



## Recommendations for Strengthening, Growing and Increasing the Impact of the American Tree Farm System



1. Managing and Growing Certification				
ATFS Element	Current Approach	Recommended Change	Impact	FAQ
<b>Certification Administration</b>	AFF manages ATFS certificates and relationship with our international endorsement from the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). State programs are responsible for implementing the program, including tracking in database for compliance.	AFF will manage certification at the regional level, removing the need for state boundaries as it pertains to certification. AFF will assume responsibility for certification administration, including audits, record keeping, and inspecting forester communication.	State programs will have more time to focus on landowner education, outreach and recognition. AFF assumes more responsibility for administering certification, which will mean hiring additional regional AFF staff.	<p><i>If a landowner has land in a recognition state, can it be certified now?</i></p> <p>We envision a future certification model based on areas of greatest demand and need, which may cross state lines. We plan to engage recognition states so that in the future, landowners in those states can be eligible for certification under a regional or group certificate.</p>
<b>Growing Certification</b>	Certification is tied to states, and growth is dependent on state program capacity.	Certification growth will be undertaken where there is demonstrated value and market demand for it, whether for wood supplies, regulatory assurance, or other purposes. Certification will be expanded on the regional level where it is important, rather than along state lines.	Opportunities exist to grow certification in key landscapes, most notably in certain wood baskets which have unmet demands for certified wood. Changes to certification administration should enhance the ability of AFF to certify more landowners allowing states to add value by focusing on landowner engagement through education, outreach and recognition.	<p><i>How are you deciding this?</i></p> <p>AFF will use industry recognized current and future assessments of market demand to gauge where the need is greatest. We will work with state programs to communicate where these areas are.</p> <p><i>Can we decline certification in our state or in an area?</i></p> <p>No; ATFS continues to be an important mechanism to bring more certified fiber to markets and needs support from the entire network to succeed.</p>
<b>Certifying New Landowners</b>	Entry into the Tree Farm program is variable by state, utilizing various methods.	State programs, volunteer foresters and AFF will collaborate to recruit new landowners to the program. AFF will make available new recruitment tools, such as WoodsCamp, to help identify eligible landowners and grow certification in priority areas. It will also provide foresters and state	More landowners enter Tree Farm and more landowners become ATFS certified. State programs, no longer burdened with certification administration, have the capacity to provide education and recognition services for additional new	<p><i>What is WoodsCamp? How is it different from MyLandPlan?</i></p> <p>WoodsCamp is a technology platform that helps landowners discover opportunities in their area based on their land and their goals. It is essentially a marketing and landowner prioritization platform for AFF and our partners, whereas MyLandPlan is a landowner education</p>



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		programs with resources to support outreach to landowners regarding certification in priority areas.	landowners brought into the program.	and planning tool. The two complement one another but do not overlap.
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### 2. Streamlining Certification Processes

ATFS Element	Current Approach	Recommended Change	Impact	FAQ
<b>Database</b>	States are responsible for maintaining accurate data within the database. AFF is assisting by providing to states for a program-wide data cleanup. These are being conducted either by the states alone or in partnership with AFF and its vendor.	Once this work is completed, AFF will assume responsibility for ensuring data integrity.	Centralized management of the database and data will ensure the integrity of the program, particularly for certification purposes.	<p><i>Will new records, address changes etc. be shared with state programs?</i></p> <p>Yes; state programs will have access to the database at all times and will be able to see any new information added.</p> <p><i>Is AFF maintaining data integrity only for certified lands, or all lands in the program?</i></p> <p>AFF will maintain data integrity for all landowners at every level of engagement in the program.</p>
<b>Forms</b>	<p>AFF has developed an uploadable PDF inspection form that is utilized by states and still available.</p> <p>A mobile inspection application was utilized by a small number of volunteers and not deemed successful. This application has been discontinued.</p>	<p>A new desktop application that can speed completion of required forms, eliminate the need for double entry of data, and maintain quality has been developed and is currently being tested in two states for refinement before a broader release.</p> <p>AFF will provide forms with pre-populated data to reduce prep time. It will also provide foresters with landowner objectives prior to first visit for contacts generated through the AFF's recruitment tools such as WoodsCamp.</p>	Utilizing technology for data collection and maintenance will reduce volunteer and data manager's time while improving data quality.	<p><i>What will our inspection form options be?</i></p> <p>Our intention is to provide tools that make the process most efficient. As such, once fully implemented, inspectors will be able to choose from an online or mobile application form to complete the inspection. For now, all current options will still be accepted.</p> <p><i>How will this app be different than the previous one?</i></p> <p>In contrast to the previous app, which was only semi-customizable for our needs, AFF is developing this new app internally and will be able to fully customize it to make it as functional and streamlined as possible, while still including the detail needed for credibility.</p>



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<b>Landscape Management Plans</b>	Foresters prepare individual forest management plans for individual landowners seeking entry into ATFS. This is time intensive for foresters.	Based on the positive results of ongoing pilots to test a new model of forest management plan, the Landscape Management Plan (LMP), AFF will expand the use of LMPs in areas where certification is important.	Landscape-level plans such as the LMP will enable foresters to more efficiently address many of the required elements of a landowner plan. This will reduce time spent writing plans and enable foresters to spend more time helping and advising landowners.	<i>Will LMPs replace individual management plans?</i> AFF's standards require that a landowner must have a written management plan. Individual management plans are and will continue to be appropriate for certification. LMPs are still being piloted and will be adapted based on what we learn. Where implemented, they can replace the need for a traditional individual management plan, though a forester can choose to offer a more detailed individual management plan as an added service for interested landowners.
<b>Tracking Landowners</b>	The ATFS database houses all landowners in the database. AFF and Program Administrators have access to the database and can pull data to facilitate their work.	AFF is developing a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for managing relationships with all landowners coming into AFF programs and to coordinate efforts around engagement. AFF will work to expand the data collected to guide our future efforts. States will continue to have access to landowner records for the purposes of leading landowner engagement in education and recognition programs.	The CRM will improve the ability of AFF and State Programs to identify landowners for specific communications and activities based on their circumstances and interests.  The CRM will provide access to more data about landowners, bringing together landowner data from multiple AFF programs.	<i>How is this going to work?</i> The system is being developed to manage relationships with landowners engaged throughout all AFF programs. One component of this system, WoodsCamp, is already helping to target unengaged landowners based on their circumstances and interests, and to channel them to the appropriate projects or foresters. This is expediting the vetting process and eliminating unnecessary work.
<b>3. Strengthening Forester Engagement and Participation</b>				
<b>ATFS Element</b>	<b>Current Approach</b>	<b>Recommended Change</b>	<b>Impact</b>	
<b>Forester Motivation</b>	State programs rely on self-motivated foresters to assist with inspections and educational events.	AFF will engage partner organizations to secure required levels of participation by foresters.	Partnering organizations and foresters will benefit from an expanded network of landowners.	<i>I'm a state agency forester and a tree farm inspector, does this affect my work?</i> It is our goal to support your work with tools, resources, and training to help you reach more landowners and assist them to practice good stewardship. We hope that



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		<p>AFF in supporting landowner recruitment, will ease the workload of foresters and will provide professional development to inspecting foresters.</p> <p>AFF will recognize and reward inspector's efforts with promotional materials while states also have capacity to recognize volunteers for deserving accomplishments.</p>	<p>Foresters will be more skilled and knowledgeable and be able to conduct their work more efficiently. The public and forestry community recognize the value of ATFS volunteers and the Tree Farm program.</p>	<p>in the coming months you'll find it even more rewarding to utilize the Tree Farm program because it gives you access to tools, educational materials and resources to engage landowners, while also supporting your professional development.</p>
<b>Forester Recruitment, Training, and Inspection Assignment</b>	AFF establishes standards and tracks compliance. State programs provide training and assign inspections to foresters	AFF regional staff will communicate standards and compliance requirements of inspecting foresters, and staff will assign and monitor progress of required inspections.	State programs will have more time to focus on landowner education and recognition. They will also have more time to foster the community of foresters at the state level.	<p><i>Will this new process recognize our state program's approval hierarchy before an inspection can be entered into the database?</i></p> <p>Today the approval hierarchy still applies; however, once changes are fully implemented, the intent is to minimize the administrative burden for volunteers and provide faster access to certification for landowners. As such, we will also be assessing what approval process is most efficient for getting landowners into the program while ensuring quality and credibility.</p>
<b>4. Fostering Landowner Engagement and Local Landowner Communities</b>				
<b>ATFS Element</b>	<b>Current Approach</b>	<b>Recommended Change</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>FAQ</b>
<b>Landowner Communications</b>	States conduct outreach to landowners. There is a high degree of variability in how this is done by state and at what level (depending on local capacity and resources).	AFF will provide financial support to state programs for effective landowner outreach and education.	Landowners benefit from more localized information and education materials.	<p><i>Will AFF provide state programs with educational resources designed for this broader network?</i></p> <p>Yes; as these recommendations take hold, the ATFS network will begin to tap a previously unengaged landowner base. AFF will work to improve and evolve existing education tools and develop new materials to ensure that they are appropriate for a broad range of landowners from the minimally engaged to the actively engaged.</p>



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<b>Engaging New Landowners</b>	<p>Tree Farm has a common set of standards for both certified and non-certified landowners. Landowners who don't meet those standards are held temporarily in a 'pioneer' classification. This is a temporary holding place but there is no pathway to keep these individuals engaged and move them towards certification.</p>	<p>AFF and the state programs will assess how to best serve, engage and recognize landowners at various points along their stewardship journeys, including those that are not able or interested in meeting the high standards of the current Tree Farm system, or those recruited through AFF's place-based conservation work. This creates an opportunity to have a broader network of landowners than currently served by Tree Farm, expanding the reach and impact of the system.</p>	<p>AFF is engaging more landowners, not all of whom want to be certified or manage to certification standards. Developing effective strategies for sustaining engagement by landowners across the spectrum will increase the sustainable management of forests.</p>	<p><i>What will happen to pioneer tree farms?</i> Pioneer Tree Farms are an important component of the ATFS network and will be part of the spectrum of landowners we seek to engage.</p>
<b>Tracking Impact</b>	<p>Tree Farmers conduct activities that achieve priority conservation and fiber supply impact; however, many of these activities are not captured in the database. Thereby we are underrepresenting the conservation impact of Tree Farmers.</p>	<p>Improvements to the inspection form, tailored to location in the country and landowner activities, will facilitate capturing more of the work Tree Farmers are doing.</p>	<p>An improved record of Tree Farmer activities can help demonstrate Tree Farm's impact and demonstrate additional value of the program.</p>	<p><i>Are you getting rid of the 004 forms?</i> No, we are adapting and streamlining it. Our aim is to streamline the inspection process and to capture meaningful information from landowners about the activities they are doing that are having a positive impact on wood, wildlife, water and recreation. Any changes to the inspection form will reflect this goal.</p>
<b>5. Embracing Variability in Tree Farm Programming</b>				
<b>ATFS Element</b>	<b>Current Approach</b>	<b>Recommended Change</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>FAQ</b>
<b>Tree Farm Outreach and Educational Programs</b>	<p>There is wide variability among the state programs with respect to activities and services offered to landowners.</p>	<p>The variability should continue among state programs. Programming will be guided by each state's preferences and AFF's goals in different regions—e.g. growing certification or promoting specific stewardship activities.</p>	<p>The modification to certification administration will free up time for state programs to focus more on activities that improve landowner engagement, conformance to AFF's standards of sustainability or</p>	<p><i>How much variability will be allowed?</i> We know that every state program is different, and we want to continue to work with you to shape your state's program based on the needs particular to your state. While the certification standards will stay the same for certified landowners across the country, state programs</p>



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			increase activities that deliver greater conservation impact.	will be able to set their own education, outreach and recognition goals based on the conditions in their state and AFF will seek to align with these goals.
<b>6. Improve Communications within the Network (AFF to States; States to AFF; and Among States)</b>				
ATFS Element	Current Approach	Recommended Change	Impact	
<b>Network Communications</b>	AFF uses several regular communications channels to share information and solicit input from the network. These include print and online newsletters, webinars, website materials, and personal communications.	<p>AFF will work with state programs, inspecting foresters, sponsor organizations, State Foresters, and other contributing organizations, to reassess how to most effectively communicate with the network in both directions.</p> <p>We will work together to establish a set of communication protocols and schedules and establish channels that foster increased participation in providing feedback to AFF around program policy, administration and operation.</p>	More effective communications between AFF and the network will result in higher levels of satisfaction by those involved in implementing the program, increased compliance with program policy, and an increase in shared problem-solving and program improvement.	<p><i>Does AFF have a specific proposal for an effective communication system?</i></p> <p>No, that's something we need to create in collaboration with those affected. Like many other aspects of this framework, we have not worked out the details pending additional dialogue.</p>