



Located where the Golden Triangle and Crown of the Continent adjoin, in Cascade and northern Lewis and Clark Counties, the Golden Crown Stewardship Initiative (GCSI) is a partnership between the American Forest Foundation (AFF) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The goal of this partnership is to give private landowners the tools they need to actively and sustainably manage their forest land. It was launched in response to a 2015 report by AFF which found that Montana ranks second, only to California, in area of private forest land that is critical to public water supply and at high risk of severe impacts from wildland fire.¹

The thrust of the GCSI is using specifically crafted messages and marketing tools to connect landowners to existing services that can help them improve the health of their forests and its resilience to wildfire, while simultaneously reducing the threat of wildfire impacts to public water supplies for downstream Missouri River communities.

The “targeted” marketing strategy used in the GCSI involves identifying a specific audience and some of their characteristics before deciding which messages, outreach methods, and service offers will most appeal to them. Within the project area we selected landowners in landscapes with high concentrations of private forested land and ended up with a target audience comprising those in the Dearborn River corridor, along the Missouri River between Craig and Hardy, and the communities of Monarch and Niehart along upper Belt Creek. This group was later amended to include Wolf Creek and drop the Belt Creek communities, both decisions based on expressed landowner interest. To find out more about landowners in these areas, we also conducted a survey asking basic questions about demographics, reasons for owning forest land, main concerns about their forest, and resources that might be most useful to them.



Results found:

- >70% are absentee landowners
- 96% of landowners are concerned about wildfire
- Most landowners owned 40 acres or less
- Written information, free meeting with a forester, and networking with other landowners were rated as most useful

¹ American Forest Foundation. 2015. *Western Water Threatened by Wildfire: It's Not Just a Public Lands Issue*. 27 p. <https://www.forestfoundation.org/western-water-forests-report>

With this information in hand, we chose to craft marketing materials and messages to appeal to an amenity-driven audience whose primary motive for owning forested property is as a retreat, i.e. a “place to get away from it all.” Because our intent was to meet landowners on their terms, but also to prompt them into the eventual action of more actively managing their forest, we chose to offer a free visit with a forester – a decision arrived at only when our generic offers of financial and technical assistance and an invitation to a Great Falls stewardship planning workshop produced little interest. Images and text used in marketing material emphasized how landowners can contribute to maintaining the beauty of their land, while reducing the threat of high-severity wildfires.



Once we got the offer right, landowner responses poured in. In less than one year, the GCSI’s targeted marketing campaign has produced the following results:

- 28 forester visits
- 17 stewardship plans developed
- 260 acres to be treated for hazardous fuel reduction

By comparison, DNRC experience with implementing fuels treatment programs shows that conventional marketing and outreach methods take 3 to 4 years on average to generate the same level of landowner interest and resulting acreage total. The targeted marketing approach also resulted in greater connectivity between projects, an essential component of any project which hopes to address landscape level issues.

Our next steps include seeking funding for additional treatments, distributing information materials to landowners in the target area, and experimenting with developing a peer network of engaged landowners who can lead a grassroots effort to get more landowner in the GCSI engaged in active forest management.

For more information on the GCSI or targeted marketing, please contact Angela Wells at awells@mt.gov or (406) 542-4221.

