

Sightline express

The monthly e-newsletter exclusively for ATFS Inspectors.

October 2012



We hope you enjoy the October edition of Sightline Express, the e-newsletter exclusively for American Tree Farm System Inspectors.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Good Luck to Amy Yambor!

After nearly seven years of dedicated service to Tree Farm, Operations Manager Amy Yambor has made the decision to begin working for a New York City-based conservation organization. The entire organization is sad to see her go, but we are all very excited for this new opportunity in her life. [Read more about Amy's transition](#), and please join us in wishing Amy the best of luck.

Dates and Deadlines

- November 1, 2012, Required sample inspections completed/entered in the database
- February 19-21, 2013, National Leadership Conference, Philadelphia, PA

Tools

Timber Tax Tools for Landowners

As 2012 winds down, many landowners may already be thinking about preparation of their 2012 taxes. The US Forest Service has recently issued their "[Tax Tips for Forest Landowners for the 2012 Tax Year](#)" as well as other resources on their [Forest Taxation website](#) and the [National Timber Tax Website](#). Please feel free to share these links and resources with landowners in your state who want to get a head-start on tax season.

We provide you the on-the-ground tools you need to help validate the work that family woodland owners are doing to keep their forest healthy and productive.

Working together, we help provide outreach to landowners and promote better forest stewardship.

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The **American Tree Farm System**[®] is a program of the American Forest Foundation.

*We grow stewardship
from the roots.*

2011 AFF Annual Report is now available!

The [AFF Annual Report](#) is a tool used to illustrate the hard work and accomplishments that the entire AFF network achieves throughout the year. The [2011 Annual Report](#) is now available online and details our expanded work in ensuring the sustainability of family forests for present and future generations. Please join us in celebrating these accomplishments by sharing this document throughout your network. For questions about the report, please contact [Mark Cheater](#), Director of Publications.

On the Ground**2012 Audit Finding Summary**

The ATFS certification program and this year's Assessment States have successfully completed the 2012 Assessment. This assessment included third-party review of the Northeast, South, and West-Central regions, including the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Montana, Illinois and Wyoming State Tree Farm Programs. Auditors interviewed landowners, reviewed management plans and assessed management on the ground for conformance with the [2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability](#), in addition to their review of each State Program's inspections process and documentation. The findings of the audit included examples of good management practices, opportunities for improvement and minor nonconformities. In addition, based on strong performance in this year's assessments, several open nonconformities and opportunities for improvement that were issued in years past were also closed in each region. The auditors approved the ATFS Corrective Action Plans. The assessment teams in each state, as well as our national office, are in the process of implementing the Corrective Action Plans. Public summaries of the regional assessments can be found [here](#). At the close of this year's assessments, each State Tree Farm Program has now undergone an assessment; this is a significant accomplishment for the Tree Farm Program! Thanks to everyone on the 2012 State Assessment Teams for coordinating a successful audit. We are also looking ahead to the 2013 audit and beginning the planning process for next year's assessments in West Virginia, Maine, Vermont, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, Colorado and New Mexico.

Recent Interpretations: Eligibility

The AFF Woodland Certification Committee recently issued interpretations and guidance to accompany the 2010-2015 ATFS Standards of Sustainability Eligibility. These interpretations relate to ATFS Certification on properties with long-term timber and mineral leases or in cases where wilderness designation or conservation easements are in effect. Landowners leasing timber rights to third parties are eligible for certification but only if they retain full control and decision-making authority over their forest management, in accordance with the objectives stated in their management plan. Landowners may also certify forestlands with active mineral

leases to third parties as long as the mining/extraction activity does not render the property no longer in conformance with the ATFS Standards. Conservation easements and wilderness designations are important for protecting future land use and important forest values. These agreements also reflect management decisions, consistent with landowner's objectives. Areas under easement or non-regulatory designations are a part of many working forest systems and are encompassed by the ATFS Standards. Thus, areas under easement or wilderness designation should be included in the total certified acreage. These recent interpretations serve as guidance and reference for inspecting foresters.

Landowner Engagement Strategy (LES) Updates

The Landowner Engagement Strategy is a multi-faceted initiative designed to strengthen support of the volunteer and landowner network, communicate the value of participation in ATFS, and ensure ATFS' financial sustainability for the future.

Membership Benefits Program Launch

We are about a quarter of the way through the launch of our new Membership Benefits Program. This program was launched in our pilot states (MO, OR, PA and SC) earlier this summer and our early returns show a greater percentage than anticipated of landowners choosing to join as Certified Tree Farmers in the ATFS Certified category. Thank you, again, to all of our volunteers in the pilot states for all of your hard work. For more information on this program launch, contact Mike Burns.

AFF Public Affairs Team Updates

AFF's public affairs team continues to work advocating for Tree Farmers and our Tree Farm network across the country. Here are some activities going on this month:

Make your voice heard with AFF's Election Tool Kit!

Congress left town at the end of September without taking action on timely issues that impact forest owners--the Farm Bill and the federal estate tax. Now that the elections are all everyone is talking about, **we need your help to educate all of your candidates** about the issues that impact family forest owners. We made it simple for you to **send a quick message** to all of your candidates to let them know why family forests are important and the issues that affect them.

Want to do more? **Check out our election toolkit** for 5 steps you can take to educate our future decision-makers about the issues that matter to you and the landowners you work with. Using our election toolkit you can easily send messages to candidates, write articles outlining our policy priorities to your local papers, or download questions to ask at a campaign event. Take action today!

Farm Bill Update

The House of Representatives failed to vote on Farm

Bill legislation, meaning the current Farm Bill expired September 30, 2012. What does this mean for forest owners? Many of the conservation tools and resources forest owners rely on will continue to operate with funds Congress appropriated earlier this year; however, there are a few programs which will either cease to exist from a budgetary perspective or won't be able to enroll new acreage. Additionally, all of the policy improvements, streamlined programs, and budget reductions that were included in both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees' Farm Bills were not made into law, meaning keeping the Farm Bill status quo is costly and ineffective. Worst of all, landowners who rely on these programs now lack the much-needed certainty on the long-term future of these programs. We will need your help, more than ever, to call on Congress to pass a Farm Bill when they return back to D.C. following the election.

Moving Toward the Future

Support the *Keep the Forest in the Family* Campaign

Keep an eye out for our latest letter, which you'll find in your mailbox in a few weeks! This letter outlines the key tools and resources we provide to Tree Farmers and the work we are doing to fight for better policies in Washington, on behalf of Tree Farmers. ATFS is fighting for a fix to the Estate Tax, so families across the country won't be faced with tax burdens that force their children and grandchildren to sell their land or harvest timber prematurely. We have already raised more than \$75,000 to sustain the research component of our *Keep the Forest in the Family* Campaign, but are relying on your support to reach our \$270,000 goal. With your help, we can ramp up our coordinated lobbying, media outreach, grassroots, and research efforts when Congress is debating this issue post-election.

And we've already had success—last month, Representatives Diane Black (R-TN) and Mike Michaud (D-ME) introduced H.R. 6439, the “Keep the Forest and the Farm in the Family Act of 2012,” to help provide additional estate tax relief to Tree Farmers, farmers, and ranchers. So far, 21 members of Congress have agreed to support H.R.6439, and you can visit www.familyforestaction.org to ask your House member to cosponsor.

Support our campaign today by sending your reply slip and contribution to the American Tree Farm System. If you prefer to make an online donation, visit our website at www.treefarmssystem.org/donate. Please contact Jenna Swirsky-Sacchetti, Individual Donor Coordinator, at (202) 463-2745 or jswirsky@forestfoundation.org if you have any questions.

Stumped?

Question: I am working with a landowner that would like to use prescribed burning. How does this fit in with the ATFS Standards for Certification?

Answer: Prescribed fire, including controlled burning of piles and windrows and broadcast applications, is an important tool in the forester's toolbox and the ATFS Standards include Performance Measures for the use of fire. When used, prescribed burning must align with the landowner's objectives, their management plan and local laws. In many states, the state forestry agency maintains a fire permitting system and provides training to landowners, which may be a requirement for obtaining a permit to burn. The permits may also reflect local regulations that limit the number of fires in a county in a given day.

A written prescribed burning plan is not required under the ATFS Standard but is recommended and may be required by the state forestry agency to obtain a permit. These plans typically include mapping of the areas to burn, accounts of fuel and required weather conditions and fire control measures.