

FOREST of RECOGNIZED IMPORTANCE (FORI)

Excerpt from Georgia Landscape Management Plan (July 2022) – pages 98-99

7.1.6. Forests of Recognized Importance (FORI)

Forests of recognized importance (FORI) represent globally, regionally, and nationally significant large landscape areas of exceptional ecological, social, cultural, or biological values. These forests are evaluated at the landscape level, rather than at the stand level, and are recognized for a combination of unique values, rather than a single attribute. FORIs may include landscapes with exceptionally high concentrations of one or more of the following:

- Protected, rare, sensitive, or representative forest ecosystems such as riparian areas and wetland biotopes.
- Areas containing endemic species and critical habitats of multiple threatened or endangered plant and animal species, as identified under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or other recognized listings.
- Recognized large-scale cultural or archeological sites including sites of human habitation, cities, burial grounds, and in situ artifacts.
- Areas containing identified and protected water resources upon which large metropolitan populations are dependent.
- Areas containing identified unique or geologic features including geysers, waterfalls, lava beds, caves, or craters.

While landowners are encouraged to contribute to or support the values that led to the FORI designation of the area, the FORI designation does not compel the landowner to take any actions.

7.1.6.1. FORI Designation within Region

In the United States, because of their significance, FORIs have generally been identified and protected by federal or state governments or are under conservation easement by an environmental nonprofit organization. There is currently no state or federal agency that regulates FORIs on private forestlands in the United States. Several conservation organizations have identified areas that they believe are of exceptional status, yet there remains no single central clearinghouse of information regarding such forested landscapes.

To support and facilitate identification of these resources within this project, AFF worked with the Support Committee to develop a list of FORIs within the state while consulting the Georgia's Forest Action Plan and area conservation priorities. The following forest landscapes were identified for the LMP, by these stakeholders, based on the combination of their unique attributes, consistent with the definition of FORI under ATFS.

7.1.6.1.1. Public Lands

Due to their recognized conservation priorities for protecting habitat, biodiversity, water resources, cultural sites, and unique geologic features, all area federal and state protected public lands are considered FORIs within this LMP. This designation includes state forests, state parks, national forests, national parks, water management areas, wildlife management areas, and wildlife refuges.

Landowner Actions to Protect FORIs

For family landowners, a likely scenario is that their property is adjacent to a state or federally protected area and identified as a FORI at a landscape scale. Landowners should consider the impact to a neighboring FORI and opportunities to support consideration of specific values or attributes when planning and implementing activities on their forest property. Given the size and scale of family ownerships eligible for ATFS certification, landowners may be limited in their abilities to significantly impact FORI presence and quality through management at the small scale.

Management activities on or adjacent to an identified FORI should seek to contribute to or support the values that led to the designation of the area. While landowners are encouraged to contribute to or support the values that led to the FORI designation of the area, the FORI designation does not compel the landowner to take any actions.

During the ATFS inspection process, an ATFS Inspecting Forester shall confirm the presence or absence of a FORI on the property. The ATFS Inspecting Forester should also identify any efforts the landowner is making to support the values of the identified FORI within the 004 Form.