

## **American Tree Farm System®** **Eligibility Requirements and Guidance for Certification**

American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) eligibility requirements were developed to ensure that ATFS certification remains consistent with the mission of outreach to family landowners and to positively affect the management of their lands.

### **Acreage Limitations for ATFS Certification**

- Individual forest owners may enroll **contiguous** properties from 10 acres to 20,000 acres.
- **Independently Managed Group** (IMG) programs may enroll **contiguous** properties from 10 acres to 20,000 acres.
- **Individual third-party certificate** holders may include under their certificate **contiguous** properties from 10 acres to 20,000 acres.
- ATFS acreage limits apply only to **contiguous** parcels.

Contiguity and Acreage Limitations: The acreage of the entire parcel is used for evaluation purposes. The evaluator is to deduct nonforest acres from the total acreage of the parcel. In cases where the candidate parcel is attached to a larger property or ownership, the contiguous parcel is the evaluation unit. Forest owners may choose to certify a portion of their entire property portfolio but may not exempt a portion of a contiguous forest management unity that does not meet the AFF Standards. Forested acres may include features such as food plots, water resources (lakes, ponds, streams) and other nonforested areas as long as these are small enough that they are an integrated part of the forest system.

Exclusions: The AFF Standards of Sustainability for Certification encompass a broad range of management objectives, considerations and strategies, including management for biodiversity conservation, forests of recognized importance, special sites and aesthetics, among others. Acres of contiguous forest parcels that are held under nonregulatory wilderness designation or conservation easement or are mechanically inoperable due to slope or elevation may not be excluded or deducted from certified acreage.

Roads: Significant roads, under ownership of other entities, represent breaks in contiguous forest parcels. Significant roads are defined as roads at least 84 feet wide, inclusive of lanes and cleared zones.

### **Landowner Requirements for ATFS Certification**

Landowner requirements may be delegated to a designated representative (family members, trustees, property managers, qualified natural resource professionals, lawyers or others) to implement the requirements of the program on behalf of the

landowner. However, landowners must be engaged in the decision to pursue certification.

- Ownership must be **privately held** or held by a **public entity**.
- Properties must be **nonindustrial** but may be associated with **small local business**.
- The landowner(s) must clearly exhibit commitment to sustainable management through management objectives or a management plan. Conformance to the requirements of the 2015-2020 AFF Standards of Sustainability is the benchmark for meeting this eligibility requirement.
- The landowner(s) demonstrates proactive forest management involvement. Forest owners may demonstrate proactive involvement by collaborating on the development of the management plan, by periodic monitoring visits to the property or by hiring a qualified natural resource professional to oversee the management of the property.
- Ownership goals and objectives reinforce the ATFS mission. The landowner's conformance to Standard 1 of the 2015-2020 AFF Standards of Sustainability is sufficient for meeting this eligibility requirement.
- The landowner(s) is engaged in active outreach efforts or can contribute to the effort.

There are several ways that landowners can participate in outreach efforts. These include hosting forest-related tours on their property; joining a national, regional or local forestry or landowner association; supporting legislation that promotes private forest health and viability; supporting research that enhances the knowledge and practice of forest management on private forests; writing for publications in support of sustainable forestry on private lands; donating resources to these, and similar, forestry and forest landowner initiatives. A new landowner may not have a history of doing these things. However, the landowner must be willing to explore ways to meet the requirement that fit their style and situation.

**ATFS reserves the right to refuse certification to any party.**

ATFS reserves the right to refuse certification to landowners whose documented actions or values are, in the judgment of ATFS, in conflict with the values and mission of the American Forest Foundation (AFF).

**Exceptions**

ATFS may review petitions for exceptions and may make eligible for certification, properties that contribute to the greater mission of AFF and the conservation of woodlands in the United States.

### Third-Party Certification Assessments

All certified Tree Farms are to be covered by a third-party certificate issued by an accredited **Certification Body**. Tree Farms enrolled through the state Tree Farm programs are certified under an ATFS regional certificate and may be included in a sample population during a state program certification assessment. Tree Farms enrolled through an **IMG** are certified under the IMG third-party certificate and may be included in a sample population during the IMG certification assessment. **Individual Third-Party Certificate** holders are required to undergo their own certification assessment by an accredited **Certification Body**.

### Enrollment Guide

Situation	Enrollment Options		
	State ATFS Program	IMG Certification	Individual 3 <sup>rd</sup> -Party Certificate
Individual owner - all contiguous parcels are 10 acres to 10,000 acres	X	X	X
Individual owner - contiguous parcels greater than 10,000 acres, up to 20,000 acres		X	X
Small Business owner - all contiguous parcels are 10 acres to 10,000 acres	X	X	X
Small Business owner - contiguous parcels greater than 10,000 acres, up to 20,000 acres		X	X
Public entity (except state governments) - contiguous parcels 10 acres to 10,000 acres (public entities may enroll in an IMG as a Category 3 member)	X	X	X
Public entity (except state governments) – contiguous parcels 10,000 acres to 20,000 acres (public entities may enroll in an IMG as a Category 3 member)		X	X
State Government – contiguous parcels 10 acres to 20,000 acres		X	X
Investment portfolio property - contiguous parcels 10 acres to 20,000 acres		X	

### ATFS Enrollment Procedures

1. State Tree Farm committees may enroll individual properties from 10 acres to 10,000 **contiguous** acres. To enroll in an ATFS state program, contact a state Tree Farm program representative (contact information is available on the ATFS website). A qualified ATFS inspector must visit the property and review relevant management documentation. If the requirements of the AFF Standards are met, the inspector will complete and submit a form to recommend the property(s) for certification.
2. Properties owned by state governments must undergo third-party certification assessments; properties may not be enrolled through a state Tree Farm program. State government-owned properties may be enrolled through an **IMG** or the entity may obtain an **individual third-party certificate**. To enroll a state-government-owned property, contact the ATFS staff representative.
3. Properties smaller than 10,000 contiguous acres that are owned by **public entities**, excluding state governments, may be certified through the state Tree Farm programs. Properties larger than 10,000 contiguous acres owned by **public entities** must be certified through an IMG program or under an **individual third-party certificate**.
4. **IMG** program properties can be enrolled by the group manager and his/her trained representatives. To enroll in an IMG, contact an ATFS staff representative to learn if IMG organizations are offering services in your area (contact information is available on the ATFS website).
5. Entities interested in obtaining an **individual third-party certificate** should contact ATFS staff for more information on the process and preliminary assessment of eligibility.

### Grandfathered Properties and Auditing Requirements

Properties smaller than 10 contiguous acres or larger than 20,000 contiguous acres that were certified prior to December 31, 2009, were grandfathered into the program contingent on continued conformance with the AFF Standards. The focus of the grandfathering process is at the landowner level, rather than the parcel level.

All grandfathered properties larger than 10,000 contiguous acres enrolled in state Tree Farm programs must undergo routine third-party audits via stratified random sampling in the 10,000 acre or larger category during state program assessments under ATFS regional certificates.

### **Public Summaries of Forest Management Plans:**

Upon formal request, responsible ATFS representatives, **IMG** organizations and **individual third-party certificate** holders shall make available to interested parties the following information:

- For individual certificate holders, the landowner shall provide a summary of the management plan included in the public audit summary compiled by the Certification Body, omitting proprietary information and other confidential information;
- For IMGs, the IMG Organization shall provide: 1) a summary of the AFF Standard required components of the management plans of IMG members' properties, and 2) summaries of the group members' management plans reviewed by the certification body and available in the public audit summary, omitting personally identifiable information, proprietary information and other confidential information;
- For state Tree Farm programs, the American Tree Farm System shall provide: 1) a summary of the AFF Standard required components of the management plans of the properties included within the scope of the regional certificate, and 2) summary descriptions of the management plans for properties included in the scope of the audit reviewed by the certification body and included in the public audit summary, omitting personally identifiable information, proprietary information and other confidential information.

### **Leasing Agreements**

- **Leasing of Timber Rights:** If a landowner retains control and decision-making authority over their forest management, in accordance with their objectives as reflected in their management plan, the land may be certified to that landowner. Lessees may not certify leased lands to the ATFS Standard.
- **Leasing of Mineral Rights:** Woodlands eligible for ATFS certification that have mining/subsurface leases in place on the property may be certified. However, if disturbance and/or change in land use renders the land no longer in conformance with the ATFS Standards of Sustainability, upon activation of the lease, the property must be decertified.

### ***Glossary***

**Certification Body (CB)** – An International Accreditation Forum (IAF) accredited organization recognized by AFF as trained and approved for third-party auditing to the AFF Standards.

**Contiguous** - contiguous parcels are discrete parcels that share a boundary line or corner point and are held under the same legal ownership name.

**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.

**Category 1 Group Members** retain final decision-making authority for management activities to be conducted on their property. This category may include individuals, family ownerships, LLCs and other similar entities. The group member may, through contract or other agreement, utilize the IMG's services for some management activities. Group members may also participate in group management plans where management decisions and responsibilities are shared between the IMG organization and the group members.

**Category 2 Group Members** have knowingly and affirmatively delegated full management responsibility for implementation of the AFF Standards to the group manager. Category 2 properties are under aggregated ownership as part of an investment fund portfolio. The group organization as the management consultant assumes overall operational management responsibility and performs all of the functions required for conformance to the AFF Standards. This category may include properties that meet the ATFS eligibility requirements and are managed by a Timber Investment Management Organization (TIMO). Category 2 group members include those entities referred to as Aggregated Management Groups (AMGs) in the ATFS Eligibility Requirements.

**Category 3 Group Members** are government entities. The property owner may have knowingly and affirmatively delegated full or partial authority for management and decision-making to the group manager, or the owner may retain all management authority. The group organization may perform some, or all, of the functions required for conformance to the AFF Standards. Examples of Category 3 members are: a local municipality, a public grade-school, a public university, a publically owned watershed authority, a tribal government, a state or federal agency.

**Individual third-party certificate:** Certification to AFF Standards is awarded by ATFS at the recommendation of an accredited certification body after a successful audit of the candidate property(s) and the relevant management documentation.

**Landowner:** Entity that holds title to the property to be certified.

**Non-industrial:** An entity whose primary source of revenue is not derived from processed forest products.

**Small local business:** The definition of a small business can be found in Title 13 of the Code of Federal Regulations: Business Credit & Assistance, Part 121 Small Business Size Regulations. Small business timber tract operations have annual receipts less than \$7 million. Small business logging operations have fewer than 500 employees. All small business wood product manufacturers have fewer than 500 employees. Small business paper manufacturers have fewer than 500-750 employees depending on the sector.

**Third-party assessors:** Qualified natural resource professionals who have completed ATFS required training for third-party assessors and are contracted or employed by an International Accreditation Forum (IAF) accredited certification body.

**Privately held:** Not publically owned; not owned by shareholders whose shares are listed, or traded, on a publically accessible exchange.

**Public entity:** Examples: a local municipality, a public grade-school, a public university, a publically-owned watershed authority, a tribal government, a federal agency. Properties owned by state governments must be covered by an individual third-party certification or an Independently Managed Group (IMG) program certificate.