

Options for Tree Farms of 10,000 Contiguous Acres of Greater

The [Eligibility Requirements for Certification by the American Tree Farm System](#)[®] (ATFS), state that all properties larger than 10,000 contiguous acres currently grandfathered into the State Tree Farm Programs must undergo third-party audit before December 31, 2012. Grandfathered properties are those larger than 10,000 contiguous acres that were certified through the ATFS State Programs prior to December 31, 2009.

What does Contiguous Mean?

It is first essential to ensure that the property is, in fact, a contiguous parcel of 10,000 acres or larger. "Contiguous" parcels are discreet parcels that share a boundary line and are held under the same legal ownership name. For example, many grandfathered Tree Farms that entered the system several decades ago are actually comprised of two or more smaller scattered parcels. In these cases, the ownerships may remain certified through the State Tree Farm Program. However, a Tree Farm must be established for each parcel, to accurately reflect the parcel's acreage. The landowner may, however, retain their original Tree Farm number on whichever parcel they wish.

For those contiguous Tree Farms that are 10,000 acres or larger, there are three pathways for maintaining ATFS certification and meeting the requirement for third-party audit:

[Single Third-Party Certificate](#)

Grandfathered property owners may obtain a single third-party certificate. Under this option, landowners maintain their own ATFS certificate and are responsible for coordination and financing of third-party audits. As single certificate holders, landowners must submit annual reporting to AFF, along with annual certification fees.

[Join an Independently Managed Group \(IMG\)](#)

Grandfathered property owners may join an IMG. An IMG provides certification to a group of landowners, under a single umbrella certificate, thereby distributing the costs of certification among the group members. An IMG program is facilitated by an IMG Manager who oversees group membership, manages certification administration and coordinates certification audits on behalf of the group members. IMG Managers submit annual reporting to AFF along with annual certification fees.

[Grandfathered Property Certification through ATFS State Programs](#)

Under this newly approved option, grandfathered ownerships may remain certified through the State Tree Farm Programs but would be assessed by third-party auditors as a part of a unique subpopulation within their respective ATFS Regional Certificates. Under this approach, landowners would retain their original Tree Farm numbers and affiliations with the State Tree Farm Program. Participating landowners would be required to submit annual reporting and grandfathered property certification fees. Research is currently underway to inform the fees associated with this option.

Many thanks to State Committees for all of their efforts to work with the owners of grandfathered properties in their states to meet the eligibility requirements and stay ATFS Certified!

- If you have coordinated with the identified property owners in your State Program regarding the requirement for third-party audit, [please notify Sarah Crow of the strategy or certification](#)

option identified for each grandfathered property by March 20, 2012. Note: the deadline has been extended.

- Based on specific input provided by ATFS State Committees about individual Tree Farms, the ATFS National Office will selectively distribute letters to the owners of grandfathered properties. The letter will outline the ATFS Certification options available and kindly request that each landowner notify ATFS of their selected pathway by a specified date. Copies of letters along with landowner responses will be forwarded to the relevant State Tree Farm Committee.

Our goal in this process is to be as helpful as possible in implementing these eligibility requirements and to retain as many of these valuable grandfathered properties in ATFS as we can. Please feel free to contact me with any questions via email (scrow@forestfoundation.org) or phone (202-463-2738).