



# Forest\*A\*Syst: Planning for Forest Management

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As a forest landowner or manager, you have unique challenges. First and foremost, you must be a good steward of the land for which you are responsible. In addition, you must make decisions regarding long-term management to enhance the land's environmental quality, wildlife habitat, aesthetic beauty, and economic benefits. These decisions are often difficult as they are dependent upon a number of factors, including property location, value, current management, and long-term objectives.

It has been said that "Failing to plan equates to planning for failure." That axiom is certainly true. Current needs and goals must be brought into balance with long-term objectives. You must have a well-conceived management plan, if you are to succeed.

To aid forest managers in the planning process, a formalized self-assessment guide has been developed. The guide, called Forest\*A\*Syst, was prepared by Mr. Rick Hamilton at North Carolina State University with funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The guide is intended to be applicable to all states and regions with little to no modification required. Based upon other successful self-assessment programs (such as Farm\*A\*Syst and Home\*A\*Syst), this program was designed to assist in the critical examination of management objectives. Subsequently, specific plans can be developed for implementing activities to meet those objectives.

The first step in developing any forest management plan is determining priority uses for the property. These priorities often include timber production, wildlife, aesthetics, recreation and others. It is important to realize that these uses can be managed in combination with each other to meet landowner goals. It is also important that the overall management priority for each use be stated prior to the planning process. By having the priorities stated initially, the forest manager can then evaluate management practices on the basis of which are best to meet the objectives for each of those uses. Likewise, the manager can also build in flexibility to allow for changing priorities over the course of time.

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<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>



**Figure 1. Forest management plans are often prepared by professionals working with forest landowners.**

Once the management priorities and objectives are established, a management plan should be prepared. In this regard, it is essential to note that a management plan, while providing a framework for future activities, is not a document to be left unchanged. Planning is an ongoing process that requires both short-term and long-term recommendations. The management plan should reflect each type of recommendation, and then be modified as objectives or technologies change.

What is included in a management plan? Certainly any plan should be developed in a manner as to meet the landowner's needs. But, the plan should also be a document that is "comfortable" to the landowner/forest manager. The plan is a roadmap, and as such, should be used by those individuals involved in the property's management without their feeling that the plan is just something that gets in the way. While individual plans vary, there are certain elements that should be included. These are:

#### **Statement of Landowner Goals and Objectives -**

Long-term goals (greater than 10 years in the future) are usually somewhat general in scope. Short-term goals are usually more specific and often include individual practices and timetables to be followed.



**Figure 2. Plantation management is but one option available to forest landowners.**

**Location** – The plan should include a map of the area and an aerial photograph, if one is available. Locations of significant features such as roads and fences should be plainly marked. Boundaries of the property should also be marked and described. In developing a map and the accompanying descriptions, the forest manager should assume that other individuals visiting the property have only the map as reference.

**Protection and Maintenance** – The plan should include a description of proposed activities relative to 1) marking and maintaining property lines, 2) road, trail and access control, 3) fire protection practices (includes fire breaks as well as access in the event of a fire), insect and disease protection and possible salvage, and 4) a timetable for review and update of the management plan.

**Stand Descriptions and Inventory Data** – Stands should be described and marked on the property map and aerial photograph. For some, delineation of stands may be a bit daunting. A stand is defined as “a contiguous group of trees sufficiently uniform in age-class distribution, composition, and structure, and growing on a site of sufficient uniform quality, to be a distinguishable unit” (Society of American Foresters, 1998). The important concept is that stands are generally managed as a unit, with specific practices applied to the entire stand and not just a part of it. Thus, landowners should identify stands as those areas to be managed in a like manner. Inventory data such as tree species, size, age, number of trees per acre, and tree condition and health should be available or collected. Other items such as co-existing plant species, recreational

opportunities, wildlife habitats, and environmental concerns should also be noted.

**Forest Management and Prescribed Activities** – This section of the plan is where prescribed activities and timetables should be listed. Some of the prescribed activities include 1) timber harvests, 2) regeneration practices, 3) herbicide and/or fertilizer application, 4) pre-commercial and/or commercial thinning, 5) wildlife management practices, 6) aesthetic enhancement, and 7) requirements to comply with state/federal regulations.

Landowners may wish to develop their own plan or may seek the assistance of a professional. However, several key points apply to all plans:

- Plans can and should be modified. The plan is simply a roadmap based upon current conditions and technologies. Landowner objectives change over time, and the plan should be modified to meet those objectives.
- Forest management plans are unique to each owner and his/her forest. To assume that plans are interchangeable among ownerships fails to recognize forest, environmental and economic conditions as well as overlooks the fact that every landowner has different objectives.
- Plans should be critically reviewed at least every 5 years and more often if conditions or objectives change. A change of ownership or the passing of the property from one generation to the next should also signal the need for a comprehensive review and possible update.

To assist in writing a forest management plan, the entire Forest\*A\*Syst guidelines are available at no cost from the OSU Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department. This 55-page document provides a step-by-step guide to developing a forest plan, while providing the reader with valuable information regarding the management practices that can be utilized. The Forest\*A\*Syst manual can be obtained by writing:

Extension Forester  
Oklahoma State University  
Room 008C Ag Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078

An on-line video explaining the various aspects of the Forest\*A\*Syst program can also be found on the web at: <http://forestasyst.org>.

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