS INITIATIVE, WITH A GRANT FROM THE US FOREST SERVICE, STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY.

GETTING OFF THE GROUND

In the early 2000s, outreach foresters in Maine and New Hampshire saw a need to better serve women woodland owners who, when affected by sudden life changes, were faced with difficult decisions about what to do with their family forestland. State agencies teamed up to launch Women and their Woods programs to better meet the needs of women landowners. The program was hugely successful until the initial funding stream expired and a key person retired.

The original Women and their Woods program was revitalized in 2015 by the Forest Stewards Guild in partnership with the Maine Forest Service and numerous local partners. The Guild coordinated workshops tailored to the women landowner populations in “home regions” of the state. Each event connected women to the Maine Forest Service, a place-based organization such as a land trust, and each other.



Now, the program has taken various titles in different regions, including Women and Our Woods, Women Owning Woodlands and Women Forest Stewards. No matter the title, these programs, umbrellaed under the WOW national program, connect women landowners to resources and tools needed to help make informed decisions about their land.

IMPETUS

The Northeast is home to many small, family-owned woodlands. Women play a significant role in the stewardship of these lands.



ENGAGING WOMEN

We partner with local host organizations and the Maine Forest Service, as well as women professionals in forestry and natural resources. By working with local partners, including women landowners, we listen to the interests of women in these areas and are better able to design workshops based on their needs.



WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

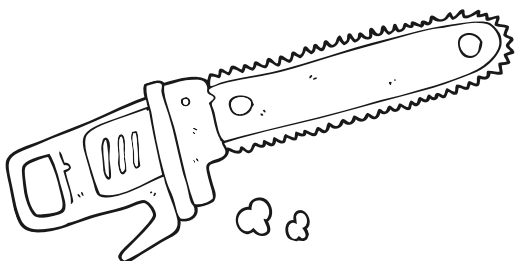
All of our workshops have been successful. Evaluations show that women feel empowered to take stewardship steps on their land, reach out to trusted professionals, and be confident in their connection with their land. We have learned that in a more intimate setting, we have a greater impact. Most of our workshops bring in 15 or so participants, averaged from these examples: We had an evening potluck and woodcock count workshop with a handful of women in rural, Downeast Maine. Nearly 30 women participated in an outdoor skills workshop in partnership with Women of the Maine Outdoors that included sessions on wildlife tracking, navigation, and chainsaw safety.

WHY CHAINSAWS?

We heard from several women that they wanted to learn how to use a chainsaw. In 2018, we saw an overwhelming demand for women's chainsaw safety courses.

We are working closely with a small suite of excellent instructors and enthusiastic partners to offer safe, high-quality workshops in places where we have heard the greatest demand. So far, we have offered an introductory course on chainsaw safety and maintenance geared toward women who have a saw or want to learn how to use one. Several have said they don't want to learn from their husband or father. Some women have a specific need, such as cutting their own firewood for heat. Others use saws to clear brush on their trails. Several women are part of their local volunteer fire department or conservation corps and need to be able to clear downed trees safely.

Chainsaws are the "hook" that engages these women in seeking needed knowledge to actively steward their land. They leave with fundamental knowledge of Personal Protective Equipment, saw maintenance, safe saw positioning, reading wood, and other elements essential to safe chainsaw use. Safety is our top priority. Once these women are "hooked" and gain well-founded confidence in their chainsaw skills, they are eager to learn more about their woodlands.



“Chainsaws are the “hook” that engages these women in seeking needed knowledge to actively steward their land.”



BARRIERS - WOMEN ARE BUSY!

The #1 challenge we have faced is that women are busy! As professionals, we see an urgent need to increase informed decision-making on privately owned forestlands through women's leadership.

As landowners, women - and men - are responsible for running busy family households, paying the bills, and dealing with a hundred other distractions that keep them from enjoying their woodlands. The woodland seems fine until a major windstorm, family emergency, or other unexpected event forces families to make difficult decisions about their land. We aim to keep family forestland owners connected and engaged with their land so that they are prepared to make thoughtful decisions when the time comes.

PUBLIC LAND STEWARDSHIP

What about women who are interested in land management but don't own any land? Is there a place for women in this program who would like to be more involved in public land management?

Absolutely! In the Northeast, women are often in leadership and stewardship roles in land trusts, which operate on privately-owned, publicly-enjoyed lands. Women often bear a sense of stewardship toward natural areas, whether publicly or privately owned. Women who participate in our programs don't need to own their own land to engage in forest stewardship.



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- Amanda Mahaffey

ADVICE TO PEERS

Amanda advises, start with what you have. Across the country, there is a community of women within the natural resource professions that leaps at the chance to increase learning opportunities for fellow women, whether students, landowners, or young professionals. Connect with those women, and the men that truly support this important work. Find someone who can coordinate an event where it's needed most. Don't have money? Hold a potluck. Don't have time to plan a separate event? Add on a women-only woods walk to a Tree Farm field day. Don't know where to begin? Connect with the network of people involved in outreach to women landowners at www.womenowningwoodlands.net. We are excited to help spread the WOW network and help you get started!



As a weathered WOW practitioner, Amanda offers some advice and keys to success...

KEYS TO SUCCESS

According to Amanda, key aspects to success are:

- Have fun, and make sure your participants are having fun. Fun is essential to meaningful learning.
- Take the time to celebrate why we love the woods. Create the space to listen.
- Get outside! The outdoor classroom is the best classroom.
- Connect women to a community. Working with local host partners and state agencies builds on women's sense of place and network of trusted professionals.
- Thank your sponsors and partners! Their support makes this important work possible. In Maine, we are grateful to the Betterment Fund, the Maine Community Foundation, the Maine Forest Service, the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry, and to our many dedicated hosts and instructors who generously give their time to support women in forest stewardship.

