



American Tree Farm System®

2010-2015

# Standards

**WE GROW STEWARDSHIP FROM THE ROOTS.**

## Introduction to the 2010-2015 Standards

The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) is the largest and oldest sustainable family woodland system in America. Through our forest certification program, we provide Tree Farmers with the confidence and validation that they are doing right by their land. Family forest owners that certify their woodlands through ATFS join a national network of woodland owners who are globally recognized for their good stewardship. ATFS certification is endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and meets strict third-party verification and audit standards.

The 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability are the tools that ATFS uses to validate the good forestry done by private woodland owners.

As a Tree Farmer, the Standards can assist you in managing your woodlands to achieve your own goals while maintaining a healthy and productive forest. The Standards delineate best management practices and address four key areas: Water, Wildlife, Wood and Recreation. Through the Standards, you can document your progress on the ground.

The Standards recognize new conservation forestry practices and evolving consumer demand for sustainably harvested forest products. Once ATFS verifies that the Standards are met and the Tree Farm is certified, landowners can proudly display the ATFS green and white sign — the national symbol for good forestry.

ATFS certified Tree Farmers make a commitment to sustainable forestry and their Tree Farm sign tells their community that they are protecting America's forest legacy for future generations.



# American Forest Foundation

## 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification

The American Tree Farm System is a program of the American Forest Foundation (AFF). AFF's Board of Trustees adopted these Standards in November 2009.

### Standards Prologue

The American Forest Foundation's (AFF's) 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification promote the vitality of renewable forest resources while protecting environmental, economic, and social benefits and work to increase public understanding of all benefits of sustainable forestry. They are based on North American and Pan-European guidelines for **sustainable forest management**, encourage **adaptive management**, and serve as the basis for the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) certification program. **Forest owners** and managers who follow the AFF Standards of Sustainability are encouraged to promote the American Tree Farm System® program by displaying appropriate signs and participating in relevant program activities.

The AFF 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability address aspects of **sustainable forest management** and incorporate eight standards with various performance measures, and indicators. ATFS **qualified Tree Farm inspectors, group managers, and accredited third-party assessors** will conduct field verification of **landowner** conformance to the AFF Standards as prescribed by ATFS policies and procedures. All AFF **sustainability** elements (standards, performance measures, and indicators) are important and will be considered in reviews. Responsibilities, task, or obligations that are phrased with the word "must," are core elements that are required to be certified by the American Tree Farm System. *Note: **Bold type throughout this document denotes words or phrases defined in the attached glossary. An asterisk symbol (\*) indicates guidance provided in the appendix document.***

This document was prepared at the direction of the AFF Board of Trustees. It was developed by the 2008-2009 Independent Standards Review Panel under the process described by the AFF Standards Setting Procedures. Guidance documents (third-party auditing, internal monitoring, and **landowner** guidance) for implementation and interpretations will be used to clarify requirements of the Standards.

### Standard 1: Commitment to Practicing Sustainable Forestry

**Forest owner** demonstrates commitment to **forest vitality** by developing and implementing a sustainable forest **management plan**.

#### Performance Measure 1.1

**Forest owner** must have and implement a written forest **management plan** consistent with the size of the forest and the **scale** and intensity of the forest activities.

#### *Indicator 1.1.1*

**Management plan** must be active, adaptive, and embody the **landowner's** current objectives, remain appropriate for the land certified, and reflect the current state of knowledge about forestry and natural resource management.

#### *Indicator 1.1.2*

**Management plans** must clearly state **landowner's** objectives, describe desired forest conditions, include management activities aimed at reaching the desired forest condition and **landowner's** objectives, document a feasible strategy for activity implementation, and include a tract map accurately depicting significant forest-related resources.

Where present, and relevant to the property, the plan must address the following resource elements: forest health, soil, water, wood and fiber production, threatened and endangered species, **special sites, invasive species, integrated pest management, and high conservation value forests.**

Where present, relevant to the property, and consistent with landowner's objectives, the plan preparer may consider, describe and evaluate the following resource elements: fire, wetlands, **desired species** (fish, wildlife, and plant), recreation, aesthetic quality, biomass, and carbon.

*Indicator 1.1.3\**

**Forest owner** should monitor for changes that could interfere with the management objectives as stated in **management plan** (e.g., presence of **invasive species**, pest outbreaks, and indications of trespass). When problems are found, reasonable actions are taken.

## Standard 2: Compliance with Laws

Forest management activities comply with all relevant federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and ordinances.

### Performance Measure 2.1

**Forest owner** must comply with all relevant federal, state, county, and municipal laws, regulations, and ordinances.

*Indicator 2.1.1*

**Forest owner** must comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and ordinances, and will correct conditions that led to **adverse regulatory actions**, if any.

*Indicator 2.1.2*

**Forest owner** should obtain advice from appropriate professionals or contractors who are trained in and familiar with relevant laws, regulations, and ordinances.

## Standard 3: Reforestation and Afforestation

**Forest owner** completes timely restocking of **desired species** of trees on harvested sites and non-stocked areas where tree growing is consistent with land use practices and the **forest owner's** management objectives.

### Performance Measure 3.1

Reforestation or afforestation must be achieved by a suitable process that ensures adequate stocking levels.

*Indicator 3.1.1*

Harvested forest land must achieve adequate stocking of **desired species** reflecting the **forest owner's** management objectives, within five years after harvest, or within a time interval as specified by applicable regulation.

## Standard 4: Air, Water, and Soil Protection

Forest management practices maintain or enhance the environment and ecosystems, including air, water, soil, and site quality.

### Performance Measure 4.1

**Forest owner** must meet or exceed practices prescribed by **State Forestry Best Management Practices** (BMPs) that are applicable to the property.

*Indicator 4.1.1*

**Forest owner** must implement specific BMPs that are applicable to the property.

*Indicator 4.1.2*

**Forest owner** must minimize road construction and other disturbances within riparian zones and wetlands.

### Performance Measure 4.2

**Forest owner** must consider **integrated pest management** to control pests, pathogens, and unwanted vegetation.

*Indicator 4.2.1*

**Forest owner** should evaluate alternatives to manage pest, pathogens, and unwanted vegetation to achieve specific management objectives.

*Indicator 4.2.2*

**Pesticides** used must be EPA-approved.

*Indicator 4.2.3*

**Pesticides** must be applied, stored, and disposed of in accordance with EPA approved labels and by persons appropriately trained, licensed, and supervised.

### Performance Measure 4.3

When used, **prescribed fire** must conform with **forest owner's** objectives, the forest **management plan**, and pre-fire planning.

*Indicator 4.3.1*

**Prescribed fire** must conform with the **management plan** and state and local laws and regulations.

## Standard 5: Fish, Wildlife, and Biodiversity

Forest management activities contribute to the conservation of **biodiversity**.

### Performance Measure 5.1

Forest management activities must maintain or enhance habitat for threatened or endangered communities and species.

#### Indicator 5.1.1

**Forest owner** must confer with natural resource agencies, state natural resource heritage programs, or review other sources of information to determine occurrences of threatened and endangered species on the property and their habitat requirements.

#### Indicator 5.1.2

Forest management activities must incorporate measures to protect identified threatened and endangered species.

#### **Performance Measure 5.2**

**Forest owner** should address the **desired species** (fish, aquatic, wildlife, and plant) and/or desired forest communities in the **management plan** and forest management activities.

#### Indicator 5.2.1

**Forest owner** should consult available and accessible information on management of the forest for **desired species** (fish, aquatic, wildlife, and plant) and/or forest communities and integrate it into forest management.

#### **Performance Measure 5.3**

**Forest owner** should make practical efforts to prevent, eradicate, or otherwise control **invasive species**.

#### Indicator 5.3.1

**Forest owner** should make practical efforts to prevent, eradicate, or otherwise control **invasive species** using a range of **integrated pest management** methods.

#### **Performance Measure 5.4**

Forest management activities should maintain or enhance **rare species** and **high conservation value forests**.

#### Indicator 5.4.1

Appropriate to the **scale** and intensity of the situation, forest management activities should incorporate measures to protect or mitigate impacts on **rare species** and identified **high conservation value forests**.

## Standard 6: Forest Aesthetics

Forest **management plans** and management activities recognize the value of forest aesthetics.

#### **Performance Measure 6.1**

**Forest owner** should manage the visual impacts of forest management activities consistent with the size of the forest, the **scale** and intensity of forest management activities, and the location of the property.

#### Indicator 6.1.1

Forest management activities should apply **visual quality measures** compatible with appropriate silvicultural practices.

## Standard 7: Protect Special Sites

**Special sites** are managed in ways that recognize their unique historical, archeological, cultural, geological, biological, or ecological characteristics.

#### **Performance Measure 7.1**

Forest management activities must maintain **special sites**.

#### Indicator 7.1.1

**Forest owner** must make a reasonable effort to locate and protect **special sites** appropriate for the size of the forest and the **scale** and intensity of forest management activities.

## Standard 8: Forest Product Harvests and Other Activities

**Forest product** harvests and other management activities are conducted in accordance with the **management plan** and consider other forest values.

#### **Performance Measure 8.1**

**Forest owner** should use **qualified natural resource professionals** and **qualified contractors** when contracting for services.

#### Indicator 8.1.1

**Forest owner** should seek **qualified natural resource professionals** and **qualified contractors**.

#### Indicator 8.1.2\*

**Forest owner** should engage contractors that carry appropriate insurance and comply with appropriate federal, state, and local safety and **fair labor rules**, regulations, and standard practices<sup>1</sup>.

#### Indicator 8.1.3

**Forest owner** should retain appropriate contracts for **forest product** harvests and other management activities to demonstrate conformance to the AFF Standards.

#### **Performance Measure 8.2**

**Forest owner** must monitor **forest product** harvests and other management activities to ensure they conform to the **management plan** objectives.

#### Indicator 8.2.1

Harvest, utilization, removal, and other management activities must be conducted in compliance with the **management plan** and maintain the potential of the property to produce **forest products** and other benefits sustainably.

<sup>1</sup> Auditors shall consider any **complaints** alleging violation of **fair labor rules** filed by workers or organized labor since the previous third-party certification audit. The auditor shall not take action on any labor issues pending in a formal grievance process or before Federal, State or local agencies or the courts, however, until those processes are completed. Absent a record of documented **complaints** or non-compliances, contractors and managers are assumed to be in compliance with this indicator.

**accredited third-party assessors** – A natural resource professional who has completed ATFS required training for third party assessors and is contracted or employed by an International Accreditation Forum (IAF) accredited certification body.

**adaptive management** – A dynamic approach to forest management in which the effects of treatments and decisions are continually monitored and used to modify management on a continuing basis to ensure that objectives are being met (Helms et al, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**adverse regulatory actions** – Written warning, citations, or fines issued by law enforcement or regulatory bodies.

**biodiversity** – The variety and abundance of life forms, processes, functions and structures of plants, animals, and other living organisms, including the relative complexity of species, communities, gene pools, and ecosystems at spatial scales that range from local through regional to global (Helms et al, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**complaint** – Labor complaints are those with formal documentation filed through the state's fair labor practices board or similar body.

**desired species** – Those species of flora and fauna designated in the landowner's management plan and not known to cause negative impacts on the local environment.

**fair labor rules** – Include federal, state, and local labor legislation and international labor standards cited in Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification systems (PEFC) Annex 3, Chapter 3.3.

**forest owner** – Landowner or designated representative such as, but not limited to, professional resource manager, family member, trustee, etc.

**forest product** – [Forest Produce] Any raw material yielded by a forest. Generally defined in Forest Acts or Ordinances, and subdivided conventionally into major forest products, i.e., timber and fuelwood, and minor forest products, i.e., all other products including leaves, fruit, grass, fungi, resins, gums, animal parts, water, soil, gravel, stone, and other minerals on forest land (F. C. Ford Robertson, *Terminology of Forest Science Technology, Practice, and Products*, Society of American Foresters, 1971).

**forest vitality** – The health and sustainability of a forest.

**group manager** – The individual(s) designated by the Independently Managed Group organization to manage the administrative affairs of implementing and achieving the AFF Standards and Standard Operating Procedures for group programs (SOP-01) for an ATFS certified,

independently managed group program. Please refer to the ATFS Group Certification Process documentation.

**high conservation value forests** – Forests of outstanding and critical importance due to their environmental, social, biodiversity, or landscape values. Due to the small scale and low-intensity of family forest operations, informal assessment of HCVF occurrence through consultation with experts or review of available and accessible information is appropriate.

**integrated pest management** – The maintenance of destructive agents, including insects, at tolerable levels by planned use of a variety of preventative, suppressive, or regulatory tactics and strategies that are ecologically and economically efficient and socially acceptable (Helms et al, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 1998). A pest control strategy that uses a variety of complementary strategies including mechanical devices, physical devices, genetic, biological or cultural management and chemical management (U.S. EPA).

**invasive species** – Non-native species whose introduction does or is likely to, cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (Executive Order 13112 Feb. 3, 1999).

**landowner** – Entity that holds title to the property to be certified.

**management plan** – Documents that guide actions and that change in response to feedback and changed conditions, goals, objectives, and policies. Management plans may incorporate several documents including, but not limited to, harvest plans, activity implementation schedules, permits, research, etc. For the purposes of the American Tree Farm System® eligible management plans, plan amendments may include letters, notes, and other forms of informal updates in addition to formal plan revisions.

**pesticide** – Pesticides include chemicals commonly known as herbicides and insecticides.

**prescribed fire** – A fire ignited by management to meet specific objectives (Helms et al, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**qualified contractor** – Forest contractors who have completed certification, licensing, recommended training, and education programs offered in their respective states.

**qualified natural resource professional** – A person who by training and experience can make forest management recommendations. Examples include foresters, soil scientists, hydrologists, forest engineers, forest ecologists, fishery and wildlife biologists, or technically trained specialists in such fields.

**qualified Tree Farm inspector** – A natural resource professional who has completed ATFS required training for certifying forested properties and is eligible to inspect properties on behalf of ATFS. ATFS requires all trained inspectors meet approved eligibility requirements.

**rare species** – A plant, animal, or community that is vulnerable to extinction or elimination.

**scale** – The extent of forest operations on the landscape/certified property.

**special sites** – Those areas offering unique historical, archeological, cultural, geological, biological, or ecological value. Special Sites include:

- A. Historical, archaeological, cultural, and ceremonial sites or features of importance to the forest owner
- B. Sites of importance to wildlife such as rookeries, refuges, fish spawning grounds, vernal ponds, and shelters of hibernating animals
- C. Unique ecological communities like relic old-growth, springs, glades, savannas, fens, and bogs
- D. Geological features such as terminal moraines, cliffs, and caves

**state forestry best management practice(s) (BMPs)** – Forestry BMPs are generally accepted forest management guidelines that have been developed by state forestry agencies with broad public stakeholder input.

**sustainability** – The capacity of forests, ranging from stands to ecoregions, to maintain their health, productivity, diversity, and overall integrity, in the long run, in the context of human activity (Helms et al, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**sustainable forest management** – The practice of meeting the forest resource needs and values of the present without compromising the similar capability of future generations (Helms et al, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 1998). Note – AFF's Standards of Sustainability reflect criteria of sustainability based on the Montreal Process, 1993, and the Pan-European Operational-Level Guidelines (PEOLGs).

**visual quality measures** – Modifications of forestry practices in consideration of public view, including timber sale layout, road and log landing locations, intersections with public roadways, distributing logging residue, tree retention, timing of operations, and other factors relevant to the scale and location of the project.

## Third-Party Certification Assessments

Tree Farmers play a critical role in third-party certification for the American Tree Farm System®. For almost 70 years, ATFS landowners have shown the country what commitment and stewardship means on private forestlands in the United States.

Third-party certification assesses the Tree Farm program's ability to ensure landowner conformance to the American Forest Foundation's Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification, elevating Tree Farm to an internationally-recognized forest certification system. This recognition also creates access to new market opportunities for certified Tree Farms.

ATFS offers affordable and accessible third-party certification to Tree Farmers through State Tree Farm Committees and through Independently Managed Group (IMG) programs.

State Tree Farm Committees are certified in one of four regions: South, West, Northeast, and North Central. Every year a few states are selected to represent their region and are visited as part of ATFS's third-party certification assessment.

Within a state, a sample of Tree Farms is selected for a visit by certification assessors who review how the Standards are implemented on these properties. Under Independently Managed Group (IMG) programs, a sample of Tree Farms is also visited as part of the group's third-party assessment.

If your property is selected for participation in the certification assessment, your State Tree Farm Committee will contact you to check your availability for a field visit. During this visit, and in preparation of the visit, the auditors will be assessing your conformance to AFF Standards in much the same way an inspector would during a Tree Farm inspection. It is a great opportunity to showcase how your forest management practices meet AFF Standards and we hope you will be a proud representative of all the Tree Farms in your state. All participation in these assessments is strictly confidential.

Your management plan is a key document for the assessment. There are a number of resources available on the Tree Farm website to ensure your management plan meets the requirements of AFF Standards. If you have any questions, contact your State Tree Farm Committee, Inspecting Forester, or ATFS staff. The Woodland Owner Resource <[www.treefarmssystem.org/woodlandresources](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/woodlandresources)> is available as a guide to the resources available in your state.

# American Tree Farm System Commitments to Tree Farmers

The privacy of Tree Farmers and the integrity of the program are of the utmost importance to the American Tree Farm System. In order to protect your privacy, we are committed to the following:

The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS), a program of the American Forest Foundation, maintains a secure database for Tree Farmer contact information, allowing state Tree Farm programs secure access.

ATFS and its state leadership use the database for the following programmatic communication purposes:

- ATFS programmatic newsletters.
- *Tree Farmer Magazine* and state partner magazines.
- Invitations to ATFS related events including Tree Farm field days, tours, workshops, conventions, and meetings.
- Important information on the program including the landowner responsibilities for the 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability, third-party certification assessments and other program requirements.
- Tree Farm related fundraising initiatives.
- Advocacy outreach.
- Surveys and research to benefit ATFS and improve the tools provided to landowners to help them do right by their land.

Certified Tree Farmers have the following responsibilities to help maintain a clean and accurate database to ensure the credibility of the program:

- Tree Farmers receive programmatic communications, as described above, which include important ATFS updates that directly affect Tree Farmers.
- Tree Farmers may opt out of receiving communications that are outside of ATFS programmatic mailings and sent by nonprofit or for-profit partners.

## A Tree Farmer's Commitments to the American Tree Farm System

The responsibilities of a Certified Tree Farmer are:

- 1) Maintain and keep an updated management plan that meets the 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability.
- 2) Cooperate with inspectors and certification assessors, all of whom are professional foresters.
- 3) Notify the ATFS national office or your state program ([www.treefarmssystem.org/stateleaders](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/stateleaders)) about changes to your contact and ownership information.
- 4) Proudly display the Tree Farm sign of sustainability on your certified forestlands. You can order the Tree Farm sign online at [www.treefarmssystem.org/atfssigns](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/atfssigns).

Managing forests and sustaining them for the future is both an honor and a responsibility. The American Tree Farm System asks that the responsibility be taken seriously.

ATFS Certification is entirely voluntary. There are no penalties for choosing to not maintain your status as a Certified Tree Farmer. However, the American Tree Farm System offers options that suit a range of stewardship goals. To learn more, contact your state program to see if ATFS Pioneer fits your needs.

The complete policy is available on our website  
[www.treefarmssystem.org/membersandvolunteers](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/membersandvolunteers)



**American Tree Farm System® is a program of the American Forest Foundation**

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