

Tree Farm News

A Quarterly Newsletter of the
Maine Tree Farm Committee

The Maine Tree Farm Committee

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A Sign of Good Forestry

Edgecomb Couple Named Maine Tree Farmers of Year

A woodworker who builds handcrafted furniture from trees grown on his own land, and a workshop teacher who has made more than 100 whimsical “fairy houses” to help children learn to enjoy the woods, have been chosen as the 2010 Maine Tree Farmers of the Year.

Andrew Abello and Amanda Russell operate the 107-acre Wind Ridge Farm in Edgecomb. They have built a life and a living around the woods.

The couple grows furniture-grade timber that Abello uses to make and repair Windsor and Queen Anne chairs and other pieces of fine furniture that are sold throughout the United States, Europe and Japan.

That’s the No. 1 objective of the Tree Farm, which was first certified in 1990. But the couple also harvests substantial volumes of pulpwood, sheathing boards and other products; manages habitat for woodcock and other species of wildlife; cuts their own firewood; works to eradicate invasive species; and maintains traditional rural uses of the land to support a locally based economy.

Until this year, Abello and Russell did all of the work in the woodlot themselves – from pruning white pine to harvesting logs and bucking firewood. The couple collaborates with forester Barrie Brusila of Warren. In addition to its Tree Farm accreditation, the woodland is also certified to the Forest Stewardship Council standard by Brusila’s company, Mid-Maine Forestry.

“Both his work and the fact that his chairs are created, literally, from the stump and are built completely on site before being sold are a singular distinction in Maine tree farming,” the nomination form states about Wind Ridge Farm. “This ultimate example of ‘value added’ to a timber product is key to keeping our land in working, rural use, and makes our Tree Farm more valuable as a working forest than any other use.”

The award will be presented Jan. 13 during the daylong SWOAM program at the annual Maine Agricultural Trades Show in Augusta.

Benefits of Being a Tree Farmer

Funded through the 2008 Farm Bill, the federal government is now subsidizing the purchase of biomass fuel chips. According to Farm Services Agency (FSA) personal, the new cost-sharing program (Biomass Crop Assistance Program or BCAP) is designed to help reduce the nation’s dependency on fossil fuels, a desire of the

Obama Administration, by lowering the cost of the biomass energy to the purchaser.

FSA, a federal agency, is responsible for the distribution of these funds, which require a number of criteria to be met by the forest landowner, logger and biomass purchaser. It is anticipated that Maine could receive \$100 million in federal funding, along with more federal employees, as a result of BCAP.

Biomass from any currently certified Tree Farm qualifies for the subsidy. The Tree Farmer (or someone else in the supply chain between landowner and mill) must execute a contract to sell biomass chips to an approved biomass conversion facility (such as a wood-to-energy plant) to receive the subsidy.

It is unknown how this program will affect stumpage prices. If the contract to sell biomass chips is held by someone other than the Tree Farmer, there is no requirement to pass any of the federal money back to the landowner. The program could even result in reduced stumpage value for landowners who do not qualify under BCAP (for example, landowners who have nothing more than the minimum forest management plan required to stay in Tree Growth.)

This program contains many complexities which may be better understood by reviewing the article in the October 2009 SWOAM newsletter, or you may contact one of the 14 Farm Services Agency county offices in Maine.

Tree Farm Strengthens Certification Standards

After creating revisions to Tree Farm standards, followed by comments from Tree Farmers and the public in general, the American Forest Foundation (AFF) has adopted a new, revised standard for the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). Bob Simpson, AFF's senior vice president for forestry programs, said in a press release that the new standards were "designed especially for small woodland owners, who provide nearly two-thirds of the wood fiber used for paper products in the U.S."

The new standards will require certified woodland owners to consider and minimize adverse impacts of timber harvesting or other activities on places of unique historical, cultural or wildlife value. Simpson added that a recent survey indicates most Tree Farmers are already performing voluntarily at a level to conserve such special sites.

In many ways, the new standards are very similar to the old, with eight standards replacing the original nine. In addition to the standards is a Glossary of

Terms, which defines in greater detail what particular value is being conserved or protected. For example, visual quality measures are defined as: Modifications of forestry practices in consideration of public view, including timber sale layout, road and log landing locations, intersections with public roadways, distributing logging residue, tree retention, timing of operations and other factors relevant to the scale and location of the project.

With the adoption of the strengthened standards, a new Tree Farm inspection form will replace the old. Tree Farm inspector training sessions will resume nationwide.

Maine has Highest Percentage of Foreign-Owned Land

Prepared by Bates Associates for the 2009 edition of the Consultant (the annual journal of the Association of Consulting Foresters), an article titled "Foreign Ownership Interests in U.S. Forestland" covers the trends in foreign-owned forestland. As required by the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978, these statistics are reported to the Secretary of Agriculture through county USDA farm services offices in all 50 states.

According to the documents, Maine has 3,270,362 acres of foreign-owned forest, more than any other state. Six Canadian-owned companies, four of whom are subsidiaries of the same parent, hold an interest in 2.8 million acres. After Maine, the states with the most foreign-owned forestland were: Alabama, 1,699,079 acres; Georgia, 1,519,739; Washington, 1,159,922; Louisiana, 1,116,839; Michigan, 738,400; Texas, 650,418; Florida, 564,733; Mississippi, 397,395; and South Carolina, 352,510.

Canada has the largest foreign ownership interest in U.S. agricultural land (including forestland). In 2007, 8,200,000 acres were owned by Canadian entities. Other foreign owners with substantial acreage include the Netherlands (second-largest), then the United Kingdom, Germany and Mexico.

To view the complete article, visit www.acf-foresters.org, click on the Media tab, then Consultant Magazine and 2009 Consultant. The article is on page 36.

