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Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program



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Are you a forest landowner interested in:

- ◀ learning how to better manage all of your forest resources while pursuing your particular interests?
- ◀ receiving a comprehensive Forest Stewardship Plan developed by natural resource professionals who blend their expertise into a simple set of recommendations?
- ◀ leaving a better forest than you found to the generations which will follow?
- ◀ being recognized as one of Georgia's Outstanding Forest Stewards?
- ◀ being eligible to receive financial assistance to carry out guidelines of the Forest Stewardship Plan?



What is Forest Stewardship?

Your forest is a complex ecosystem where trees, other plants, animals, micro-organisms, soil and water interact. Its health, productivity and beauty is an important contribution to the community. Production of raw wood materials provides economic returns and supports Georgia's largest manufacturing industry. But forest habitats also nurture a myriad of plants and animals, including some that are becoming increasingly rare because of habitat loss.

Your forest protects soil resources and provides clean water throughout the state. Forests offer aesthetically pleasing views and high-quality recreational opportunities. A commitment to the wise use and management of your forest resources now and for future generations is the cornerstone of Forest Stewardship.

What role can you play as a forest landowner to make an impact on the quality of this precious resource? Think back to the fondest memories of your youth. Perhaps you conjure up carefree adventures involving hunting, fishing, camping or hiking. It may not have occurred to you then that those experiences were possible only because someone had taken the time and effort to preserve the natural resources under their control before passing them along. It brings to light that although we may technically own the land, we are only stewards while it is in our care. Land management activities have a profound effect on the quality of the resource today and in the future.

Wise management practices produce multiple uses and benefits of the natural resources under your control. Important Forest Stewardship goals include conserving soil and water, managing timber, providing plant and animal habitats and enhancing recreational and aesthetic aspects of your property.

As a private landowner with the opportunity to manage forest resources, which direction will you take? What will be your approach to management, what resources will you favor and where can you go to get sound advice on management activities? The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) was developed for nonindustrial private forest landowners to enhance the management of multiple resources.

Landowners with at least 25 acres and at least 10 acres in woodland are eligible for the program. There is no upper limit to acreage size. Landowners not meeting the minimum tract size criteria can petition the state Stewardship Coordinating Committee to be included in the program.

The Forest Stewardship Program enables you as a private forest landowner to have a single, coordinated Forest Stewardship Plan developed for your property. A team of experts in timber, soil and water conservation, wildlife and recreation and aesthetics create the plan, based on your objectives, addressing multiple or stewardship management.

Forest Stewardship: Priorities and The Plan

Setting management priorities is the important first step in developing your Forest Stewardship Plan. Perhaps you found that talking with several resource professionals in the past about management options for your forest was somewhat confusing because each presented slightly different options. A forester focused on timber production, while a wildlife biologist emphasized management for a particular animal. Both probably offered sound advice for their particular commodity interest or expertise. But you still felt unsure how to best manage your property.

Participating in the Forest Stewardship Program can help make sense of various management options because a team of resource professionals work together to tailor a plan for you. And you will play an active role in the plan because you must make some important decisions before the plan can be started. After you enroll in the FSP you will be asked to identify a primary and secondary management objective in which you have a personal interest. Examples are timber management, wildlife management, soil and water conservation, recreation or aesthetics. By prioritizing your interests, your plan is designed to meet those needs.

While the Forest Stewardship Plan strives to enhance all resources on your property, some uses require trade-offs. Emphasis on one resource or commodity can affect the productivity or well being of another.

In designing your plan, resource professionals will try to maximize benefits of all resources, placing particular emphasis on your primary and secondary objectives. Their management recommendations are designed to help you achieve your interests or objectives and improve the natural resources of your forest.

Your plan begins with an on-site resource inventory of timber, wildlife, soil and water, recreation and aesthetics. Sites and structures of cultural or historical interest will also be noted. Simple management guidelines for each resource will be presented, including how the overall management plan will integrate these resources.

Important features of the plan are descriptions of the tract, including topographic maps, aerial photos, and soils interpretations and maps. Soils that may be wetland or highly erodible are indicated. Regulations concerning wetland and highly erodible soils specified in the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills, are included.

Locations of any rare, threatened or endangered species are identified, along with specific habitat enhancement activities to promote recovery.

Summaries of forest products market information, along with general price information as appropriate, are developed.

Your plan is compiled in a personalized notebook including all management recommendations, maps and photos, and information on additional sources to help you implement the plan.

Forest Stewardship: Resources

Now that you have learned about the basics of the Forest Stewardship Program, take a closer look at the resource components each plan focuses on and some examples of Forest Stewardship Plans.



Timber

Your timber resource will be evaluated and designated into stands of similar ages, structure or origin. Information about the condition and volume of trees in these stands is used to project growth, determine the timing of thinnings and harvest cuts. Based on your objectives, the timber resource plan is developed.

Minimum timber management activities for all plans will involve protecting your forest from wildfire, insects and disease. Prompt salvage of damaged or dying timber is recommended. Plans are developed to insure regeneration following final harvests.

When you choose timber management as the primary objective, management guidelines for the following areas are developed:

Protection

Insect and disease hazards can be reduced by treatments that promote healthy, vigorous tree growth.

Fire hazards can be reduced by establishing and maintaining firebreaks and using prescribed burning as necessary. Salvage of dead, diseased and damaged timber is encouraged when it is economically feasible.

Regeneration

Management plans are developed to insure adequate regeneration within three years of final harvests.

Stand Management

Timber harvests are planned when trees reach an economic rotation age. Tree growth, health and quality are improved by stand improvement practices.





Wildlife

If you choose wildlife habitat management as a primary objective, your plan focuses on developing and maintaining quality wildlife habitat. Management recommendations are tailored to your land's characteristics and highlight wildlife species of special interest to you.

Habitat management involving woodlands is carefully coordinated with your objectives for timber management, aesthetics, soil and water conservation and recreation.

Recommendations on thinning, burning, harvesting or regenerating woodlands are made to help achieve your wildlife objectives while promoting forest health.

Your plan addresses special management needs of wildlife on your property. Any species you wish to promote from harvestable populations of deer, quail, turkey, rabbit and others, to nongame species such as songbirds, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians, can receive special focus. Information is included on protecting and enhancing populations of rare, threatened or endangered plants and animals present on your land.



Soil and Water Conservation

Protecting the soil and insuring clean supplies of water are vital activities in maintaining the quality and productivity of your forest resources. Prevention of soil erosion and water pollution by sediment, nutrients and pesticides is addressed in all Forest Stewardship Plans.

Forestry practices are recommended according to the Best Management Practices (BMPs) developed for Georgia. These voluntary practices reduce soil erosion and water pollution during road building, harvests, site preparation and other associated forestry practices.

A key feature of your plan involves managing Streamside Management Zones to protect streams and other water bodies. These buffers receive special care during harvests, site preparation and road building to minimize damage.

A Soil and Water Conservation District approved SCS Conservation Plan is recommended to enhance the productivity and reduce erosion on cropland and pastures located on the property.



Recreation and Aesthetics

Many landowners hold land for the recreational and aesthetic pleasure that it affords them. If recreation is your primary objective, your plan will recommend improvements to enhance or develop recreational facilities. Developing nature, hiking or horseback riding trails, boat ramps and picnic and camp sites creates and enhances recreational opportunities.

Well-managed forests provide many pleasing aesthetic qualities. Your plan may recommend developing areas which have the greatest scenic beauty with well-planned trails, camp or picnic sites. Timber and wildlife management activities can be recommended that enhance recreational or aesthetic values.

Other Considerations

Many unique geological and archeological treasures are found on forested sites in Georgia. You may find evidence of pottery, worked flint pieces and mounds on your property. Remains of village sites may be indicated along streams and bluffs. More modern treasures include old mills, home sites, barns and other vanishing glimpses of our past. The Forest Stewardship Plan can help identify, protect and preserve these unique areas and artifacts from threatening activities.

Once Your Plan is Complete

When your management program is well underway, you may be nominated for the prestigious Forest Steward designation, signifying your commitment to the highest stewardship principles. Once nominated, an inspection team visits your forest to evaluate your management activities. Forest Stewards receive a plaque and a Stewardship Forest sign to display on the property. Properties designated as Stewardship Forests are reinspected at five-year intervals to insure that proper management is continuing.

Once your plan is complete you become eligible to apply for Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) funds to help offset the cost of certain recommended management practices. Cost-share funds are also available if you want to hire private consulting foresters or wildlife biologists to develop your plan.

The Stewardship Incentive Program targets ownerships of 1,000 acres or less, although

exemptions can be granted for up to 5,000 acres. Individual payments cannot exceed \$10,000 per fiscal year. Any SIP cost-shared practices must be completed within 18 months of approval, unless otherwise specifically allowed. If you receive SIP funds you maintain and protect those funded practices for a 10-year minimum at your expense.

Examples of Forest Stewardship Plans

Example 1

A south Georgia landowner considers timber management as the primary objective and soil and water conservation as a secondary objective.

The tract consists of 1,500 acres in the coastal plain. The timber stands consist of sawtimber-size natural slash-longleaf pine, hardwoods in drains and wet flats and pine plantations from two to 14 years old. Several fields are in row-crop production.

Both the natural and planted stands are scheduled for periodic thinning to maintain tree growth and vigor. Firebreaks have been carefully installed and a prescribed burning program is used to control understory vegetation and reduce fuel buildup in the stands while improving wildlife habitat.

As these stands mature harvesting plans are carefully implemented. Streamside Management Zones are marked in each

stand to protect streams drainages from sedimentation. Skid trails and road location and construction follows Best Management Practices. Special attention is given to activities in wetlands and on highly erodible sites. Following harvest, site preparation and regeneration is scheduled for completion in two years.

An SCS Conservation Plan has been developed for the cropland. Terraces, grassed waterways and conservation tillage systems are used to control erosion. Fields are limed and fertilized according to soil test results.

Example 2

On this 280-acre piedmont tract the landowner has chosen wildlife management as the primary objective and recreation as the secondary. This tract consists of mixed pine-hardwood stands on rolling topography. A stream runs through the property, and hardwoods are plentiful along the stream terrace. White-tailed deer and turkey are desired species and are common to the tract.

Permanent openings in the forest stands are being created. The openings are designed to enhance wildlife viewing, hunting and aesthetics. Permanent view/hunting platforms are being constructed at each opening.

Stands are scheduled for thinning to improve tree growth, favor mast-producing species and increase light to the forest floor. A prescribed burning program is setup to periodically burn blocks in the pine stands to provide browse, nesting,

escape and brood-rearing habitat. Snag trees are retained to provide den trees for cavity-nesting birds.

A scenic trail running from the upland area to down along the stream is being constructed. A camp site with a picnic table was located near the trail.

Forest Stewardship: Conclusion

If you decide to enroll in the Forest Stewardship Program your plan, based on your objectives and site resources, serves as a management guide. As a landowner you are not obligated to follow any of the recommendations, but as a true steward of your land you will want to.

Developing your Forest Stewardship Plan is a cooperative effort by the Georgia Forestry Commission, the Department of Natural Resources and The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. Federal agencies include the Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. Private forestry and natural resource consultants also participate in the Forest Stewardship Program.

**Call 1-800-GA TREES
to start your
Forest Stewardship Plan.**

Cooperating Agencies

Georgia Forestry Commission

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

The University of Georgia
Cooperative Extension Service

USDA Soil Conservation Service

USDA Forest Service

USDA Agricultural Stabilization and
Conservation Service



The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

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