

“We Own Land”

An Activity Using the Peers and Pros 360° Teaching Method with Talking Points for Pennsylvania Forest Landowners

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“A new and novel approach to organizing landowner/teacher/public educational tours around peer to peer discussion with professionals' insights and knowledge sharing.”

The Peers and Pros 360° method uses peer statements (numbered, bold, and in quotes below) to serve as discussion starters along a forest trail or even in a quiet indoor setting. The statements in this curriculum set represent common remarks made by Pennsylvania citizens.

To begin, the statement card sheets must be cut into separate cards – one statement per card. These cards are then handed out randomly to participants at the beginning of the program. If there are more participants than there are cards, that’s OK, not everyone needs to have a card. A group size of between 10 and 25 individuals works best for this activity. Next, the tour (or indoor discussion) starts off and heads toward several predetermined stops. Upon reaching the stops (based on each theme), the leader asks the participants who are holding the appropriate cards (three cards per theme) to read them out loud to the group. Have the group stand in a circle at each stop, as this facilitates hearing AND discussion. The leader then asks the group of peers how they would respond if they heard another person say this. Every effort should be made to encourage discussion and participation and not to embarrass participants based on what they know about forests and forestry. Everyone is there to learn from each other. It is important to note, the individuals reading the statements out loud do not have to respond unless they wish to do so.

Following the participant discussion for each theme, the tour leader and other natural resource professionals will share their own thoughts and give suggestions (see talking points below for ideas) about the comments made and topics discussed at each stop. Sometimes this will mean gently correcting a false belief or misperception expressed by the participants. If time allows, a few quick questions may be entertained after the professionals have shared. The objective of this method is to make the activity interactive and one where learning begins at the knowledge level of the peer participants. It also allows for increased learning and sharing among all participants.

Talking Points for Tour Leaders

STOP ONE – Theme: Ownership Objectives, Planning, and Assistance

1) “We bought our land so we could have a place to get away and relax.”

- There are many reasons why people own forestland. Some landowners place high importance on lifestyle and amenity reasons for owning woods, such as aesthetics, privacy, rest, relaxation, recreation (especially hunting and watching wildlife).
- Others are concerned about providing for biodiversity and wildlife habitat.
- Economic reasons include timber harvesting (sawtimber, pulpwood, firewood) and investment in the land.
- Lastly, for some, land ownership is closely tied to family and heritage. They may have inherited their land and it has significant sentimental value and memories tied to it.

2) “We don't have a written plan for our forestland, but we do have some ideas about what we hope to do with the property.”

- Writing plans down, even if it's one or two pages, has many advantages over just “having a plan in your head.” Written plans have more success. Writing a plan down forces a person to think about what they want to accomplish, and how and when it should be done.
- Written plans give other family members a gift and guidelines in the event the landowner is not able to carry it out to completion. They will benefit greatly from all the knowledge, effort, and thought put into developing the property plan.
- Formal plans include stand descriptions and recommendations as well as a map and a 10-year schedule of activities. They are prepared by private consulting foresters based on the landowner's objectives for ownership. Cost-share assistance is available through Farm Bill programs to help offset the expense.

3) “I've heard there's someone from the state who will come look over your woods.”

- DCNR service foresters are available to assist. They can visit properties and give one-on-one technical service, recommendations, and advice. However, they are not allowed to provide timber evaluations. For timber assessment, land appraisals, and management plans, landowners may need a private consulting forester's help in evaluating their resource and writing a plan.
- The Game Commission has biologists that are available to assist landowners with planning for wildlife habitat improvement, and Penn State Extension Forestry Educators can provide information and education too.

STOP TWO – Theme: Timber Harvesting and Forest Management**4) “We don't plan on cutting down any trees on our property, only dead ones for firewood.”**

- To manage a forest effectively it is often necessary to cut live trees. Dead trees, called snags, have important values for recycling nutrients back into the soil and providing homes and food for wildlife. Professionals typically recommend leaving dead trees, unless they are hazardous, and cutting live trees to “manage” the forest.
- Thinning and crop tree release are good examples of forest management practices where live trees are cut to help the trees that are left grow faster and stay healthy.

5) “We know someone who has a logging business; we plan to contact him soon. Why should I hire a consulting forester and pay him a fee to sell my timber?”

- The timber sale process is complex. What is the best way to sell timber? It involves measuring and marking the proper trees to be removed, a sale prospectus listing the known quantities of wood by species of trees, and sealed bids from many potential buyers, legal contracts, etc. Competition determines market price.
- Study after study has shown that it pays to hire a consulting forester. They will more than pay for their service.
- Going directly to a firm and offering one's timber for purchase is **not** generally recommended unless low value, small diameter timber is involved. Beware of people who approach landowners seeking to buy timber directly. Regardless of what they tell the landowner, they typically seek to procure timber well below market value, and may not know anything about professional or sustainable forestry.

6) “It's best to only cut the big trees; that way you can come back and harvest again every 10-20 years.”

- Select cutting and diameter cutting (harvesting all trees above a specified diameter) are usually just forms of “high grading” – taking the best and leaving the rest. Landowners do not want to see this happen in their woods. It can be avoided by getting unbiased professional assistance.
- The future value of the leftover, or “residual” trees after a high grade is rarely positive. They are “genetic runts,” typically low value species, seldom grow well, don't produce much wood, and are often damaged by the equipment that removed the best trees.

STOP THREE – Theme: Invasive Plants, Animals and Insects**7) “Invasive plants are just ‘wiping out’ all of our native plants.”**

- Non-native invasive plants did not originally occur in the area where they are found now, they grow rapidly, spread aggressively, out-compete, and displace native plants.
- Invasive plants are often very hard to control. Each one can be a separate challenge, and the use of herbicides is often necessary. Manual control methods are seldom effective and often make a bigger problem.
- There are important ecological relationships between native plants and the native animals and insects that rely on them. They often need each other to complete their lifecycles. If a native plant is displaced by an invasive plant, it may alter the entire ecosystem in the area. Large areas covered by invasive plants often create ecological “deserts” and very poor wildlife habitat.

8) “Most of the trees in Pennsylvania are being killed by bugs and diseases from other countries.”

- This statement is only partially true. But, it’s becoming more and more of a problem that exotic pests (both insects and diseases) will continue showing up and attacking our native tree species. It’s a serious situation. Consider how we lost the American chestnut and American elm to exotic diseases. Now our eastern hemlock, white ash, and oaks are under siege from non-native insect invasions.
- Press coverage about these issues often leads us to think that all is lost. There is some promising research going on to find solutions to these problems, but no major breakthroughs yet!

9) “I just love to see all the ferns in my woods; it reminds me of where I hunted up north as a kid.”

- Ferns and other native plants can also be invasive under the right conditions. They are viewed as a positive because they are native plants, but when that’s all you have on the forest floor, they’re a negative.
- Excessive ferns, and many other native plants, are usually the result of high deer populations. The deer have eaten all the desirable regeneration (young trees and shrubs) and the ferns, which are not preferred deer food, take over – inhibiting the growth of other plants and reducing biodiversity.

STOP FOUR – Wildlife Management Issues

10) “I’m interested in helping wildlife on our property, but I don’t really know what to do.”

- A high percentage of landowners think and feel this way. Wildlife viewing is a common reason given for why they own their land. What many landowners don’t realize is that the best way to “help wildlife” is to create and enhance habitat.
- There is a lot of research-based information available from Penn State Extension about managing vegetation for food and cover and enhancing water sources for wildlife. Conservation organizations, the PA Game Commission, DCNR Bureau of Forestry, consulting foresters, and privately-employed wildlife biologists are available to guide landowners.

11) “We enjoy feeding the deer, turkeys, and bears that come to our property.”

- Feeding wildlife is NOT a good idea. By congregating wildlife in small areas, the possibility of disease and insect transmission is increased, such as chronic wasting disease in deer and mange in bears. Use the analogy of guests coming to one house and everyone eating off the same plate to clarify this.
- Further, the foods and other items put out for wildlife (such as corn, salt lick products, and livestock feeds) are not part of their natural diet and can fill stomachs with non-nutritious “junk foods” that cause serious digestive issues.

12) “Cutting trees destroys wildlife homes and places where they get food.”

- While some animal habitat might be affected, young forest habitat will be created through the new vegetation that grows back. “Younger” forest habitat is needed and lacking in many areas. It’s critical that these younger trees are protected from over-browsing if deer populations are high in the area. Increased hunting and deer exclosure fences are two options.
- Animals will shift to other trees in surrounding areas to meet their needs.
- Much of the woody material that is left on the ground after a timber harvest is important to forest wildlife – it decays and provides food (such as insects and fungi) and cover. It also decomposes and becomes part of the soil layer.

STOP FIVE – Woodland Legal and Administrative Issues

13) “I’ve heard that you need to sign your name on all your “NO TRESPASSING” signs, but I’m not really sure about this.”

- Names and signatures are NOT required in PA. Signs should clearly state what is prohibited on the property. Placing signs so that they can be seen clearly by anyone entering the property is essential. It is recommended that when standing and looking at each sign on your property, the signs to the right and left of it should also be visible in the distance.

- Signs alone are not always enough in the eyes of the law. If people are known to trespass on a property, landowners should back up their signs with verbal, or better yet, written communication stating that they are trespassing and should stay off the property.
- Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act limits the liability, resulting from personal injury or property damage, of landowners who make their land available to the public for recreation free of charge.
- Discuss the pros and cons: This act protects landowners from unwarranted liability suits by people using their property if the land is NOT POSTED and OPEN to the public. If a person's property is POSTED, they have higher general liability if someone is harmed on their property, especially if that person was INVITED by the landowner to the property to recreate or be there for some other reason.

14) “The biggest headache we have on our property is ATVs from the nearby camps.”

- This is a widespread problem and a tricky one to deal with. Discuss how trespass laws in PA work, and who enforces them. Wildlife Conservation Officers (WCOs) are not generally involved in enforcing the trespass law – this is for local and state police to enforce. However, police are often hesitant to spend much time doing it.
- Rock barriers and gates can be used on access roads and trails to discourage ATV trespassers.
- Some landowners have found solutions by working directly with their neighbors instead of involving law enforcement.
- If you are enrolled in the Game Commission's Hunter Access programs, the WCO will often assist you with managing ATV trespass.

15) “I don't want to enroll in any government programs because I would have to open my land to the public.”

- This is not always true. For example, Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) participants, and landowners participating in Game Commission Hunter Access programs, have the right to limit the public's access to their property. The NRCS Farm Bill programs that provide cost sharing for conservation land improvements don't require that the land be open to the public as well.

STOP SIX – Theme: Pennsylvania Forest History

16) “The forests we have in Pennsylvania today were planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and other groups.”

- The CCC played a role in providing work for young men during the depression in the 1930's. They were active in tree planting efforts, especially in areas that had been cut and burned over and old farms that were purchased by the state for back taxes. The CCC

was given lots of press for their planting work. They also helped build infrastructure projects in what became Pennsylvania state forests and parks.

- Many of the young men who were active in the CCC remembered and shared their experiences with their families and the people of Pennsylvania for years after their service.
- The CCC only replanted a very small portion of the state (mostly pines and spruce) and the rest of our forests regenerated naturally from seeds, stump sprouts, and root suckers.

17) “The forests of Pennsylvania used to be all white pines and hemlocks. After they were cut down, only hardwoods came back.”

- This is often stated as truth, but is largely a myth. The state was covered with a mixture of tree species during the colonial era. There were pure stands of pine and hemlocks in some regions, but they did not make up most of the forested area.
- It is true that softwoods made up a larger percentage of trees in Penn’s Woods in the past than today, but this is the result of past cutting practices and wildfires and the way both types of trees (hardwoods and softwoods) grow back (regenerate).

18) “My property is old virgin timber; I don’t think it’s ever been cut!”

- While some individuals believe this is true about their property, it is rarely the case. There are very few “virgin” or old growth stands of trees in Pennsylvania and those that do exist are mostly in public ownership. Most of Pennsylvania was last cut over between 1880 and 1920.
- It’s more likely that a person’s “virgin” forest contains larger trees than the neighboring properties, and/or they are misinformed about when the last cutting occurred on their land.

STOP SEVEN – Theme: Forest Legacy & Estate Planning

19) “We plan to pass the property on to our three kids in equal portions.”

- The division of land into equal portions is problematic. Some portions of a property are more desirable, have better access, are worth more, contain more natural resources, etc. It is nearly impossible to split land and natural resources equally and fairly without liquidating the land and timber into cash first.
- Simply dividing land into “equal portions” is often a recipe for family division. The more children there are, the more complicated this can be. Some children may not want to own land, while others do. This can often lead to hard feelings as family members strike deals with other family members to “buy them out,” or sell to non-family members before offering or selling it cheaply to family.

- Family discussions about these issues, before a will is drawn up, are the best way to determine if this method will work for a family. These discussions might not be easy to have, but they may prevent even harder feelings down the line, and maintain family unity.

20) “None of my kids are really interested in the woods. I’m not sure what will become of my land when I die.”

- This is a common situation. If it hasn’t happened already, an open discussion with heirs might surprise the property owner. Sometimes heirs are very hesitant to bring this topic up or don’t want to discuss the death of a loved one. Landowners might discover that some of their heirs have more interest in owning a forested property than they thought.
- Landowners must decide what is most important to them regarding the future of their property and family. If they desire their management objectives for the property be carried on after their death, they may want to know more about the options that conservancies, conservation easements, land trusts, or donations to public natural resources agencies might offer them.
- The sale of the property to a private individual may also offer a solution, if the buyer embraces a similar vision and goals as the seller.

21) “I’m going to deed the woods over to my boys before I go. They love to hunt.”

- All the issues mentioned above for Statements 19 and 20 relate to this statement.
- Additionally, deeding land over to children like this can put landowners and their children in some difficult tax and Medicare payment situations. The government can look back many years and hold one or the other liable for health care expenses if the land was deeded over for free or below market value.

STOP EIGHT – Theme: Absentee Forestland Owner Issues

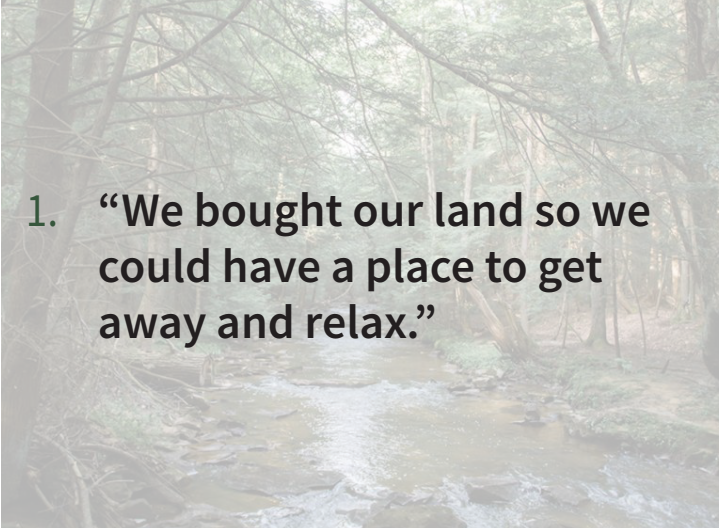
22) “I’m concerned about people breaking into our camp and destroying the property.”

- This is a valid concern. Camps are often secluded and out of view from main roads. Having trusted neighbors keep watch over a camp and forest property, or having a caretaker, are traditionally practiced prevention methods.
- Using security lights, motion cameras, and alarm systems, blocking access roads with strong gates or large stones, installing extra thick, solid entry doors, and more frequent use by family members can reduce problems.

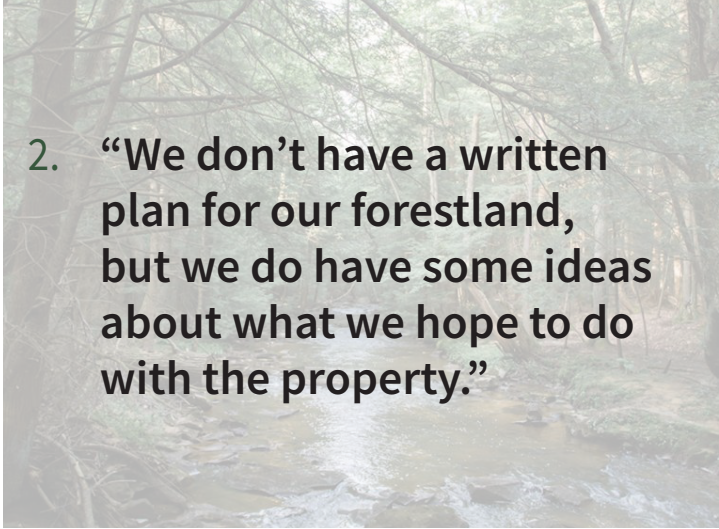
- 23) “We don’t live near our property, so we can’t really get many things done up there.”**
- There’s no free lunch; a second property is lots of extra work and, when it’s far from your main dwelling place, you may just have to hire people to help you out sometimes if you cannot spend more time working there yourself.
 - Trusted individuals might be willing to do some work for you on your property or at your camp in return for letting them use it occasionally for a vacation or private hunting spot.
- 24) “I’ve been thinking about letting some hunters post my land for me You know, in return for them watching over things when I’m not here.”**
- If there is a good understanding of expectations between the parties involved, this can be a very effective system to provide security and perhaps generate some income through a lease hunting agreement.
 - Landowners need to make it clear when they will be using the property, what they will allow and **not** allow on the property, and when they do not want others recreating or using the land.

Printing the Attached Statement Cards:

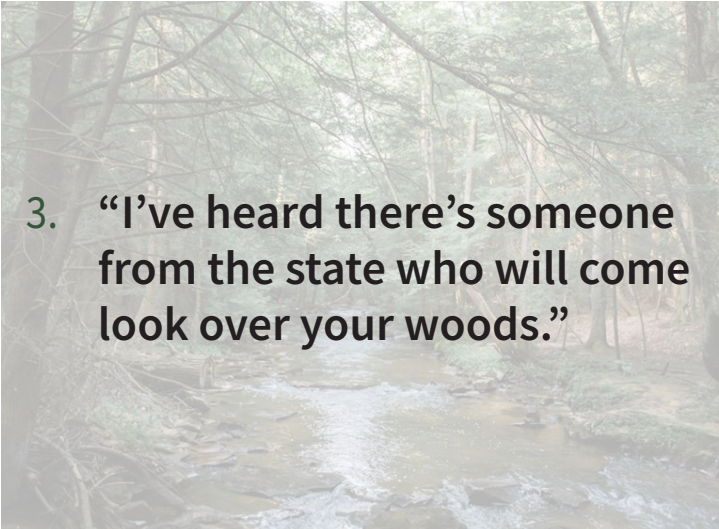
When printing the attached Landowner Peer statement cards, you can print out the pages – single sided – on cover stock and then cut the cards apart OR you can print them directly onto Avery 5392 Name Badge Insert Refills (3 x 4 inches). When trimmed (or spilt apart on the perforations on the Avery refills), they have about a 1/8" border all the way around. Having the background pic makes it easy to cut them about the same size.



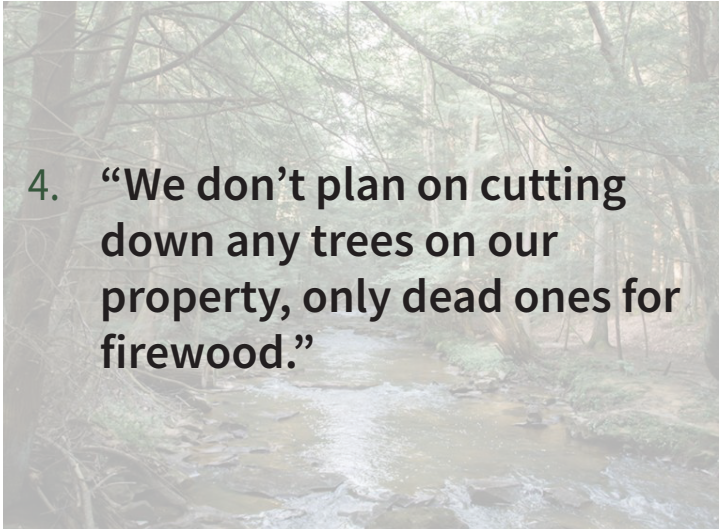
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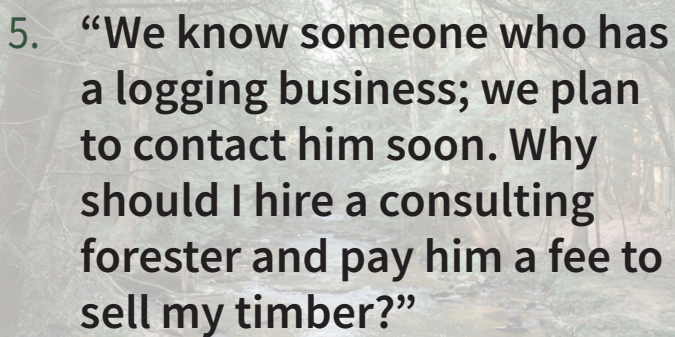
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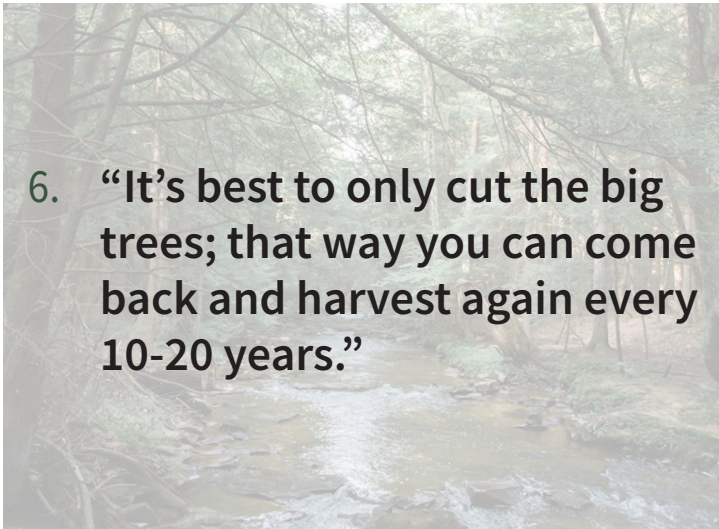
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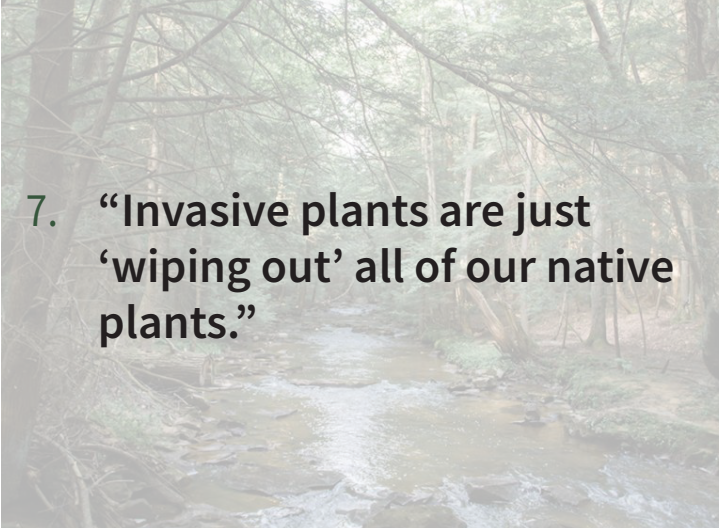
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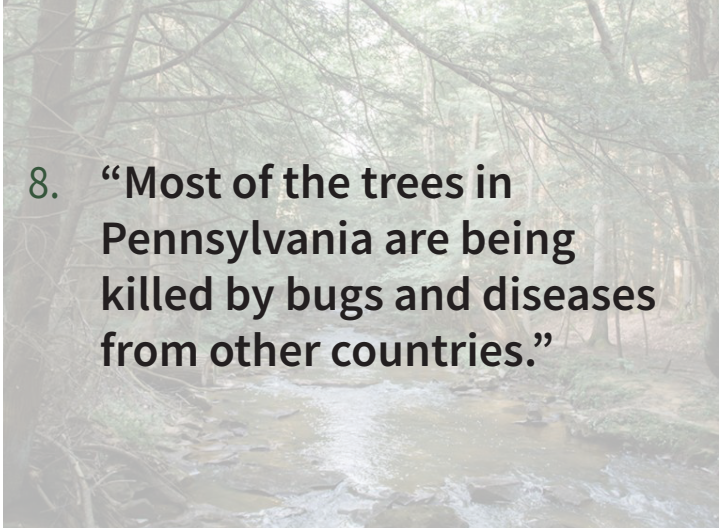
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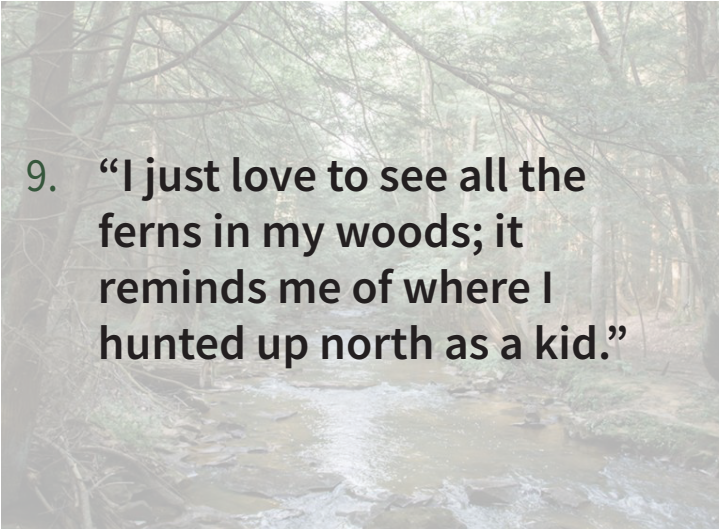
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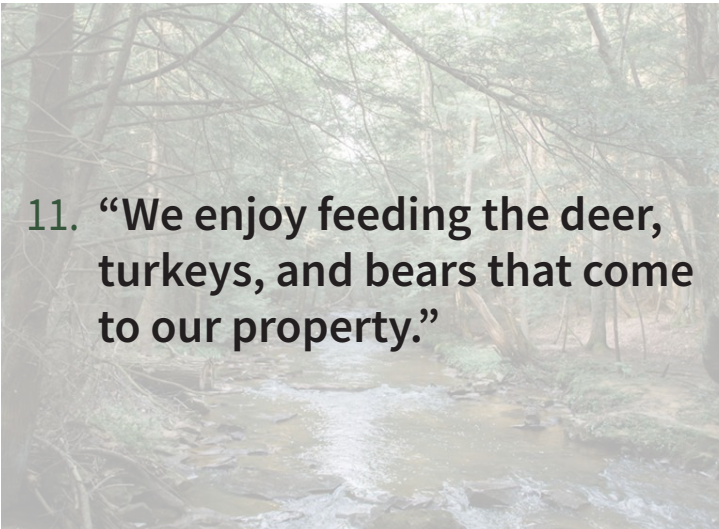
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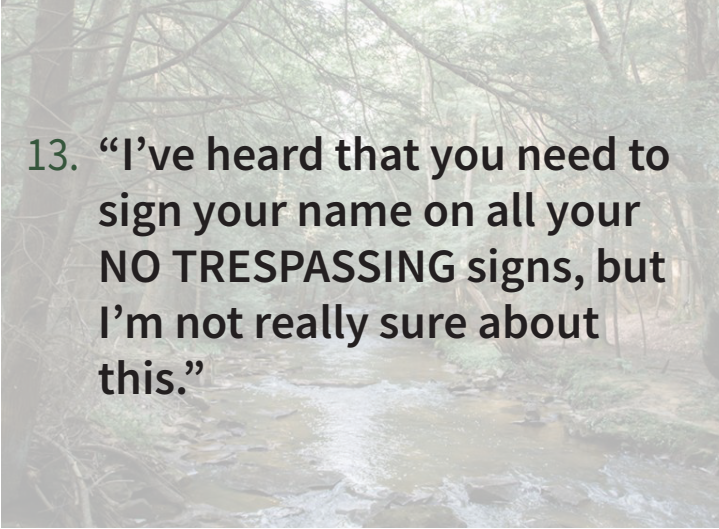
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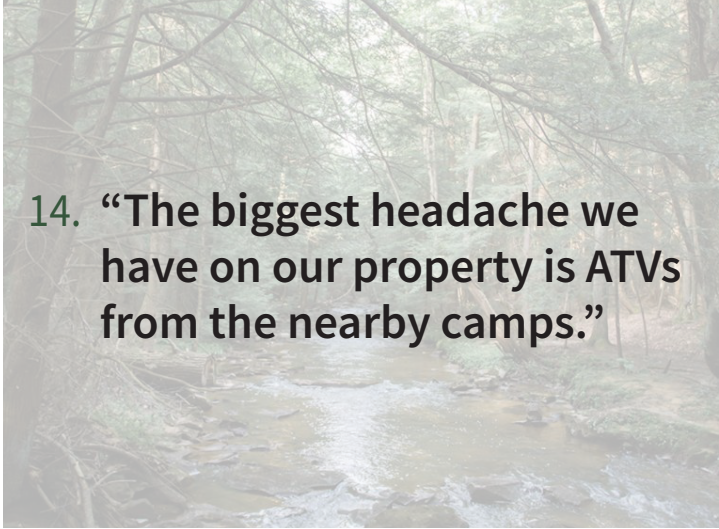
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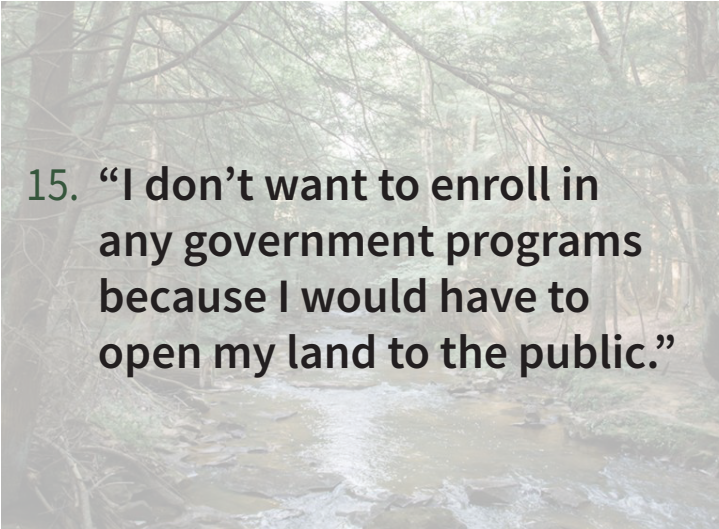
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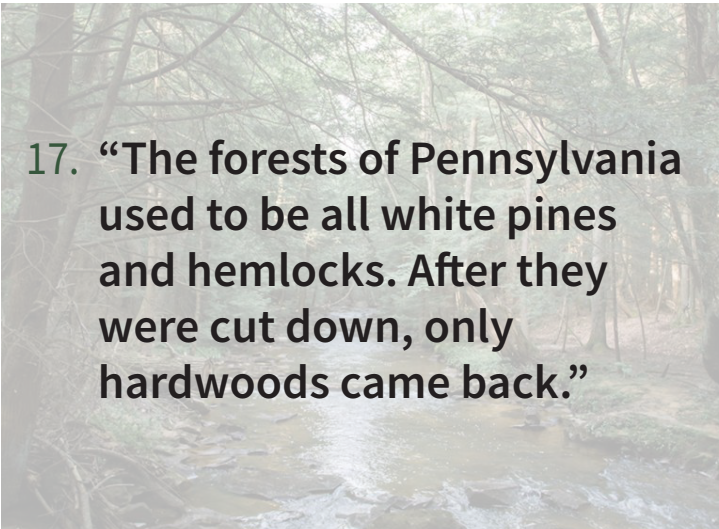
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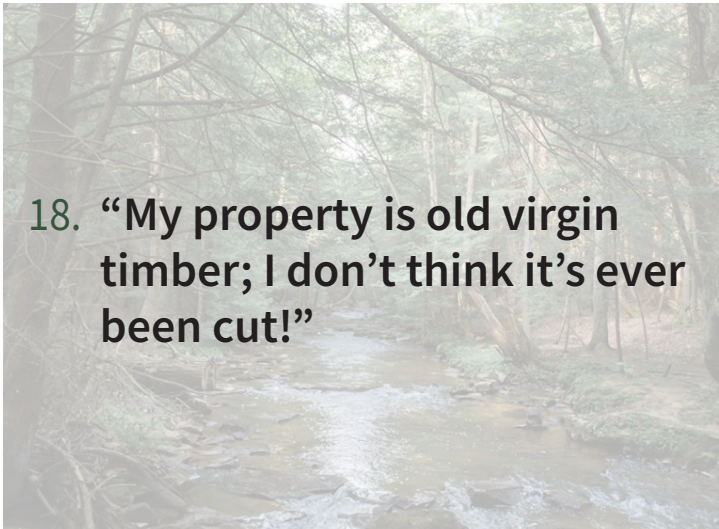
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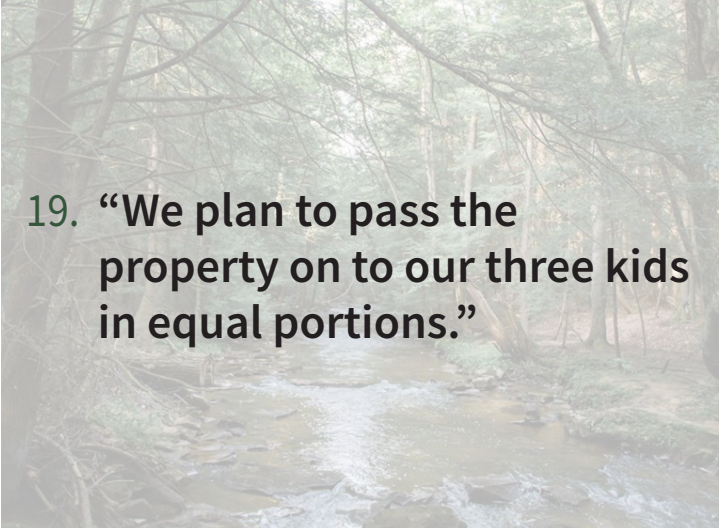
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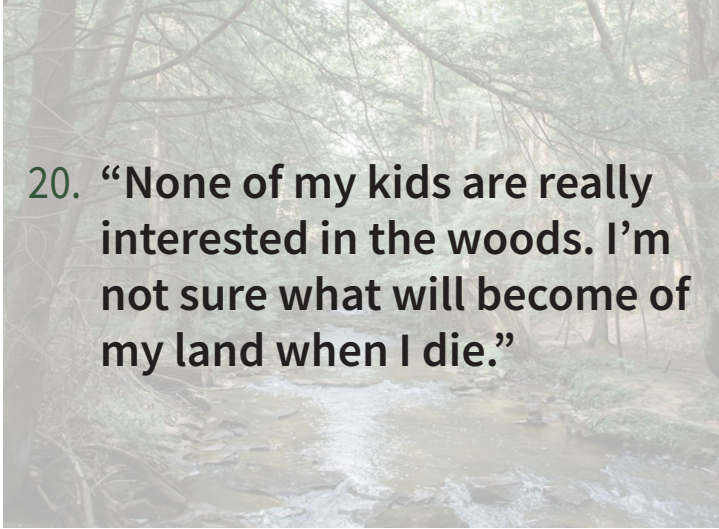
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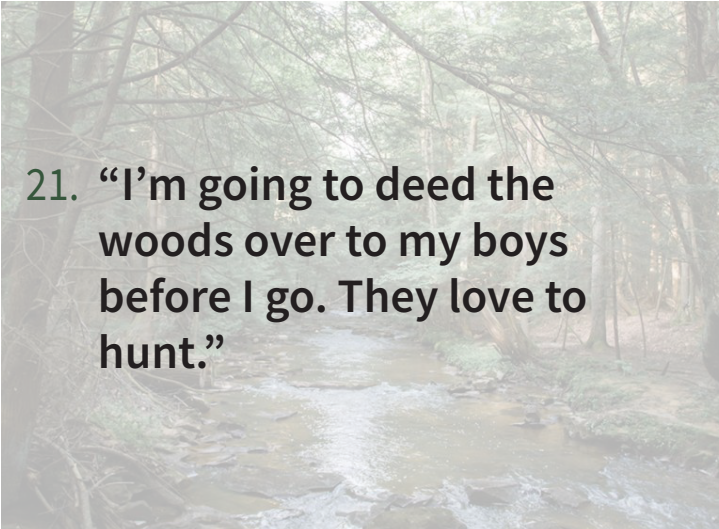
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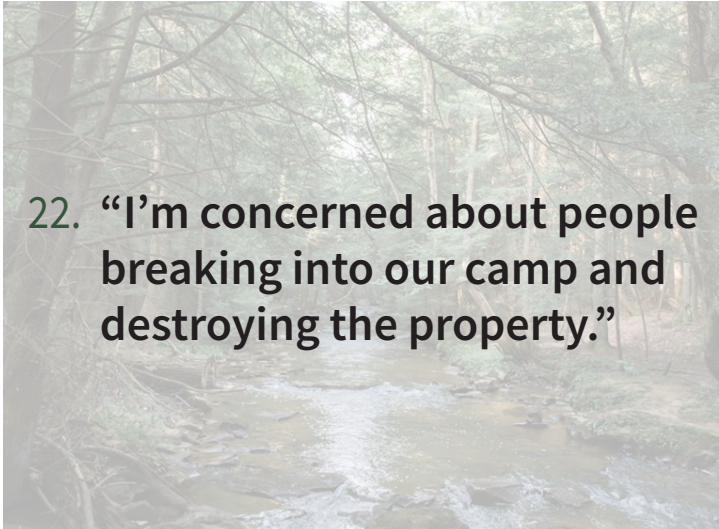
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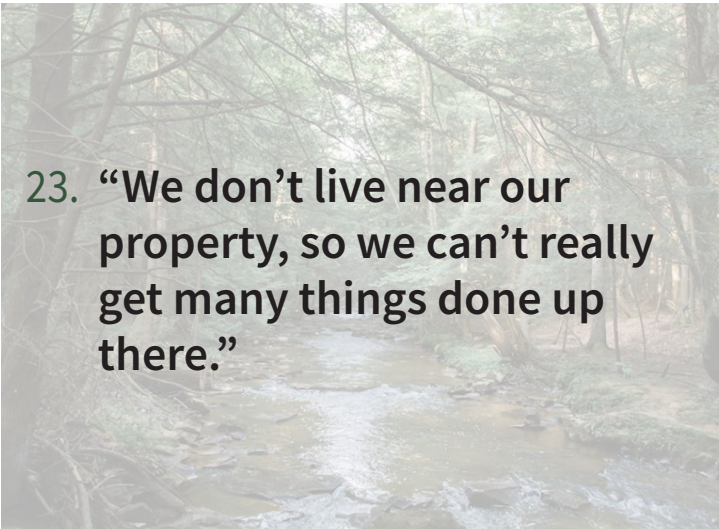
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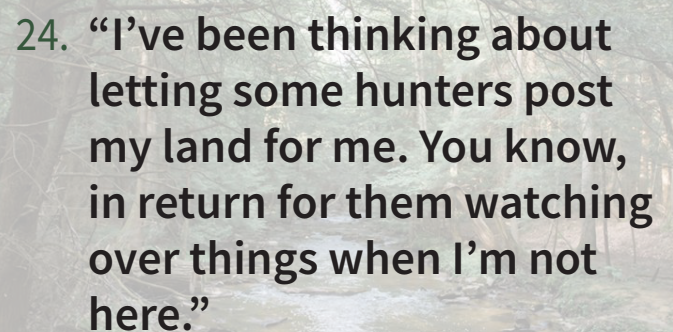
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