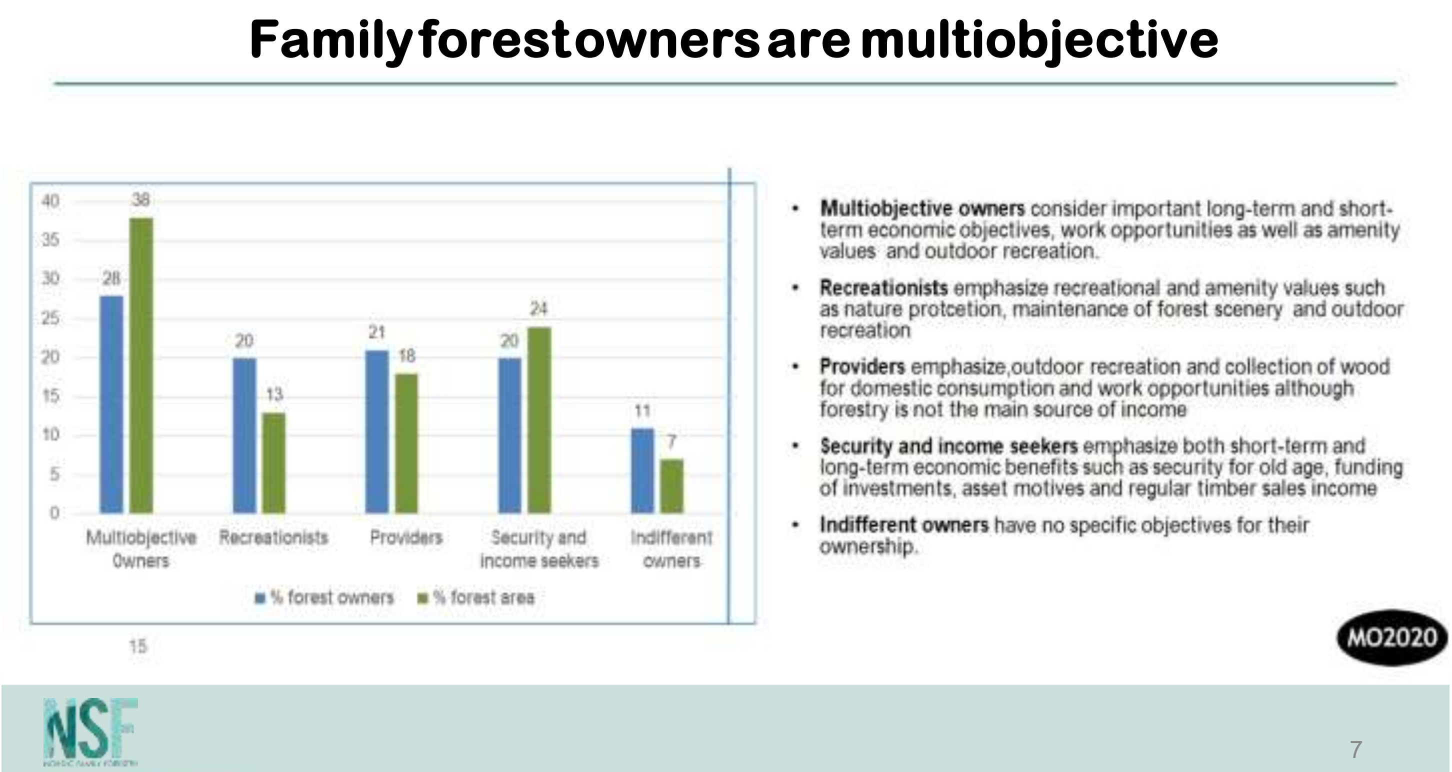
Private forest owners providing multiple services

Private forest owners are at the heart of sustainable forestry in Finland end Europe. They do not manage forests for a single purpose. Instead, they balance economic, environmental, social, and cultural objectives according to their own values, life situation, and long-term goals.

Finland has approximately 600,000 forest owners. Most of them are members of MTK, the organisation representing Finnish farmers and forest owners. Across Europe, there are an estimated 16 million private forest owners, making private ownership the dominant form of forest ownership in the European Union.

Research and recent member surveys show that Finnish forest owners increasingly make decisions based on multiple objectives rather than a single target such as timber production alone. In the 2026 MTK Member Survey, 68% of forest owners identified financial security and income as an important objective, while 38% highlighted multiple simultaneous objectives. Around 30–40% emphasized recreation and personal use, and approximately 20% emphasized biodiversity and conservation. Importantly, these categories overlap. The same forest owner may seek timber revenues while also valuing wildlife, scenic landscapes, berries and mushrooms, carbon storage, recreation, and biodiversity.



Private forests deliver renewable raw materials for the bioeconomy, climate benefits through carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, recreation opportunities, landscape values, rural employment, and energy security.

Our message to both national and European decision-makers is simple: create an enabling and encouraging operating environment for forest owners. Stable policies, respect for property rights, functioning markets, and incentive-based solutions are far more effective than increasing restrictions and administrative burdens. When the framework is right, forest owners respond. They invest, manage forests actively, improve biodiversity, strengthen carbon sinks, and provide the many benefits that society expects from forests.

At MTK and together with the Forest Management Associations, our role is to help forest owners balance these different objectives in practice. We do this through advice, planning, market access, and the development of new service models that convert societal demand into opportunities for forest owners.

> *"Forest Management Associations (MHYs) are member-based organizations owned by Finnish forest owners, providing expert services for sustainable forest management, timber sales, nature management, and forest property ownership. With more than 40 local associations and over 1,000 forestry professionals across Finland, MHYs help forest owners achieve their economic, environmental, and personal objectives while advocating for their interests at the local level."*

Traditionally, forest owners have been able to generate income through timber markets and forest energy markets. Already years ago, we were involved in piloting carbon services and exploring how climate benefits could create new value for forest owners. Today, we are taking the next step. Through Luontoarvot.fi, we are building a marketplace that creates new opportunities for forest owners to participate in biodiversity and nature value markets.

This development reflects a broader transformation in forestry. Society increasingly expects forests to produce not only wood, but also climate benefits, biodiversity, recreation opportunities, clean water, and other ecosystem services. Forest owners are willing to contribute to these objectives, but success requires functioning markets, clear incentives, and policies that support active and sustainable forest management.

The future of European forestry is therefore not about choosing between economic and environmental objectives. It is about creating conditions where private forest owners can successfully deliver both. When owner objectives, innovation, and markets work together, forests can provide multiple services and multiple benefits for society.

Finland's experience shows that when forest owners are trusted, given freedom to choose, and provided with practical tools and functioning markets, they are remarkably effective at helping society achieve its goals. The task of policymakers is not to replace the forest owner's decision-making. The task is to create a framework in which those decisions benefit both the owner and society.

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