Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program

—natural resource management for Mississippi landowners
MISSISSIPPI
FOREST STEWARDSHIP
PROGRAM

— natural resource management for Mississippi landowners

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INTRODUCTION
The Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program promotes the active and informed participation of private, nonindustrial forest landowners in the management and use of all natural resources in their care. This program has been established on the concept that forest landowners can receive the best in total resource management by combining quality natural resource planning with sound management principles.

Landowners participating in the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program can enjoy the many benefits derived from a well-managed forest while knowing future generations will appreciate a legacy built on the stewardship ethic.

This document, or plan, provides the framework for how the Forest Stewardship Program is conducted in Mississippi. Primary components of this plan include the establishment and operation of state and district level Forest Stewardship committees, development and implementation of local Forest Stewardship Plans, and the certification and recognition of landowners participating in the program.

BACKGROUND ON FOREST STEWARDSHIP
The Forest Stewardship Program was initiated in 1991 as a component of the 1990 Farm Bill. The USDA Forest Service, through the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act, provides funding to state forestry agencies for implementing a program with the following stewardship objectives:

- To help private forest landowners more actively manage their forestland and related resources.
- To maintain these lands in a productive and healthy condition for present and future owners.
- To increase the economic and environmental benefits of these lands.

The Mississippi Forestry Commission, National Association of State Foresters, and USDA Forest Service fully endorse the Stewardship Program and philosophy.

MISSISSIPPI’S FOREST RESOURCES AND BENEFITS
Mississippi is blessed with diverse and abundant natural resources. From the Gulf Coast Flatwoods to the Upper Coastal Plains, forest resources abound in Mississippi. Forest resources represent the state’s largest single land use, covering more than 19.8 million acres. Sixty-four percent of the state’s total land area is forestland.

Private, nonindustrial landowners make up the largest forest ownership class in Mississippi, owning 70% of the state’s forestland. Other ownership classes are forest industry (12%), federal (16%), and state/local government (2%).

Every citizen of the state is affected in some capacity by the forest resource. Annually, forestry ranks between the top two agricultural products produced in the state. In addition, Mississippi’s forests provide other benefits such as habitat for game and non-game wildlife species, soil protection, water quality enhancement, and vast recreational and education opportunities.
Forestry and Forest Production
Forestry and the forest products industry are big business in Mississippi. Over one billion dollars’ worth of forest products are harvested from Mississippi’s forest lands annually and delivered to mills and other manufacturing plants. Total industry output exceeds $11 billion each year. Forestry and the forest products industry account for 10 percent of all jobs in Mississippi, approximately 125,000 jobs. Average income for forestry and forest products jobs exceeds the average wage in Mississippi by $4,042.00.

Water Quality
The forestlands of Mississippi provide protection to over 12,000 miles of streams, rivers, lakes, and associated wetlands. These areas play a vital role in the overall health of Mississippi’s forest ecosystem. Resource professionals are aware and concerned with the potential effects forest management may have on water quality. The maintenance or improvement of Mississippi’s water is inherent in the development of all Forest Stewardship management plans.

Wildlife/Recreation
Wildlife in Mississippi is both abundant and diverse. Over a million Mississippi residents 16 years of age and older fish, hunt, or engage in non-consumptive activities such as bird watching, feeding wildlife, photographing wildlife, hiking, camping, or boating. Almost a billion dollars a year are spent on wildlife-associated recreation by Mississippians.

Soil Conservation
Mississippi’s soils are well suited for the production of timber and forest products. Forty-two percent of the commercial forestland in Mississippi is capable of producing over 120 cubic feet of wood volume per acre annually. Another 40 percent is capable of producing over 85 cubic feet per acre per year. Nationwide, only 23 percent of commercial forestland is capable of producing over 85 cubic feet per acre per year. These productive soils must be protected in order to provide valuable resources for future generations.

Air Quality
With the increasing population and industrial growth of today, air quality has become a universal issue. The increase of pollutants in the atmosphere has begun to impact health in all areas of the world. Through photosynthesis, trees remove pollutants from the atmosphere, store carbon, and in turn produce oxygen. The Forest Stewardship Program encourages timely reforestation and management of the forest resources, which in turn fosters improved air quality. Private, nonindustrial landowners play a very important role in helping maintain improved air quality because of the large amount of forestland in their care.

Aesthetics
Often overlooked as a benefit, the aesthetics forests provide play an important role in the economic and social well being of Mississippi. The beauty and serenity found in the forest setting have a positive impact on tourism and economic development. Mississippi is truly a treasure only just being unveiled as evidenced by the number of motion pictures that have been produced here in recent years. Our prized geological features, natural scenic areas, and seasonal color and beauty displayed through the diversity of tree and plant species all contribute to the quality of life and the attractiveness of Mississippi to businesses and travelers.
MISSISSIPPI’S PRIVATE, NONINDUSTRIAL LANDOWNER

Approximately three-fourths of the 19.8 million acres of forestland in Mississippi is in private ownership. There are 313,800 private landowners who own over 13 million acres. Many of these private, nonindustrial forest acres have little or no professional management. Basic practices such as regeneration after a harvest often go lacking. Recent studies have shown that just over 50 percent of the landowners in Mississippi regenerate their property after a harvest. Most private forest landowners have a limited understanding of the complex inter-relationship between the different resources of the forest. Quite often this leads to either neglect or misuse of these resources. The result of these non-managed or mismanaged resources is not only the loss of a valuable natural resource but also a loss to society as a whole.

Among the reasons that Mississippi’s private landowners do not regenerate their land after a harvest are:

- Information on reforestation options not known.
- Belief that the site would reforest itself.
- Cost of reforestation.
- Cost-share assistance not available.
- “Red tape” involved in getting assistance.
- Future land use plans undecided.
- Other uses for timber sale income.

CHALLENGES TO FORESTRY IN MISSISSIPPI

The forest landowner of today is faced with many challenges affecting how natural resources are managed. It is essential that forest managers and landowners stay abreast of these issues as well as new ones that may impact the forest landowner of Mississippi.

Sustainable Forestry

The Mississippi Forestry Commission and the forestry community within the state have embraced the philosophy of forest sustainability. Simply stated, sustainable forestry is the application of management philosophies and techniques to ensure healthy and productive forests and related resources for present and future generations.

Forest industry has produced a set of forest principles and guidelines that require companies to reforest harvested land promptly, provide for wildlife habitat, improve water quality and ecosystem diversity, and protect forestland having special ecological significance.

Private landowners play a key role in forest sustainability because of their large land ownership. The Forest Stewardship Program provides an avenue through which private forest owners can ensure their contribution to sustainability of the forest resource.

Urban Interface /Fragmentation

Forestry and natural resource management face new challenges as land use and ownership patterns change. Both encroachment of urban development into traditionally forested areas and the fragmentation of land into smaller parcels with a greater number of owners impact management objectives as well as attitudes toward traditional forest practices.
In the wildland-urban interface, where urban lands meet and interact with rural lands, natural resource managers are challenged to become involved in land use planning issues in order to assure the safety and health of the forest as well as the public. New tools and skills are required in wildfire prevention and control, watershed conservation and management, and forest resource management and conservation.

In addition to the impact of development on forest fragmentation, traditional forested acres are subdivided into smaller tracts resulting in an increase in the number of landowners. It is anticipated that a significant portion of private lands in the South will change hands over the next five years. This shift increases the challenge of ensuring that forest owners are aware of and active in forest management and conservation of natural resources.

**Endangered Species**

Mississippi has over 60 state and federal species and subspecies of flora and fauna found on the threatened or endangered species list. These species include freshwater mussels, fish, salamanders, frogs, snakes, turtles, birds, bats, mammals, and plants. It is important for the landowners of Mississippi to be aware of threatened or endangered species and the laws protecting them in order to apply proper management when dealing with these protected species. In 1974, Mississippi passed the Non-game and Endangered Species Conservation Act. Both the state and federal law prohibit taking, harming, possessing, transporting, exporting, processing, selling, offering to sell, or offering to ship threatened or endangered species. Fines for violating endangered species laws include a monetary fine and imprisonment for up to one year. The Forest Stewardship Program will emphasize landowner education as to the importance and role of these protected species.

**Import/Export**

The southeastern United States, with its favorable climate and productive soils, plays an ever-increasing role in the production of wood products. Competition for wood products is escalating as more and more are being exported to foreign markets. Mississippi landowners are challenged to meet production needs, manage on a sustainable basis, and protect natural resources.

Timber producers in the south are facing new challenges created by the increasing imports of wood products to local markets. These wood imports are often government subsidized, thereby creating an unfair advantage for local producers. As the United States struggles with these issues of changing markets and competition, Mississippi landowners through the Forest Stewardship Program are focusing on properly managing their forest resources to ensure the availability of wood products for now and future generations.

**Wood Certification**

Wood certification is defined as the endorsing of forest management by an independent, accredited organization or agency. This system of management must meet certain criteria, which reflects all aspects of the landscape and associated area. Wood certification could play a significant role in the marketability of a private, nonindustrial landowner’s timber in the future. Several national retailers of wood products have begun to endorse certification and now carry certified wood products. Certification programs such as the Forest Stewardship Council, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and the American Tree Farm System are becoming more
prominent in the Southeastern states. The National Association of State Foresters and the USDA Forest Service are working to gain recognition of the Forest Stewardship Program as a means of addressing certification of private, nonindustrial forestlands.

**Best Management Practices**

Studies have shown that while timber harvesting and silvicultural practices do not significantly impact water quality, applications such as skid trails, roads, and fire lanes could potentially lead to erosion and stream sedimentation. These potential problems can be diminished by proper planning and implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). The forestry community in Mississippi developed and adopted the publication *Mississippi’s BMPs - Best Management Practices for Forestry in Mississippi* (MFC Publication # 107) as a guide for reducing erosion and preventing sedimentation. In addition to adopting BMPs, the forestry community has developed extensive education and training programs to assure that foresters, landowners, and loggers are fully knowledgeable of these practices and their importance. The educational and training efforts, along with monitoring the application and effectiveness of BMPs, will assure that the forestry community is doing its part to protect water quality in Mississippi.

**Forested Wetlands**

Wetlands play an important role in maintaining a desirable quality of life by providing environmental, social, and economic benefits to Mississippi. Wetlands provide a natural means of flood control and storm damage protection, recharge aquifers, and offer critical habitat essential for the life-cycle of many species of wildlife, fish, and aquatic organisms. They also provide recreational benefits to hunters, fishermen, campers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. Forestry is an important component of both the protection and restoration of wetlands in Mississippi.

Many wetland areas can be managed for timber production without compromising the water resource. Management practices must be aimed at protecting or enhancing the water resources and aquatic habitats of the fragile, wetland ecosystem. *Mississippi’s BMPs - Best Management Practices for Forestry In Mississippi* (MFC Publication # 107) includes a section that serves as a guide for forestry operations in bottomland hardwood areas and other types of wetlands.

**Longleaf Pine Ecosystem**

Longleaf pine and its associated ecosystem once occupied up to one-third of the land area in Mississippi. Longleaf pine ranged from the Gulf Coast to as far north as Lauderdale County in central Mississippi and played an invaluable role in providing habitat for many wildlife and plant species, as well as supplying valuable wood and naval resources to the state. Much of the traditional habitat for longleaf pine has been replaced over the years by other tree and plant species or alternate land uses. Efforts are currently under way to restore this ecosystem in the South. The Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program will promote the reintroduction of longleaf pine, where applicable.

**Utilization and Changing Markets**

Mississippi’s forest landowners are experiencing markets where demand for traditional products (e.g. pulpwood, sawtimber, etc.) is being replaced by engineered products like oriented strand board (OSB) and bio-energy facilities. These newer markets utilize biomass in
the form of smaller diameter trees expanding the opportunities for landowners to implement revenue generating management activities. In addition to consumptive markets, forest landowners are being provided options for development of non-consumptive uses or ecosystem services that provide sources of revenue that were not available before.

**BIOLOGICAL AND OTHER THREATS TO MISSISSIPPI’S FOREST RESOURCES**

**Insects and Diseases**

Insects and diseases have always been a part of the forest environment. Insect populations are cyclic and can at times increase to epidemic proportions and create widespread destruction. Usually, lack of management or mismanagement of the forest resources has created opportunities for these outbreaks to occur. Through properly managing the forest resources, impact from forest insects and diseases may be minimized.

Of greatest significance to Mississippi is the southern pine beetle. In epidemic years, thousands of acres of valuable pine forests have been lost to this insect. Other common insect and disease problems encountered in Mississippi include *Ips* engraver beetle, oak borers, pine sawflies, eastern tent caterpillar, Nantucket pine tip moth, oak decline, fusiform rust, pitch canker, and annosus root rot.

**Invasive Species**

Man has proven, either intentionally or unintentionally, to be his own worst enemy by the introduction of exotic invasive species into the landscape. These invasive species encroach and displace native vegetation interfering with management strategies and creating new challenges for the management and regeneration of the forest resources. It is important that landowners and natural resource managers be aware of these threats and keep abreast of any new methods for confronting these threats as they arise.

Some of the more problematic invasive species impacting Mississippi landowners include kudzu, cogon grass, privet, Chinese tallowtree, and tropical soda apple.

**Fire**

Fire can be a friend or foe to forests in Mississippi. Unabated wildfires can be devastating not only to the timber but also to other components of the forest community. The Mississippi Forestry Commission spends a large portion of time and resources in the prevention, detection, and suppression of wildfires. The negative impact of wildfire can be minimized through proper planning and implementation of preventive measures such as firelanes and prescribed burning. In addition to reducing fuel levels, prescribed fire can be useful in controlling unwanted vegetation, controlling disease, improving access into an area, and improving wildlife habitat.

**Climate Change**

Mississippi is not immune to the effects of global climate change. Regardless of the forecasts predicted from climate change models Mississippi forests and wildlife will be impacted by the long range trend effects. Although the forests of Mississippi make a significant contribution to the effort to mitigate the impacts of climate change, the Mississippi Forestry Commission is in the process of developing Adaptation Best Management Practices (A-BMPs) to capitalize on stewardship opportunities. A-BMPs will promote afforestation and reforestation efforts that
adjust to anticipated loss or expansion of forest habitat. The A-BMPs will recommend practices that minimize climate change effects on water quality and quantity and reduce the increasing risk of fire. Measures incorporated within A-BMP guidelines will also address the need to utilize species that are highly adaptive and resilient to climate stressors and the associated threats of drought, insects, and diseases. Altered silvicultural and forest management practices that reduce the risk of loss from increased storm activity or intensity will also be included.

**FOREST STEWARDSHIP PHILOSOPHY AND PURPOSE**

The goal of the Forest Stewardship Program in Mississippi is to empower landowners to make quality decisions regarding the management of their forestland. The planning, educational, partnership, and recognition components of the program all focus on equipping the landowner with the information, tools, and resources needed to optimize economic and environmental benefits for present and future generations. It is important that in today’s society landowners are informed and knowledgeable on issues affecting forest management and forest landowner rights. The Forest Stewardship Program provides an avenue for forest landowners to become informed and educated on these issues. Stewardship landowners will not only have access to up-to-date technical information, but also the opportunity to interact with other landowners. This interaction allows landowners a forum through which they can exchange information on successes and failures. This dialogue among landowners is where many of them receive their most valued advice.

Landowners who adopt the stewardship philosophy realize that the work and care of their forestlands impact more than just themselves and their family. Their labors are a contribution to the whole of society. Wise stewardship manifests itself in healthier forests, improved soil and water quality, healthier and more diverse wildlife populations, and increased recreational opportunities.

**FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

The Mississippi Forestry Commission will be primarily responsible for the implementation of the state’s Forest Stewardship Program. It is the desire of the Mississippi Forestry Commission to build a Forest Stewardship Program aimed at meeting the forest resource and related needs of the state. Through the implementation of this program, the Mississippi Forestry Commission embraces its role as a leader in forest resource management. In this role the Mississippi Forestry Commission commits to:

- Embrace the Stewardship philosophy of multiple resource management.
- Assure quality service and professionalism is provided to landowners through education and training of agency resource professionals.
- Be actively involved in educating and inspiring landowners to better manage their lands.

An agency Stewardship Coordinating Council will provide support, oversight and guidance in developing the Forest Stewardship Program and assuring quality service to Mississippi landowners.

Components of Mississippi’s Forest Stewardship Program include the establishment and operation of state and district level Forest Stewardship committees, development and
implementation of local Forest Stewardship Plans, and the certification and recognition of landowners.

Partnerships are vital to the success of the Forest Stewardship Program. Natural resource agencies, resource specialists, and landowners are invited to take part in the Forest Stewardship Program through participation on the State Forest Stewardship Committee or any of the seven District Forest Stewardship Committees.

**STATE FOREST STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE**

The State Forest Stewardship Committee consists of representatives of various agencies and organizations that have an interest and a role in the management of the forest resources in Mississippi. Invited to participate on the State Forest Stewardship Committee are representatives from the following agencies and organizations:

- USDA Forest Service
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Mississippi State University Extension Service
- Alcorn State University Cooperative Extension Service
- Local Government
- Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
- Consulting Foresters
- Environmental Organizations
- Forest Products Industry
- Forest Landowners
- Land Trusts
- Conservation Groups
- Other Interested Groups, Organizations, Individuals

The duties of the State Forest Stewardship Committee are to provide advice and recommendations to the Mississippi Forestry Commission concerning the development, implementation, promotion, and monitoring of the State Forest Stewardship Program. However, by the nature of its makeup, the State Forest Stewardship Committee has the potential to address current and future forestry issues that may impact forestry and the forest resources of Mississippi. Bringing the natural resources community together to work on issues such as sustainable forestry, wood certification, and water quality, will result in better-managed resources today and in the future. It is the intent of the Mississippi Forestry Commission to fully utilize the State Forest Stewardship Committee in providing coordination and direction for its private landowner assistance program. It is hoped that through the coordinated efforts of the State Forest Stewardship Committee, private landowners throughout Mississippi will be better served by all resource agencies.
DISTRICT FOREST STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEES

District Stewardship Committees will be established in each of the seven Mississippi Forestry Commission districts. Each District Stewardship Committee will be composed of a minimum of three people, including a Mississippi Forestry Commission Service Forester and two additional local representatives from the forestry, wildlife, or environmental communities. District Stewardship Committee responsibilities will include:

- Provide advice and recommendations to the Mississippi Forestry Commission regarding implementation of the program within the district.
- Review, approve, or reject properties and landowners nominated for Forest Stewardship Certification (see Nomination for Forest Stewardship Certification).
- Assure appropriate recognition of certified properties and landowners (see Landowner Recognition).

FOREST STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATION CRITERIA

Forest Stewardship Certification is the recognition component of the Forest Stewardship Program. Landowner participation is voluntary. Private, nonindustrial forestlands eligible for certification include lands owned by any private individual, group, association, corporation, Native American tribe, or other private legal entity. It includes rural lands with existing tree cover, or lands suitable for growing trees. State and local government lands may qualify as a Demonstration Forest.

In order to qualify for certification, a landowner’s forest management program must meet the minimum criteria established for Forest Stewardship Certification. These minimum criteria include:

1. The land holding must be a minimum of ten (10) acres and in private, nonindustrial ownership. State or locally owned public lands may be certified as a Stewardship Demonstration Forest.

2. The landowner must have at least two (2) objectives for management based on the following:
   - Timber Production
   - Wildlife
   - Recreation
   - Aesthetics
   - Environmental Education
   - Water Quality
   - Ecological/Site Restoration
   - Air Quality

3. The landowner must have a current, approved ten-year multiple resource management plan on one hundred (100) percent of his/her forested land existing in a contiguous ownership block.

4. The landowner must demonstrate that he/she is a good steward by practicing multiple resource management in accordance with the resource management plan and the following criteria:
Timber is protected from fire, insects, and disease in accordance with the management objectives.

- Damaged timber is salvaged, unless salvage interferes with primary or secondary management objectives.
- Regeneration plans are made before final harvest, unless the land use will change.
- Management activities are carried out in a manner least damaging to other resources.
- Unique plant communities, critical wildlife habitat, and endangered species habitats are preserved.
- Consideration is given to aesthetics in carrying out management objectives.

**Nomination for Forest Stewardship Certification**

A landowner meeting the certification criteria may be nominated for Forest Stewardship certification. A completed nomination form and a copy of the landowner’s stewardship plan are submitted to the Mississippi Forestry Commission Service Forester. The Service Forester will assure the minimum certification requirements are met by conducting a field visit. A Forest Stewardship certification form and a copy of the landowner’s plan are forwarded to the District Stewardship Committee for approval. Once approved by the District Stewardship Committee, the request for certification is submitted to the State Forest Stewardship Coordinator for final approval and official certification of the landowner (Forest Steward) and property (Stewardship Forest) in the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program. The District Stewardship Committee will conduct periodic field reviews to verify the accuracy of the Service Forester’s recommendations. Field reviews will be conducted on a minimum of ten percent of all nominations.

**Forest Stewardship Demonstration Forests**

State or locally owned public land may be certified as a Forest Stewardship Demonstration Forest, providing the minimum criteria for Forest Stewardship certification is met and a Stewardship Demonstration Plan is prepared. The Demonstration Plan will include an explanation of the practice(s) to be demonstrated, the conservation or forest management message to be demonstrated, the target audience the message is directed toward, and the planned means for getting the message to the target audience. The nomination process will be the same as for private lands. A demonstration area on a part of a public entity’s land holding will qualify the entire ownership which meets the Forest Stewardship criteria for certification.

**Landowner Recognition**

After approval by the Mississippi Forestry Commission Forest Stewardship Coordinator, a Forest Stewardship certificate and property sign will be awarded to the landowner. The Forest Stewardship Coordinator will mail the Stewardship certificate directly to the landowner and notify the appropriate District Stewardship Committee. It will be the responsibility of the District Stewardship Committee to assure that the landowner’s Stewardship Forest sign is awarded in an appropriate setting. Examples of appropriate settings for presenting the sign include county landowner association meetings, community Arbor Day ceremonies, other local
natural resource agency events such as wildlife banquets, Soil and Water Conservation District annual meetings, forestry field days, or at a specially planned media event. A Stewardship Forest sign will be presented within three months of the official certification from the Forest Stewardship Coordinator.

The landowner’s achievements should be publicized through various media outlets including local newspaper, magazines, conservation newsletters, the Mississippi Forestry Commission’s website, and/or local radio and television programs.

Special awards will be presented on five-year intervals to private landowners with continuous participation in the program. Upon recertification, these awards will be presented to the landowner in an appropriate fashion similar to the initial landowner recognition activities.

**RECERTIFICATION**

Recertification will be required on five-year intervals. The Service Forester will be responsible for assuring that each landowner is contacted and an audit of accomplishments on the property is conducted. Landowners continuing to meet the criteria for Forest Stewardship certification will be eligible for recertification.

When the audit is completed, the Service Forester will submit a Forest Stewardship certification form, indicating a recommendation for recertification to the District Stewardship Committee. Upon approval by the District Stewardship Committee, the certification form will be submitted to the Forest Stewardship Coordinator for final approval.

Landowners qualifying for recertification will be appropriately recognized (see Landowner Recognition). Landowners not meeting the requirements for recertification will be decertified.

**DECERTIFICATION**

Landowners and/or their property may be decertified for the following reasons:

- The landowner no longer meets the minimum criteria for Forest Stewardship certification.
- The landowner requests to be removed from the Forest Stewardship Program.
- The property is sold or transferred to another owner.
- Death of the landowner.

For landowners no longer meeting the criteria for the Forest Stewardship certification, the Service Forester will have the authority to decertify a landowner and his property. If the landowner’s certification is to be withdrawn, the Service Forester will notify the landowner and request that the Mississippi Stewardship Forest sign be removed from the property. The Service Forester has the authority to remove the sign from a landowner’s property if the landowner does not remove it. The Service Forester may allow the landowner up to one year to bring the property into compliance with the Forest Stewardship certification criteria before completing the decertification process.
If a landowner requests to be removed from the Forest Stewardship Program, or if the landowner dies, the Service Forester will indicate “decertification” on the Forest Stewardship certification form. The change is forwarded to the District Stewardship Committee and then to the Forest Stewardship Coordinator.

In the case of a change of ownership, the new owner will be interviewed to determine his/her management objectives. If the new owner agrees to follow the original plan’s objectives, the Service Forester will revise the Forest Stewardship certification form to reflect the change in ownership. The District Stewardship Committee will review/approve and forward to the Forest Stewardship Coordinator who will make the appropriate changes to the Forest Stewardship database. When the new owner has different objectives for the property, a new Forest Stewardship plan must be prepared, and the nomination process for Forest Stewardship certification will be followed. The Service Forester will be responsible for notifying the Forest Stewardship Coordinator regarding decertification of the previous owner.

**FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLANS**

Forest Stewardship Plans are comprehensive management plans aimed at providing the landowner with information regarding options for managing his/her forest resources. Plans must identify and describe actions to protect, manage, maintain, and enhance relevant resources such as soil, water, timber, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and aesthetic quality. A plan must be developed in a manner compatible with the landowner’s objectives and must be prepared by or in consultation with a professional resource manager.

**Forest Stewardship Plan Components**

The following information must be included in a Forest Stewardship Plan.

- Give the landowner’s name, address, telephone number, and other vital contact information.
- Provide the name and contact information for the resource professional who prepared the plan.
- Indicate the date the plan was prepared and the time period covered by the plan. (Must be a minimum of ten years.)
- Clearly state landowner goals and objectives based on an interview with the landowner. The landowner must identify at least two of the following objectives for property management:
  - Timber Production
  - Wildlife
  - Recreation
  - Aesthetics
  - Environmental Education
  - Water Quality
  - Ecological/Site Restoration
  - Air Quality
- Identify number of acres and property location including forty, section, township, range, county, and/or latitude and longitude. Information on the location of property within the county may be included either in narrative or map form.
Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program State Plan

- Include a map clearly showing property boundaries, cover types, water, roads, etc.
- Incorporate soil and water information such as classification of soil type, soil productivity, presence or absence of a fragipan, erosion potential, topography, drainage, and existing bodies of water.
- Give a general description of the property including history, notation of historical, cultural, or archeological areas, wetlands, and/or any threatened or endangered species present.
- Describe the relationship of the Forest Stewardship Program property to the surrounding properties.
- Describe each forest condition by cover type and acreage (as depicted on the map). Consideration will be given to the need to include information regarding dominant vegetation, species composition, timber size classes, stocking, timber quality, volume, age, growth, production potential, and site quality. Identify and describe management recommendations, or where appropriate, options for alternative treatments, for meeting the landowner’s objectives and protecting soil, water, aesthetic quality, forest health, and fish and wildlife resources. Recommendations will be condition specific. The Forest Stewardship plan will include a schedule of activities by condition, practice, and date practice is to be implemented.
- Include information regarding assistance available, incentive programs, educational materials, a glossary of terms, and an explanation of applicable federal, state, and/or county regulatory programs.

Procedures for Development of a Forest Stewardship Plan by a Resource Professional

1. The landowner should contact a resource professional who is authorized to discuss and explain the Forest Stewardship Program and to develop a Forest Stewardship plan. This could include recognized resource professionals such as a Mississippi Forestry Commission forester, Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks biologist, or wildlife and forestry consultants.
2. A thorough interview with the landowner should be conducted prior to any field visit in order to determine the landowner’s objectives, past management accomplishments, interesting history information about the property, and any other pertinent information needed or relating to the development of the Forest Stewardship plan.
3. An on-site assessment of the entire property should be conducted to gather the necessary information for plan development. Information from the landowner’s interview will be utilized along with the field data to develop the Forest Stewardship Plan.
4. The Forest Stewardship plan components will be considered the minimum standard for preparing an acceptable Forest Stewardship plan. Depending on the diversity of the property and landowner objectives, one or several resource professionals may be utilized to develop the plan.

Stewardship Education Program

The State Stewardship Committee will work cooperatively to develop a strategy to promote the Forest Stewardship Program within Mississippi. Information and education programs will be
Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program State Plan

designed to promote the stewardship ethic and to reach landowners who may be prospective participants in the Forest Stewardship Program.

Stewardship Workshops

In 1997, the Mississippi Forestry Commission and the Mississippi State University Extension Service entered into an agreement to get landowners personally involved in managing their property. The two organizations worked together to develop a program for conducting Forest Stewardship Plan Development Workshops during which landowners are actively involved in developing their own Forest Stewardship plans. The field data is provided for the plans through the combined efforts of consulting foresters, Mississippi Forestry Commission foresters, and others working on a volunteer basis. In the first three years, 21 Stewardship Plan Development Workshops were held in 21 counties involving 171 landowners, and 117 Forest Stewardship plans covering 27,483 acres were developed. The Mississippi Forestry Commission and the Mississippi State Cooperative Extension Service continued this joint effort through the year 2003.

Outreach Program

The Mississippi Forestry Commission has heightened efforts for identifying and servicing minority landowners in recent years. As a result, the Minority Outreach Program was established in partnership with Alcorn State University to encourage more minority landowners to participate in forestry activities and the active management their forestlands.

Since 1999, the Minority Outreach Program has provided forestry assistance information to 7,680 landowners, 347 outreach seminars have been conducted, and career counseling has been provided to 2,692 Alcorn State University students.

Landowner Assistance Programs, Tax Credits and Opportunities

One reason private, nonindustrial forest landowners do not reforest is the lack of funds, including the absence of long-term credit to finance reforestation investments. To encourage Mississippi landowners to reforest their land, several incentive programs and tax credits are available to eligible private, nonindustrial landowners.

Forest Resource Development Program

The Forest Resource Development Program was established to encourage reforestation and management of forest resources. The program provides technical assistance and cost-share funding for tree planting and forest improvement practices for the purpose of long-range timber production. Qualified landowners are eligible for up to $7,000 per year and must maintain established practices for a period of ten years. The Mississippi Forestry Commission sponsors this program.

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program was created to stabilize soil erosion on marginal cropland by establishing grass or trees. This program allows for incentive payments for applying certain practices as well as annual rental payments based on acres under landowner contract. Contract periods usually range from 10 to 15 years. This program is sponsored by the Farm Service Agency.
Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program State Plan

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides technical assistance to landowners to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. It supports a wide range of habitat improvement practices that establish, improve, protect, enhance, or restore the present condition of the land for the specific purpose of improving conditions for wildlife. Agreement periods can be for 5 to 10 years. Shorter-term agreements may be used to relieve wildlife habitat emergencies. The Natural Resource Conservation Service sponsors this program.

Limited Resource Farmer Program
The overall goal of the Limited Resource Farmer Program is to increase assistance to small or limited resource and minority producers and directly improve the farm income of these producers. The Natural Resource Conservation Service sponsors the Limited Resource Farmer Program.

Wetland Reserve Program
The Wetland Reserve Program allows the federal government to obtain conservation easements from landowners and provides cost-share payments for wetland rehabilitation practices. The federal government buys easements at a price equal to the lesser of the agricultural value of the land, an established value limit, or an amount offered by the landowner. It also provides cost-share assistance to restore wetland functions and values. The Natural Resource Conservation Service sponsors this program.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program
The Environmental Quality Incentives Program assists private landowners by addressing natural resource problems that threaten environmental quality. The program targets watersheds, regions, and areas of special environmental sensitivity or other areas facing significant soil, water or related natural resource concerns. Approval of program assistance is based on the potential environmental benefits resulting from the project. The Natural Resource Conservation Service sponsors this program.

Mississippi Reforestation Tax Credit
The Reforestation Tax Credit provides a Mississippi income tax credit up to 50% of the cost of approved hardwood and pine reforestation practices. The tax credit promotes reforestation on private, nonindustrial lands. The credit applies only to individuals or groups of private, nonindustrial landowners. There is a lifetime limit of $75,000. Any unused tax credit may carry over into future years. Landowners must have a reforestation plan prepared by a graduate or registered forester. The cost of planting orchards, Christmas trees, or ornamental trees does not qualify.

Acreage enrolled in a state or federal incentive program is not eligible for the tax credit. However, certain landowners may be eligible for the tax credit in addition to incentive payments. Those landowners whose adjusted gross income is less than the federal Earned Income Credit level may be eligible for this provision. See a tax advisor for further information.
Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program State Plan

The work must be verified by the forester on Mississippi tax form 80-315 as completed according to the prepared plan and submitted to the state Tax Commission by the landowner in order to qualify.

Federal Reforestation Tax Credit and Amortization

A federal tax credit and amortization for reforestation is available to qualified landowners. A qualified landowner can claim a 10 percent tax credit up to $10,000 for reforestation expenses. The same expenses can be amortized (deducted annually) over a 7-year period.

Forest Legacy Program

The Forest Legacy Program was authorized by the 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade act to identify and protect environmentally important, private forestlands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. The Forest Legacy Program is a USDA Forest Service program in partnership with Mississippi that will help support local efforts to protect environmentally sensitive, privately owned forest lands threatened by conversion to non-forest use through land acquisition and conservation easements.

An Assessment of Need (AON) identifies areas of the Mississippi such as the Piney-woods region of south Mississippi, the Jackson area and northeast Mississippi where important natural forest communities exist on private lands that are potentially threatened by conversion from urban and suburban growth or other threats. The AON recommends these areas of the state be designated as Forest Legacy Areas so that willing landowners may nominate their property as a possible Forest Legacy Tract. For more information go to the MFC website (www.mfc.state.ms.us), click on Forest Management then Forest Legacy Program.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the forest stewardship program is to better educate and equip the forest landowner to manage their land in order to assure sustainability of the forest in the future. Enhancing relationships within the forestry and natural resource communities is an inherent part of assuring that landowner needs are met.

The following Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program objectives are only the beginning efforts to identify activities that can enhance the ability of the Mississippi Forestry Commission and other resource professionals and agencies to aid the private, nonindustrial landowner. As the Forest Stewardship Program evolves and more partnerships are developed, additional objectives and actions will be identified.

Stewardship Objectives

- Conduct cross-discipline training with the various agencies providing services to Mississippi’s forest owners.
- Work with the National Association of State Foresters, the USDA Forest Service and the American Tree Farm System to help position the Forest Stewardship Program to qualify nationally as a wood certification program.
• Continue to develop and update the interactive computer program for Mississippi Forestry Commission foresters; incorporating GIS and mapping capabilities for use in Forest Stewardship plan development.
• Keep equipment and necessary resources current to promote Forest Stewardship and better equip Mississippi Forestry Commission foresters to service Stewardship landowners.
• Develop a program for small woodlot owners to better equip the Mississippi Forestry Commission to service landowners owning less than 10 acres of forestland. This program will connect landowners with a host of information available on woodlot management via brochures, pamphlets, and Internet web sites.
• Continue to promote the Forest Stewardship recognition program as a statewide program.
• Develop a quarterly Mississippi Forest Stewardship newsletter.
• Continue to enhance information available to Mississippi’s forest landowners on the Internet.
• Monitor federal and state legislation as it pertains to Mississippi’s nonindustrial forest landowners and provide input and action as needed to ensure landowner needs are met.
• Work with the State Forest Stewardship Committee to identify further objectives that may be pertinent to forest resource development on private lands in Mississippi.
• Develop and strengthen partnership participation in the Forest Stewardship Program.

Targets

With the utilization of the Forest Stewardship Plan Writer, target goals are the development of 131,000 acres of certifiable Forest Stewardship Plans during this 5-year plan.

Additionally, the Mississippi Forestry Commission would like to see that 40% of all plans produced by the Stewardship Plan Writer actually be certified in fiscal year 2009 to be increased to 48% by fiscal year 2013. It is also our desire that 20% of the certified plans be produced in the important forest areas of the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program Targets</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>5-Year Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop Forest Stewardship Plans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Plans</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>2,160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Acres</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>131,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Certified Stewardship Forests</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Owners</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Acres</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>11,440</td>
<td>12,420</td>
<td>13,440</td>
<td>57,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certified Stewardship Demonstration Forests</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Forests</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Acres</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are a vital component of the Forest Stewardship Program. Working together, natural resource professionals and landowners can assure that future generations of Mississippians will enjoy the many benefits of well-managed forests. Resource managers will become more proficient in managing the forest and associated resources, thereby optimizing economic, social, and environmental benefits. Partnerships established through the State Forest Stewardship Committee will be fundamental in providing program direction and enhancing the working relationship at the different levels of the program.

The District Forest Stewardship Committees will be vital in providing feedback to the state committee and assuring the program is properly implemented at the local level. But, as always, local people and partnerships are the key to making a difference on the ground. It is the quality of these local partnerships and the one-on-one relationships developed that will ensure a successful program.

The Mississippi Forestry Commission openly invites any agency, group, or individual with an interest in securing the future of Mississippi’s forest resources to find their place in the Forest Stewardship Program.
Appendix

**FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM FORMS**

Nomination Form

Certification Form

Stewardship Forest Demonstration Plan

**FOREST STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATES**

Landowners Certificate

Demonstration Forest Certificate

**REFERENCES**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
MISSISSIPPI FOREST STEWARDSHIP

NOMINATION FORM

I respectfully nominate the following landowner and property for official Forest Stewardship Certification as endorsed and provided by the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landowner’s Name</th>
<th>Street or Box Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

City  State  Zip Code

County or counties in which property is located.

The nominee has met the minimum criteria for certification as a Mississippi Forest Steward. Furthermore, the nominee has duly noted his/her commitment to the Forest Stewardship principles by the application of practices set forth in a Forest Stewardship Plan and hereby agrees to pursue the objectives of the plan and principles set forth in the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Creed. Nominator’s Signature  Date

Nominator’s Signature

Date

Nominator Information (Please Print)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Organization:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Telephone:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-mail:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MISSISSIPPI FOREST STEWARDSHIP CREED

Believing that the right to own land is among the most treasured and valued rights of all Americans; and

Believing that the ownership of land not only grants me the privilege of pursuing my goals but also carries the responsibility of good stewardship; and

Believing that good stewardship of this country’s precious natural resources is necessary to the strength and well-being of our great nation; and

Believing that good stewardship of my forest lands will help provide for this country’s need for forest products, while protecting air and water quality, enhancing wildlife, and providing forest-based recreation; and

Believing further that good stewardship of my forest lands will contribute to the natural bounty of Mississippi and will guard against erosion and the loss of soil productivity; and

Believing that good stewardship involves protecting my forest lands from insects, diseases, wildfires, and overgrazing; therefore

I pledge to practice good stewardship on my lands, protecting and enhancing the natural resources that occur on them; further I pledge to promote good stewardship among my peers so that future generations will benefit from our collective actions; and

I pledge that if I discontinue managing my Stewardship Forest in the manner outlined by this creed, I agree to withdraw my lands from the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program.

Landowner’s Signature

Date

(Submit this nomination form to the Service Forester. If nomination is for public lands, attach a copy of the Forest Stewardship Demonstration Plan.)
### Certification Form

#### Property Information
- **County Name:**
- **40#:**
- **Section:**
- **Township:**
- **Range:**
- **Additional property information:**

#### Landowner Information
- **First Name:**
- **Last Name:**
- **Agency/Business Name:**
- **In Care Of:**
- **Address:**
- **City:**
- **State:**
- **Zip Code:**
- **Phone ( )**
- **E-mail:**

**Enter additional landowners on supplemental form**

#### Name(s) as they are to appear on certificate(s):**

#### Number of certificates to print:

#### Special instructions:

#### Nominated By
- **First Name:**
- **Last Name:**
- **Agency/Business Name:**
- **In Care Of:**
- **Address:**
- **City:**
- **State:**
- **Zip Code:**
- **Phone ( )**
- **E-mail:**

#### Certification Criteria
- **Does landowner have a current 10-year forest mgt. plan that includes all required Stewardship plan components?**
  - **Y**
  - **N**

- **If yes, list years covered by plan:**

- **Does forest management plan cover all forested acres in this contiguous ownership block?**
  - **Y**
  - **N**

#### Landowner Objectives: (Insert appropriate objective #)
- **Primary**
- **Secondary**
- **Other**

1. Timber Production
2. Wildlife
3. Recreation
4. Aesthetics
5. Environmental Education
6. Ecological/Site Restoration
7. Water Quality
8. Air Quality

#### Description of Forest Stewardship accomplishments within last five (5) years:

#### Has landowner carried out management activities in accordance with the spirit of Forest Stewardship?**

- **Y**
- **N**

#### Recommendation
- **Decertification (select reason(s)):**
  - **Fails to meet minimum criteria**
  - **Landowner requests removal**
  - **Property sold**
  - **Death of landowner**
  - **Other(explain):**

- **Certification transferred?**
  - **Y**
  - **N**

#### Remarks:
**SUPPLEMENTAL FORM**

**Property Information**

- County Name ____________________________  
- 40# _____ Section _____ Township _____ Range _____

**Landowner Information**

- First Name ____________________________  
- Last Name ____________________________
- Agency/Business Name __________________
- In Care Of ____________________________
- Address ______________________________
- City __________________________________
- State _________________________________
- Zip Code _____________________________
- Phone (____) __________ E-mail __________

---

**Landowner Information**

- First Name ____________________________  
- Last Name ____________________________
- Agency/Business Name __________________
- In Care Of ____________________________
- Address ______________________________
- City __________________________________
- State _________________________________
- Zip Code _____________________________
- Phone (____) __________ E-mail __________

---

**Landowner Information**

- First Name ____________________________  
- Last Name ____________________________
- Agency/Business Name __________________
- In Care Of ____________________________
- Address ______________________________
- City __________________________________
- State _________________________________
- Zip Code _____________________________
- Phone (____) __________ E-mail __________

---

**Landowner Information**

- First Name ____________________________  
- Last Name ____________________________
- Agency/Business Name __________________
- In Care Of ____________________________
- Address ______________________________
- City __________________________________
- State _________________________________
- Zip Code _____________________________
- Phone (____) __________ E-mail __________
### Mississippi Forest Stewardship

#### Stewardship Forest Demonstration Plan

This Stewardship Forest Demonstration Plan has been prepared for:

---

**Agency / Owner**

(Attach this plan to the Forest Stewardship Certification Form.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservation or forest management practice(s) being demonstrated:</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message(s) to be delivered:</th>
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<table>
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<th>Target Audience(s):</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will message be delivered to audience?</th>
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</table>

---

**Authorized Signature**

---

**Date**
Landowner’s Forest Stewardship Certificate

MISSISSIPPI FOREST STEWARD

By virtue of personal dedication and genuine desire to follow the ethic of forest stewardship, based on the wise use and management of the natural resources of the great State of Mississippi, and all inherent benefits arising therefrom.

This certificate acknowledges the recipient’s steadfast commitment to the multiple-use concept of natural resource management, ensuring a valuable legacy for future generations, and furthermore establishes the official certification of the owner’s eligible property as a Mississippi Stewardship Forest.

Date

State Forester
Mississippi Forestry Commission
By taking a leadership role in promoting the wise use and 
management of the natural resources found in the great State of Mississippi, and

By publicly displaying the forest stewardship ethic through the demonstration of specific forest management practices, and

By exemplifying the actions of a responsible forest steward so that others might be encouraged to likewise adopt the ethic of forest stewardship

is hereby officially recognized as a Mississippi Forest Steward

This certificate acknowledges the recipient’s steadfast commitment to the multiple-use concept of natural resource management, ensuring a valuable legacy for future generations,

and furthermore establishes the official certification of the public forest under their care and management as a

**Mississippi Stewardship Demonstration Forest.**

State Forester
Mississippi Forestry Commission

Date
REFERENCES

*Discover Mississippi’s Forests*, Forest and Wildlife Research Center, Mississippi State University.

Doolittle, Larry, “An Inventory of Private Landowners in Mississippi”, *Final Report for the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Committee*, Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, Mississippi State University, August 1996.


*Forestry and Forest Products*, FWRC #51, Forest and Wildlife Research Center, Mississippi State University.

Glass, Patrick A., *2005 Southwest Mississippi Forest Inventory*, Mississippi Institute for Forest Inventory.


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thanks is extended to the following individuals for the time, knowledge and talent each contributed to the development of the Mississippi Forest Stewardship Program and production of this plan.

Elizabeth Barber  Kent Grizzard  John Moore
Steve Burgess     Lisa Harris     Don Neal
Steve Butler      Alan Holditch  Jim Phillips
Sandra Ford       Jim Lacy       Randal Romedy
Bruce Frasier     Jim Lipe       Stacey Shankle
Patrick Glass     John Locke     Larry Smith
Brant Godbold     Joe Miles      

MISSISSIPPI
STEWARDSHIP
FOREST