

Forester's Guide to Implementing the Cumberland Plateau Landscape Management Plan

This guide is designed as a resource for foresters using Alabama's Cumberland Plateau landscape management plan (LMP). The LMP approach is designed to highlight the important role foresters and other natural resource professionals play, their expertise and the relationship and trust they form with the landowners they support.

Because the LMP is a new and innovative tool for working with and supporting landowners, this step-by-step guide leads foresters and other natural resource professionals through its use, saving time and resources and helping us reach many more landowners.

While coordination with a landowner will likely be structured organically in a conversational tone and format, this field guide provides forest resource professionals a more structured approach to ensure all components of the LMP are addressed to meet certification standards.

Initial Contact with the Landowner

Landowners may reach out to you by phone or email, respond to marketing materials or you may meet through the introduction of a neighbor, family member or friend. To best support the landowner and take advantage of the LMP, it is important to capture pertinent information about the property, its history, size and location, wildlife presence, and the general goals and objectives of the landowner. Using the information you obtain during this initial conversation, you will be more prepared for your meeting on the landowner's property and the work you will do together.

Preparing to Meet the Landowner

Before you head out to meet with the landowner on their property, there are a few steps you can take to get ahead of the game, maximize the value of your visit and fully leverage the LMP.

- Access the most current spatial information in the LMP geodatabase to locate and characterize the landowner's property.
 - Reference location, water and soils map(s) for reference during the visit. (NOTE: this information may also be used to aid determination of applicable forest types)
 - Determine current forest type(s) and acreage, which will be verified during onsite consultation.
 - Identify additional property characteristics, such as forests of recognized importance (FORI), special sites, potential listed species, and area invasive species concerns.
- Review common landowner and landscape objectives within the LMP for the existing forest types anticipated on the property.

- Review any internal records available to determine if the landowner has an existing, outdated plan or is already enrolled in related programming including American Tree Farm System (ATFS) certification. The existing plan will provide historical context and can be used during a review of the landowner's objectives, forest types and resources, and implementation activities. The additional information found in the LMP and geodatabase will then be used to supplement and replace the existing plan.
 - For the ATFS program, you can check the ATFS database to verify their current certification status or call the State Program Administrator. Based on this information, you will know if it is appropriate to conduct an initial inspection, if the landowner is interested in joining ATFS, or a re-inspection for existing Tree Farmer.

Meeting the Landowner/Interview Process

Once on the property and walking the woods with the landowner, there are a few key steps to take and important items to touch on in your dialogue that will enable you and the landowner to fully leverage the value of the LMP.

- Identifying Objectives:
 - Ask the landowner what they value most about their land, what they hope to achieve or the goals they might have for their woods. This can happen during your initial interaction and/or during the visit onsite at their property.
 - Probe each objective identified by the landowner to ensure you understand the underlying motivations and goals for the property. A clear understanding of the landowner's objective will help you identify the silvicultural strategies that are the best fit for their objective and their woods.
 - In many cases, especially with new or previously unengaged landowners, their goals are general, like "I want my woods to be healthy" or "We love wildlife." This is OK and provides you, their forester, with the opportunity to use your expertise to help deepen their connection to their land and attend to more technical details of the management.
- Review and discuss potential landscape objectives to identify any commonalities or alignment that exists with the landowner's objectives and wider conservation goals. The landowner may be unaware of or gain interest in specific landscape objectives that shape their own goals more specifically. Some landowners may not be interested. In either scenario, landowners are not required to commit to any landscape objectives. Even when a landowner's goals align with wider conservation goals, there are no specific requirements and responsibilities for direct collaboration with other landowners.
- Review the current site conditions and determine a target forest type(s) and other forest resources and considerations (including threatened and endangered species, FORI, special sites, invasive species, etc.) relevant to the property. This

forest type(s) could be different or the same as the current forest type on the property.

- Based upon landowner objectives, potential landscape objectives, target forest type(s), other resource considerations and the geodatabase review, identify an actionable strategy using the silvicultural options identified in the LMP (by forest type).
- Discuss with the landowner the strategy to meet the identified objectives and provide them with advice for the first steps to take. You may also suggest contractors, provide contact information, or help coordinate these steps with the landowner. Encourage the landowner to reconnect with you after they have taken the next set of steps.
- If the landowner is interested in joining ATFS, be sure to fully complete the ATFS 004 Form, taking care to specifically identify:
 - Tree Farm number, noting that the LMP is being used,
 - Objectives being pursued,
 - Current and desired conditions,
 - Required elements –
 - any supplemental information not captured in the spatial geodatabase (presence and location of additional roads, water sources, special sites, T&E species, etc.;
 - confirmation of the presence or absence of elements noted in the spatial geodatabase based on field observations,
 - Forestry activities, including those recommended to the landowner and any notes about past activities that may impact management, and
 - Any other specific details about the property.
 - For new Tree Farmers, they will need to sign the 004 Form.

Post Visit

- Call the landowner between one week and one month following the visit to provide any additional support and encouragement for implementing the activities identified during the onsite visit. Provide answers to any questions you were unable to answer during the visit or additional questions or comments that arose following the last meeting.
- Document when future follow-up visits should occur in relevant system.

Monitoring and Regular Follow Up

- On return visits, assess implemented activities and determine if any changes to the landowner's objectives and/or the property's condition have occurred. Provide

additional advice and technical support to the landowner, as needed. Document all relevant information in a 004 Form.

- Depending on the forest type and the silvicultural options selected, a longer period between contacts with the landowner may occur. Optimistically, landowner should be contacted every five years to promote and foster their engagement in the active management of their property.