

August 17, 2009

## 2008 ATFS National Required Sample Final Report

### Introduction:

The 2008 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, 1,200 Tree Farms, comprising 439,587 acres, were designated for national required sample inspections. The sample also designated 40 properties per stratum as replacements for Tree Farms identified to be sampled that are no longer part of ATFS and were found to be decertified through the national required sample process.  
43 states were allotted national required sample inspections.

### Methods:

The sample was developed by Dr. Harold Burkhart and Kevin Packard at Virginia Polytechnic University (Virginia Tech) in January 2008 and distributed to State Tree Farm Committees in February 2008. 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, 2008. 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 as the deadline was moved up in 2008 from December 1 to November 1.

38,803 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.

% conformance = #recert / (Total inspections received – (#sold + #no interest + #missing owners + #owners deceased))

### Results:

By March 1, 2009, ATFS national support staff received 1,354 004 inspection forms, with 94% completion of the sample. Out of 1,354 inspections, 1062 properties were recertified and 27 were decertified due to substandard conditions. From these results, we found 97.52% conformance to the AFF Standards of Sustainability.

Status	Count
Recertified	1062
Decertified – Substandard	27
Decertified – Sold	81
Decertified – No Interest	95
Decertified – Missing Owners	47
Decertified – Owners Deceased	42
<i>Total</i>	<i>1354</i>

15 out of 43 states completed all requirements of the 2008 national required sample. They were Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Maine, Montana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Virginia, and Vermont. 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. The revised inspector training to be released following approval of the revised AFF Standards of Sustainability by the AFF Board of Trustees. Some Tree Farms have included within their certified acreage orchards and Christmas tree farms. ATFS does not certify these areas and will work on outreach to landowners about this point. Other outreach needs include mandatory implementation of state BMPs.

**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 done by the landowners and helps staff and volunteers tailor to the program to the various interests of Tree Farmers.

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. Inspectors are also noting that the management plan needs to be updated. 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, but ATFS staff will work to post available resources on the Tree Farm website. 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.

Area specific observations made on required inspection forms:

**Forest protection:** Landowners were engaged in forest pest control for kudzu, grapevine, mountain pine beetle 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. Landowners were taking steps to prevent forest degradation from grazing and browsing. 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.

**Education and outreach:** Several landowners visited as part of the 2008 required sample are doing interesting work in the field of education and outreach. Examples include outdoor classrooms, educational hiking/nature trails, “Take a Kid Fishing” site, placement of large Tree Farm signs along busy roads, and a master logger continuing education site.

Landowners are also working with outside organizations. Examples include SFI State Implementation Committees, state and federal government programs such as EQIP and CRP, local resource conservation districts, conservation easement organizations, forest agricultural tax classification programs, Boy Scouts,

Alabama Treasure Forest program, and industry cooperative forest management (CFM) programs.

Wildlife protection: The 2008 required sample showed that Tree Farmers are very interested in protecting and enhancing habitat for wildlife, both game and non-game species. Examples include a 9 acre waterfowl reservoir, maintenance of old-growth hardwood stands, longleaf pine restoration through longleaf conservation grants, food plots, use of prescribed fire for wildlife benefits, protection of bird nesting habitat, habitat maintenance and improvement through minimum site prep activities, protection for threatened species such as indigo snakes and gopher tortoise, and snag retention for cavity nesters and 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 a preservation of a historical monument commemorating a Native American massacre site, slave cemetery, Native American burial grounds, establishment of a permaculture and conservation community, conservation management for endangered Pyramid Magnolia, heritage and historical tree plantings, and research on grant funding for improvement of a longleaf pine wet savanna habitat.

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. There were examples of landowners reaching outside of the traditional forestry community to solicit advice on managing their property, including a botanist and a paleontologist.

Harvest activities: Landowners were engaged in all types of harvest activities, including firewood, beetle kill salvage, timber stand improvement for fuel reduction, single tree selection, 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 2008 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 2008 sample, ATFS staff has met with Dr. Burkhardt 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 Spotlight newsletter for inspectors.

The inspection incentive program was a success. All 41 state committees included in the national required sample participated in the incentive program, and over \$114,000 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, state employee recognition through awards dinner, certification seminar, and passing out “Certified Tree Farm Inspector” jackets.