

Program Participation and Policies Summary

2007

Certified Tree Farm: meets the AFF Standard, current inspection, within acreage limit (or falls under grandfather clause), non-industrial private forestland

Pioneer Tree Farm: designed for new Tree Farmers that do not meet AFF Standard, not ATFS Certified

CERTIFIED TREE FARM

The Certified Tree Farm category is the highest level of participation in the program. ATFS Certification requires landowners to meet the AFF Standard and remain subject to an inspection under a yearly national sampling system after required initial inspection. Landowners must meet the ATFS eligibility requirements and not own more than 20,000 contiguous acres. Properties between 10,000 – 20,000 contiguous acres must contact the national office to obtain an application and procedures to proceed with a third-party audit. Properties between 10,000 – 20,000 contiguous acres must meet the ATFS eligibility requirements and must undergo a third-party audit for Tree Farm certification.

Elements of Certified Tree Farms:

1. Minimum of 10 and Maximum of 20,000 contiguous forested acres.
2. Certified Tree Farms must meet the AFF Standard at initial inspection, including a written forest management plan.
3. Certified Tree Farms must maintain certification subject to inspection under yearly national sampling system.
4. Certified Tree Farms receive Tree Farm Sign and Certificate.
5. All properties exceeding 10,000 contiguous acres (and not greater than 20,000 contiguous acres) must undergo a third party audit by an ATFS recognized third-party auditor.
6. Properties exceeding 10,000 contiguous acres may be subject to an annual administrative fee.

Eligibility Requirements for ATFS Certification:

- Properties exceed 10 acres and are less than 20,000 contiguous acres.
- Properties are non-industrial in nature. May be associated with small local business.
- Ownership is privately held and not publicly traded.
- Commitment to sustainable, long-term forest management is apparent through management objectives and/or management plan.
- Owner(s) demonstrates proactive forest management involvement.
- Ownership goals and objectives do not compromise ATFS mission.
- Owner(s) are receptive to active outreach efforts or can contribute to the efforts.
- Not appropriate for landscape scale ownership.

PIONEER TREE FARM

The Pioneer Tree Farm category allows interested landowners, who may not quite meet the AFF Standard, to participate in the American Tree Farm System. The goal of using Pioneer Tree Farm is to establish communications with non-managing landowners to motivate them to work toward Tree Farm Certification by implementing excellent forestry on their property. Pioneer status is an introductory level of participation in the program, however, is not a mandatory starting point for Tree Farmers meeting all requirements of ATFS Certification. Landowners meeting the AFF Standard should be considered for ATFS Certification.

Requirements of Pioneer Tree Farm:

1. Minimum of 10 and Maximum of 20,000 contiguous forested acres.
2. Non-Industrial Private forestland.
3. Pioneer Tree Farms may have a written forest management plan, but the plan is not required prior to initial inspection and designation as a Pioneer Tree Farm. In order to achieve ATFS Certification, a Pioneer Tree Farmer must begin following a written plan that meets the AFF Standard before graduation to Certified status can occur.
4. Pioneer Tree Farms must meet the AFF Standard within five years or be removed from the program. Graduation to Certified status may take place sooner than five years, but Pioneer status cannot be retained longer than five years.
5. There is no official recognition of Pioneer Tree Farms. Pioneer Tree Farms do not receive the Tree Farm Sign or Certificate. If Certified at a later date, Tree Farm Sign and Certificate are provided.

TREE FARM ACREAGE LIMITS

The minimum acreage required for ATFS Certification eligibility is 10 acres. The maximum number of acres for ATFS Certification eligibility is currently 20,000 acres. (Tree Farms larger than 20,000 acres that were already in the system prior to the establishment of this acreage limit were grandfathered in; the limit applies to all new Tree Farms). All Certified Tree Farms must consist of contiguous forested acres. If a landowner owns separate forest management units, the landowner may certify each management unit as an individual Tree Farm. Bodies of water such as ponds or lakes should not be included in Tree Farm acreage.

SPECIAL TAX TREATMENT QUALIFICATION

It is the policy of the American Forest Foundation that ATFS Certification may be used as one of the proofs of forest management to qualify for special forestland taxation. However, ATFS Certification should not be the only proof accepted for qualification, as this may place privately funded, volunteer communities in the role of enforcing standards for a state law.

GROUP CERTIFICATION

Technically speaking, Group Certification is the process of evaluating and certifying organized groups of individual family forest owners under a single certificate. This is a significant departure from the ATFS's present method of certification involving one landowner meeting with one forester, going through a certification inspection and then upon successful completion of the inspection, being recommended for certification. If the State Committee agrees with the inspecting forester's recommendation, a certificate is issued to the landowner and is valid for a period of up to five years, at which time another inspection occurs.

Following are some frequently asked questions and answers regarding group certification.

Q. What is group certification?

- A. Group certification allows a group of landowners organized under a single entity to be certified under a single certificate. To be certified, these group organizations must use internationally accepted auditable procedures developed by ATFS and forest owners must manage their forests according to AFF's Standards of Sustainability.

Q. How are groups certified?

- A. Eligible groups write to the ATFS national office for a copy of the Manual for Group Organizations (SOP-01). This manual gives a step-by-step description of how groups may prepare themselves for a third-party group certification audit. After reviewing the manual, eligible groups determine if they wish to go through the group certification process. If they decide yes, they send in an accompanying application and fee. Upon receiving the application, ATFS reviews it and determines if the group is ready to proceed with the group certification process. This is similar to pre-audit scoping. If ATFS determines the group is ready to proceed to the audit planning stage, they will send a list of accepted auditors to the Group Manager. The group may then solicit bids from these ATFS approved auditors.

Q. Why would someone want to join a certified group organization?

- A. Among the many benefits of ATFS Group Certification, group members may find a greater facilitation of information and an overall reduction in the cost of third-party certification. Group members may also maintain market access in a time when several large paper purchasing companies in the US are setting significant certified content goals for the paper they purchase. Third-party forest certification is a big part of these company's self-imposed goals. Group certification allows forest owners the option of having their property third-party certified by an internationally recognized program – ATFS – and thereby being able to have low cost access to third-party certified markets.

Q. What groups are eligible for ATFS Group Certification?

- A. Eligible groups include, but are not limited to, state Forest Stewardship Programs, landowner assistance programs, forestry cooperatives, state forest owner tax abatement programs, forestry associations and consulting foresters. Simply, almost any group of organized forest owners who have an oversight or managing body are eligible.

Q. What is the maximum and minimum number of forest owners and acres in a group?

- A. There is no limit to the number of landowners in a group. However, the acreage limits set for individual certification by the ATFS still apply to individuals under group certification.

Q. Upon successful completion of the audit, are group members considered full- fledged Tree Farmers?

- A. The National Operating Committee has determined that group members are eligible for all the rights, privileges and benefits accorded individually certified Tree Farmers.

Q. How often will a certified Group Organization need to be re-audited?

- A. Currently, Group Organizations are required to undergo a third-party recertification audit a minimum of every five-years, following an initial audit.

For more information about American Tree Farm System Group Certification contact the American Tree Farm System at info@treefarmssystem.org.