2021 Arkansas Tree Farm Program Audit

Jennifer Johnson
501-375-2441
Agenda

1) What is an Assessment?
   1) What are Findings?

2) Documentation Provided to the Auditors
   1) What they are looking for, and
   2) Questions they may ask

3) What to Expect

4) Regional Results

5) Arkansas’s Results

6) What’s Next
What is a Tree Farm Audit?

• As a globally endorsed certification system, the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) must undergo third-party certification audits.
  • PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) auditors review provided documentation to verify that Tree Farmers are managing their forest in a way that conforms to the AFF Standards.

• Every year, 12 State Tree Farm Committees participate in these third-party certification audits to ensure conformance to the American Forest Foundation Standards.
The ATFS Regions

ATFS State Programs

Northeast Region
West Central Region
Southern Region

Recognition
Certified
No ATFS Program
SOUTHERN REGION

• The ATFS Southern Region consists of eight Tree Farm committees and participating non-industrial forest landowners. The South Region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

• The states of Arkansas, Texas and Virginia were assessed with eighty Tree Farms reviewed.
The Assessment

There are two main parts to the assessment

(1) State Tree Farm program documentation and process, and

(2) Field visits to Tree Farms…or in this case, virtual visits -- conference calls.
Assessment Findings

• Good Management Practices
  • The assessment team will note examples of exemplary forest management activities.
  • Outstanding efforts to maintain wildlife
  • Strong landowner commitment to outreach and education

• Opportunities for Improvement (OFI)
  • These issues do not indicate nonconformity with the Standards or the ATFS program requirements but indicate potential for nonconformity in the future if not addressed.

• Minor Nonconformity
  • A minor nonconformity occurs when there is a trend across a state or region where a performance measure or indicator of the Standards or a requirement of the ATFS program is not met.
    • An example of a recent minor nonconformity is state programs not completing their Internal Monitoring (Required) Inspections within the calendar year they were assigned.
Assessment Findings, continued

• Major Nonconformity

• A major nonconformity occurs when there are several minor non-conformities that together lead the assessor to believe that there is a serious trend of Tree Farmers not meeting one or more requirements of the Standards or Eligibility Requirements. An example of a major nonconformity occurred in the first year of the assessments (2009). Thirty percent (30%) of all management plans reviewed as part of the assessment for the West-Central and Southern regions were missing or failed to address required elements.

• The accredited certification body, PwC, issued a major nonconformity for the regions and ATFS was not able to move forward with the certification until the situation was remedied. State programs in each of the regions worked with the landowners to update or find their management plans, which were then submitted to PwC for review. Through the actions of the state programs, inspectors and landowners, the major nonconformity was downgraded to a minor nonconformity.
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<th>TUESDAY</th>
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**AUDIT WEEKS**

JUNE 21 – July 2
WEEK 1 – June 21 – June 25

John Cook
501-332-2081
501-282-4910 cell
John.cook@agriculture.Arkansas.gov

Tabitha Holloway
870-267-0133
870-751-0201 cell
Tabitha.Holloway@agriculture.Arkansas.gov

Leigh Peters
Certification Manager, American Tree Farm System

Bob Radspinner
Auditor - PwC
Documentation Provided to Auditors

021 Form
• Inspection of the property

Pre-Planning Form
• Brief summary of recent on the ground activity pertinent to ATFS

Management Plan
• Management Plan, Schedule of Activities, Maps, Addendum

Contracts
• Any contracts supplied

Miscellaneous
• Additional supplied documentation
The Audit Call

- The PwC assessor visited with 4-5 Tree Farms each day, making for a long day. Because of this busy schedule, the calls were limited to one hour.
  - The visits included:
    - First 15-20 minutes, after introductions, the PwC Forester with the landowner and/or forester about forest management activities, asking questions he/she had after reviewing the management plan.
    - Approximately 30 minutes were spent talking about recent forest management activities.
    - At the end of the call, the PwC assessor provided a verbal review of good management practices that were observed and/or potential findings if there were any issues with meeting the Standards.
    - If any of the required element(s) of the Standards are found to be missing, the Tree Farmer must take action to address those elements to remain certified.
After the Call

Audit participants do not receive individual written reports from the PwC assessor. Any follow-up communication or required corrective action is relayed by a state committee representative.
The Results
National Results

• The American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the Northeast, Southern and West Central Regions have continued to maintain conformance with the requirements of the American Forest Foundation Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (2015-2020 AFF Standard).
## Management Plans

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<th>Region</th>
<th>% Plans with Missing Elements</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<td>West Central</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<td>Northeastern</td>
<td>44%</td>
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## ATFS Database & Eligibility Requirements

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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Arkansas’s Results

Opportunities for Improvement: 15
Minor Nonconformity: 6
Major Nonconformity: 0
Best Management Practices: 25
Opportunities for Improvement

- Forest management company is diligent about including notations regarding special sites and FORIs in their stand information file. The foresters might consider adding notations regarding Threatened and Endangered species in the same file.

- In the written forest management plan, the landowner’s objectives were found in some of the stand recommendations. The landowner should consider having objectives stated in a more prominent part of the plan.

- Discrepancies between the addendum and management plan occurred for water and special sites. The addendum cited no water or special sites while the management plan noted a creek and a small cemetery present on the property. The landowner or his forester could consider consistency between documents.

- Landowner has objectives in addition to those documented in the GBP LAP program umbrella plan. Forester could consider including all objectives in the plan.

- Forester checked appropriate resources for special sites and none were found; however, the landowner designated a special site of personal significance. Forester could consider inclusion of this site in the management plan.

- Discrepancies between the plan information sheet and addendum for water. The addendum cited a creek while the plan information sheet noted no waterbodies. The landowner or his forester could consider consistency between documents.

- A contractor was used to apply herbicide. CSP funding was obtained; a contract was used and state forestry personnel monitored the work. However, it is unknown if the contractor held a current pesticide applicator’s license. Landowner/forester could consider confirming license prior to contracting.

- The property consists of several stands but the management plan map does not delineate them. Recommendations include 40 acres of timber stand improvement and includes timber type and a lat long location. Forester may wish to delineate and reference stands to clarify recommendations.

- Addendum addresses FORIs and resources used but did not make determination of presence or absence. The forester/landowner could consider including determination in the management plan.

- Landowner leases property for hunting through a verbal lease agreement. The landowner could consider use of a written lease agreement.

- While a natural resource professional is a valid source for determining special sites, the forester/landowner could consider consultation of documented resources to make this determination.
Landowner shall have and implement a written forest management plan consistent with the size of the forest and the scale and intensity of the forest activities. Landowner’s objectives are not written in plan. 

Landowner objectives were not included in the management plan. The landowner articulated his objectives during the interview. 

The natural hardwood stand on the property was not included as a stand in the plan (was not listed as a stand on the spreadsheet and did not have a stand number on the map). The certified acreage included this stand. 

Certified acres between TFDB and the management plan do not match. There is a discrepancy between topo and stand map areas. The natural hardwood stand on the Tree Farm was listed as a stand on the spreadsheet and did not have a stand number on the map but the certified acreage as stated in the database for the landowner assistance program included this stand. 

The Tree Farm database lists 35 acres while it appears the Tree Farm consists of 40 acres. It appears that the wetland area with SMZ and pond are not included in the Tree Farm acres. 

the Tree Farm database lists 186 forested acres while it appears from the map that the Tree Farm consists of ~ 220 acres. It appears that the hardwood acres are not included in the Tree Farm acres.
<table>
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<th>Best Management Practices</th>
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<td><strong>Foresters managing these Tree Farms conduct a pre-harvest conference with the operator, have regular inspections, and complete a post harvest report on site conditions, utilization, and BMP compliance.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Forest management company requires logging contractors to participate in Arkansas Pro Logger training. The company's office maintains records and tracks contractor certification to make sure they are current.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The irregular shape and variability of the game food plots provide excellent edge effects benefitting wildlife and greatly minimizes visuals on this Tree Farm.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Landowner has established camps for weekend use by scouts. An activity to improve the environment is held on Saturday. Scouts complete a project, identify trees, and learn proper tool use.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Forest management company sponsors a day off of production to work with the Arkansas Timber Producers Association to provide continuing education in Arkansas Pro Logger training for contractors.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Forest management plan has a schedule of activity with check boxes and space for dates - prompting landowners to action.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff manages the &quot;Keeping it in the Family Sustainable Forestry &amp; African American Land Retention Program&quot;. Serving 18 counties, the program promotes intergenerational land retention, empowering landowners and working forests through technical assistance in forest management, conservation and financial assistance programs.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Landowners are a former two-time AR Tree Farmer of the Year. They have hosted tours including ones for teachers, been involved with Women Owning Woodlands and other activities for groups and neighbors. They hold an annual board meeting for all family to come together with upwards of 100-120 family members from all over the country in attendance.</strong></td>
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Landowners have management agreement with forest consultant that keeps management activity data and maps updated on an enterprise wide GIS system for all clients. The consultant has a data share agreement with ANHC for T&E species.

Landowner crosses two landowners to access his property and spent considerable resources to improve and maintain property access.

Landowner is active in public outreach - hosted tours including those with AR senator, UAM forestry students, AFA, and SE AR Conservation District. Landowner also has genetics research trials on his property including side by side comparisons along the road.

Landowner's long term goal is to use the proceeds from timber management to fund higher education for heirs of the property.

Landowner works with APHIS and local conservation district to trap hogs, a major invasive species in the area, using current most effective methods.

The AR Tree Farm Committee has identified FORI in their state, posted the information on the AFA website, sent this information to inspectors and included it in their inspector training.

The AR Tree Farm Committee developed a spreadsheet for landowners to document pesticide usage.

Landowner was named 2020 AR Tree Farmer of the year. Landowner immersed herself in extensive self study and attended field tours and webinars. She went on to host tours with AFA and WOW.
| Landowner keeps detailed Tree Farm journal/diary and meticulous Tree Farm financial records. |
| Highway department worked with the landowner to replace headstones and fence a small cemetery on the Tree Farm. |
| Landowner has held sporting clay shoot on his property for 9 years. Money raised from the event is given to a local charity. Landowner also talks to young people about the environment, his Tree Farm and management goals. |
| Landowner works with several partners (AFC, Quail Forever, USDA and AR Game and Fish). Also has pollinator projects. |
| The management plan has excellent maps and includes highlighted verbiage that describe specific details about the Tree Farm. |
| The AR Tree Farm committee sends out an informative monthly e-newsletter to all AR Tree Farm Inspectors. They also send a monthly e-newsletter and quarterly mailed newsletter (AR Families and Forests) to all AR Tree Farmers. |
| The AR Tree Farm committee developed a fee structure and the annual invoice is also used for database quality. The invoice includes a form to return that asks for changes in contact information, acreage changes etc. |
| The AR Tree Farm committee’s Annual Tree Farm conference was transitioned to a Zoom meeting and included a virtual tour of the AR OTFY. |
| 76% of AR Tree Farms have Lat Long information in the Tree Farm database. Most Lat Long information is close to an entry point to the Tree Farm. |
What Does This Mean?

- Future Audits
  - Likely in 2025
  - Will be held to new Standards of Sustainability
- Pesticide Usage Form
- Data Quality
- Updated Management Plans
Q & A
Thank you

Jennifer Johnson
ARKANSAS TREE FARM PROGRAM
arkforests.org/treefarm
501-374-2441