WHAT'S NEW IN THE 2021 STANDARDS OF SUSTAINABILITY?
KEEPING THINGS SIMPLE FOR LANDOWNERS

By Angela Wells, Director, American Tree Farm System

The American Forest Foundation’s (AFF) American Tree Farm System (ATFS), with its 74,000 participating landowners owning roughly 19 million acres, is the largest forest certification system for family forest owners in the world. Landowners who voluntarily enroll in this program agree to manage their lands to a set of Standards of Sustainability that is internationally recognized and endorsed. These Standards are revised on a regular cycle, on average every five years, to ensure that they continue to meet criteria that promote the long-term health and vitality of forest systems and the continued provision of responsibly grown and harvested wood supplies, wildlife habitat, clean water, and recreation opportunities. A revised version of the Standards was approved by the AFF Board of Trustees in late 2020 and adopted in January of 2021.

What does this mean for you as a landowner? One of the reasons that ATFS is the largest certification program for family forest owners is that its Standards are tailored to the scale and intensity of management typically occurring on family forest lands, as well as the skills and capacity of the landowners themselves. For that reason, changes to the Standards during any revision are scrutinized and informed by a panel of independent stakeholders (the Independent Standards Review Panel or ISRP) and a multi-phased public comment period. Last year, the overwhelming feedback AFF received from Tree Farmers, foresters, and State Tree Farm Program leadership was to make as few changes as possible in the revision, and then only to maximize benefit to the landowner and clarify guidance.
The following summarizes the changes to the Standards that most affect Tree Farmers.

THE FULL STANDARDS and Tree Farm eligibility criteria may be viewed at [https://www.treefarmsystem.org/view-standards](https://www.treefarmsystem.org/view-standards). For a paper copy please contact your State Tree Farm Program Administrator.

**PAST STANDARD**

**STANDARD 1** - Asked landowners to commit to sustainable forestry, but no specific mention of landowner education.

**STANDARD 3** - Offered no guidance to landowners on reforestation resulting in conversion to plantation or afforestation of non-forest ecosystems.

**STANDARD 3** - Landowners were encouraged to use native species for reforestation and afforestation.

**STANDARD 3** - Current and potential use of genetically modified trees was unclear.

**STANDARD 4** - No requirement for landowners to maintain records of pesticide usage, outside laws and regulation requirements.

**2021 STANDARD**

**STANDARD 1 - ADDITION OF LANDOWNER EDUCATION**

Landowners are highly encouraged, but not required, to seek out education opportunities including workshops, field days, professionals, online resources, etc.

**STANDARD 3, GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 3.1.1 - ADDITION OF ‘CONVERSION’ GUIDANCE**

A plantation may be established to add economic or ecosystem value. Afforestation may occur so long as the conversion does not have a negative long-term effect.

**STANDARD 3 – GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 3.1.1 - ADDITION OF ‘NATURALIZED SPECIES’**

Landowners may use native and/or naturalized species where appropriate for afforestation and reforestation.

**STANDARD 3, GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 3.1.1. – ADDITION OF GUIDANCE THAT PROHIBITS THE USE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED TREES**

Current stock offered by the American Chestnut Foundation is not considered a genetically modified tree under these Standards. ATFS commits to follow emerging science and revisit as needed.

**STANDARD 4, GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 4.2.2. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT TO MAINTAIN RECORDS OF ALL PESTICIDE USAGE**

What kind of records? This depends on the size, scale, and scope of usage. At a minimum records should document pesticide name, purpose, and date of application. This may be noted in the margin of a management plan, a separate ledger or in the ATFS addendum.