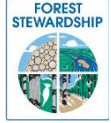




Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program



Standards for Forest Stewardship Plans & Renewals

INTRODUCTION

Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program began in 1990 as part of a larger national effort to better educate non-industrial private forest landowners in multiple-use or stewardship management of their land and resources.

The program utilizes the unprecedented cooperation of resource professionals from both the public and private sector with backgrounds in forestry, wildlife biology, soil science, and recreation management. Working together, they produce detailed and comprehensive management plans, called Forest Stewardship Plans for landowners enrolled in the program.

Landowners who have been enrolled in the program for 10 years or more are due for a plan renewal. Also, any landowner who has acquired property from the original plan owners or who has a change in plan objectives is eligible for a renewal plan. This handout gives specifications for new as well as renewal plans so that participating resource professionals understand what is required under the Forest Stewardship Program. Once completed, all plans are reviewed to assure consistency and high standards throughout the program. **Completed plans should be submitted to Lead Forester (or other direct supervisor) for initial review. Lead Forester will forward reviewed plans to a Stewardship Specialist for final review and signature.**

The program also seeks to recognize landowners who adopt their plans and do an outstanding job of managing their forest resources. A set of guidelines was developed to assess the landowner's land management accomplishments and determine eligibility for Certified Forest Steward designation. Certified Forest Stewards are recognized locally for their accomplishments and given a property sign signifying their achievements. Georgia Forestry Commission Stewardship Coordinator and Specialists are direct contacts for this programs.

Participants in the Forest Stewardship Program who already have an original plan may exempt certain plan requirements according to the following renewal guidelines.

Plan Criteria Information

Intranet File Uploads

Every Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) should be uploaded to the landowner's file in the Stewardship database by PlanID# followed by the landowners last name. Example:
12345_Name

FSP's must have an associated kml or kmz boundary file created for the plan and it must be uploaded onto the GFC ArcGIS Online server.

- ◆ This file may be downloaded from the county tax assessor's website, created using a mapping program, or converted from an existing shapefile.
- ◆ For plan renewals, the plan writer should verify that original boundary file is already uploaded to the online server and is accurate.

COVER LETTER

- ◆ Identify the landowner as a participant in Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program and congratulate them on their intent to practice multiple-use forestry.
- ◆ Specify that the management plan covers a ten-year period.
- ◆ The property acreage listed on cover letter should match acreage listed on GFC intranet and kml/kmz file uploaded to ArcGIS Online (this total acreage is reported to USFS and must be accurate.)
 - If GIS acreage differs on stands maps, etc.; include a disclaimer in plan or on maps that these figures may not be accurate.
- ◆ If landowner resource concerns are listed on the cover letter, these must be in the same order as resource concerns identified by landowner on application and within the body of the plan.
- ◆ Refer to the possibility that the landowner may be designated as a Certified Forest Steward and duly recognized at some point in the future when significant progress has been made in implementing the plan.
 - If a landowner is already a Certified Steward, this statement should be changed and their Certification Number should be added for recognition.
- ◆ Plans must contain the plans writer and approvers name, signature, and position. Phone number and credentials such as RF # are optional but encouraged. **All plans must be reviewed and signed by a Stewardship Specialist.**

LMP USE WITH FSP'S

- ◆ Any resource professional that chooses to utilize the GA LMP when developing an FSP for the landowner should include at a minimum all of the following information in order to ensure the plan meets National FSP Standards.
 - The cover letter of the plan must include the following statement.
 - This plan is written to incorporate Georgia's Landscape Management Plan (LMP). The LMP focuses on large scale geographical areas providing general recommendations and knowledge to help accomplish management objectives throughout the area. The LMP can be viewed at the following link https://gatrees.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Updated-Georgia-LMP_2024.pdf.
 - Additional information on LMP reference of FSP National Standards can be found in Section 1.4 of the GA LMP.
 - The plan writer should include specific references throughout the FSP where appropriate for the following key elements: landowner objectives, stand level descriptions and recommendations, general management recommendations, resource elements, and available assistance.

LANDOWNER OBJECTIVES

- ◆ All plans should outline that silviculture has been, is currently, and will be conducted into the future.
- ◆ Specify the landowner's management objectives clearly. These must reflect the landowner's interests as detailed on his/her application for participation in the program.
- ◆ All landowner objectives should consider the overall program goals of timber management, wildlife management, soil conservation, water quality protection, and biodiversity enhancement.
- ◆ In order of landowner interest, briefly mention each forest resource (timber, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetics) indicating how their management will be integrated.

Note: When wetlands or waters of the US are present on the subject property, the following statement should be included in the plan:

The Federal Clean Water Act, Section 404 (33 CFR Part 323.4 & 40 CFR Part 232.3), exempts normal established, ongoing silvicultural activities from the permitting process for discharges of dredged or fill material in wetlands, streams and/or other jurisdictional waters of the US. However, fifteen (15) baseline provisions for forest road construction and maintenance in and across waters of the US (33 CFR Part 328.3 & 40 CFR Part 230.3) are mandated to qualify for the forest road exemption. The burden of maintaining silvicultural exemptions through historical activity, current activities and future plans falls on the landowner. The

ultimate determination of whether activities are exempt can only be made by the USACE and the USEPA.

Property Maps for Plan

- ◆ Maps required: Aerial Photo, Stands Map, and Topo Map. Optional maps: Location map and soils map.
- ◆ All plans should include an aerial photo or ArcGIS map of the property including a legend, north arrow, title showing the landowner name, county, tract acres, and a correct map scale.
- ◆ The stands map developed for the tract should have the stands delineated and should have the same numbering scheme as the stand descriptions in the plan along with acreages.
- ◆ The topo map should be zoomed to an appropriate scale so that it is usable for the landowner. Plan writers are encouraged to write a brief description of site topography.
- ◆ Additional maps such as location map and soils map would be extremely beneficial to the landowner should also be included.
 - **If a soils map is not included within the plan, the plan must include a link to the NRCS websoil survey and a general description of soil types found on the tract.**
- ◆ All maps should be neat in appearance. Avoid using any imagery that appears blurry when exported from mapping software.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ General recommendations are optional but should be provided when appropriate. A list of possible recommendations is included in the appendix (see below.)

SPECIFIC STAND DESCRIPTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ **Stand numbering should match sequence on Stands Map.**
- ◆ Special Natural Areas (if present) should be treated as individual stand types, delineated, and numbered on the aerial photograph.
- ◆ Each stand should be fully described so that the landowner knows what he/she has and what the current condition is. Stand information should include (to the extent possible) stand origin, age, over story species composition, basal area per acre, and understory condition. Any current Forest Health issues should also be identified (invasive species, insect or disease, etc.)
 - Photos used to show the current stand condition are encouraged but not required.
- ◆ The extent to which a particular resource is described should relate to the landowner's interest in that resource, but should include the desired future condition. **See below.**
- ◆ The following should be addressed in the description section:

- Timber Resource. A thorough description of the timber should be included. Proprietary information such as volumes and value may be added at the discretion of the forester. This information should be presented in a form that is both understandable and useful to the landowner. Tables should only be used when there is a clear reason for doing so.
- Wildlife Resource. If wildlife management is a secondary interest of the landowner, then information on the habitat and conditions of target populations should be given.
- Soil & Water Resources. Any critical soil conditions occurring within this stand should be fully described. A general description of the soil (including a measure of productivity) may be given if it is pertinent to the anticipated management recommendations. Describe water resources with comments on water quality. When wetland conditions are present or likely, report it by stand or stand type.
- Recreation Resources. Existing recreation use in the stand should be detailed, if applicable. Potential resource use and development should be covered as well. When this is a secondary objective of the landowner, considerable detail is expected here.
- Aesthetics Resource. Comment on the aesthetic appeal of the stand, but tread lightly (remembering that beauty is often in the eye of the beholder!). Any eyesores should be detailed here. When this is a secondary objective of the landowner, considerable detail is expected here.
- ◆ Recommendations for each stand should immediately follow the description for that stand (before the next stand is described).
- ◆ Recommendations should address multiple use management as indicated by the landowner's choice of objectives and not focus on only a single resource. (Don't just address Timber aspect of stand, must include other appropriate resources.)
- ◆ Recommendations should offer specific management details for both water quality and forest health considerations. Specific recommendations from BMP manual should be integrated where necessary under each stand type.
- ◆ Recommendations should be explained in layman's terms, be concise and easy to understand and should document a feasible strategy and timetable for practice implementation. *Avoid the use of slang or vernacular that may be hard for landowner to fully understand.*

RESOURCE ELEMENTS

The plan preparer will consider, describe and evaluate resource elements present and their importance to the ownership. Resource elements to be considered include:

- Soil and Water
- Biological diversity
- Aesthetic quality
- Recreation
- Timber
- Fish and wildlife
- Threatened and endangered species
- Forest health

- Archeological, cultural and historic sites
- Wetlands
- Fire (Firewise)
- Carbon Sequestration

Management recommendations and alternative strategies, consistent with the landowner objectives, will be provided to protect or enhance all resource elements that are present. The professional resource manager will discuss the Forest Stewardship Management Plan with the landowner, following completion, and periodically, to assure understanding and encourage plan implementation.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

- ◆ Each plan must contain a summary list of recommended actions and include year of treatment and any other pertinent information.
- ◆ Any action items that include future GFC service delivery should be forwarded to the appropriate supervisor for that service.

APPENDIX ITEMS (Examples)

- ◆ Glossary: a glossary of forestry terms is helpful to most landowners.
- ◆ Sources of assistance: A list of vendors, consultants, government agencies and programs, timber buyers, etc. is very helpful to landowners.
- ◆ Literature: Any literature referenced in the plan which covers recommended practices and management techniques should be included for the landowner to study as he/she wishes. This will allow the forester to write a more streamlined plan by leaving out long explanations. Hub articles and fact sheets can provide detailed information.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

- ◆ List appropriate sources of assistance and services available including contact person's name, phone number, and address.

Suggestions include.

- ◆ Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- ◆ Farm Services Agency
- ◆ DNR Game Management
- ◆ CFC
- ◆ Cooperative Extension Service
- ◆ Consulting Foresters & Wildlife Biologists
- ◆ Industry landowner assistance programs
- ◆ Vendors
- ◆ Suppliers

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS (Optional)

Some potential general management recommendations may include:

- ◆ All land management practices should seek to mitigate the impact on the soil and water resource as well as conserve and enhance native biodiversity.
- ◆ Establish, mark, and maintain the property boundaries. For liability purposes, posted signs should be used. Try to avoid placing these signs on trees especially those with timber value. If trees must be used, aluminum nails should be used to secure the signs.
- ◆ Firebreaks should be installed around the perimeter of the property for wildfire protection. It is also encouraged to install firebreaks around all pine/mixed pine-hardwood stands and establish a prescribed burning regime where appropriate.
 - A prescribed burn should be used on a 1-5 year rotation (based on landowner objectives and site needs) to reduce fuel buildup, control unwanted hardwoods, and promote early successional habitat. Break stand into 15 to 40ac compartments to better facilitate management. Most burns should be conducted in late winter or early spring; however, summer burns may be used as a hardwood control method. The burn should be done under very specific weather conditions. The Georgia Forestry Commission or a consulting forester can assist you with this operation.
- ◆ Conduct periodic thinning to maintain at least 30% of ground in direct sunlight. A residual basal area of 65-75 ft²/ac is a good compromise between timber production and wildlife management. Evenly scatter slash from thinning throughout, and remember to retain 4-6 hardwood snags/acre where possible. Thinning more heavily within (30-120 ft.) of stand edge along roads, firebreaks, and openings provides better access, improves fire protection, and promotes transitional habitat for wildlife.
- ◆ Retain mast-producing hardwoods during thinning in groups or stands. When possible oaks should comprise 1/2 of remaining trees with rest being a variety of soft-mast producers. Discourage conversion of existing hardwoods (e.g., oak, hickory, cypress) unless recommended by professional.
- ◆ Removal of cull or inferior trees for firewood is encouraged. Release of good, mast bearing trees (acorn, nut, and fruit producers) can be attained by removing any lesser valued trees that are crowding them. The oaks and yellow poplars will have a higher value than a sweetgum. When harvesting trees for firewood, protect all snags 12' diameter at breast height (4.5ft above the ground) or greater for use by cavity dependent wildlife species.
- ◆ Establish and maintain Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) following "Recommended Best Management Practices for Forestry in Georgia". However, most wildlife species benefits from wider (100-300ft) SMZ's along creeks, lake sites, and other drainages. Vehicle and heavy equipment use should be restricted within the SMZ.
- ◆ When creating any new woods roads, the guidelines set forth in "Recommended Best Management Practices for Forestry in Georgia" should be followed. Water control structures, such as water bars, water turnouts, and broad-based dips, should be installed on all woods roads where needed to prevent erosion. Any new permanent woods roads, openings, or log decks should be seeded with recommended vegetation to limit erosion and create suitable wildlife habitat. All erosion control methods used should conform to USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service standards.
- ◆ On properties where game management is emphasized, strive for 5-20% of the property to be in wildlife openings. Loading decks, powerline right-of-ways, adjacent roadways, firebreaks, agricultural fields, and fallow areas can be used as wildlife openings. Manage for native forages by prescribed burning, winter disking, or planting 30-50% of opening on a 1-3 year rotation. A soil sample is beneficial to determine time and fertilizer needs. More information for game management practices can be found at <http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us>, click hunting, publications & information, manage wildlife on your lands.

PLAN CRITERIA CHECK LIST

For (landowner or farm name):

1. Landowner Objective: Landowner objectives have been clearly stated?
Yes No

2. Plan was prepared with or verified as meeting the minimum standards of a Forest Stewardship Management Plan by a professional resource manager and authorship is documented?
Yes No

3. Plan describes current forest condition or condition class of the property? Plan describes desired forest condition or condition class, and includes practices and activities aimed at reaching the desired forest condition or condition class?
Yes No

4. Plan documents a feasible management strategy and timeline for implementing conservation practices over a 10-year period. Recommendations are site specific and will protect or enhance all resource elements that are present?
Yes No

5. Plan describes any suggested monitoring activities to be done by the forester, other natural resource professional, or landowner?
Yes No

6. The plan preparer has considered, described and evaluated resource elements present and their importance to the ownership. Resource elements to be considered may include: Soil and water, biological diversity, aesthetic quality, recreation, timber, fish and wildlife, threatened and endangered species, forest health, archeological, cultural and historic sites, wetlands, and fire.
Yes No

7. The landowner's understanding may be improved by including additional information appendices. Appendices might include: Descriptions of assistance available and incentive programs, educational materials, a glossary of terms, an explanation of applicable federal, state and/or county regulatory programs, especially as they apply to: archeological, cultural and historical sites, wetlands and threatened and endangered species. Appropriate appendices included?
Yes No

8. Associated maps and boundary (kml) file: These are required in all plans and obtainable through the Georgia Forestry Commission local office, but may be obtained from other sources. Appropriate maps included in plan and boundary (kml) file uploaded in AGOL?
Yes No

Plan writer:

Date [Click here to enter date](#)

(Note: this check sheet should be completed for each FSP and a copy should be uploaded into the stewardship database as a part of the plan.)