



# sightline

Spring 2014

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE INSPECTING FORESTERS OF THE AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM®

## A New Direction: State's Voice, State's Choice

*During the past several years, the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) community has engaged in a process of testing, listening and learning. This process has included piloting new models, examining our third-party assessment results and reviewing market trend analysis and research by the U.S. Forest Service and others. We have also engaged in many discussions with landowners, state Tree Farm committee members, ATFS inspecting foresters, state and federal agencies, and partners in the forest industry and the conservation community across the country.*

In all these discussions, ATFS was recognized as a symbol of quality and dedication to good forestry. As ATFS inspectors, you are essential to that credibility and commitment. But we also heard that one size does not fit all for our state ATFS programs. Third-party certification is a driving force for landowners in some states but not in others. For example, in some regions, markets for certified products are emerging. In other areas, ATFS certification serves as a baseline for conservation programming. Finally, there are some states where third-party audited certification is not a factor for landowners at all.

State Tree Farm programs are looking for flexibility to respond to the cultures, partners and landscapes in their states. ATFS, at all levels, looks to expand and nurture partnerships while also engaging a broader spectrum of landowners and building the financial sustainability of our programs. Together, we seek to strengthen ATFS as a credible and vibrant program that serves landowners.

As a result, ATFS is embarking on a new approach, known as State's Voice, State's Choice. This approach seeks to respond to the diversity of programs across the country by providing options to adapt to the conditions in each state. Through State's Choice, each state Tree Farm committee will engage in a collaborative discussion to make an informed decision before the end of 2015 about maintaining third-party audited status. In addition, state programs will also be exploring funding avenues and options to help contribute to the financial sustainability of the program.

Regardless of the path a state chooses on third-party certification, the same ATFS standards will apply in all states—and to become Tree Farmer, landowners must meet the standards. This ensures that the ATFS program maintains national integrity and excellence.

As boots on the ground, inspecting foresters are essential to the ATFS program. The support and expertise you provide to landowners is critical and we appreciate your commitment and your efforts to ensure that landowners have what they need to be effective stewards of the land.

## ATFS Standards Under Review

The ATFS Standards of Sustainability are the basis for the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) program and must be met for a property to become a Tree Farm. These standards are under review in 2014 by the Independent Standards Review Panel (ISRP). To form the ISRP, the American Forest Foundation's (AFF's) Board of Trustees invited a representative cross-section of forestry community leaders and stakeholders with an interest in forest sustainability on small private forest ownerships in the United States. The ISRP includes representatives from academia, the conservation community, the forest industry, landowners, foresters, loggers, buyers and public forest agencies.

The ISRP's primary responsibility is to guide public review of the standards and, based on feedback from the public, make recommendations for appropriate modifications of the standards to AFF's Board of Trustees. The public is invited to submit comments during two 60-day public review periods in 2014, one early in the year and a second, on a revised standard, in the summer. As an ATFS inspector, your comments are particularly valuable—so please take a moment to submit your feedback.

Once enacted by AFF's board, there will be a transition period, during the 2015 calendar year, to full implementation of the revised ATFS standards. At the conclusion of the transition period, all Tree Farms must comply with the new standards. During the transition period, ATFS will launch a training program in collaboration with state Tree Farm programs to ensure that all qualified Tree Farm Inspectors update their credentials to the new ATFS standards.

For more information, visit [www.treefarmssystem.org/standards-review](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/standards-review).



## Stumped?

**Q:** New landowners just purchased a Tree Farm that has been in the program for 50 years. The new landowners wish to remain in the program. Can they use the old owner's management plan, implement those recommendations and keep the Tree Farm number and 50-year status? Or do they need to start from scratch?

**A:** It is exciting that the new owners are committed to good management and that the property will remain enrolled in the Tree Farm program. ATFS Tree Farm status applies to the ownership, not the physical property itself. If the property is transferred outside the family, a new number must be assigned. In this case, the landowners will need to undergo inspection to ensure that the property meets the standards under their ownership and a new Tree Farm number can be issued.

The landowners may choose to use the existing management plan as a reference point. However, they will need to ensure that the plan is updated to reflect their own objectives and any changes in the forest conditions on the ground, and that it identifies a strategy for achieving their goals. In addition, they will also want to ensure that all of the details of the property, including acreage, legal description and the landowner's contact information, are also accurate in the plan and in ATFS inspection records.