

## American Forest Foundation (AFF) 2021 Standards of Sustainability

### Standards Prologue

The American Forest Foundation's (AFF) 2021 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (Standards) promote the health and sustainability of America's family forests. These Standards are designed as a tool to help woodland owners be effective stewards of the land as they adaptively manage renewable resources; promote environmental, economic and social benefits; and work to increase public understanding of sustainable forestry. The Standards are based on international sustainability metrics and North American guidelines for sustainable forest management and serve as the basis for the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) certification program. The ATFS certification program is internationally endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC™).

Landowners and qualified natural resource professionals who follow the Standards are encouraged to promote the American Tree Farm System® program by displaying appropriate signs and participating in relevant program activities. Landowners following these Standards are recognized as ambassadors for exemplary woodland stewardship.

### How to Use the Standards

The Standards are designed to accommodate the range and diversity of family and small to mid-sized woodlands. As such, the AFF Standards should be utilized adaptively and as appropriate for the size, scale and intensity of the woodlands and operations.

### Structure and Demonstrating Conformance

Each of the eight Standards of Sustainability addresses aspects of sustainable forest management. Moving from general to specific, each Standard incorporates performance measures and indicators to illustrate conformance. All components of each Standard apply to every property certified under the AFF Standards. Because the indicator is the most specific, it is the most explicit element for demonstrating or evaluating conformance.

A standard is an overarching principle of sustainability.

A performance measure refines the Standard's intent and describes considerations and pathways for conformance.

An indicator identifies specific actions or activities that demonstrate conformance.

### Level of Requirement

Performance measures and indicators that include the word "shall" are considered core elements required for certification under the American Tree Farm System®

Performance measures and indicators that include the word "should" draw on personal and professional judgment of landowners, qualified natural resource professionals, qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors. These elements allow for latitude in

implementation to the greatest practical extent in given circumstances and are justifiable in a third-party verification process.

### Format of the Standards

Bold type throughout this document denotes words or phrases defined in the attached glossary.

### Who Uses the Standards?

The Standards are used by a wide range of people. Landowners use the Standards to guide their management. Qualified natural resource professionals use the Standards to support and inform landowners in developing management plans and implementing sustainable forest management on the ground. Qualified ATFS inspectors and group managers use the Standards to conduct field inspections and management plan evaluations to determine conformance that qualifies a property for certification. Finally, third-party assessors review operations and management plans to verify conformance with the Standards, as prescribed by ATFS policies and procedures.

### Guidance

Guidance statements appear throughout this document and are intended to inform the landowner, the qualified ATFS inspector and the third-party assessor about the intent of the Standard and how it may be applied on-the-ground. Guidance statements are not the Standards and are not considered normative language.

Qualified ATFS Inspectors and third-party assessors are cautioned to apply the Standards as written, avoid personal preferences and seek evidence of conformance. Qualified ATFS Inspectors and third-party assessors are urged to respect the landowner's opportunity for creative solutions and adaptive management embodied in the Standards.

### Documentation

The Standards and respective guidance were designed to recognize and support on-the-ground stewardship. Throughout this document, landowners are encouraged to develop and retain documents related to their management activities. Documents should be retained for three years, as a general rule of thumb, although some landowners may retain documents much longer, while other may not retain documents at all. Qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors are advised to view documentation as supplemental evidence supporting on-the-ground performance, rather than a proof point for conformance.

## Standard 1: Commitment to Practicing Sustainable Forestry

Landowner demonstrates commitment to forest health and sustainability by developing a forest management plan, implementing sustainable practices, and seeking opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding of sustainable forest management.

### Performance Measure 1.1

Landowner shall have and implement a written forest management plan consistent with the size of the forest and the scale and intensity of the forest activities.

#### GUIDANCE

The management plan may include several separate documents that, taken together, constitute the management plan. Management plans vary widely and may encompass a wide range of formats, language styles and document types, including emerging digital technologies and other tools that illustrate evidence of planning.

Umbrella management plans may be utilized in the management of multiple parcels and ownerships. Landowners or their designated representatives and qualified natural resource professionals are advised to select language that best reflects landowner's objectives and property circumstances. Consideration of specific conditions (size, scale and intensity of property and operations), landowner capacities, access to resource professional support and nonliteral interpretations are advised.

#### *Indicator 1.1.1*

Management plan shall be active, adaptive and embody the landowner's current objectives, remain appropriate for the land certified and reflect the current state of knowledge about natural resources and sustainable forest management.

#### GUIDANCE

The management plan's detail should reflect the forest and habitat complexity of the property as well as the management intensity planned for the property. The Standards do not require a prescribed management plan information structure or hierarchy. The plan preparer has considerable latitude in developing the management plan, or its composition of parts, at a level of complexity that reflects the landowner's objectives and provides for an accurate method of prescribing any planned treatments or activities on the property. A more formal or structured system is appropriate for larger collections of properties, whether under one ownership or part of an independently managed group (IMG) structure. A group manager should have a system in place to allow timely retrieval and editing of management plans under his/her authority and responsibility. Handwritten notes to the plan are acceptable as indications of updates to the plan for individual properties.

The nature of adaptive management requires that the landowner or his/her designated representative not be bound to follow the management plan prescriptions when circumstances influencing the property and its management have changed or when the landowner's objectives change. Examples of such changes include changes in family

circumstances, the sale or acquisition of lands included in the certificate and disturbance from storms, fires, pests or disease outbreaks. Forestry involves dealing with dynamic natural systems and some accommodations may be necessary for natural events such as fires, flooding or wind damage, as well as the landowners' personal circumstances. To respond to such events, management plans must be active and adaptive in nature, as indicated in Indicator 1.1.1. While the management plan is not expected to address all possible facets of state-of-the-art forestry or habitat management, the plan is expected to avoid forestry or wildlife management practices that do not support sustainable forest management. For example, a plan that prescribes practices to maximize short-term income should not compromise long-term forest health or resilience.

*Indicator 1.1.2*

Management plans shall describe current forest conditions, landowner's current objectives, management activities aimed at achieving landowner's objectives, document a feasible strategy for activity implementation and include a map accurately depicting significant forest-related resources.

The forest management plan shall demonstrate consideration of the following resource elements: forest health, soil, water, wood and fiber production, threatened or endangered species, special sites, invasive species and forests of recognized importance. Where present and relevant to the property, the plan shall describe management activities related to these resource elements.

Where present, relevant to the property and consistent with landowner's objectives, the plan preparer should consider, describe and evaluate the following resource elements: fire, wetlands, desired species, recreation, conversion, forest aesthetics, biomass and carbon.

GUIDANCE

Current conditions may be described in general terms, including age, species and composition, or identified in accompanying maps and inventories. The depth of narrative and level of detail in current condition descriptions may vary widely with access to technical support, property attributes and the scale and intensity of management. Third-party assessors are encouraged to recognize a range of approaches in assessing current condition descriptions.

The plan must clearly describe landowner's current objectives. Landowner objectives are concise, high-level statements of what the landowner hopes to accomplish through his or her management. Landowners are *encouraged*, but not required, to seek education opportunities, such as written materials, landowner workshops and field days, as well as consult qualified natural resource professionals as they identify their objectives. Landowners are encouraged to locate sources for these references in their state. Local State Tree Farm Committees can provide a great resource to landowners and may be found on the ATFS website: <https://www.treefarmssystem.org/state-tree-farm-programs>

Landowner objectives may range widely in language styles and approaches, from specific and technical to general and nontechnical. For example, some plans may describe specific

forest conditions (fast-growing conifer stands, mixed hardwood bottomland forests, older forests of longleaf pine, etc.) or general goals for the property (good habitat for animals, a healthy forest, etc.) the landowner is attempting to achieve.

Strategies for achieving the landowner's objectives should be reflected in the body of the plan. For example, if the landowner's objective is to increase the occurrence of wildlife on the property, the management plan is expected to prescribe management activities that will enhance, or at least maintain, suitable habitat.

The plan must specifically mention the required topics (forest health, soil, water, wood and fiber production, threatened or endangered species, special sites, invasive species and forests of recognized importance). If there is no occurrence of an attribute on the required topic list (threatened or endangered species, for example), the plan should state that the attribute is not present on the subject property and describe the consultation or means by which the determination was made. For example, a plan may state that, "Based on field review of the property and review of the state natural heritage database on XX date, no threatened or endangered species are known to be present on the property." For requirements and guidance on required elements and consultation options regarding forest health, threatened or endangered species, forests of recognized importance and special sites, please refer to Standards 5 and 7, respectively.

If attributes such as fire, wetlands, desired species, recreation, aesthetic quality, biomass or carbon are present on the property and aligned with the landowner's objectives, the landowner or designated representative may consider inclusion of these elements in his or her management plan.

There is no requirement for level of detail around optional elements. Addressing the attribute may be as simple as saying that, "The attribute will be protected during all forest operations in compliance with applicable regulations." Alternately, the plan preparer may provide a detailed description of the management actions or protections specific to the attribute.

A property recently covered by a written management plan will not necessarily have evidence of plan performance.

Management plans can present a suite of options to landowners for their consideration. ATFS does not view management plans as a strict blueprint for landowner action, rather that management plans are adaptive and responsive to a number of factors. Qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors should contemplate the following question when assessing the conformance of a management plan to the AFF Standards: *does the failure to perform the plan-action constitute a breach of **sustainability** for this property?* If the answer is no, then, the landowner is not out of conformance. If the answer is yes, this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

### *Indicator 1.1.3*

The Landowner should monitor for changes that could interfere with the management objectives as stated in management plan.

#### GUIDANCE

Monitoring for individual landowners or designated representatives can be achieved by visiting the property on a regular basis, riding through it or walking the trails. This can be done annually or more or less frequently depending on the individual circumstances (region, soils, risk of invasive species, risk of pest outbreaks, etc.).

Landowners and designated representatives are encouraged to keep a written record of monitoring observations to reflect and document changing conditions-- including the presence of invasive species, pest or disease or storm damage-- along with management activities. In addition, these records may also be used to defend against adverse possession claims, substantiate any casualty losses and enable timely response to trespass, illegal dumping, timber theft and insect or disease outbreaks. Records of monitoring may be informal, such as handwritten notes, and could include photos, digital technologies, online tools such as [www.mylandplan.org](http://www.mylandplan.org) and other emerging media.

Landowners are encouraged to update management plans based on monitoring.

A management plan is considered current if it remains consistent with the landowner's objectives and the conditions on the ground, regardless of when the plan was written.

## Standard 2: Compliance with Laws

Forest management activities comply with all relevant federal, state and local laws, regulations and ordinances.

### Performance Measure 2.1

Landowner shall comply with all relevant federal, state, county and municipal laws, regulations and ordinances governing forest management activities.

#### GUIDANCE

The Standard only applies to laws, regulations and ordinances related to forest management activities taking place on the property.

Landowners or designated representatives should employ the maxim, “When in doubt, ask.” Common forest management activities that are regulated in many states include conservation of state and federally protected species and their habitat, prescribed burning, pesticide application, harvesting, road building, pond construction and stream crossings.

Excellent professional resources are available at local natural resource agency offices. Please consult the resource pages on the [ATFS website](#) and at [www.mylandplan.org](http://www.mylandplan.org) for additional help on relevant federal and state laws and regulations.

#### *Indicator 2.1.1*

Landowner shall comply with all relevant laws, regulations and ordinances and will correct conditions that led to adverse regulatory actions, if any.

#### GUIDANCE

Full legal compliance with relevant laws, regulations and ordinances is the intent of the Standard. Mistakes may occur in carrying out forest management activities. Landowners must be committed to correcting inadvertent violations. A pattern of willful violation of relevant laws, regulations or ordinances is not acceptable.

If there is evidence of past nonconformance, then the landowner must show proof of a good-faith effort to remedy the nonconformance. If the matter is tied up in court, then the landowner is only disqualified when a final adverse judgment is rendered and the landowner refuses to comply with the ruling.

Compliance with all relevant (applicable) laws can be verified by a three-tiered process:

Step 1 – Observation of conditions on the subject property

Step 2 – The landowner’s verbal or written claim of legal compliance

Step 3 – Research with the state Department of Natural Resources, local Natural Resource Conservation Service office or State Forestry Commission offices

If Step 1 and Step 2 do not raise any issues, then the qualified ATFS inspector or third-party assessor is not required to employ Step 3.

#### *Indicator 2.1.2*

Landowner should obtain advice from appropriate qualified natural resource professionals or qualified contractors who are trained in, and familiar with, relevant laws, regulations and ordinances.

#### GUIDANCE

Landowners are advised to engage qualified natural resource professionals and qualified contractors, licensed pesticide applicators and other trained professionals to support regulatory compliance.



### Standard 3: Reforestation and Afforestation

Landowner completes timely restocking of desired species of trees on a regeneration harvest site and nonstocked areas where tree growing is consistent with land use practices and the landowner's objectives.

#### Performance Measure 3.1

Reforestation or afforestation shall be achieved by a suitable process that ensures adequate stocking levels.

##### *Indicator 3.1.1*

Reforestation or afforestation shall achieve adequate stocking of desired species reflecting the landowner's objectives, within five years after regeneration harvest, or an appropriate time frame for local conditions, or within a time interval as specified by applicable regulation

#### GUIDANCE

The landowner or designated representative should ask his or her qualified natural resource professional or check with the state agency responsible for forestry assistance to find out if there is a reforestation law in place, and if so, to ensure compliance with it.

Federal and state reforestation programs may provide guidance regarding adequate stocking levels that landowners may utilize as a reference to support management. However, certain wildlife habitat management regimes may favor lower stocking rates than the cost-share program or silvicultural guidelines do. Therefore, it is important to make sure the chosen guidelines fit the forest conditions and are consistent with landowner objectives.

Natural regeneration stocking assessments should account for both softwood and hardwood regeneration and should take place within the normally accepted time frame for local conditions.

For reforestation and afforestation, use of native and naturalized species and local provenances that are well-adapted to site conditions is preferred, where appropriate. A plantation may be established to add economic value and/or ecosystem services. If nonnative species are selected, landowner should consult or seek guidance from qualified natural resource professionals, such as agencies, academic institutions or professional associations, to ensure that potential negative impacts on the ecosystem and on the genetic integrity of native species and local provenances have been evaluated, and to determine whether negative impacts can be avoided or minimized. Landowners should avoid use of invasive species in reforestation and afforestation efforts.

Afforestation within an ecologically important non-forest ecosystem, such as a peatland, is likely to be extremely low. A landowner should consult a qualified natural resource

professional to ensure that conversion of non-forested ecosystems to forest does not have a long-term negative impact on the ecology.

The potential use of biotechnology and genetically modified trees is an evolving issue in US regulations and the field of forestry in United States. Genetic engineering may offer new opportunities for the restoration of species, such as the American chestnut, and other potential benefits for the resilience of forests. AFF recognizes that much research is still being conducted to study the ecological cost and benefits of genetically engineered trees and regulations concerning forest biotechnology continue to evolve. Research is ongoing and AFF will continue to monitor emerging scientific developments in this area, adjusting guidance for the ATFS Standards, where appropriate.

Use of genetically modified trees is limited to very specific applications of species restoration, in accordance with federal regulations. As such, use of genetically modified trees by family landowners in the US is likely to be extremely low during the implementation period of ATFS 2021 Standards. However, use of genetically modified trees is not supported under these standards, reflecting conformance with PEFC requirements, which endorses the ATFS certification program. Most tree farmer collaborators with The American Chestnut Foundation deploy stock that was developed using traditional backcross hybrids that are not considered genetically modified trees and are acceptable.

## Standard 4: Air, Water and Soil Protection

Forest management practices maintain or enhance the ecosystems and ecosystem services provided by the forest, including air, water, soil and site quality.

### Performance Measure 4.1

Landowner shall meet or exceed practices prescribed by state forestry best management practices (BMPs) that are applicable to the property.

#### GUIDANCE

Compliance with all state forestry BMPs that apply to elements such as air, water, soil and site quality are required on all ATFS certified properties, even if voluntary in the state of practice. Landowners and designated representatives are urged to secure a copy of the state forestry BMP guide from their state forestry agency and to familiarize themselves with the guidelines in it for harvesting, road building, reforestation, habitat management and other forest activities. For many states, this information is available free online and in printed format.

For states with forest practice acts, the statutes, administrative rules and guidance for the acts is considered the equivalent of BMPs. Where the Standards note state forestry BMP, the inspector or third-party assessor should reference the forest practice act in states where present.

#### *Indicator 4.1.1*

Landowner shall implement specific state forestry BMPs that are applicable to the property.

#### GUIDANCE

When planning management activities that will cause any soil disturbance or require chemical application, the BMP manual for the state in which the property is located should be consulted and applicable BMP methods employed.

Examples of activities requiring BMP application:

- Harvest planning – including block design, haul roads, skidder trails, stream crossings and truck-loading areas
- Reforestation design – mechanical or chemical site preparation, machine or hand planting
- Construction and maintenance of new and existing roads and recreation trails
- Prescribed burning plans – fire lane construction, smoke management, agency notification

No field evidence of BMP implementation is expected where no management activity has occurred. However, if the property shows evidence of water quality impairment originating on the property that is not caused by the landowner's or designated representative's actions, the landowner is strongly encouraged to have plans for remediation.

Examples:

- Landowner purchases a tract with a forest road that is eroding soil into a water body.

- ATV riders are trespassing on the property and are crossing a stream causing the banks to erode.
- Garbage is being dumped on the property near a stream crossing and some of it is getting into the stream during high-water conditions.
- Storm damage has impaired the performance of road culverts.

*Indicator 4.1.2*

Landowner shall minimize road construction and other soil disturbances within riparian zones and wetlands.

GUIDANCE

Activities in riparian zones and wetlands shall comply with applicable BMPs. BMP manuals are generally quite detailed on recommended practices for road construction and other disturbances of riparian zones. If there is a point of confusion, the landowner or designated representative is advised to consult with a qualified natural resource professional who is experienced in forest road design and installation. In some states, permits may be required for forest roads or other disturbances that intersect a riparian zone. Landowners should specify with qualified contractors that BMPs must be adhered to. In all cases, the primary concern is to avoid contaminating watercourses that are adjacent to the forest activity.

Performance Measure 4.2

Landowner shall consider a range of forest management activities to control pests, pathogens and unwanted vegetation.

*Indicator 4.2.1*

Landowner should evaluate alternatives to pesticides for the prevention or control of pests, pathogens and unwanted vegetation to achieve specific management objectives.

GUIDANCE

Landowners or designated representatives should consult with their state forestry agency or qualified natural resource professional to learn about the range of recommended management techniques for any particular disease, invasive species or pest outbreak on their property. Links to these resources are available at the [ATFS website](#).

Integrated pest management (IPM) is an excellent approach to controlling, suppressing or preventing pests and can take many forms. Preventative measures, efforts to improve forest health or, in some other way, protect the property from injurious organisms are often the most practical and effective approaches. Pesticide applications may be used when other control measures are ineffective or impractical.

While landowners and designated representatives are urged to take feasible actions to address pests, pathogens and unwanted vegetation, third-party assessors are advised that, in some cases, there may be no feasible options for controlling a pest or outbreak due to severity, scale and timing of onset.

*Indicator 4.2.2*

Pesticides used shall be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and applied, stored and disposed of in accordance with EPA-approved labels and by persons appropriately trained, licensed and supervised.

#### GUIDANCE

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approves the use of pesticides for specific situations and on specific plants or animals, at specified application rates. The landowner is responsible for ensuring that the planned use of a pesticide is in compliance with the EPA label requirements. Use of pesticides should be documented by the landowner or designated representative.

Please consult the ATFS resource page for links to the EPA and other relevant resources for additional information on EPA-approved pesticides.

In most states, forestry chemicals must be applied by a licensed applicator. The landowner is responsible for ensuring that anyone applying forestry use chemicals is in compliance with state and federal regulations. In some states, landowners or designated representatives can apply certain pesticides on their land without any special permits or licenses. In others, they can apply for and receive a license or permit to apply forestry chemicals on their own lands according to the EPA label limitations. In any event, the requirements for safe use, storage and disposal must be met by landowners.

#### Performance Measure 4.3

When used, prescribed burns shall conform with landowner's objectives and all applicable rules, laws, and regulations.

#### GUIDANCE

In many states, the state forestry agency employs a permit system for prescribed burning. Many of these agencies provide training for prescribed burning that is available to landowners and designated representatives. Successful completion of a prescribed burning course is often required before the state forestry agency will issue a burning permit. Many states regulate the amount of open burning that can be conducted on a given day in a county or multi-county zone.

Prescribed burning includes controlled burning of piles, windrows and broadcast fire applications.

A prescribed burning plan is highly recommended, which will include reconnaissance of the burning block, estimates of fuel condition, required weather conditions and adequate means of controlling the fire after it is set. Oral discussion of a burning plan with all of the parties involved, before the burn is started on the property, is acceptable. A written burning plan record is not required by the Standards but may be required by the state agency that regulates open burning in the state.

Qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors may verify compliance through interviews with landowners or designated representatives and observing the property.

The landowner or designated representatives may have written records to support conformance claims but is not required to do so.

*Indicator 4.3.1*

Prescribed burns shall conform with the landowner's objectives and state and local laws and regulations.

**GUIDANCE**

The landowner's plans and good-faith actions in using prescribed burns should conform to the management objectives and the relevant laws and regulations.

Even the best-laid plans may go awry. Qualified Tree Farm inspectors or assessors are advised to look for a pattern of responsible use of prescribed burns where it is used.

## Standard 5: Fish, Wildlife, Biodiversity and Forest Health

Forest management activities contribute to the conservation of biodiversity.

### Performance Measure 5.1

Forest management activities shall protect habitats and communities occupied by threatened or endangered species as required by law.

#### GUIDANCE

Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), landowners are required to protect occupied habitat for threatened or endangered animal species. If landowners or designated representatives become aware of the presence of a threatened or endangered animal species on their property, it is their duty to review the requirements for protecting the habitat for that species and to take appropriate actions in the management of their property. Under ATFS certification, landowners may choose to go above and beyond ESA requirements and protect unoccupied animal habitat.

Although private landowners are not required to protect threatened or endangered plant species under the ESA, landowners are encouraged to do so.

Activities implemented under a federally approved habitat conservation plan (HCP) are deemed in conformance with the ATFS Standard. Additional information on the Endangered Species Act is available at [http://www.fws.gov/ENDANGERED/esa-library/pdf/ESA\\_basics.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/ENDANGERED/esa-library/pdf/ESA_basics.pdf)

In addition to ESA requirements, states maintain their own lists of protected species and legal requirements for protection by landowners.

#### *Indicator 5.1.1*

Landowner shall periodically confer with natural resource agencies, state natural resource heritage programs, qualified natural resource professionals or other current sources of information to determine occurrences of threatened or endangered species on the property and their habitat requirements.

#### GUIDANCE

Threatened or endangered species lists are maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the ESA [[http://ecos.fws.gov/tess\\_public/](http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/)]. Nationally listed threatened or endangered freshwater fish that migrate to sea are listed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) [<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/esa/>]. Contacting the state natural resources agency or service representative is usually an effective way to find out if a property or region is known to contain a threatened or endangered species. *Some **threatened or endangered** species are also listed separately by the state agencies. Please consult the [ATFS website](#) and [www.natureserve.org/](http://www.natureserve.org/) for additional resources on **threatened or endangered** species.*

Although landowners are not required to do an exhaustive search for threatened or endangered species on their property, under the AFF Standards, landowners or designated

representatives are expected to make a good-faith effort prior to the start of significant forest management activities, such as a timber harvest or road construction, to identify any known occurrences of these species on their property through on-site review and the use of a qualified natural resource professional or natural heritage databases. Consultation with appropriate resources is demonstrated in management plan documentation.

*Indicator 5.1.2*

Forest management activities shall incorporate measures to protect identified threatened or endangered species on the property.

**GUIDANCE**

If there are known occurrences of threatened or endangered species on the property, the landowner may be required to make provisions for protection of the species and habitat as specified by regulation. Landowners or designated representatives are encouraged to consult with a qualified natural resource professional for assistance in planning to protect threatened or endangered species.

The presence of threatened or endangered species on the property is not considered a prohibition of management but may influence the timing or technique of management activities.

Measures for habitat protections may include:

- limited mechanical entry in the habitat area
- restricted pesticide use in the habitat area
- residual tree maintenance in the habitat area
- buffer zone establishment and maintenance around the habitat area
- hunting or fishing limitations
- signage or marking of the habitat area

Performance Measure 5.2

Landowner should address the desired species and/or desired forest communities when conducting forest management activities, if consistent with landowner's objectives.

**GUIDANCE**

Landowners may wish to increase the presence of one or more desired species (fish, wildlife or plants) on their property such as bobwhite quail, longleaf pine or wild berry species. While these goals may be described in the landowner's objectives, the body of the management plan should provide a description of management activities planned to achieve the stated objective(s). Desired species management is only relevant if identified as an objective by the landowner.

*Indicator 5.2.1*

Landowner should consult available and accessible information on management of the forest for desired species and/or forest communities and integrate it into forest management.



## GUIDANCE

Several good sources for desired species management are readily available to the landowner:

- Nonprofit organizations that focus on the desired species
- State and federal agencies that focus on fish and game species
- Extension Service publications

Please consult the resource pages on the [ATFS website](#) for additional information on desired species management.

State specific resources for desired species management may include available state Wildlife and Forest Action Plans.

### Performance Measure 5.3

Landowner should make practical efforts to promote forest health.

#### *Indicator 5.3.1*

Landowner should make practical efforts to promote forest health, including prevention, control or response to disturbances such as wildland fire, invasive species and other pests, pathogens or unwanted vegetation, to achieve specific management objectives.

## GUIDANCE

New, previously unknown or under-recognized pests, pathogens and invasive species are, unfortunately, emerging as serious and immediate threats to forest health. Outbreaks and impacts may be sudden, widespread and profound. Given this and a landowner's deployable resources, he or she may have limited ability to prevent, respond or control the impacts of a disturbance.

Landowners or designated representatives are advised to take a practical, proactive approach to promoting the resilience, productivity and vitality of their forests. Landowners or designated representatives are encouraged to work with their qualified natural resource professional to understand and identify the range of stressors in which their woodlands may be vulnerable and consider measures to promote the resilience and reduce the susceptibility of their properties.

Qualified natural resource professionals can supply the landowner or designated representative with information on emerging forest health issues and techniques for preventing, mitigating the impacts of and responding to stressors and events. Landowners are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to learn about forest health issues and approaches for preventing and responding to stressors and promoting resilience.

On monitoring visits to the property, landowners or designated representatives should be alert to potential impacts to forest health.

Qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors may verify compliance through interviews with landowner or designated representative, review of management plan documents or observing the property.

#### Performance Measure 5.4

Where present, forest management activities should maintain or enhance forests of recognized importance.

#### GUIDANCE

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 the stand level and are recognized for a combination of unique values, rather than a single attribute. FORIs may include but are not limited to 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

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, at this time, no state or federal agency that regulates FORIs on private forest lands 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.

In an effort to support and facilitate identification of these resources, AFF developed the Forests of Recognized Importance Resource as a reference for landowners and qualified natural resource professionals. This resource is available at the ATFS website and MyLandPlan.org:

<https://www.treefarmsystem.org/fori>

<https://mylandplan.org/content/what-forest-recognized-importance>

In addition, the AFF National Standards Interpretation Committee (NSIC) also advises consulting state forest action plans, state wildlife action plans and state natural heritage databases as resources for identifying FORIs.

Due to the small scale and low-intensity of family forest operations, informal assessment for the occurrence of FORIs through consultation with experts or review of available and accessible information is appropriate.

Consideration of FORIs is relatively new to forestry practice and planning in the United States. As such, adoption of the model has been uneven and a range of terms has been deployed in the identification, protection and management for enhancement of FORIs. Landowners or qualified natural resource professionals may use terms such as “high conservation value forests” or “forests of exceptional value” or other terms to describe this concept, which are considered acceptable in fulfilling this Standard. Qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors are advised to recognize this diversity of terms and the intent in verifying conformance.

*Indicator 5.4.1*

Appropriate to the scale and intensity of the situation, forest management activities should incorporate measures to contribute to the conservation of identified forests of recognized importance.

**GUIDANCE**

Landowners or designated representatives who have identified some or all of their forest property as part of a FORI should delineate the area on the maps associated with the management plan. 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.

For family landowners, a more 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.

## Standard 6: Forest Aesthetics

Forest management activities recognize the value of forest aesthetics.

### Performance Measure 6.1

Landowner should manage the visual impacts of forest management activities consistent with landowner objectives, the size of the forest, the scale and intensity of forest management activities and the location of the property.

#### *Indicator 6.1.1*

Forest management activities should apply visual quality measures compatible with appropriate silvicultural practices.

### GUIDANCE

Forest aesthetics considerations can be incorporated into management planning with little cost to the landowner. Employing forest aesthetics considerations into the management plan can produce a much more visually appealing experience on property visits for owners, their guests and passers-by using nearby public roads.

Many state agencies have guidelines for forest aesthetics that landowners, designated representatives and qualified natural resource professionals can use to inform their management. A few good examples include:

*Guide to Logging and Aesthetics* by Geoffrey T. Jones:

<http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/info/pubs/Harvesting/A%20Guide%20to%20Logging%20Aesthetics.pdf>

Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry, Section 7:

<http://www.gatrees.mobi/resources/publications/BMPManualGA0609.pdf>

University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension's *Good Forestry in the Granite State*:

<http://extension.unh.edu/goodforestry/toc.htm>

Voluntary Harvesting Guidelines for LANDOWNERS IN VERMONT. Chapter 2:

[https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Forest\\_and\\_Forestry/Forest\\_Management/Library/VH\\_G\\_FINAL\\_COVER.pdf](https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Forest_and_Forestry/Forest_Management/Library/VH_G_FINAL_COVER.pdf)

Forest Stewardship: Planning for Beauty and Enjoyment

<https://extension.psu.edu/forest-stewardship-planning-for-beauty-and-enjoyment>

Examples of forest aesthetic practices include:

- Place log-truck-loading zones out of public view
- Put a bend or turn in the entrance road to block view of tract interior
- Follow contour lines and timber type margins with roads and harvest boundaries
- Close and revegetate idle roads with wildlife-friendly plants

## Standard 7: Protect Special Sites

Special sites are managed in ways that recognize their unique historical, archeological, cultural, geological, biological or ecological characteristics.

### Performance Measure 7.1

Forest management activities shall consider and maintain any special sites relevant on the property.

#### *Indicator 7.1.1*

Landowner shall make a reasonable effort to locate and protect special sites appropriate for the size of the forest and the scale and intensity of forest management activities.

### GUIDANCE

Special sites are diverse and can be identified through consultation and consideration processes described below and during property reconnaissance prior to preparing the management plan.

Landowners or designated representatives should identify special sites on management plan maps and, where appropriate, on the ground. Some landowners may choose not to identify some special sites on a map or on the ground in an effort to protect these sites from vandalism or overuse.

Landowners or designated representatives should make efforts to protect any known special sites especially during forest management activities. These efforts may include creating a vegetation buffer, fencing the area or otherwise distinguishing it from surrounding areas. Because special sites are often in the ground, measures may be taken to control erosion and limit soil disturbance. Landowners and designated representatives are advised to review their special sites map and protection plan with qualified natural resource professionals and qualified contractors assisting in forest management activities. After harvests, landowners and designated representatives are encouraged to follow up to ensure adequate protection.

Sites of historical, archeological and cultural importance are identified on the National Register of Historic Places, a listing administered by the National Park Service or by State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), state agencies that oversee the preservation efforts in their state. Listing of sites on the National Register (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm>) reflect a determination of a site's significance to the history of a community, state or the nation. AFF recognizes this determination of significance and requires protections of such sites under certification, as directed by law.

Federal law does not require protections of sites listed on the National Historic Register so long as there are no federal monies attached to the property. However, there may be state or local preservation laws in place. Many SHPOs maintain web-based directories of their

listings for reference by landowners and designated representatives. Landowners and designated representatives may wish to contact local historical societies and museums for additional information on sites of local significance and any preservation laws applying to them. It is important to note that history agencies vary widely in their staffing and capacities for consultation with landowners or designated representatives.

Many properties may include historical, cultural or archeological sites that are not listed in National Historic Register or SHPO listings. Landowners may choose to designate sites not listed by relevant authorities as special sites. To do so, landowners and designated representatives should evaluate sites for congruence with all of the following criteria:

- Significance: Sites may be significant if (A.) associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or (B.) associated with the lives of significant persons of the past; or (C.) they embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or (D.) they yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.
- Age: At least 50 years old.
- Integrity: The site must retain its historical physical integrity with its character-defining features still present. A building, structure or landscape feature must be relatively unchanged. An archaeological site must be relatively undisturbed, with its patterns and layers of artifacts and other archaeological evidence relatively intact. A traditional cultural site must be recognizable to today's affiliated cultural group, evidenced through tradition and still used or revered in some way.

Special sites of biological and geological significance may be identified through consultation undertaken related to the identification of FORIs and threatened or endangered species and communities (Standard 5).

In addition to these criteria, landowners may designate sites of personal significance to them.

Qualified ATFS inspectors and third-party assessors may verify for conformance by interviewing the landowner or qualified natural resource professional for awareness, reviewing planning documents and associated operating records and/or by observing the property.

Additional information and guidance about special sites are available at the ATFS website at <https://www.treefarmssystem.org/special-sites>.

## Standard 8: Forest Product Harvests and Other Activities

Forest product harvests and other management activities are conducted in accordance with the landowner's objectives and consider other forest values.

### Performance Measure 8.1

Landowner should use qualified natural resource professionals and qualified contractors when contracting for services.

#### *Indicator 8.1.1*

Landowner should seek qualified natural resource professionals and qualified contractors.

### GUIDANCE

The services of qualified natural resource professionals and qualified contractors can prove very cost-effective for landowners.

Many states have registration or licensing systems for foresters and wildlife managers. The people listed by these systems have passed rigorous qualification exams and are required to regularly obtain continuing education.

State forestry and wildlife agencies often can provide referral lists of qualified natural resource professionals who are working in the state or county.

The Society of American Foresters has a Certified Forester program: <https://www.eforester.org/>

The Wildlife Society has a Certified Wildlife Biologist program: <https://wildlife.org/learn/professional-development-certification/cwbawb-directory/>

The Association of Consulting Foresters is a national association of forestry consultants: <http://www.acf-foresters.org>

The American Forest Foundation's [www.mylandplan.org](http://www.mylandplan.org) has a forester directory.

A qualified natural resource professional often will be familiar with the qualified contractors who are doing forestry-related work in the area and can make recommendations.

Please consult the resource pages for landowners on the [ATFS website](#), for help in finding qualified contractors who are trained in BMP and regulatory compliance, as well as assistance in finding qualified natural resource professionals.

*Indicator 8.1.2*

Landowner should engage qualified contractors who carry appropriate insurance and comply with appropriate federal, state and local safety and fair labor rules, regulations and standard practices<sup>1</sup>.

GUIDANCE

Landowners and designated representatives are encouraged to stipulate that contractors must be in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. A qualified natural resource professional can help with this process.

Landowners are encouraged to discuss liability issues with their insurance agent and their attorney to gain a perspective on appropriate insurance minimums that they might require of contractors.

*Indicator 8.1.3*

Landowners should retain appropriate contracts or records for forest product harvests and other management activities to demonstrate conformance to the Standards.

GUIDANCE

Landowners or designated representatives should review the Standards before planning management activities. When contracting for forestry activities, landowners or designated representatives should specify that appropriate state forestry BMPs must be adhered to.

Other contract specifications might include:

- Protection of special sites or habitats
- Adherence to labor laws
- Requirements for adequate insurance
- Protection of soil and water integrity
- Residual tree damage
- Forest road maintenance and restoration
- Fence and gate protection and/or restoration
- Litter control
- Hazardous material spill prevention and clean-up

Examples of forestry activities requiring review for AFF Standards compliance:

- Harvest operations including timber and nontimber products
- Site preparation and reforestation
- Forest road construction and maintenance
- Mineral extraction
- Hunting and fishing
- Invasive species control
- Pest management

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<sup>1</sup> Auditors shall consider any **complaints** alleging violation of **fair labor rules** filed by workers or organized labor since the previous third-party certification audit. The auditor shall not take action on any labor issues pending in a formal grievance process or before federal, state or local agencies or the courts, however, until those processes are completed. Absent a record of documented **complaints** or noncompliances, contractors and managers are assumed to be in compliance with this **indicator**.



As a general rule, landowners are encouraged to retain contracts or records for management activities for three years.

### Performance Measure 8.2

Landowner or designated representative shall monitor forest product harvests and other management activities to ensure they conform to their objectives.

#### *Indicator 8.2.1*

Harvest, utilization, removal and other management activities shall be conducted in compliance with the landowner's objectives and to maintain the potential of the property to produce forest products and other benefits sustainably.

### GUIDANCE

The landowners may monitor harvesting and other activities personally or they may employ someone else to do it for them. Many landowners engage a qualified natural resource professional for this function.

If the landowner's objectives do not specify directives as to harvest, utilization and removals, regional norms and accepted practices are expected.

The intent of Performance measure 8.2 is to ensure the maintenance of "the potential of the property to produce forest products and other benefits sustainably." Good planning, utilizing qualified natural resource professionals, engaging competent qualified contractors and using an effective contract go a long way toward this end.

## Glossary of Terms

**adaptive management:** A dynamic approach to forest management in which the effects of treatments and decisions are continually monitored and used, along with research results, to modify management on a continuing basis to ensure that objectives are being met (Helms, et al., The Dictionary of Forestry, Society of American Foresters, 2018).

**adverse regulatory actions:** Written warnings, citations or fines issued by law enforcement or regulatory bodies.

**afforestation:** Process of planting or seeding trees on an area of land that have been under a different use, transforming land use from non-forest to forest.

**biodiversity:** The variety and abundance of life forms, processes, functions and structures of plants, animals and other living organisms, including the relative complexity of species, communities, gene pools and ecosystems at spatial scales that range from local through regional to global (Helms, et al., The Dictionary of Forestry, Society of American Foresters, 2018).

**complaint:** Labor complaints are those with formal documentation filed through a state's fair labor practices board or similar body.

**conversion:** Removal of natural or historical vegetative cover to convert land use from forest to non-forest, or non-forest to forest.

**desired species:** Those species of flora and fauna designated in the landowner's management plan and not known to cause negative impacts on the local environment.

**designated representative:** A person designated by a landowner to represent him or her. Designated representatives may include, but are not limited to, family members, trustees, property managers, qualified natural resource professionals and lawyers.

**ecosystem:** A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

**ecosystem services:** Benefits obtained from ecosystems. Provisioning Services or the provision of food, fresh water, fuel, fiber, and other goods; Regulating Services such as carbon, water, and disease regulation as well as pollination; Supporting Services such as soil formation and nutrient cycling; and Cultural Services such as educational, aesthetic, and cultural heritage values as well as recreation and tourism. (based on Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005)

**forest aesthetics:** Forest aesthetics is the application of practices that enhance the visual quality of timber management for forest products. These practices should be carried out with the companion goals of protecting and conserving water and air quality, soil productivity and wildlife habitat

**forest health:** The perceived condition of a forest derived from consideration of such factors as its age, structure, composition, function, vigor, vitality, presence of unusual levels of insects or disease and resilience to disturbance and a range of stressors.

**forest management-** the practical application of biological, physical, quantitative, managerial, economic, social, and policy principles to the regeneration, management, utilization, and conservation of forests to meet specified goals and objectives while maintaining the productivity of the forest management includes management for aesthetics, fish, recreation, urban values, water, wilderness, wildlife, wood products and other forest resource values. (Helms, et al., *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, 2018).

**forest plantation:** A forest of introduced or native species established through planting, of the same age and generally the same species.

**forest products:** Goods and materials derived from the forest that are tangible and physical objects of biological origin. Such materials may include, but are not limited to, timber, fuelwood, fibers, biomass, leaves, fruit, grass, fungi, berries, resins, gums, animal parts, water, soil, gravel, stone and other minerals on forest land. In addition, products may also include other quantifiable goods or services including carbon storage or water protection.

**forests of recognized importance (FORI):** Globally, regionally and nationally significant large forest landscape areas of exceptional ecological, social, cultural or biological values. These forests are evaluated at the landscape level, rather than the stand level, and are recognized for a combination of unique values, rather than a single attribute.

**genetically modified trees:** Trees that have had genetic modifications resulting from the direct introduction of one or more genes from another non-tree organism using recombinant DNA technology. Clones and trees produced via grafting, vegetative propagation or tissue cultures and hybrids developed by natural processes are not considered genetically modified under the ATFS Standards.

**good faith:** A diligent and honest effort.

**group manager:** The individual(s) designated by the Independently Managed Group (IMG) organization to manage the administrative elements of an IMG and comply with the American Tree Farm System®(ATFS) IMG Certification Standards (2015-2020).

**indicator:** Identifies specific actions or activities that demonstrate conformance.

**independently managed group (IMG):** A company, corporation, firm, authority or institution that is a legal entity. The entity has its own functions and administration and consists of a group manager and individual qualified group members seeking to collectively implement and become certified to the AFF Standards and ATFS IMG Standards. All IMGs are required to undergo audits, by accredited third-party assessors, to ensure conformance with the ATFS Standards and the ATFS IMG Standards.

integrated pest management: A pest control, suppression or prevention approach that utilizes a suite of complementary strategies including mechanical, biological, cultural, physical, genetic and chemical approaches.

invasive species: Plants, animals, or pathogens that are non-native to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause harm. (USDA National Invasive Species Information Center, 2014)

landowner: Entity that holds title to the property to be certified.

landowner's objectives: the stated landowner desires, reasons for ownership and potential activities that guide the management of the property.

management plan: Documents that guide actions and that change in response to feedback and changed conditions, goals, objectives and policies. Management plans may incorporate several documents including, but not limited to, harvest plans, activity implementation schedules, permits, research, etc. For the purposes of the American Tree Farm System® eligible management plans, plan amendments may include letters, notes and other forms of informal updates in addition to formal plan revisions. The term "management plan" is inclusive of stewardship plans and other similar documents that describe resources, landowner objectives and management strategies.

naturalized: A non-native plant that does not need human help to reproduce and maintain itself over time in an area beyond its historical range.

performance measure: Refines the standard's intent and describes considerations and pathways for conformance.

pesticide: Pesticides include chemicals commonly known as fungicides, herbicides, insecticides and rodenticides.

prescribed burn: A fire intentionally ignited by management in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific objectives (Helms, et al., The Dictionary of Forestry, Society of American Foresters, 2018).

qualified contractor: Forest contractors who have completed recommended certification, licensing, training or education programs offered in their respective states.

qualified natural resource professional: A person who by training and experience can make forest management recommendations. Examples include foresters, soil scientists, hydrologists, forest engineers, forest ecologists, fishery and wildlife biologists or technically trained specialists in such fields.

qualified ATFS inspector: A qualified natural resource professional who has completed ATFS- required training for certifying forested properties and is eligible to inspect properties on behalf of ATFS. ATFS requires all trained inspectors meet approved eligibility requirements.

regeneration harvest: Harvest of a forest with a goal to establish a young new stand of trees, by removing all or components of an existing stand.

reforestation: Re-establishment of forest through planting or seeding on land classified as forest. (FAO 2018)

scale: The extent of forest operations on the landscape/certified property.

shall: Responsibilities or obligations that include the word “shall” are considered core elements that are required for certification under the American Tree Farm System.

should: Responsibilities or obligations that include the word “should” are directives that draw on personal and professional judgment of foresters, landowners and assessors. These directives allow for latitude in implementation to the greatest practical extent in given circumstances and are justifiable in a third-party verification process.

special sites: Those areas offering unique historical, archeological, cultural, geological, biological or ecological value. Special sites include:

- A. Historical, archaeological, cultural and ceremonial sites;
- B. Sites of importance to wildlife such as rookeries, refuges, fish spawning grounds, vernal ponds and shelters of hibernating animals;
- C. Unique ecological communities such as springs, glades, savannas, fens and bogs;
- D. Geological features such as terminal moraines, cliffs and caves;
- E. Sites of importance to the landowner.

standard: An overarching principle of sustainability.

state forestry best management practice(s) (BMPs): Forestry BMPs are generally accepted forest management guidelines that have been developed by state forestry agencies with broad public stakeholder input.

sustainability: The capacity of forests, ranging from stands to ecoregions, to maintain their health, productivity, diversity and overall integrity, in the long run, in the context of human activity (Helms, et al., The Dictionary of Forestry, Society of American Foresters, 1998).

sustainable forest management: The practice of meeting the forest resource needs and values of the present without compromising the similar capability of future generations ; practicing a land stewardship ethic that integrates the reforestation, managing, growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees for useful products with the conservation of soil, air, and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat and aesthetics. (Helms, et al., The Dictionary of Forestry, Society of American Foresters, 2018).

third-party assessor: A qualified natural resource professional who has completed ATFS-required training for third-party assessors and is contracted or employed by an International Accreditation Forum (IAF)-accredited certification body.

threatened or endangered: Defined and listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) and listed under applicable state or provincial laws as requiring protection.

visual quality measures: 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. (see forest aesthetics)