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TREE FARM BULLETIN

The High Jacking of the Word “Certified”

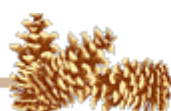
Many words in the English Language have double meanings. At any one time, each of us can make a list of these words and wonder how we can use them in so many different ways. Currently, as members and partners in the American Tree Farm System, we find ourselves in the middle of major discussions around the word “certified”.

A little background, when I first started working with the American Tree Farm System, there were two types of Tree Farmers: Pioneer and Certified.

Pioneer Tree Farmers were those landowners who had an interest in becoming tree farmers but had not done any management activities on their lands and did not have a management plan. There were a few that had cut a few trees, done some thinning or restoration activities (e.g. plantings, erosion control work), but had really not done anything yet.

Certified Tree Farmers were those landowners who had a completed management plan, had accomplished several natural resource related projects on their lands and, generally could be considered ‘journeyman’ landowners that were in the process of implementing their plans and completing projects on a yearly basis. These tree farmers received a “Certified Tree Farm Sign” and their properties were considered to be meeting the primary goal of the American Tree Farm System by getting “Good forestry on the ground and keeping it there”.

About ten years ago, a new terminology was added, “Certified Family forest”. This was added because many tree farmers are not really “Tree Farming”; they recognize that forestry is more than just tree farming, that it also means managing for wood, water, wildlife and recreation among other things, and that Tree Farm was just not descriptive enough of what tree farmers really do. A funny story was related to Joe and me at the National Leadership Conference (NLC) in Philadelphia last week concerning this addition. Larry Weismann, who was the past CEO of the American Forest Foundation, the parent non-profit cooperation of the American Tree Farm System, was talking to members of Congress about the Tree Farm Program and they (Congress) kept asking, “What are tree farmers”. Larry explained that most tree farmers were private forest owners and held lands that had been in families for multiple generations. It turned out that our elected officials understood what a family forest was versus a tree farm.



Back to the stated topic, starting about 2000, the term certified as it relates to wood products and forestry started taking on a different term. There is a thought process out in the forest products marketing world that makes the suggestions that forest products that are produced in an ecologically sustainable way would have a greater value than forest products produced in a more traditional sense. An analogy of this would be that consumers will pay more for King Crab that was actually caught in the Gulf of Alaska than King Crab that was raised in a fish farm (crab farm would be a better term).

With this suggestion, as it related to forest products, various entities (both national and international) engaged in the process of certification so their products could be sold for more money in the forest products industry. An underlining assumption here is that there are enough consumers out there that care about purchasing “certified sustainable forest products” or “green certified” and these consumers actually drive the forest products market. The American Tree Farm System thus found itself engaged in a race to secure the “certification” stamp of approval against various other organizations to help support its members in the market place. This resulted in alliances and cross recognition of the Tree Farm logo with various other “certifying” organizations, too many for me to name as well as remember what the Initials stand for (SFI, PEFC, etc., etc.).

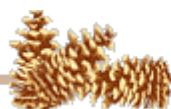
This “certification” or “green certification” resulted in the need for us to incorporate our current “Standards for Sustainability” check list that is attached to the Tree Farm inspection form and our need to complete 5 year audits to maintain the sustainability certification.

So, in 15 years, we have gone from “certified” meaning a graduate practicing tree farm/family forest who is operating within the recommendations of an approved management plan and completing forestry activities as they can to “certified” meaning that the tree farm is producing an unspecified amount of forest products for the “green certified” forest products market.

This model just does not fit our program in New Mexico. Most of our tree farmers/family forest owners have small properties, are more interested in protecting and managing their properties for forest health, watershed, wildlife, recreation and aesthetics. About half will never harvest more than a few dozen truckloads of logs (or firewood). Also, the green certification, to date has not been a market force in the state.

So where do we go from here? That is a good question. The American Tree Farm System did a pilot project over the last year with the states of Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Missouri. A new naming convention was developed to separate the traditional “certified” tree farms of old (they would be called Forest Stewards) from the green certified tree farms of the new. This was resoundingly rejected at the NLC last week. Where it stands now is we have till the end of December, 2015 to decide if we want to “opt out” or opt in” to the certification system. Some states, the ones who have a vibrant forest products industry, will most likely opt in and then try to work to achieve the benefits of the green certification status for their tree farmer/family forest owners. This also may result in a fee or stipend paid by the landowner to be “green certified”.

Other states may opt out, (like New Mexico could do) so that we can still maintain our program but not be involved in the green certification. The good part is that we would not have to take part in the 5 year audit/assessment program. The bad part is that it may place limits on how we use the certified tree farm/family forest sign, receive funding from the national office, and hinder our efforts to get grants.



Nationally, I think it would dilute the Tree Farm/Certified Family logo; if we opt out and Texas and Colorado opt in, what does that represent on a nationwide perspective. Will we then need to change all of our signs to something else?

One of the many benefits of the Tree Farm Program in New Mexico is that it has no membership fees to be a member. If we opt in, my feeling is that sooner or later every tree farmer/family forest owner may soon be required to pay dues or a small stipend. My question, is that something that you would consider to continue being a member of the Tree Farm/Family Forest Program, or would change your mind about being a member of the program. Joe and I would like to hear from you all on your thoughts.

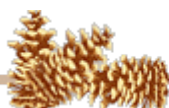
The decision does not have to be made right now, but it will need to be made in the future and we should have a solid discussion about it. Certified has a new meaning and we need to decide what definition we are going to use in New Mexico.

Thanks for your time. *Doug Boykin, Program Advisor, NM Tree Farm Committee*

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN: Keep Saturday, 04 May, open for a field day at Carl Struck's Tree Farm near Peñasco, NM on the Cimarron District. We are planning the schedule now and anticipate the following topics: wildlife pond planning and construction, mycoforestry, "Camp Colin" (a documentary), chain saw use/safety and lastly a tour of the property. Also, start thinking about taking a walk in your forest which I will discuss next month. As Doug mentioned in his treatise on "certification" we attended the National Leadership Conference last week in Philadelphia (one of the reasons for the late publication of the bulletin). Besides extensive discussion on the certification issue, we also learned about grants to further our program. We also had numerous discussions with the staff of the American Tree Farm Program as shown in the photo below. Please let me know your thoughts on Doug's "opt in/opt out" issue.

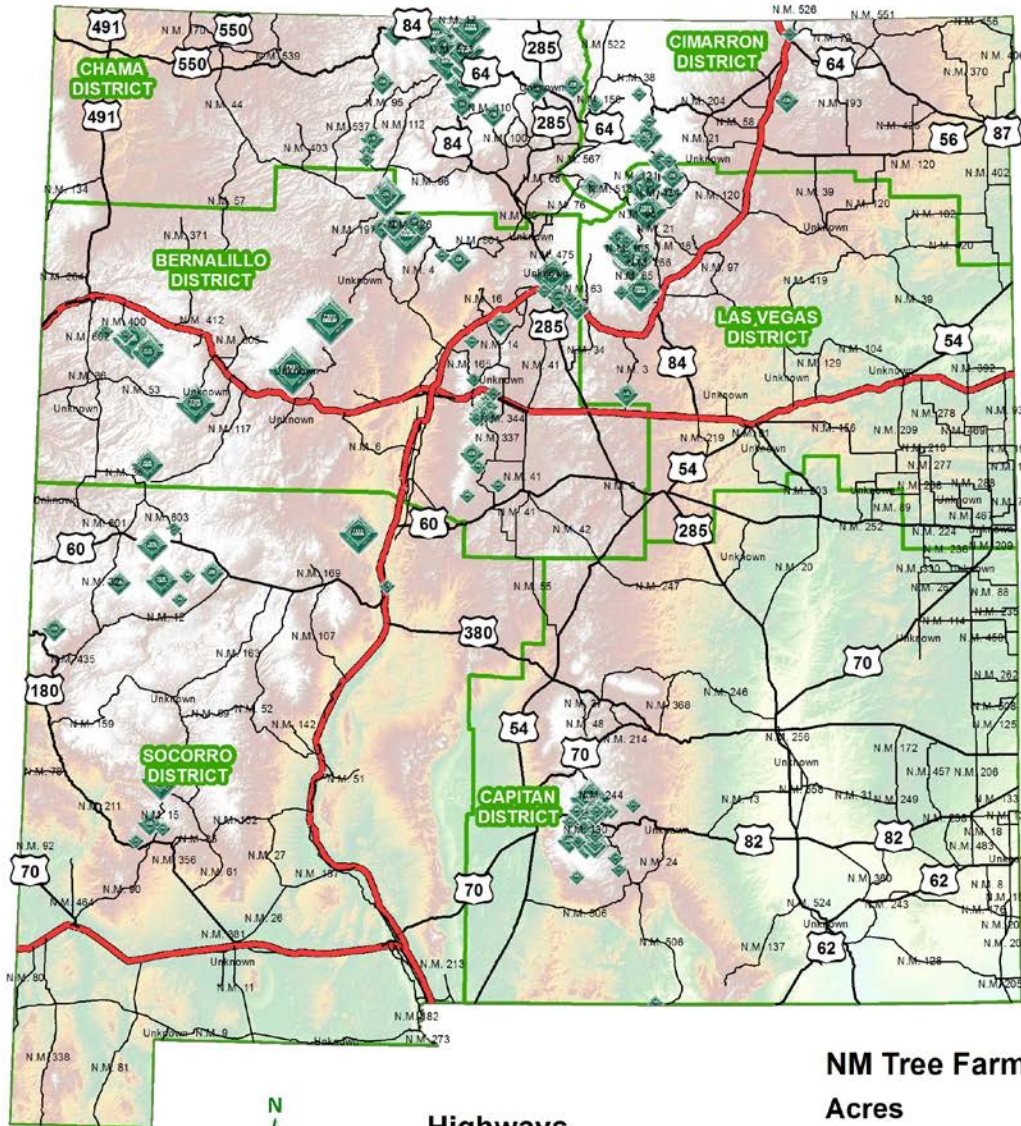


Left to right: Doug Boykin, Program Advisor, NM Tree Farm Committee; MacKenzie Rawcliffe, Program Coordinator, ATFS; Sara Anrrich, Operations Manager, ATFS; and Joe Stehling, Chairman, NM Tree Farm Committee.





New Mexico Tree Farms



Highways

- Interstate
- U.S.
- N.M.
- Unknown

NM Tree Farms

Acres

- 0 - 100
- 101 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1001 - 10000
- 10001 - 100000

