



Woods Forum

If you promote it, they will come

Successful landowner event planning, promotion, and hosting

1. Details:

Brief description/teaser

- Landowner gathering – landowners share advice and experiences and learn from one another. Exchange with other landowners.
- Include specific content for “hook” (i.e. Address local issue [e.g. Tree care after storm], Chapter 61, Conservation Restrictions, Timber harvesting, etc.)
- Local professionals are available to meet and answer questions

Time

- Weekday evening program is often best, unless local people recommend otherwise (e.g. weekend morning). Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays are best. 6:30-8:30pm is ideal time.
- Schedule a back-up date in case of bad weather. Ideally, this date should be one week later on the same day of the week. Another good choice is to host it on a later day of the same week.
- Verify date doesn't conflict with relevant town meetings (i.e. Conservation Commission or Open Space Committees)

Location

- Select ‘neutral ground’, i.e. library, town hall, grange, senior center, community space, American Legion)
- Private venues may charge a fee. Ask for discounts associated with non-profit/public/educational organizations. Consider asking hosting organization(s) for financial contribution for any associated fees.
- Find out if you will need a key to get into the space or if it will already be open. Get a phone number of someone to contact the day of the event in case there are any issues.

Host organizations

- Identify primary, local hosting organization(s) that will take the lead on promotion. Invite other regional organizations.

RSVP

- 15 or more RSVPs required for event to take place
- Possible language on promotional materials: “RSVP Requested. Space is limited, please reserve your spot.”
- Make sure all partners promoting the event know this and stress RSVP request to potential attendees.

2. Materials:

For promotion:

Fliers

- Template will be available on MassWoods.net

Postcards

- Template will be available on MassWoods.net
- Print on cardstock, cut, and distribute by mail or leave at strategic locations

Press release template (available for download at

<http://www.masswoods.net/index.php/woodsforum>

For event:

Writing implements

- Enough pens for sign-in table and for each attendee to complete evaluation forms
- Sharpie for name tags

Signs

- Signs for doors of event space, e.g. “Woods Forum Tonight”
- Markers and paper for making last-minute signs

Name Tags

- Name tags for Natural Resource Professionals (optional whether or not you have landowners put on name tags)

Projector

- Some venues may be able to provide this

Projection screen

- Some venues may be able to provide this

Extension cord with 3-prong end

- 2+ cords preferable for 1) laptop; 2) projector; 3) coffee pot(s)

Camera

- Take photos of full room, candid shots of attendees speaking, and small groups of attendees talking to one another.

Paperwork

- List of RSVP'ed attendees (2 copies)
- Blank sign-in sheet with columns for address, phone, email (4+ copies)
- Evaluation forms (bring more than the number of confirmed attendees)
- CEU forms for foresters (must get permission from _____ to offer them)

Refreshments

- Solicit local businesses for food donations. In exchange, offer business acknowledgement at event. Hosting/participating organizations probably already have relationships with area businesses.
- Ask hosting organization(s) to contribute snacks.
- Snacks: Cookies, fruit, pretzels, popcorn, etc.

- Beverages: Hot beverages are always a big hit, but require equipment (unless you buy boxes of hot coffee from Dunkin Donuts, for example). Verify that hot beverages are allowed at venue. Cider, juice, soda, flavored seltzer water are good alternatives.
- Cups, plates, napkins, utensils (serving and eating).
- Trash, recycling, compost bags/containers
- Paper towels and all-purpose cleaner, for cleanup and in case of spills

3. Attendees:

Landowners

- The primary goal of a Woods Forum is to connect landowners with landowners to catalyze peer-to-peer learning.

Local Professionals

- Include local conservation experts so that landowners may meet them in person and ask them questions. Visit MassWoods.net to identify your local conservation professionals.
- Ask these professionals to reach out to landowners whom they know would be interested in learning more about options for their land. Show conservation commissions, land trusts and foresters your complete mailing list and have them indicate landowners whom they know and think you should target.
- Encourage professionals to bring a stack of business cards and written educational materials for attendees.

Professionals:

Local state service forester

Local consulting foresters & industrial foresters

Land trust representatives

Watershed association

Landowner association

4. Promotion

Audience

Target audience:

- Select towns, consider including 3-6 towns surrounding host town
- Identify target landowners, e.g. woodland owners, agricultural landowners, minimum acreage, proximity to focus area/target resource, etc.

Previous event attendees

- Reach out to people who attended past events (therein lies the value of the sign-in sheet!). Thank them for their past participation, describe new event and invite them to attend, also ask them to think of friends, family or neighbors who might be interested in attending the upcoming event.

Engaged landowners

- Mailing and contact lists of local conservation organization. Invite membership, volunteers, and landowners with whom partner organizations are communicating about conservation options or potential projects.

Unengaged landowners

- Direct mailing followed by PHONE CALLS is best approach, but resource-intensive

Distribute print materials

Post fliers and leave stacks of postcards

- Prime locations:
 - Event location
 - Town halls
 - Libraries
 - Community centers
 - Schools and colleges
 - Popular stores (General store, co-op, pharmacy, coffee shop, etc.)
 - Hardware/home repair businesses
 - Nursery/landscaping businesses
 - Gyms
- Inform people working at the above locations about the event, in case they would like to attend or are asked questions by patrons. Leave your business card with them.

Direct mailing to landowners

- Locate mailing lists
 - Town Assessors Offices: Call and request landowner list with certain acreage (i.e. 10+ acres, 20+ acres). Check online for office hours, as many have sporadic hours. Some offices will be able to provide this information easily and immediately in an Excel spreadsheet. Others may be more perplexed by your request but will be able to get you info if you are persistent. Some offices will ask for a formal letter of request to keep on record. See MassWoods.net for template letter. On occasion there will be a small fee for the list, between \$5 - \$10.
 - Purchase mailing lists: Data companies compile landowner information and sell lists that meet your specific requirements. Researchers at UMass Extension and the Family Forest Research Center often have these lists and may be able to share them with you. Contact Paul Catanzaro (cat@umext.umass.edu).
 - Outreach mailing lists of conservation organizations involved in event.
- Mailing timing: Aim to have postcards arrive at homes early in the week (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday) 3-4 weeks prior to event. Put in mail on Saturday to ensure early-week arrival.
- Mailing postage: Your mailing may be eligible for non-profit rates through the USPS if sent through a qualified non-profit. See USPS Business Mail 101,

Getting Started, Prices, Non-profit Status
(<http://pe.usps.com/businessmail101/rates/nonprofit.htm>)

Follow-up phone calls to direct mailing recipients

- A friendly phone call reminding recipients of the mailing and encouraging them to come **MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE!!!!**
- Organize a team of 3 or more volunteers to make 2-hours worth of phone calls
- Timing: Make calls during the 2 weeks prior to the event. Make calls between the hours of 5 and 9pm for best contact rate.
- See script below for general approach. Remember to use a happy, enthusiastic tone. This will be the only voice associated with the event and the tone should convey that the event will be enjoyable, helpful and well-attended.

Hello, My name is (Your Name) and I'm calling to remind you about the upcoming Woods Forum event in (Town). Did you receive a post card invitation?

The Woods Forum is next (Day, Date) from (Time) to (Time) at the (Name of Location) at (Address) and refreshments will be served.

It's a chance for you to learn more about different options for your land. You can ask your questions, hear from other landowners and meet local professionals. Will you be attending?

Thank you very much for your time and we look forward to seeing you on (Day) at (Start Time) at the (Name of Location).

- Leaving a message: Be sure to remind folks to RSVP to the appropriate phone number. Say the number slowly and repeat it twice!

Hello, my name is (Your Name) and this message is for (Landowner Name). You should have received an invitation in the mail to a Woods Forum happening (Day) at (Start Time) at the (Name of Location). Refreshments will be provided and we hope to see you there. Please RSVP for the Woods Forum by calling (Phone Number). Again that's (Phone Number). Thank you.

Other media

Local newspapers:

- See template press release at MassWoods.net.
- Request event posting on community events calendar, ask about print and online versions.

Online media:

- Online events calendars and listservs (e.g. BEAT News: Team@thebeatnews.org; 413-230-7321), Radio

- Local radio stations (NPR: WFCR, UMass: WMUA, etc.): Request interview about conservation issues and plug event. Otherwise, pay for an advertising spot.

TV

- Community public television event calendars

5. Putting on the Event

Below is a step-by-step guide for setting up, hosting and breaking down an event.

SET UP

1. Consider visiting the event space prior to the event to scope out
 - Entrance location(s), key situation (if you are responsible for unlocking and locking up), and signage needs
 - Electric outlet locations (to determine how many extension cords are needed),
 - Kitchen/sink availability,
 - Number of chairs and tables, etc.
2. On the day of the event, arrive 1.5 hours before start time to set up. Some attendees will always show up ~30 minutes early, so this will leave you 1 hour to set up
3. Unload all supplies and scope out event space.
4. Turn on lights in event space and along the route attendees will use to get to the room
5. Hang signs (“Woods Forum Tonight” signs on the outside of all entrances, and “Woods Forum →” signs directing people inside the building to the event room)
6. Set up 4 tables: 2 for refreshments, 1 for registration by the main entrance, 1 for written educational materials
7. Begin to brew coffee or heat hot water
8. Set up chairs
8. Set up refreshments. Set out promotional materials from any businesses who have donated food
9. Set out written educational materials
10. Place an evaluation form and a pen on each chair
11. At registration desk, set out RSVP lists, blank sign-in sheets, name tags, pens and sharpies

RUNNING THE EVENT

1. Welcome everyone and thank them for attending
2. Introduce yourself and your organization
3. Tell people that they are welcome to get refreshments at any time. Thank any businesses who donated refreshments for the event.
4. Tell people where the restrooms are located
5. Introduce the presenter(s)
6. Hand it over to the presenter(s)
7. At the end of the event, remind everyone to fill out and return their evaluation forms

8. Thank everyone for coming
9. Make any pertinent announcements about upcoming events, etc.

CLEAN-UP

1. Remove trash
2. Replace all furniture and equipment to original location
3. Collect signs
4. Turn out lights
5. Lock up and deposit key, as necessary

FOLLOW-UP

1. Send a thank-you (note, email or phone call) to the following people:
 - Local host organization and volunteers who helped with promoting and running the event
 - Event space contact
 - Natural resource professionals who attended
2. Compile final attendee list and calculate:
 - Total # attendees
 - # Landowners and/or # households
 - # Natural resource professionals