



# sightline

A Newsletter for the Inspecting Foresters of the American Tree Farm System®

## Spotlight! Third-Party Certification Audits

As a globally endorsed certification system, the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) must undergo third-party certification audits. Every year, 12 State Tree Farm Committees participate in these third-party certification audits to ensure conformance to the American Forest Foundation Standards. As a volunteer inspector, you are a crucial link to Tree Farmers. If a landowner that you work with is selected to participate in an audit, you may be asked to help the landowner gather the necessary documentation. If you are the landowner's primary forester, you may be the most knowledgeable on how their management meets the AFF Standards.

Primary documentation needed from landowners include

- An active and current management plan that meets the AFF Standards
- A copy of any maps for the Tree Farm
- Any harvest plans that describe recent management activities (only if available/applicable)
- Any documentation (plans, permits, etc.) for prescribed burning or herbicide/pesticide applications (only if available/applicable)

This documentation is necessary to help the auditors verify that Tree Farmers are managing their forest in a way that conforms to the AFF Standards.

Audit activities are coordinated through the State Tree Farm Committees with help from ATFS staff. State committees will be the main point of contact if a Tree Farmer with whom you work with has been selected to participate in an audit.

### **Case Study: What would you do?**

Mr. Allen has been asked to participate in the 2010 third-party certification audits but does not know where he put his management plan. Inspector Tom knows that there is a copy of Mr. Allen's Forest Stewardship plan kept at the county department office. Inspector Tom sends a copy of the Forest Stewardship plan to Mr. Allen to make sure it is up to date and still meets his objectives for his land. Once Mr. Allen has reviewed the plan and confirmed that it still meets his objectives and is current for the land certified, Tom sends a copy to the state committee for auditor review.

### **Case Study: What would you do?**

John and Betty have been active Tree Farmers for more than 30 years and they can provide their recently updated management plan to the state committee for the auditors to review prior to the field visit. John and Betty are diligent about having contracts for each harvest and thinning on their land and ensuring the contracts state only trained loggers were hired to conduct forest operations. John and Betty's inspector, Svengard, is working with them to prepare for the third-party certification audit this summer and knows that the contracts are a great example of how John and Betty are working to meet Standard 9: Wood Fiber Harvests and other Operations. Inspector Svengard advises John and Betty to make a copy of the most recent contract with the financial information blacked out for the auditor to review along with their management plan.

## Good Management Practice

Many Tree Farmers keep a folder of all documents related to their Tree Farm for safe keeping, making documentation collection for third-party certification audits and Tree Farm inspections easier. During your inspections and Tree Farmer interviews be sure to ask where the management plan is kept, if they have harvest plans or contracts for forest operations, and if they have any documents related to cost-share programs, pesticides, prescribed burns, or special sites.



# Stumped?

## Answers to Inspectors' Most Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What does it mean for a management plan to “address” resource elements such as forest health, soil, water, wood and fiber production, threatened and endangered species, special sites, invasive species, integrated pest management, and high conservation value forests?**

**A:** A management plan must address the listed resource elements and note that these elements were considered. If certain elements are not on the property or relevant to the management practices, then the recommendations or actions are not required to be included in the plan. For example, the management plan should state that the Tree Farmer reviewed the state heritage database and found no listed species or special cultural sites on his/her property or in the immediate vicinity. The management plan should then state that a search of the state heritage database was done for the property and showed that there are no special sites.

**Q: As an inspector, what sort of evidence should I look for to see if the Tree Farmer has met the Standards' indicators?**

**A:** There are several types of evidence that can show conformance to the Standards' indicators: physical evidence, documentation, and interview evidence. Under physical evidence, you may see that the culverts installed before the Tree Farmer's last harvest are in great shape and large enough for the size of the drainage. Under documentation, the management plan notes that the Tree Farmer worked with their forester

to review special site databases developed by the state's Extension department, with the search date and the results. Under interview evidence, you may note that the Tree Farmer works with SFI® trained loggers for all harvests and thinning. These are examples, but remember to look for documentation or interview evidence when assessing whether or not the Tree Farmer's management meets AFF Standards.

If you have any questions about the AFF Standards and ATFS program requirements, please visit our website at [www.treefarmssystem.org](http://www.treefarmssystem.org), or contact staff by e-mail at [vlockhart@forestfoundation.org](mailto:vlockhart@forestfoundation.org).

**Q: How can I get information from Tree Farm on a more regular basis?**

**A:** Send us your e-mail address and we'll send you our monthly e-newsletter *Sightline Express*. *Sightline Express* provides inspectors with updates on the Tree Farm program in a concise, convenient format. Archives of *Sightline Express* can be found at [www.treefarmssystem.org/inspectorscorner/](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/inspectorscorner/). E-mail [Inspectors@forestfoundation](mailto:Inspectors@forestfoundation) today to sign up!

## Updated ATFS Inspector Training for the New AFF Standards

In November 2009, AFF released the new 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification. The 2010-2015 Standards are important to you as an ATFS Inspector because it will be your job to assess whether Tree Farmers meet the new Standards.

We will offer classroom training workshops through the State Tree Farm Committees and an online refresher course through the ATFS database. This training will cover the updates and changes to the new Standards and provide you with the tools to answer any questions Tree Farmers may have. All volunteer inspectors must be retrained to the new Standards by the end of 2010. Contact your State Tree Farm Committee about the availability of classroom training and instructions to access the online training.

## Need a 004 form?

Electronic copies of the 004 inspector form and the auditor verification form are always available on the ATFS website. Visit [www.treefarmssystem.org/inspectorscorner](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/inspectorscorner) for this and other resources for inspectors.