

Policy and Procedure 7-1

Forest Management Planning

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Codes/Mandates: Code of Virginia: [§10.1-1105](#) Additional powers and duties of State Forester.

References: Policy and Procedure 7-3 Rural Forestry Laws
Policy and Procedure 7-4 Rural Forestry Technical Procedures
Policy and Procedure 7-5 VDOF Services and Equipment for Forest Landowners
Policy and Procedure 7-6 State-Owned Lands Program
[American Tree Farm System - Management Plan Template](#)
[American Tree Farm System – Standards of Sustainability](#)
[American Tree Farm System – Inspector’s Corner](#)
[Best Management Practices for Water Quality Technical Guide](#)
[Pre-Harvest Best Management Practices Plan Template](#)
[Pre-Harvest Best Management Practices Plan for VDOF Easement Properties Template](#)
[Common Forest Cover Types in Virginia from Forest Cover Types of the United States and Canada](#)
[Department of Environmental Quality - Wetlands](#)
[Department of Historic Resources](#)
[Department of Wildlife Resources T&E Database](#)
[DCR Division of Natural Heritage](#)
[Forest Stewardship Management Plan Template](#)
[Forest Stewardship Management Plan Appendix](#)
[Guide to Threatened and Endangered Species on Private Land in Virginia](#)
[Land-Use Plan Template](#)
[National Forest Stewardship Program Guidelines](#)
[NRCS - Electronic Field Office Technical Guide \(eFOTG\)](#)
[USFS Service Foresters Handbook](#)
[USDA web soil survey](#)

Forms: Form 3.11 Cost-Share/AMP Project Amendment
Form 7.1 Forest Management Service Agreement
Form 7.6 Alternate Management Plan (AMP)
Form 7.7 Alternate Management Plan Supplement For (Transfer) (AMP)
Form 7.8 Cost-Share Plan
Form 7.9 NRCS Conservation Activity Plan (CAP #106) Application
Form 7.10 Forest Stewardship Program Application
Form 7.11 Forest Stewardship Program Certification Inspection Record
Form 7.13 Pine Survival/Reproduction Field Tally Sheet
Form 7.16 Virginia Conservation Activity Plan #106 Component Checklist
Form 7.22 Stand Data Sheet
Form 7.23 Stand Data Summary
Form 7.24 Forest Stewardship Program Monitoring Report
Form 084 Hardwood Reinspection Field Tally Sheet
[ATFS Form 004 – Tree Farm Inspection Record / Instructions](#)

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PURPOSE

To identify the different types of management plans in Virginia that are developed by the Virginia Department of Forestry and provide guidance to foresters on the information that is included in each type of plan and how these plans may interact with each other.

POLICY

The Virginia Department of Forestry’s professional foresters will provide forest management planning services to all Virginia landowners and produce a variety of forest management plans that address the landowner’s individual needs and are based upon their stated management goals and objectives.

DEFINITIONS

“Agency” and “VDOF” means the Virginia Department of Forestry.

“ATFS” means the American Tree Farm System.

“BMP” means best management practices.

“Commonwealth” means the Commonwealth of Virginia.

“EQIP” means Environmental Quality Incentive Program

“FSA” means the USDA Farm Service Agency.

“FSMP” means Forest Stewardship Management Plans.

“MOU” means Memorandum of Understanding.

“NIPF” means non-industrial private forest.

“NRCS” means the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“SMART” means USFS Stewardship Mapping and Reporting Tool.

“USDA” means the United States Department of Agriculture.

“USFS” means the United States Forest Service.

PROCEDURES

Overview

Management plans serve as the foundation for engaging forest landowners in effective forest management that meets landowner goals and those of the greater Commonwealth. This planning should lead to the implementation of forest management and conservation practices on the ground. Planning is critical to achieving tangible accomplishments that meet our customer's goal and objectives.

VDOF foresters should direct landowners toward comprehensive, long-term management through whole tract multi-use management plans. These provide the most long-term benefit and value to the landowner. Practice or stand plans can also be valuable in addressing more immediate landowner needs and can lead to more comprehensive planning in the future.

VDOF foresters should always encourage private sector involvement in planning and follow Policy and Procedure 7-5 VDOF Services and Equipment for Forest Landowners, which states: *"VDOF will promote the development and continuation of all private free market solutions, including forestry contractors, consulting foresters and other related service providers, which provide needed services to forest landowners in the Commonwealth"*. VDOF foresters, private consulting foresters and forest industry foresters can offer management planning services.

Each management plan will, at a minimum, provide the following elements:

- ◆ A cover letter
- ◆ Landowner's management goals and objectives
- ◆ Specific stand descriptions based on field data from an examination of the property
- ◆ Concise management recommendations
- ◆ A detailed map

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Regarding Management Plans

On July 7, 2010, the Virginia Department of Forestry signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Virginia Tree Farm Committee and the Virginia Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The MOU is patterned after a national MOU between the USDA Forest Service, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the American Forest Foundation, sponsor of the American Tree Farm System.

The MOU recognizes that forest management plans prepared under any of the three programs will be mutually accepted and recognized as meeting the plan requirement for the other programs. (i.e., **Forest Stewardship Management Plan**, **NRCS Forestry Conservation Activity Plan (CAP#106)** and **Tree Farm Management Plan**). A plan prepared under any of these programs will meet the plan requirement for any of the others. However, a landowner has to express a desire to enter any of the programs or "opt in." Just having a plan does not automatically mean that they will be enrolled in another program.

This MOU will help improve efficiency, lead to greater participation in these programs, promote private forestry service providers and be beneficial to forest landowners, particularly with access to **forest certification** through the Tree Farm Program. This is the only practical certification program for small private forest owners. It will help them remain competitive in the marketplace.

Cross Program Participation

Here are several scenarios for participation in multiple programs:

- ◆ A landowner with a Forest Stewardship Plan or Conservation Activity Plan (CAP 106) and wants to be a Certified Tree Farmer:
 - The landowner requests a tree farm Inspector for Certified Tree Farmer status.
 - The tree farm inspector completes the nomination form, and reviews and approves the management plan.
 - Tree farm inspector sends the inspection form to the regional tree farm chair.
 - The regional tree farm chair sends the inspection form to the Virginia Tree Farm Committee.

- The Virginia Tree Farm Committee sends the inspection form to the National Tree Farm Committee for certification.
- ◆ A landowner that is a Certified Tree Farmer or landowner who has a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP 106) and wants to be in or have benefits afforded through the Forest Stewardship Program:
 - The VDOF deputy regional forester verifies the plan and map as equivalent to a Forest Stewardship Plan.
 - **Tree Farmers:** Landowner completes the Form 7.10 Forest Stewardship Program Application; VDOF area forester processes and records in IFRIS as a Stewardship Plan.
 - **Conservation Activity Plan (CAP 106) Landowners:** Due to a separate source of funding within USDA, the plan is not recorded in IFRIS as a stewardship accomplishment. The VDOF area forester can provide the landowner with a statement or letter that the plan is equivalent to a Forest Stewardship Plan for any programs that require a Forest Stewardship plan.
- ◆ A landowner with any of the three plans (Tree Farm, Forest Stewardship Plan or Conservation Activity Plan 106) that want to apply for a USDA cost-share program:
 - The landowner verifies their land eligibility through FSA and then completes the cost-share application.
 - The VDOF area forester reviews the management plan, examines the site and prepares a detailed Form 7.8 Cost-Share Plan or other practice/stand plan as needed.
 - The VDOF area forester indicates on cost-share ranking forms that a recommended practice is part of an overall management plan (Tree Farm, Forest Stewardship Plan or Conservation Activity Plan 106), which could improve their Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) score.
 - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) processes the cost share application for approval, if funding is available.

Field Data Collection and Developing Recommendations

Forest resource management planning is the foundation of the VDOF's landowner assistance program. VDOF's foresters are professionals, silviculturalists, scientists and resource practitioners. As professionals, VDOF foresters need to use and apply their knowledge and experience to assess current forest conditions and develop recommendations to achieve future resource goals. This is the core foundation of good forestry and good forest management.

In order to evaluate current forest conditions, VDOF foresters collect accurate and detailed data in a systematic and scientific manner. VDOF foresters will use their forestry tools to assemble, record and analyze a sufficient amount of data to formulate sound forest management recommendations. This information can then be saved if questions ever arise as to why certain forest management recommendations and decisions were made.

Data Needs

- ◆ The extent of data collected should be sufficient to meet the landowner needs and align with their objectives.
- ◆ Data collection shall be done in a systematic and scientific manner and in a level of detail to provide a basis for developing and implementing recommendations to meet objectives.
- ◆ Data is recorded in a consistent format that serves as a file record and that can be used by other foresters and resource professionals. Utilize the field data collection guidelines – Form 7.22 Stand Data Sheet or equivalent and Form 7.23 Stand Summary Sheet will help to achieve this consistency.
- ◆ Data is presented in an understandable manner for landowners in the body of the plan and on the Form 7.23 Stand Summary Sheet.

Data Collection Guidelines

- ◆ **Forest Type** – A category of forest defined by its vegetation and/or locality factors: *Common Forest Cover Types in Virginia from Forest Cover Types of the United States and Canada*, F. H. Eyre, Editor, Society of American Foresters, 1980.

- **Pine and Softwood Types** – By species or species mix, example Loblolly pine, shortleaf pine, eastern white pine, loblolly-shortleaf pine
- **Pine-Hardwood** – Pine species-primary, hardwood species-secondary
- **Upland Hardwood** –
 - If pure species – list by species (e.g., white oak, yellow poplar, oak-hickory)
 - If mixed species – by primary species (e.g., sugar maple-beech – yellow birch, other species mix)
- **Bottomland Hardwood** –
 - If pure – by species (e.g., water tupelo)
 - If mixed species – by primary species (e.g., willow oak-water oak, elm-ash-cottonwood)
- **Exotic Hardwoods** – List by species
- **Non-stocked**
- ◆ **Species** – Primary overstory and pertinent understory species by common name
- ◆ **Size** – DBH by two-inch diameter class and product class
- ◆ **Stand Age and History** –
 - For artificial regeneration – year of planting and current age
 - For natural stands – age to nearest five to 10 years, approximate year of previous harvests or major stand events (fire, storm, insect or disease event)
 - If more than one age class – indicate as closely as possible. Avoid categorizing stands as all-aged.
 - Utilize tools and physical resources including increment borer, stumps and other sources including aerial photographs, personal and local knowledge.
 - Be aware of actual versus effective age or the period of time since a tree was released (i.e., from a small core of narrow growth rings).
- ◆ **Tree Quality** – Describe tree form, straightness, limb angle, rot or defect, presence of injury or decline that affects wood, wildlife or aesthetic quality.
 - Consider these attributes in reference to landowner goals (e.g., many of the oaks are hollow and make excellent habitat for cavity-nesting wildlife if wildlife is a primary goal vs. many of the oaks are hollow and are of low timber quality if timber is a primary goal).
- ◆ **Stocking and Stand Density** –
 - For pre-commercial stands and plantations – number of trees per acre and stocking condition relative to desired conditions (non, under, well, overstocked)
 - For pole-sized stands or larger – basal area, number of merchantable stems per acre, and stocking condition relative to desired conditions
- ◆ **Growth Rate and Vigor** –
 - For pre-commercial stands and plantations – average height growth in feet per year
 - For merchantable stands – diameter growth in past 10 years in inches, predicted growth in inches or percentage in next 10 years
- ◆ **Site Quality and Soils** –
 - For merchantable stands – site index measurement of age and height of trees of representative trees and species.
 - Recommend base age 25 for loblolly and white pine plantations
 - Recommend base age 50 for hardwood stands, mixed stands, shortleaf pine
 - Site index curves are in the USFS Service Foresters Handbook.
 - Appropriate field observation soil sampling – can include sampling methods ranging from “kicking the dirt;” soil texture ribbon; depth of “A” Horizon; depth to drainage restriction, indicator plants and vegetation, hydric features. Utilize field tools (soil auger, soil probe).

- Record slope, aspect and position.
- Major soil series and highlight characteristics as they relate to growth of the target species including soil depth, drainage and productivity. Reference is USDA web soil survey.
- ◆ **Wildlife Habitat** – assessment of tree/plant size, condition, characteristics and configuration; water; other habitat attributes, and how they relate to current or target wildlife species.
- ◆ **Recreation/Aesthetics** – assessment of stand structure, orientation and attributes, and how that relates to current or potential use
- ◆ **Cultural Resources** – check for visual indications of cultural resources
 - Examples include structures, foundations or other stone work; depressions; ditches; stone piles; fences; unusual or exotic plant species; open-grown trees; wells; cemeteries, or artifacts.
 - If this is a primary objective, check Department of Historic Resources data and/or local printed data.
- ◆ **Threatened or Endangered Species** – For all plans, consult DCR Division of Natural Heritage and Department of Game and Inland Fisheries data search tools. The deputy regional forester will have login information for these sites. Look for evidence of these or the presence of suitable habitat or other species in the field, including actual observation, nests, feathers, flowers, etc. Follow or guide landowner to follow the flow diagram in Virginia Tech Extension Publication “Guide to Threatened and Endangered Species on Private Land in Virginia.
- ◆ **Wetlands** – Wetlands are transitional areas on the landscape between dry land and open water or streams, and often exhibit characteristics of both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. State and federal laws define “State waters” as *“all water, on the surface and under the ground, wholly or partially within or bordering the Commonwealth or within its jurisdiction, including wetlands.”* Further, “wetlands” are defined as *“those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas.”*
 - VDOF foresters are not trained wetlands delineators. However, based on the above definition, we can generally determine if land might be considered wetlands. It is important in our plans to use the word “may” when referring to wetlands and to refer landowners to the correct agency if they plan activities other than normal forestry operations in or near wetlands.

Parcel Designation

Parcel designation is largely a matter of professional judgment. Here are some guidelines:

- ◆ Separate younger plantations (sub-merchantable) by year of establishment, and, if necessary, by noticeable differences in character or condition (stocking, density, free to grow status, stand treatments).
- ◆ Separate merchantable plantations that have different characteristics or which will have different desired outcomes or treatments.
 - Consider combining similar merchantable plantations that may have different years of establishment, but have similar stand attributes, desired outcomes or treatments.
- ◆ For natural stands, separate stands that have sufficient variation in species, size, history, condition or age (suggest a difference of more than 20 percent of rotation length).
 - Consider combining similar natural stands that will be managed as a unit or in similar fashion. Note differences in stand conditions in stand description.

Sampling Intensity Guidelines and Tips

VDOF does not provide stand volume inventory information. VDOF should gather stand attribute data that provides a baseline for development of silviculturally-sound recommendations. Foresters should collect adequate data to substantiate and support the recommendations that are made.

- ◆ **New and Pre-Commercial Plantations** –

- **Pine** – Reinspect at the end of the first growing season as outlined in the instructions for Form 7.13 Pine Survival/Reproduction Field tally Sheet *{See Procedure 7-5 for additional detail}*. In many cases, this information will already be on file or available. If so, a quick verification with a few 1/100th or 1/50th acre plots may be all that is necessary. However, be aware of conditions that may have affected the stand in the early years since sampling, like drought, voles, deer, beaver, wildfire, hardwood or grass competition.
- **Hardwood Plantations** – Reinspect at the end of the second growing season as outlined in the instructions for Form 084 Hardwood Reinspection Field Tally Sheet *{See Procedure 7-5 for additional detail}*. Be aware of potential changes in time since sampling, particularly recruitment of naturals or invasive species and animal predation.
- ◆ **Pre-Commercial Natural Stands** –
 - Use imagery, topographic maps and other stand records as a guide for uniformity. Dense conditions can make sampling in these stands challenging. Utilize a small-plot radius 1/1000th, 1/100th, 1/50th, as stand conditions allow. If possible, run transects as needed across topographic features, or if necessary, access the stand through trails or adjacent stands, periodically entering the stand a sufficient distance to avoid edge effects. Number of plots will depend upon stand uniformity. Be aware of the effect of lone or groups of residual trees from the previous stand, which may skew data.
- ◆ **Merchantable Stands** –
 - Use imagery and maps to gauge stand uniformity. Intensity of sampling will depend upon this, the complexity of the stand and the landowner’s objectives for future stands. In the office, make a projected stand sampling map with general random plot locations. Be sure and visit each stand or portion of stand, bearing in mind changes in topography and sites. Generally, older, open stands and plantations allow easier sight and determination of uniformity.
 - In the field, if plots have a high degree of variability, increase plot density. Different stand attributes may call for different levels of sampling intensity. For instance, a stand may be of uniform age, but vary in stocking, so age sampling would not be needed on each plot, but density sampling would.
 - In mixed stands that contain loblolly and white pine that may be harvested, take sufficient plots to determine if these species constitute 25 percent of the stand and are 10 acres and larger and subject to the Seed Tree Law *{See Procedure 7-3 Rural Forestry Laws for additional detail}*.
 - Collect adequate data to substantiate the stand recommendation.

Developing Recommendations

A stand recommendation:

- ◆ Is based on analysis of field data
- ◆ Is grounded in silviculture
- ◆ Is designed to meet landowner objectives
- ◆ Is practical and realistic to apply (current absence of contractors should not preclude making a recommendation)
- ◆ Leads to desired future stand conditions

The forester is expected to use a combination of professional education and training, experience, supervisor input, reference materials and contractor and consultant input to analyze and develop recommendations.

The standard format for stand recommendations includes:

- ◆ Action(s) recommended
- ◆ Summary of relevant data to support the recommendation
- ◆ Steps to implement recommendation
- ◆ Desired outcome
- ◆ Cost-share programs available for recommendations, if applicable

There may be alternatives or more than one option to achieve the landowner objective. The goal is to make the landowner aware of alternatives if the first recommended action is not desirable to the landowner or cannot be implemented. The alternatives do not need to be described in considerable detail, but the relative benefits or

drawbacks to the alternatives should be mentioned. The landowner should always be encouraged to contact their forester if they have questions or want more information.

All steps should contain sufficient detail and clarity for the landowner, consulting forester or contractor to implement the recommendation. This includes:

- ◆ Existing and target stand stocking and tree density
- ◆ Methods or tools
- ◆ Timing of stand treatments
- ◆ If needed, recommendations for herbicide use (including potential herbicides, rates and application timing)
- ◆ Any immediate follow-up needed within the term of the plan
- ◆ Comments on alternatives, if appropriate

Stand Recommendation Notes and Tips

- ◆ For efficiency, generalized language could be developed for stands with similar characteristics and customized with specific stand data (e.g., first thinning recommendation for pine; clearcut of mature stand, pre-commercial thinning.)
- ◆ Language and sentence structure should be clear and understandable for the intended reader.

Tract Plans

Tract plans refer to comprehensive, forest management plans that are developed for an entire, contiguous ownership. These plans generally divide the forests resources into specific parcels or stands that have unique characteristics and management recommendations. Other features like lakes, ponds, agriculture fields, etc. are also included in tract plans.

Forest Stewardship Management Plans (FSMP)

The Forest Stewardship Program was developed by the USDA Forest Service in 1990 and adopted by the VDOF; therefore, Forest Stewardship Management Plans must follow the national guidelines established by the USDA Forest Service. Forest Stewardship Management Plans will be developed to cover recommended management activities to be implemented over a 10-year time period and should be revised every 10-years depending on the landowner's management progress.

The Forest Stewardship Management Plan is equivalent to the Forestry Conservation Activity Plan #106 and the Tree Farm Plan.

Landowner Eligibility and Signup

Who Forest Stewardship Management Plans Are For

Forest Stewardship Management Plans will be offered to all non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners we serve; a stewardship plan is appropriate in most cases. It can be a:

- ◆ Multiple-use plan for one timber type where timber management is the primary objective
- ◆ Plan for multiple timber types with objectives other than timber
- ◆ Must be a minimum of 10-forested acres

Informing Landowners of the Forest Stewardship Program

Some clients may not want a FSMP or are not willing to sign any type of government agreement. If the landowner is only interested in a single resource, the forester may provide verbal recommendations with a follow-up letter and other information; a stand plan; a land use plan; a pre-harvest plan or provide a list of local forestry consultants who can provide the service. However, the FSMP will be offered as the preferred plan.

Who Prepares Forest Stewardship Management Plans

- ◆ Within VDOF, only foresters will complete FSMPs.

- ◆ When the forester receives more requests than he or she can service in six months, additional requests will be referred to consulting foresters, especially larger tracts.
- ◆ Consulting and industry foresters who have received forest stewardship management planning instruction through statewide training or one-on-one training by the regional staff may prepare Forest Stewardship Management Plans.

Application

- ◆ Landowners who wish to have a FSMP developed for their property by a VDOF forester must submit a signed, Form 7.10 Virginia Forest Stewardship Program Application.
- ◆ VDOF staff must inform landowners that there is a \$1.50 per acre fee for plans with a minimum charge of \$200 per plan and that by signing the application Form 7.10, they agree to the service conditions stated on the form. Therefore, the Form 7.1 Forest Management Services Agreement, is not needed.
- ◆ If a landowner wishes to add additional acres that adjoin the original plan acres and the plan is less than 10 years old, the additional acres can be added to the plan as an addendum and the landowner will be charged only the \$1.50 per acre for the additional acres with no minimum charge. If the plan is more than 10 years old, the entire plan should be revised and the additional acres incorporated into the plan under the regular rate schedule. The landowner must still complete the Form 7.10 on to be used as the "Service Agreement."

Plan Development

Determining the Tract Boundary for Separate Plans

- ◆ The FSMP will cover all forested and non-forested land that are planned to be planted with trees within two years of the plan completion date or that have specific natural resource recommendations in the Stewardship Plan within the contiguous property boundary of the stewardship applicant.
- ◆ It is not necessary to have all of a landowner's other property in the county included in a single plan.

When to Obtain Recommendations from Other Resource Professionals

This decision must be based on the landowner's objectives and the conditions found on the property relative to the expertise of the forester in providing necessary recommendations. Other resource professionals will be offered the opportunity to visit the tract or review the plan when a non-forestry activity is a primary objective. If there is no specific non-forest resource objective and the forester feels that he or she can make the management recommendations with no problem, he or she may consult other resource professionals at their discretion. The goal is to have an adequate level of input into the preparation of a plan.

Plan Format and Template

The FSMP format is at the discretion of the forester; however, a FSMP template has been developed by the Forest Resource Management Branch that provides a concise plan format and includes all the resource elements that must be considered. VDOF foresters are encouraged to use the template when it fits the needs of the landowner. An example FSMP is included in the Forest Stewardship Management Plan notebook reference package.

Resource Elements to Be Considered

The plan preparer will consider, describe and evaluate plan elements and their importance to the ownership when they are present, but these elements may be removed from the plan if not applicable. **The Threatened & Endangered Species element is required and must be addressed in every plan.**

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ◆ Soil and Water | ◆ Fire |
| ◆ Biological Diversity | ◆ Threatened and endangered species |
| ◆ Range | ◆ Forest health and invasive species |
| ◆ Agroforestry | ◆ Aesthetic quality and desired Timber species |
| ◆ Recreation | ◆ Archeological, cultural and historic site |
| ◆ Wood and fiber production | ◆ Conservation-based estate planning / legacy planning information |
| ◆ Fish and wildlife habitat | |

- ◆ Wetlands
- ◆ Carbon Sequestration and Climate Resilience
- ◆ Forests of Recognized Importance

It is important to provide a comprehensive plan to the landowner that may include wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, BMP information and management recommendations. There are many ways to cover multiple-use for a tract; the important point is that they be covered specifically for the tract. For a 10-acre tract on the top of a mountain or a swamp, it may be appropriate to say “Due to the difficult accessibility, recreational opportunities are limited, and no water quality problems exist.”

The primary landowner objective may be to “**manage the timber**” but this does not relieve us of the responsibility to address fringe benefits. We must educate the landowners of the advantages of forest management to wildlife and use wildlife habitat improvement to sell forest management.

The information provided in the appendix will be referenced in the FSMP to further explain recommendations. This can shorten the written portion of the plan by eliminating duplicate information. Additional sheets may be added and spaces are provided in the table of contents to include additional topics.

Ten-Year Recommended Schedule of Management Activities

A 10-year recommended schedule of management activities table should be included with each plan. It is important to be as concise as possible, to include potential cost-share programs that may be available and what the anticipated future stand conditions will be if the activity is implemented. There is a sample table toward the end of the Forest Stewardship Management Plan template.

Certification

Forest Stewardship Certification Criteria

Landowners who make *substantial* accomplishments in implementing their management recommendations and reaching their goals will be recognized as “**Certified Forest Stewards**” and publicly recognized for their accomplishments. All landowners enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program will become recipients of various mailings on topics of interest and should remain in close contact with resource professionals so that their accomplishments can be maintained.

Eligibility

To be eligible for certification as a “**Certified Forest Steward**”, properties must be actively managed with a multiple-use forest management approach based upon the landowner’s priorities and objectives. This involves performing management activities which enhance the following resource areas:

- ◆ Wood and Fiber production
- ◆ Aesthetics
- ◆ Soil and Water Conservation
- ◆ Agroforestry
- ◆ Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- ◆ Invasive Plant Species Control
- ◆ Recreation
- ◆ Historic and Cultural Resources

It is important to note that multiple-use benefits do not have to be completed on every acre. Some areas may provide only one benefit, while other areas may provide many uses. When the property is considered as a whole, however, the landowner must demonstrate active management for at least two of the above-mentioned resources. In addition to active management, passive management within forested wetlands and streamside management zones (SMZ) will be viewed as good overall management and worth recognizing during the certification process.

Stewardship certification is a subjective decision recommended by the local VDOF forester, forestry consultant or other forestry professional, and made by the deputy regional forester, or the state stewardship coordinator. As a rule of thumb, landowners who have practiced no previous active management before entering the program may need one to three years to bring their properties up to program standards. However, landowners should not have to wait for certification until they have performed all practices described in their Forest Stewardship Management Plans.

Nomination

Any consulting, industrial or VDOF forester, or other natural resource professional that is assisting the landowner in carrying out the recommendations in his or her FSMP may nominate the landowner using the Form 7.11 Forest Stewardship Program Certification Inspection Record.

Inspection Procedure

Agency representatives, landowners or consultants may request a certification inspection for a participating property by contacting the VDOF forester or regional stewardship coordinator. The certification inspection team will consist of the deputy regional forester, the VDOF forester and any other resource professional that had input into the plan. The landowner should also be present, if possible. If the evaluation team agrees that the landowner's property meets the certification criteria, the forester will send the completed Form 7.11 Stewardship Certification Inspection Record along with the map, identifying where the property is located, to the Forest Resource Management Branch, (FRMB).

Award

In recognition of certification as a Forest Steward, the landowner receives a letter of acknowledgment and congratulations for his achievement from the state forester. The nominating forester schedules an appropriate recognition event for presentation of a special, laser-engraved, walnut Stewardship plaque and a "Stewardship Forest" sign for placement on the forest property. The Forest Resource Management Branch (FRMB) will order the plaque and sign and notify the forester when it has arrived at HQ. The forester will coordinate with the FRMB to pick up the plaque and sign. This special landowner recognition is publicized as deemed appropriate through local and statewide media and agency/organization information newsletters.

Follow-Up Reinspection

This certification program is ongoing and includes periodic revisits by professional foresters and other natural resource specialists to keep in touch with the landowner's progress and to be available for future stewardship management activities. After a minimum of ten years, the forester will revisit the tract where a FSMP was completed and reevaluate the FSMP, the tract and the landowner's progress to ensure that the landowner is continuing to practice good resource management.

Minimum Standards and Basic Guidelines for Certification

These minimum standards and basic guidelines are designed to help the natural resource manager or specialist with his involvement in the Forest Stewardship Program. The natural resource professional should use these criteria as a measure of the landowner's progress and accomplishments towards Stewardship Forest Certification. To use the criteria, the natural resource professional must know the landowner's resource management objectives.

To qualify for Stewardship Forest Certification, a landowner must:

- ◆ Manage one of his resources intensively as his or her primary management objective.
- ◆ Designate at least one secondary resource management objective.

With the landowner's objectives known, the natural resource professional can refer to the appropriate minimum standards and basic guidelines in determining whether the property and landowner should be certified. Though a landowner may do much more than the criteria listed, these are minimum standards that must be done to qualify. In addition, a special category of "Preliminary Standard Accomplishments" is listed. Regardless of a landowner's resource management objectives, he must meet all of these criteria to qualify for certification.

Preliminary Standard Accomplishments

- ◆ Protection from wildfire, insects and disease
- ◆ Salvage of damaged timber, unless it interferes with primary and secondary resource management objectives
- ◆ Definite plans to regenerate all lands before final harvest, unless there is a land-use change
- ◆ Primary and secondary resources managed in a way least damaging to other resource values
- ◆ Water quality maintained and erosion minimized by following BMPs

- ◆ Protection of natural heritage resources including unique plant communities, important wildlife habitat, endangered species habitat, and archaeological and historical resources

Timber Production

Primary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Active protection of stand from wildfire, insects and disease by:
 - Reducing wildfire hazard;
 - Salvaging all damaged timber in a timely manner, and
 - Managing stand in a manner that reduces insect or disease hazard.
- ◆ Planned regeneration occurring soon after final harvest
- ◆ Timber harvested before biological maturity of the stand
- ◆ Stands thinned as needed to maintain vigor
- ◆ Size and shape of harvested areas compatible with other objectives
- ◆ Tree species favored and managed that are best adapted to specific sites
- ◆ Non-merchantable trees controlled as compatible with other objectives
- ◆ Stands managed toward achieving full stocking
- ◆ Livestock grazing limited to levels compatible with the plan
- ◆ Forestry BMPS implemented where appropriate

Secondary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Salvage of damaged timber, unless it interferes with the primary objective
- ◆ Planned regeneration occurring in a timely manner after final harvest
- ◆ Stands thinned as needed to maintain vigor
- ◆ Trees which may reach biological maturity, but harvested before decline becomes evident in the stand
- ◆ Tree species favored and managed that are best adapted to specific sites, unless it interferes with other objectives
- ◆ Non-merchantable trees managed, unless it interferes with other objectives
- ◆ Adequate stocking maintained in stands compatible with other objectives and past history
- ◆ Size and shape of harvested areas compatible with other objectives
- ◆ Forestry BMPS implemented where appropriate

Wildlife

Primary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Feature species identified and wildlife management plan followed
- ◆ Enough suitable habitat deliberately created, maintained and improved to support fairly dense populations of desired species
- ◆ Wildlife populations kept from becoming so dense they are damaging their own habitat or the habitats of other species
- ◆ Other resources managed to enhance the habitat of featured wildlife species

Secondary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Desired species identified and wildlife management plan followed

- ◆ Some habitat created, maintained and retained for desired species consistent with primary objective
- ◆ Wildlife populations kept from becoming so dense they are damaging their own habitat or the habitats of other species
- ◆ Other resources managed in ways that supply some habitat needs of desired wildlife species, considering the property as a whole

Environmental and Recreation

Primary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Develop management plan to protect, enhance, utilize or restore identified natural heritage historic resources
- ◆ Recreational use specified and management plan followed
- ◆ Recreational opportunities, such as picnic areas, campsites, riding or walking trails, or boat docks, etc., must be actively maintained, retained and created
- ◆ Litter control
- ◆ Actual recreational use of property
- ◆ Environmental impact of recreational activities minimized
- ◆ Area with hunting as recreational use must show evidence of developing hunting opportunities beyond wildlife management
- ◆ Significant accomplishments toward maintaining or enhancing aesthetics must be shown

Secondary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Develop management plan to protect, enhance, utilize or restore identified natural heritage and historic resources
- ◆ Recreational use specified and management plan followed
- ◆ Recreational opportunities maintained, retained and created as compatible with primary objective
- ◆ Litter controlled in recreational activities
- ◆ Environmental impact of recreational activities minimized
- ◆ Areas with hunting as recreation use must show evidence of developing hunting opportunities beyond wildlife such as hunting blinds, camping areas, etc.
- ◆ Some accomplishments toward maintaining or enhancing aesthetics must be shown. Examples include the following:
 - Retaining trees with good fall colors
 - Planting or maintaining flowering trees, shrubs and wildflowers
 - Identifying and maintaining scenic overlooks, unique geological features
 - Improving access to scenic areas

Soil and Water

Primary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Conduct all land management activities on both forest and agricultural lands in accordance with Best Management Practices (BMPs) or field office technical guide (NRCS - eFOTG).
- ◆ Significant accomplishments towards conserving soil and enhancing water quality must be shown. Additional examples include the following:
 - Completing projects suitable for BMP demonstration areas
 - Rehabilitating critical areas and stabilizing old roads
 - Maintaining streamside management zones and filter strips

- Manage wetlands so as to maintain or improve their functions

Secondary Objective Criteria

- ◆ Accomplishment must be shown toward conserving soil and enhancing water quality. Examples include the following:
 - Maintaining cover on highly-erodible lands
 - Use of BMPs on forestry and other land management practices

Monitoring

Monitoring Forest Stewardship Plan Implementation

- ◆ Successful implementation of landowner Forest Stewardship Management Plans, and thus sustainable forestry in practice, provides the best indication that the program is achieving its primary purpose of encouraging the long-term stewardship of non-industrial private forestlands.
- ◆ The USDA Forest Service will use the Stewardship Mapping and Reporting Tool (SMART) to generate a plan-monitoring list each year for Virginia.
- ◆ The state stewardship coordinator will use a random number generator to assist in selecting additional tracts to the SMART generated list.
- ◆ Selected properties will be visited and assessed by at least two of the following resource professionals:
 - VDOF area forester
 - Senior area forester
 - Deputy regional forester
 - Forest Resource Management Branch staff member
 - Other qualified resource management professionals
- ◆ A visit to the property will indicate whether the property is being managed sustainably as defined by the Forest Stewardship Management Plan.
- ◆ The inspection team will complete the Form 7.24 Forest Stewardship Program Monitoring Report as a method of documenting the visit and their decision of whether or not the landowner is following their Forest Stewardship Management Plan. Once the form is completed, an electronic copy of the form will be sent to the state stewardship coordinator and the original copy retained in the landowner's file.

State-Owned Land Plans

State forested lands typically under the VDOF responsibility consist of most any Commonwealth-owned lands except for those currently owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) or VDOF lands. VDOF can develop plans for DCR and DGIF upon request, through a specific agreement. *{See Policy and Procedure 7-6 State-Owned Lands Program for additional information.}*

Land-Use Plans

Land-use plans are concise, one- to two-page plans with a map that includes brief information about the present forest stand, the soils and general forest management recommendations. These plans can be used to meet county requirements for use value taxation and covers all forested acres on a contiguous tract. The VDOF will communicate with landowners regarding the benefits of comprehensive forest management plans and the options for having one prepared. The VDOF will encourage landowners to use private foresters for land-use plans, but VDOF does offer this service if specifically requested.

A field visit is required unless the forester has adequate current knowledge of the property. The landowner requesting a land-use plan must sign a Form 7.1 Forest Management Service Agreement and submit it to the VDOF and the current VDOF charge per plan will apply. The plan will cover all forested acres on a contiguous tract. The forester will communicate with the owner to determine their specific needs and describe services available from VDOF and the timeframe that the landowner should expect the plan to be completed, which is based on the forester's workload.

Land-use plans do not contain sufficient detail to qualify for Tree Farm status or cost-share programs. Land-use plans are not equivalent to Forest Stewardship Management Plans or NRCS Conservation Activity Plan #106.

Plan Development

Land-use plans should include the following basic information:

- ◆ Tract description and location
- ◆ Landowner's management objective(s)
- ◆ General forest description (specific stand descriptions not required), including
 - Acres
 - Forest types
 - Soils (indicating general productivity categories (Poor, Average, Excellent))
 - Age
 - Size
 - Stocking (areas designated as forests meet minimum tree stocking criteria)
 - Other important information (i.e., invasive plants, cemetery or other historic resources, etc.)
- ◆ General management recommendations
- ◆ Map
- ◆ General information concerning use of BMPs, forest health, forest protection and fire, and sources of additional assistance should also be included with each plan. This information can be included in paragraph form at the end of the plan. There is a VDOF Land-use plan template available for these plans.

Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) #106

These multi-resource management plans follow the guidelines established by the Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) and are written by certified Technical Service Providers (TSP). VDOF foresters **DO NOT** develop Conservation Activity Plans.

There is cost-share funding available for developing these plans under the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Landowners must apply for these funds at their local NRCS Service Center and funding is not guaranteed.

NRCS has established strict standards regarding landowner information (i.e., Personal Identifiable Information (PII)). VDOF area foresters and NRCS technical service providers will adhere to the signed Certification of NRCS Conservation Cooperator Agreement regarding landowner information security.

Plan Development and Approval

Once the landowner is approved for funding, they will select a TSP and complete Form 7.9 NCRS Conservation Activity Plan (CAP #106) Application. When the TSP completes the plan, they must submit it to the respective deputy regional forester (DRF) for review and approval. The DRF will review the plan based on the CAP#106 Component Check-off List. If revisions are necessary, the DRF will request that the TSP make the changes and resubmit the plan. Once the plan meets all of the requirements, the DRF will approve the plan, in writing, via an email or specific approval letter to the TSP. The TSP will submit the plan to the landowner along with their invoice and approval letter. The landowner will submit the plan and approval to the NRCS for cost-share payment *{See the CAP #106 Process List for additional information.}*

The DRF will make a copy of the plan and send it to the respective VDOF forester for creating the tract, if needed, recording the accomplishment and digitizing the plan map in IFRIS.

The Conservation Activity Plan #106 is an equivalent plan to the Forest Stewardship Plan and the Tree Farm Plan.

Tree Farm Plans

- ◆ These multi-resource management plans follow the standards established by the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and the American Forest Foundation (AFF), Standards of Sustainability 2020-2025, and are developed by

certified Tree Farm Inspectors. The plan is the first step toward the landowner's eligibility to be certified by the Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification.

- ◆ The ATFS certification program is internationally endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC™).

Plan Development

- ◆ The Tree Farm Plan is an equivalent plan to the Forest Stewardship Plan and the NRCS Conservation Activity Plan #106. Even though the majority of VDOF foresters are certified Tree Farm Inspectors and are qualified to prepare Tree Farm plans, VDOF Foresters will promote and develop Forest Stewardship Management Plans only. The landowner can still be in the Tree Farm Program with the Forest Stewardship Management Plan.
- ◆ A certified Tree Farm Inspector can assist the landowner in joining the American Tree Farm System by helping them complete the ATFS Form 004 Tree Farm Inspection Record. Once ATFS Form 004 and the plan are complete, the form will be sent to the regional tree farm inspector for review, and signature then sent to the Virginia Tree Farm Committee and they will send it to the National Tree Farm Committee.
- ◆ See American Tree Farm Program's Website (<https://www.treefarmssystem.org/virginia>) for additional information.

PRACTICE/STAND PLANS

Alternate Management Plans (AMP)

Landowners who harvest timberland subject to the Seed Tree Law and who choose to maintain the land in forest cover are required under the law, in lieu of leaving the required number of seed trees, to follow a reforestation plan meeting VDOF approval. The VDOF forester is responsible for enforcement of the Seed Tree Law within his/her jurisdiction, execution of AMPs and completion of the reforestation.

Plan Development

The area forester will complete the Form 7.6 Alternate Management Plan to provide the landowner with the information needed to reforest the tract in a timely and acceptable manner. Additional pages may be added to the report if the Form 7.6 does not provide adequate room for the forester's observations and recommendations.

Alternate management plans should include the following basic information:

- ◆ Landowner contact information
- ◆ Management objective and tract location
- ◆ Current site conditions
- ◆ Specific management practice recommendations
- ◆ Detailed map
 - Area subject to the AMP designated on a map
 - AMP acreage
 - Name and distance to the nearest community
 - Access roads and nearest state road to the property

Plan Implementation

Upon receipt of approved Form 7.6 Alternate Management Plan, the AMP may proceed.

Reinspection

At the end of the first growing season following reforestation, the parcel will be inspected to determine the number of free-to-grow trees per acre of the designated species *{See Policy and Procedure 7-4 Rural Forestry Technical Procedures – Pine Free-to-Grow Status}*. It is intended that the VDOF forester, when evaluating a new plantation in terms of meeting

AMP requirements of 250 free-to-grow seedlings for loblolly or 200 free-to-grow for white pine, will be guided by these classifications. It is suggested that if the tally of seedlings sampled reveals at least 250 (loblolly), 200 (white pine) seedlings per acre in Class 1, 2 and half of Class 3, the landowner may be released from the AMP. Likewise, a tally of seedlings in Classes 3, 4 and 2 where hardwoods are likely to persist reveals the extent to which a plantation needs release {See Policy and Procedure 7.4 Rural Forestry Technical Procedures}.

Amendment

If the closing deadline is not met, the AMP may be extended using Form 3.11 Cost-Share/AMP Project Amendment. This form may also be used to change the recommendation in the original AMP.

If the AMP is completed in stages, it may 1) be held at the VDOF field office until the entire area is completed and the entire plan closed at one time, or 2) it may be closed in part as various sections of land are satisfactorily reforested. If closed a section at a time, a map must accompany the closing letter showing which area(s) has been completed. A copy of this map will also accompany the letter sent to the Regional Office.

Change of Ownership

If land changes ownership and the new owner agrees to assume responsibility for the AMP, a Form 7.7 Alternate Management Plan Supplement must be completed and signed by all parties. A signed copy will be provided to the past landowner, the current landowner and a copy retained in the VDOF landowner's file.

Blanket Alternate Management Plans

Companies who routinely harvest and reforest their own timberlands, which fall under the Seed Tree Law's jurisdiction, may request a blanket AMP from the VDOF. If granted, this blanket AMP will cover all of the company's timberlands and will satisfy the Seed Tree Law's legal requirements.

VDOF requires companies requesting a blanket AMP to employ a professional forester on staff who will be responsible for AMP administration. For any company not meeting this requirement, the blanket AMP will either be terminated or not granted by the state forester.

Sale of land under a blanket AMP may result in misunderstandings by purchasers with regard to their responsibility. A company holding a blanket AMP must be fully responsible for the reforestation of harvested tracts subject to the Seed Tree Law. The transfer of this obligation must be by a Form 7.6 Alternate Management Plan prepared for the new owner and signed by the state forester.

Cost-Share/Practice/Stand Plans

- ◆ A management plan for a single stand or area of a tract, particular management concern or landowner area of interest. These management plans provide the landowner with the management steps necessary to implement a single project on their property. They are developed for single stands (i.e., a harvested site for reforestation, a pine stand for thinning, a young hardwood stand for timber stand improvement, or an open field for afforestation).
- ◆ The USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) has established strict standards regarding landowner information (Personal Identifiable Information (PII)). VDOF area foresters and NRCS technical service providers will adhere to the signed Certification of NRCS Conservation Cooperator Agreement regarding landowner information security.

Plan Development

- ◆ Form 7.8 Cost-share Plan is a one page, plan template that can be used to develop these plans and is most often used for projects under a state or federal cost-share program. However, this plan format may not provide the plan preparer with enough space to fully explain the detailed steps necessary to complete the project. If this is the case, a supplemental page or pages can be attached to the Form 7.8 Cost-Share Plan or an entirely different plan format should be used.

Cost-Share/Practice/Stand plans should include the following information:

- ◆ Landowner contact information

- ◆ Management objective and tract location
- ◆ Current site conditions
- ◆ Specific management practice recommendations
- ◆ Detailed map

- ◆ Reforestation of Timberland Programs (RT) Application (IFRIS generated), is also considered a cost-share plan and does not need an additional plan unless more management practice recommendation detail is needed.

- ◆ A copy of the plan and map must be provided to the state or federal agency who administers the program.

Pre-Harvest Best Management Practices (BMP) Plans

- ◆ A pre-harvest BMP plan contains a series of action steps that will help the landowner and logging contractor minimize the potential impact to soil and water quality when conducting a timber harvesting operation and keep them in compliance with applicable water quality laws.

Plan Development

- ◆ VDOF field staff can develop these pre-harvest BMP plans, while loggers or logging managers generally prepare the actual harvest plan. Pre-harvest BMP plans are based on standards in the BMP Technical Manual and will identify recommended streamside management zones, as well as potential problem areas such as fragile soils or steep slopes, that may require special treatment during the harvesting operation. The VDOF forester, technician or water quality engineer will begin by reviewing topographic and aerial photographs of the tract and identifying potential haul road and skid trail locations. These potential roads and trails should be verified, on-the-ground, before the plan is finalized.

- ◆ The Pre-harvest BMP Plan should include the following basic information:
 - Landowner and tract information
 - Landowner's management objectives
 - Basic soils information, including sensitive areas
 - Potential haul road, skid trail, stream crossing and logging deck recommendations
 - Additional resources and information for stream crossing structure design and installation
 - Local VDOF staff contact information for additional information or clarification
 - Detailed topographic map identifying:
 - Harvest boundary location
 - Sensitive areas
 - Recommended haul road, skid trail, stream crossing and logging deck locations

- ◆ The Pre-Harvest BMP Plan Template can be used to develop this plan and it is located on the VDOF intranet under the Forms & Templates page.

- ◆ A copy of the plan and map will be provided to the landowner, the logging contractor and the VDOF landowner's case file.

Pre-Harvest Best Management Practices (BMP) Plans on VDOF Open Space Easements

- ◆ VDOF Easements require landowners to notify VDOF of their plans to harvest and to complete a Pre-Harvest BMP Plan at least 30 days prior to the harvest.

- ◆ Pre-Harvest BMP Plans on VDOF Easements should include all the basic information of a non-easement plan but should also clearly note any relevant restrictions imposed by the Easement such as Habitat Protection Areas, Cultural Protection Areas, and Streamside Management Zones.

- ◆ Pre-Harvest BMP Plans on VDOF Easement properties should use the ***Pre-Harvest Plan for Easement Properties*** template, located on the intranet.

- ◆ All Pre-Harvest BMP Plans written for VDOF easement properties must be submitted to the Forestland Conservation Coordinator and the Regional Water Quality Engineer for approval.

- ◆ Additionally a copy of the plan and map will be saved to the VDOF Easement case file.

AUTHORITY

This policy and procedure is issued by the Virginia state forester.

INTERPRETATION

The director of forest resource management and deputy state forester is responsible for the interpretation of this policy and procedure.

APPROVAL

I certify that this policy and procedure is approved and ready for publication.

Todd Groh

Forest Resource Management Program Coordinator Name (Print)

Forest Resource Management Program Coordinator Signature

Dean Cumbia

Director of Forest Resource Management Name (Print)

Director of Forest Resource Management Signature

Ed Zimmer

Deputy State Forester Name (Print)

Deputy State Forester Signature