



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **ATFS Forest Certification Program Strengthens Its Standards**

Washington, DC— The American Forest Foundation (AFF), the nation's oldest and largest network of woodland owners, today announced that its Board of Trustees has adopted a new, revised standards for the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), its woodland certification program. Bob Simpson, AFF Senior Vice President for Forestry Programs, said "The changes do two important things: they go further in protecting woodlands of high conservation value, and they streamline the process for woodland owners participating in USDA conservation incentive programs."

The new standards were developed by an independent panel of experts, representing academia, conservation organizations, Federal and State governments, landowners, and foresters. Designed especially for small woodland owners, who provide nearly two-thirds of the wood fiber used for paper products in the U.S., ATFS requires adoption of a woodland management plan that will ensure conservation of multiple resources—water, wildlife, timber, scenic views, and recreation. The new standards will require certified woodland owners to consider and minimize adverse impact of timber or other activities on places of unique historical, cultural, or wildlife value.

A recent survey by ATFS found that its members are already doing a lot to conserve special sites on a voluntary basis. Wide-ranging examples include:

- Protecting a waterfowl reservoir
- Maintaining old-growth hardwood stands
- Protecting bird nesting habitat and threatened species like the gopher tortoise
- Replanting longleaf pine which had been reduced to less than 3 percent of its original range throughout the South
- Commemorating historical Native American burial grounds and a slave cemetery.

Another practical impact of the changes will be in equalizing the woodland management plans required under ATFS and under various USDA conservation incentive programs. In the past, a woodland owner may have been required to produce and follow two parallel plans with very similar goals but differing in the details.

The new standards take effect January 1, 2010, and landowners will have one year to make sure their woodlands meet the new standards. The American Forest Foundation will use the transition year to educate landowners and train the over 4,000 volunteer inspectors who administer the ATFS certification program.

The American Tree Farm System has certified over 90,000 woodland owners as managing their land sustainably, in a way that will ensure that the wood, wildlife, water, and recreation benefits will continue for future generations. Together, ATFS members are conserving 24 million acres. Wood products derived from ATFS certified land is distributed throughout North American and the world under the consumer labels SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) and PEFC (Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes).

AFF's Simpson said "Although our ATFS certification program is the oldest in America, operating since 1941, we are constantly working to improve our standards to make them fit new conservation forestry practices and consumer expectations. Consumers want to be able to rely on green brands, and the ATFS brand continues to grow in stature and acceptance."

Simpson cited two other developments that have recently attracted national attention to the ATFS certification program. On September 28th, Maine Governor John E. Balducci announced a new partnership with the American Tree Farm System, Time, Inc., Hearst Enterprises, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and others to significantly increase the amount of certified forestland in the state. In a related development last month, ATFS was validated through a third-party audit conducted by NSF International and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) certifying that Tree Farms across the country were meeting applicable standards.

AFF President and CEO Tom Martin said, "I am very proud of our volunteers who work so hard to make forest certification understandable and accessible to small woodland owners." Most of the ATFS members own only 100 acres or less. Martin sees the strengthening of the ATFS certification as an important step in gaining and expanding woodland owners' access to the green marketplace. "As the focus for many woodland owners shifts from primarily timber production to other uses including wildlife, nature appreciation, safe drinking water, and climate change, the certification program is an important tool to demonstrate their commitment to conservation forestry."

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The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) conservation and education organization that strives to ensure the sustainability of America's family forests for present and future generations. Our vision is to create a future where North American forests are sustained by the public which understands and values the social, economic, and environmental benefits they provide to our communities, our nation, and our world.

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## **THE 6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW STANDARDS**

You can learn more about the following items by visiting:

[http://www.treefarmssystem.org/cms/pages/26\\_130.html](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/cms/pages/26_130.html).

1) **Designed for small woodland owners:** These Standards were developed specifically for small woodland owners. The independent panel took care to ensure that the requirements were appropriate for the scale of management practiced on family woodlands across the U.S.

2) **Management plan:** The management plan requirements help streamline the process for Tree Farm owners to participate in USDA conservation incentive programs. The management plan requirements under the 2010-2015 Standards correlate with the US Forest Service guidelines for forest stewardship program forest management plans. Tree Farm management plans will address the following elements as appropriate for the land certified:

- landowner objectives
- forest condition and health
- management activities/ prescriptions
- tract map
- soils and water resources
- wood and fiber production
- threatened and endangered species, high conservation value forests and other special sites
- invasive species and integrated pest management

To learn more about the management plan please visit:

3) **Special Sites:** As the current Standards do, the 2010-2015 Standards require maintenance of special cultural and environmental sites (historical, archeological, geological, biological and ecological sites). ATFS will be introducing new tools on the Tree Farm website to help landowners research special sites in their state and on their certified Tree Farms.

4) **Monitoring:** Periodic monitoring has been added to the Standards to encourage landowners to monitor their woodlands for changes that could interfere with their management objectives. Things to be on the look out for include pest outbreaks (pine beetle, emerald ash borer, etc), invasive species encroachment (kudzu, Canadian thistle), and indications of trespass. Many landowners are already doing things like walking their boundaries, and inspecting after a thinning or planting for new groups of invasive species.

5) **Invasive Species:** Tree Farmers are encouraged to make practical efforts to prevent, eradicate or otherwise control invasive species using a range of integrated pest management methods. Integrated pest management methods may include pesticides, physical removal methods and preventative methods.

6) **One year to implement:** The new Standards were officially released January 1, 2010, and Tree Farmers will have one year to ensure their management plans and management activities meet the Standards. All volunteer inspectors will be retrained to the new Standards within the

year and we will be working with state programs to provide education to Tree Farmers about the changes. To read the new Standards, visit [Strengthening the AFF Standards](#) is an important step in gaining and expanding woodland owner's access to markets through American Tree Farm System certification. The implementation of third-party certification assessments is essential for maintaining the credibility of the Tree Farm program. Tree Farmers should be prepared for the possibility they will be asked to participate in third-party assessments. An assessment visit is similar to a Tree Farm inspection, where the assessor will review the management plan and related documents and take a walk around the property to confirm the management follows the appropriate management plan.

12 states per year are selected to participate in the third-party certification assessments. In 2009, third-party assessors visited Tree Farms in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, Kentucky, Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, New Mexico and Colorado. Thank you to all of the landowners, volunteer foresters and state committee volunteers that participated in the 2009 assessments! In 2010, third-party assessors will visit Tree Farmers in New Hampshire, Maryland, Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Alabama, Georgia and Florida.