The Special Sites on Your Land

What is a “Special Site”? It’s a place of particular value that may be present on your land. The ATFS Standards of Sustainability outline what you must do to identify and protect special sites. Examples of special sites are diverse and may include:

- Historical, archaeological, cultural, and ceremonial sites;
- Sites of importance to wildlife such as rookeries, refuges, fish spawning grounds, vernal pools, or shelters of hibernating animals;
- Unique ecological communities such as springs, glades, savannas, fens, and bogs;
- Sites of importance to you as the landowner, such as a family graveyard, a special tree, or an old mill dam; and
- Areas of significance for you or your family.

Special sites are diverse and should be recognized through consultation with your forester or other natural resource professionals with relevant expertise and on-the-ground surveillance of your property. Sites of historical, archaeological, and cultural importance are identified on the National Register of Historic Places, a listing administered by the National Park Service, or by state historic preservation offices (SHPOs). These lists denote sites that have been recognized as significant to the history of your community, your state, or the nation.

Many landowners may choose to designate areas not listed by relevant authorities as special sites.

Tips For Protecting Special Sites

- Get to know your woods. Locating the special sites on your land is the first step in protecting them. Take time to walk your woods and identify the unusual plant communities, old structures or possible artifacts, and unusual features (for example, mounds or depressions in the ground) that you discover.
- Note where special sites are located. Once you have found your special sites, make sure to flag them, both on the ground and on your property map. A GPS unit can be beneficial when you are doing this. Use it to record the exact locations of your special sites, then transfer the data to your computer for mapping. Pair that information with photographs, notes, or any other information that helps you track your special sites. Or use the mapping tool.
- Get expert help. Once you have identified and recorded your special sites, then transfer the data to a nursery tour with Nursery Manager James Shelton.

Although I could not attend due to being quarantined, the AFA staff and the Tree Farm Committee rallied the troops and made it happen!” said Jennifer Johnson, administrator of the Arkansas Tree Farm Program. “I am so thankful to have their support — and that of the Tree Farmers and the conference sponsors — who came and made this event a success."

We want to thank all of the sponsors and attendees for making this event possible. You may view photos from the event on the Arkansas Tree Farm Program Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/ARTreeFarm.

Arkansas FORI’s Distinguished at Annual Meeting

Forests and trees have always been of great importance to humankind since prehistoric times. They perform vital functions that have been broadly classified into environmental, economic, and socio-cultural values. While forests are valuable and necessary assets that are crucial to our very existence, not all may have the designation of being called a Forest of Recognized Importance, commonly referred to as FORI’s. FORI’s hold global, national, or regional significance and are evaluated at the landscape level rather than the stand level and are recognized for a combination of unique values rather than a single attribute.

A Best Management Practice within Tree Farm Program certification is for each state program to identify the forests of Recognized Importance within their state and ensure their sustainability by including them in the inspection process for each Tree Farm certification.

Earlier this month, at the AFA Annual Meeting awards breakfast, Jennifer Johnson acknowledged the six forests within Arkansas that met the criteria as a Forest of Recognized Importance and thanked them for their impact on our environment and their partnerships with the Arkansas Tree Farm Program and Arkansas Forestry Association.

The six FORIs of Arkansas are:

- Ozark National Forest
- St. Francis National Forest
- Ouachita National Forest
- Pea Ridge National Military Park
- Lake Maumelle Watershed
- Beaver Lake Watershed

You may find more information related to Arkansas FORI’s at: www.arkforests.org/treefarm.
Hunting Leases - A Valuable Tool For Landowners

Hunting, fishing, and nature tourism are popular recreational pastimes in the United States and Arkansas. Almost one-third of Arkansas residents hunt, and more than half participate in wildlife watching activities.

In today’s world, leasing land based on a handshake agreement is asking for trouble, and although the Tree Farm Standards of Sustainability do not require a lease agreement, they are highly encouraged. Miscommunication between the user and the landowner or an accident on the property could result in a lawsuit. The Arkansas recreational use statutes take some liability pressure off landowners; however, the regulations offer only limited protection, mainly when a landowner benefits financially from the agreement. The effort taken to set up a good lease agreement from the start will avert potential problems later. For hunters and wildlife watchers, a lease agreement offers a place to be outdoors with friends and family or escape crowded conditions on public lands. For landowners, a wildlife lease can help offset increasing agriculture production costs and pay property taxes. There are other benefits as well. Those who sign a wildlife lease have a vested interest in monitoring the property and reducing unwanted trespassers. Lessees may voluntarily improve wildlife habitat at no additional cost to the landowner.

A written hunting lease is a vital tool for protecting you and your assets if an accident or incident should occur on your leased property. Avoid informal arrangements with hunters on your property. A written contract may not guarantee that you will be absolved of wrongdoing in a court of law. However, without a written agreement, it will be your word against someone else’s with little to substantiate either side. Additionally, the legal system places many responsibilities on the landowner, whether or not the landowner had direct knowledge of their lessee’s actions. Having:

1. A written agreement that an attorney has reviewed.
2. Adequate insurance coverage.
3. A release or waiver can help protect you if something unfortunate should happen on your leased property.

The Arkansas Tree Farm Program has the Fact Sheet “Are You Considering a Hunting Lease for Your Family Forest?” available at www.arkforests.org/treefarm or by calling the AFA office at 501-374-2441.

Special Sites, con’t.

On your property and how to protect them best:

• Include special sites in your management plan. Your findings and the federal, state, or local guidelines for protecting special sites should become part of your woodland management plan. Aim to minimize damage and disturbance to the site by creating a vegetative buffer, fencing the area, or distinguishing it from surrounding areas. Try to control for erosion and disturb the soil there as little as possible. This also means doing things a little differently at harvest time. Make sure to review your special sites map and protection plan with your timber buyers, loggers, foresters, and any other professionals assisting you with forest-management activities and monitor their work. After harvests and other activities, follow up to make sure your special sites are appropriately protected.

Visit www.treefarmsystem.org for more information on the Standards of Sustainability and special sites.