**Summary of Engagement Process and Feedback Received**

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| **PUBLIC REVIEW PERIODS**  *First Public Review Period:* *January 7- March 7, 2014*  Second Public Review Period:  July 2-September 2, 2014 | **IN-PERSON FEEDBACK SESSIONS**  *Wednesday, February 19, 2014, 3-4pm* *ATFS National Leadership Conference* *Savannah, Georgia*  Thursday, July 17, 2014, 1:30-2:30pm  National Tree Farmer Convention  *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* |

**Overview of Engagement Process**

Engagement of stakeholders and receiving public feedback was a central component of the ATFS Standards Review Process. Feedback was collected during two formal public review and comment periods. During the first, running January 7-March 7, 2014, the public was invited to submit feedback on the [**2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/stuff/contentmgr/files/1/0c913bb23eaf1d138c16cec30bc2ef08/pdf/aff_2011standards_brochure_finalproof.pdf). During the second, running July 2-September 2, 2014, the public was invited to submit feedback on proposed revisions to the ATFS Standards, Guidance and [**IMG Requirements**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/stuff/contentmgr/files/2/a6015d533f6ef42fcf381dc813b15c39/pdf/approved_final_atfs_img_standards_11112014.pd), based on feedback collected during the first review period. The majority of feedback during the second review period supported the proposed changes and valued the clarification provided.

Both review periods allowed stakeholders several vehicles for providing feedback. This included an online commenting platform, facilitated listening sessions via webinars and in-person at the ATFS National Leadership Conference and the National Tree Farmer Convention. In addition, feedback was also shared by stakeholders through direct dialogue or communication with members of the [**Independent Standards Review Panel**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/standards-committee-members) (ISRP) or the National Standards Interpretation Committee (NSIC) or AFF staff.

Summaries of feedback opportunities and themes collected during these review periods are below.

**Overall Summary of Review Periods**

**Stakeholder Groups**

Stakeholders submitting comments and perspectives identified themselves as certified and uncertified family woodlands owners, consulting foresters, loggers and representatives of state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, forest industry, landowner associations and other sectors.

**Online Commenting Platform**

A customized online commenting platform was developed to allow stakeholders to comment on each individual Standard, Indicator and Performance Measure, specifically as well as providing general feedback on the ATFS Standards broadly. Comments were received via the platform for the full duration of both public comment periods. In addition, perspectives were also collected via an optional survey.  More than 400 individual comments were submitted via the online platform.

**Standards Overview and Review Webinar**

Several webinars outlining the current standards and proposed changes while soliciting public input were offered. The webinars, announced via ATFS’s email lists, were attended by hundreds of participants from across the country. The webinars included pre- and post event questionnaires, as well as instant polling around key and emerging issues for consideration in the revision process.

**In-Person Listening Session at the ATFS National Leadership Conference**

The annual ATFS National Leadership Conference brings together partners, volunteers, auditors and landowners from across the ATFS national network and community. To engage this critical community, a trained, neutral facilitator led a listening session to gather perspectives and feedback on the current ATFS Standard and other emerging issues for consideration in the revision process including climate change, bioenergy and carbon markets and forest conversion. The session was attended by more than 150 representatives from around the country and included three forms of feedback collection: instant polling, open forum and written comment submission. The session was attended by [**ISRP members**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/standards-committee-members) and the panel’s Chair, members of AFF’s various governance bodies including the Board of Trustees, National Standards Interpretation Committee (NSIC) and Woodland Committee and AFF staff.

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**In-Person Listening Session at the ATFS Tree Farmer Convention**

The annual Tree Farmer Convention held in Pittsburgh, PA brought together landowners from across the country. A listening session was held to gather reactions and feedback on proposed changes to the Standards. The session included three forms of feedback collection: instant polling, open forum and written comment submission. Members of the **[ISRP](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/standards-committee-members)**were in attendance and AFF staff were in attendance as well.

**Feedback Review Process**

January through October, the [**ISRP**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/standards-committee-members) gathered through a series of teleconferences and two in-person meetings. Supported by a neutral facilitator, the ISRP collaboratively reviewed the comments and feedback gathered during the public review periods. The ISRP reviewed all raw written comments, as well as documented verbal comments. Comments were also compiled and analyzed by thematic area and Standard element. In addition, panel members also exchanged their own personal and organizational perspectives in assessment of each component of the Standard. Summaries of each of the ISRP’s meetings are publicly available [**here.**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/standards-meeting-minutes)

**Public Comment and Feedback Themes**

The most prevalent themes emerging from the first comment period included simplicity, clarity, flexibility, support for existing language and consideration for landowner capacity and resources. Based on feedback and comments on specific Standards components, the [**ISRP**](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/standards-committee-members) is recommending a limited number of minor revisions, reflected the Final Revisions. In addition, many comments submitted have relevance to the*ATFS* *Standards Guidance*. The *Guidance*serves as the Standards’ interpretation and designed to furtherinform the landowner, the inspector and the third-party auditor as to the intent and implementation of the Standard.  As such, although not required in standard setting processes, to enhance familiarity and utility the Standards and Guidance, revised Guidance based on proposed revisions to the ATFS Standards are also available for public review.

Strong support for the proposed changes emerged from the second public commenting period. Clarification of the Standards and inclusion of the *Guidance* was valued.

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**Summaries of prevalent comment themes by Standard are below:**

*Standard 1: Commitment to Practicing Sustainable Forestry*

Comments received in relation to this Standard included a range of perspectives on the requirement for and extent of written management plans, how specific resource elements should be addressed within management plans, private property rights, landowner capacity, financial costs, documentation requirements and timing of monitoring. In addition, many comments expressed support for the current language.

*Standard 2: Compliance with Laws*

Comments received in relation to this Standard included diverse discussion of private property rights; clarifying relevant forestry laws; and the impact of regulation. In addition, comments expressed support for the current language.

*Standard 3: Reforestation and Afforestation*

Although most comments expressed support for existing language, feedback received in relation to this Standard included discussion of forest health, species selection and timing for reforestation.

*Standard 4: Air, Water and Soil Protection*

Comments received in relation to this Standard included concern regarding understanding of the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) among foresters and landowners and clarification around pesticide application. In addition, several comments expressed support for the current language.

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

Comments received in relation to this Standard included discussion of the need to clarify landowner obligations when threatened or endangered species are or are not present on a property, landowner capacity, financial costs, consultation options, clarification of definition for “rare species,” a need for clarity around the definition of landscape forests with unique values (forests of recognized importance; high conservation value forests) and landowners’ roles/obligations.  In addition, many comments expressed support for the existing language.

*Standard 6: Forest Aesthetics*

Comments received in relation to this Standard focused on the subjective nature of aesthetic values; however, most comments supported existing standard language.

*Standard 7: Protect Special Sites*

Comments received in relation to this Standard focused on the need for clarity as to what special sites are, how they are identified and required measures for protection.  These elements tend to be addressed through Guidance.

*Standard 8: Forest Product Harvests and Other Activities*

Comments received in relation to this Standard referenced continuity with management plan directives under Standard 1 discussed aesthetics and addressed the role of professionals. Comments also supported existing language.