



sightline

Spring 2013

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

Independently Managed Groups

In addition to becoming certified individually through a state Tree Farm committee, a landowner may also be American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) certified through an Independently Managed Group (IMG).

The IMG program was initiated in 2003 with three goals: to bring competitive third-party certification to a wider array of ownerships, to promote sustainable forest management across landscapes, and to add value to existing organizations. IMGs allow individual family forest owners and other qualified participants to be certified under an umbrella certificate at a low cost, benefiting from the economies of scale that come from being part of a larger group.

This type of certification is coordinated by an organization that serves as the IMG manager. IMGs have been developed by consulting foresters, landowner organizations and forestry associations. In some cases, forest products companies coordinate certification as part of a landowner assistance program in their procurement zones. Other groups come together as part of a state tax-incentive or other state program. In each case, the group manager is responsible for all aspects of the certification process, including costs (which are usually passed through to members) and coordination of the audit.

One of the advantages of the IMG program is that more ownership types are eligible for certification. Although the woodlands must still be nonindustrial, IMG members may enroll parcels that are between 10 and 20,000 contiguous forested acres. Also, unlike individual certification, state-owned forests and investment portfolio properties may be certified through an IMG.

For example, the state of Kentucky recently obtained ATFS certification for their state forests by joining an IMG. These forests span more than 43,000 acres and are already managed for the objectives of wood, recreation, water and wildlife—so ATFS certification is a natural fit. The Kentucky Division of Forestry chose ATFS certification because of a desire for recognition and market access, along with a goal to serve as a model for private woodland owners in the state.

Nationwide, there are 12 IMGs operating on 5.5 million acres of forested land, working with over 47,000 landowners to provide a suite of services. A range of organizations and consulting foresters already providing management advice and technical assistance--or managing properties on behalf of landowners--can easily add certification to their tool-kit through the IMG program. The advantages of the program are many: Third-party review adds credibility and recognition to an existing organization or consulting practice; a group certificate validates a supply of responsibly produced fiber, allowing landowners to have greater access to markets; and the program also validates good forest management.

The ATFS IMG program gives forest managers and organizations flexibility for structuring their IMG to augment and further support their operations. Partnering with those who have shared goals is what has made the Tree Farm Program strong and helps to expand the reach of good management to more landowners.

Special Sites

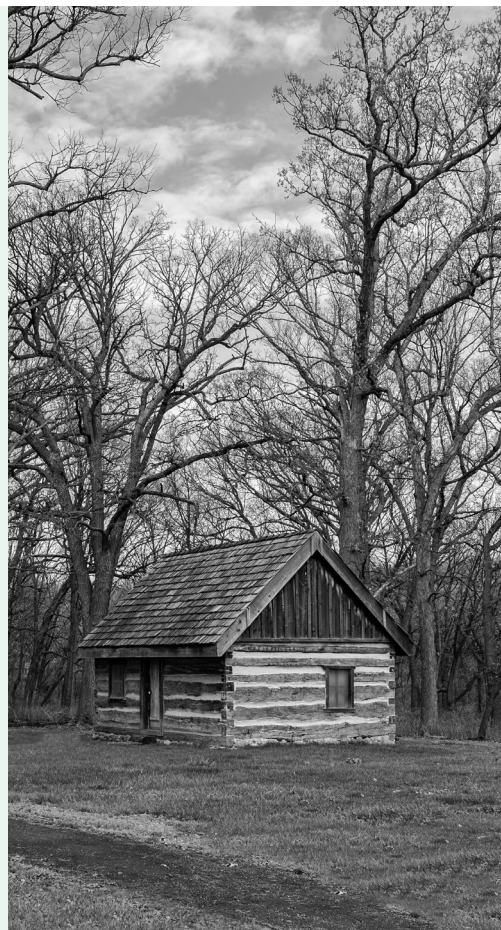
SPECIAL SITES ARE AREAS OF UNIQUE HISTORICAL, ARCHEOLOGICAL, CULTURAL, GEOGRAPHIC, BIOLOGICAL, OR ECOLOGICAL VALUE.

A special site may be a cave, vernal pond, burial site, or the foundation of an early settler's cabin. A special site may also be designated by a landowner for sentimental or recreational reasons, such as a favorite picnic spot or a tree stand for hunting.

These locations can be found not only by walking a property with a landowner, but also with the help of online databases. State natural heritage programs, historical societies and historical maps are valuable tools for researching special sites. The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) Woodland Owner Resource (www.treefarmssystem.org/woodland-resources) provides state-by-state listings of these resources for easy access.

For ATFS Certification, landowners must demonstrate a good-faith effort to locate special sites and, where they exist, they must be maintained. Landowners should be sure to identify special sites in their management plan and map, and communicate those locations to forest contractors to ensure protection during harvests. While some landowners choose to physically mark these sites for recognition, others may choose not to do so to protect them from vandalism or overuse.

Visit www.treefarmssystem.org/special-sites for more information.



Stumped?

ELIGIBILITY OF LANDOWNERS

Q: One of my landowner clients owns a small family business and conducts frequent annual harvests. Is this ownership considered nonindustrial? Is American Tree Farm System® certification right for them?

A: A range of ownership types are eligible for ATFS Certification. The ATFS Eligibility Requirements state that “properties must be nonindustrial, but may be associated with small local business”. According to federal guidelines, small business logging and timber tract operations have annual receipts less than \$7 million and fewer than 500 employees. The state tree farm committees are open to accepting these small business landowners, but ones with more land (more than 10,000 acres) or different ownership structures may fit better with an Independently Managed Group.