

February 21, 2010

# 2009 ATFS National Required Sample Final Report

## Introduction:

The 2009 ATFS National Required Sample was used as part of the ATFS internal monitoring procedures to measure conformance of Tree Farm participants to the AFF Standards of Sustainability. The sample measures conformance as the number of properties recertified through required sample inspections versus the number of properties decertified due to substandard conditions. The sample inspections collected information on decertifications for reasons other than substandard conditions, but these results were not included in the final calculations.

In total, 1500 Tree Farms, comprising 603, 803 acres, were designated for national required sample inspections. 44 states were allotted national required sample inspections.

The sample was developed by Dr. Harold Burkhart and Charles Sabatia at Virginia Polytechnic University (Virginia Tech) in January 2009 and distributed to State Tree Farm Committees in February 2009. State Tree Farm Committees received pre-printed 004 inspection forms for the required sample properties and replacement properties in their state. All states follow a general pattern – the state program administrator receives the pre-printed 004 inspection forms from the national office and distributes them out to the district chairs or directly to assigned inspectors. Inspectors complete the field inspection and landowner interview and send the 004 inspection form to the state committee chair (or designated representative) for approval. Following state approval, the inspection is entered into the ATFS national database and a copy of the inspection form sent to the national office.

Completed inspection forms were due to the ATFS national office by November 1, 2009. All inspections were to be entered into the database by that time as well. Committees were allowed to apply for a deadline extension if necessary.

39,333 Tree Farm records were entered in as the base population. A stratified sample scheme was developed for six acreage strata, each with a near equal number of Tree Farm records. Each stratum sampled approximately 200 Tree Farms plus 40 replacement properties. For complete statistical methodology – please see *Summary of National Sampling Scheme for Estimation of Compliance Rates for the American Tree Farm System* (report prepared by Burkhart and Packard for ATFS national support staff).

Percent conformance was calculated by dividing the number of inspections resulting in recertification by the total number of inspections completed (and received in hard copy

form to the AFF offices) minus the number of decertifications resulting from the following reasons; sold, owner not interested in continuing in the Tree Farm program, missing owner, deceased owner. Please see summary equation below. Conformance was calculated in this way to isolate decertifications due to substandard conditions.

$$\% \text{ conformance} = \# \text{recert} / (\text{Total inspections received} - (\# \text{sold} + \# \text{no interest} + \# \text{missing owners} + \# \text{owners deceased}))$$

**Results:**

By February 21, 2010, ATFS national support staff received 1,306 004 inspection forms, with 87% completion of the sample. Out of 1,306 inspections, 1025 properties were recertified and 25 were decertified due to substandard conditions. From these results, we found 97.52% conformance to the AFF Standards of Sustainability.

<b>Status</b>	<b>Count</b>
Recertified	1025
Decertified – Substandard	25
Decertified – Sold	90
Decertified – No Interest	74
Decertified – Missing Owners	52
Decertified – Owners Deceased	39
<i>Total</i>	<i>1306</i>

17 out of 44 states completed all requirements of the 2009 national required sample. They were Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and West Virginia. Many states entered in all required inspections into the ATFS national database, but did not mail in all forms to the national support staff.

**Sample observations made on required inspection forms:**

Areas for Improvement: We observed several areas for improvement in the required sample program. Inspectors were not always consistent in filling out all elements of the 004 inspection form for example – some inspectors gave excellent detail about current activities while others chose only to make check marks. The revised inspector training to be released following approval of the revised AFF Standards of Sustainability by the AFF Board of Trustees will address some of these inconsistencies and encourage inspectors to provide as much detail as possible.

Good management practices: Many inspectors add a great deal of detail to their 004 inspection forms, which helps inform the state committees and the national office of interesting management activities done by the landowners and helps staff and volunteers tailor the program to the various interests of Tree Farmers. Many inspectors were very impressed with the forest management completed by the

landowners and they described as “stewards of the land” and “good record keepers.”

Several 004 forms showed that there is some confusion when choosing a reason for decertification, for many times there are multiple. For example, if the landowner has been decertified because they passed away and the wife sold the property, they often choose both or only one and explain the situation below. Potentially discussing this within a case study of the inspector manual would be beneficial. There needs to be a priority listing of the decertify reasons.

ATFS volunteer inspectors try all possible avenues when contacting a landowner for reinspection. There were several examples of inspectors checking the local tax records to confirm an address and telephone number when attempting to contact a landowner for an inspection. Other inspector good management practices include noting on the 004 inspection form that they have checked to see if the landowner has any harvest or forest management related violations.

In 2008, several states have asked inspectors to detail on each form where the management plan is held and when it was last updated. Following the 2009 certification assessments, ATFS staff have elected to incorporate this good management practice into the revised 004 inspection forms that will be released with the revised AFF Standards. This was present on a number of the 004 forms but it varied greatly by state. Inspectors are also noting that the management plan needs to be updated and some within the year for inspection to qualify. Some inspectors are encouraging their landowners to monitor their property for invasive species, boundary lines issues, forest pests, etc.

Inspectors in some states are actively researching where endangered and threatened species are found, not just on Tree Farm certified properties but also in the surrounding area. They are using a county based natural area inventory list, which ATFS understands is not available in all states. ATFS is addressing the need for additional information on threatened and endangered species and other special sites through the new Woodland Owners Resource (available on the Tree Farm system website in March 2010).

**Area specific observations made on required inspection forms:**

Forest protection: Landowners were engaged in forest pest control for kudzu, cogongrass, mountain pine beetle, gypsy moth and others. Some inspections noted that the landowner would be interested in prescribed burning to improve forest health but that it was a challenge to get done and abandoned the idea despite the potential benefits. In many instances, if the landowner used prescribed fire on the property, the local forestry office was in command. Several properties were decertified because the land had been clearcut improperly and was not reforested in the time allowed by the AFF Standards and appropriate regulations. There were several examples of landowners donating their property for permanent protection, while still maintaining ownership and timber rights.

Education and outreach: A number of landowners are employed by the state natural resource commission so their job never ends. One property owner donated 18 acres of his property to a local school for an outdoor classroom. They constantly talk about three farms and their personal relationship to it. Many landowners were cited for taking courses in prescribed fire, master logger and chain saw safety.

Many landowners are working in partnership with a number of agencies to help them accomplish their stewardship goals. Examples include state and federal government programs such as EQIP and CRP, local resource conservation districts, conservation easement organizations, forest agricultural tax classification programs, Georgia Pacific and other cooperative forest management (CFM) programs.

Wildlife protection: The 2009 required sample showed that Tree Farmers are very interested in protecting and enhancing habitat for wildlife, both game and non-game species. Examples include multi-acre food plots, use of prescribed fire for wildlife benefits, protection of bird nesting habitat, habitat maintenance (i.e. cutting of aspen stands for quail habitat), and protection for threatened species such as bald eagles and gopher tortoise, and snag retention for cavity nesters.

Special sites protection: While many inspections listed that there were no rare species or special sites found on required sample properties, several properties stood out as exceptional examples of special site management. Examples of special sites protection include an old logging camp in Michigan, graveyard and 1860's log cabin in West Virginia, one landowner has planted an American Chestnut plantation with the blight resistant chain. A landowner in Indiana has a 19th century cemetery that is listed under the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.

Inspectors and technical assistance: The required sample provided information on the level of technical assistance utilized by landowners in the forest management. Many landowners are supported by local industry foresters who help them with management plans and harvest plans. Tree Farmers are working with certified burn professionals, certified pesticide applicators, and master loggers. Some landowners would only work with loggers who carry the appropriate insurance. Many properties are managed by consultants, particularly when there are absentee landowners. The trend appears in the 2009 forms that often those landowners who have a close relationship with their forester tend to be more active on their land, or the inspectors were more willing to write about their good work.

Harvest activities: Landowners were engaged in all types of harvest activities, including firewood, timber stand improvement for fuel reduction, single tree selection, and restoration cuts to restore proper species balance and composition,

and operator select. Several inspection forms noted that landowners were delaying harvest and thinning activities because of poor market conditions.

Conclusion:

Overall, ATFS is pleased with the result of the 2009 national required sample. Areas to work on for the coming years include 100 % state completion and submission of paper copies of the inspection forms, and greater inspector education on the importance of thorough completion of 004 inspection forms. To address administrative troubles with the 2009 sample, ATFS staff has met with Dr. Burkhart and Charles Sabatia at Virginia Tech to revise the sampling procedure. ATFS staff will also work to clarify the requirements of the required sample process to state committees through the Leadership Update newsletter and the Sightline and Sightline Express newsletters for inspectors.

Again this year the inspection incentive program was a success. All 44 state committees included in the national required sample participated in the incentive program, and over \$116,700 was distributed to the committees to be used for some aspect of the volunteer inspector program. Some ways that the funds received from the 2008 program are being used by the states include direct reimbursement to inspectors, graduated incentive program for inspectors based upon when the inspection was submitted, gift certificates, and state employee recognition through awards dinner, certification seminar, and passing out "Certified Tree Farm Inspector" jackets.