



CERTIFICATION CORNER

A Different Approach to Forest Certification

by Christopher Reeves

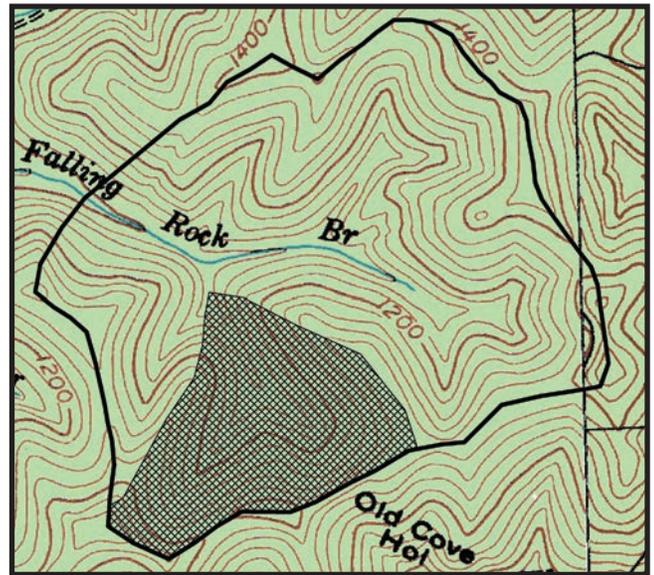
The main requirement for any forest management certification system (American Tree Farm System®, Sustainable Forestry Initiative®, and Forest Stewardship Council™) is to have a management plan for the woodlands. However, situations commonly arise in which a woodland owner must quickly sell their timber to pay for unexpected events or to take advantage of rising stumpage prices. In these situations the preparation of a full traditional management plan may not be practical because of time and financial constraints. But how does a woodland owner get certified without a traditional management plan? That's where the Progressive System can assist woodland owners.

The Progressive System is a new program developed by the Center for Forest and Wood Certification for family woodland owners (< 2,470 acres). This innovative program allows for woodland owners to get involved in certification quickly without developing a traditional comprehensive management plan. The process begins with a woodland owner selecting a Center-trained Cooperating Forester and completing an application to enroll in the program. Cooperating Foresters are consulting foresters

and in some cases industry foresters that have been trained to help you through the certification process. This process is not complicated, but a trained forester's assistance is required. The Center will then retrieve rare, threatened, and endangered species data for the property from the state natural heritage agency and return it to the woodland owner and forester.

The forester will then prepare a detailed harvest plan using Center-provided documentation that implements an appropriate woodland management practice for only the stand that is going to be harvested. The remainder of the property that is not going to be harvested must undergo a walkthrough. This walkthrough is essentially to check the rest of the property for any critical issues that are having a negative impact on the environment. The forester will be looking for major insect, disease, or storm damage; checking roads for

sections that might be affecting water quality; or finding stands that are heavily infested with invasive species. The walkthrough is important to identify anything that might



A detailed harvest plan must be prepared for the area planned to be cut (cross hatched area). A walk through of the rest of the property must take place to determine if any critical impacts to the environment are present that could delay certification.

be needed to be addressed at a future time and to ensure that certification will not be held up because of the condition of the woodlands outside of the harvest area. The completed planning forms, including the harvest prescription and the results of the walkthrough, are then returned to the Center for review and if approved, certification can be granted.

Because the Progressive System allows for woodland owners to obtain certification without a comprehensive traditional management plan, woodland owners are required to use a logger that has demonstrated the capacity to carry out the harvest in a safe and sustainable manner. For this reason only participants in the Certified Master Logger Program may conduct the timber harvest under the Progressive System. These loggers are different from the Kentucky Master Loggers with which most woodland owners may be familiar. Kentucky Master Loggers have only been trained in logging safety, water quality, and use of Best Management Practices. Certified Master Loggers have not only been trained but have also been inspected



The Center for Forest and Wood Certification has 45 cooperating foresters in nine states available to help woodland owners achieve forest certification.

A complete list can be found at www.forestcertificationcenter.org/CF_List.

by independent third-party auditors to ensure that their on the ground performance matches their training. The logger's audited performance indicates that these Certified Master Logger Program participants can easily implement the harvest that meets any forest management certification standards. Coupling a Certified Master Logger, a Cooperating Forester, and a willing landowner allows for efficient and quick certification without having to immediately develop a traditional comprehensive management plan.

Once certification is initially granted a woodland owner has to obtain a comprehensive management plan that covers the entire property. This management plan is required within three years or before the next management practice is conducted including harvesting, planting and forest improvement work. Woodland owners can get any forester to prepare the plan as long as it continues to meet the certification standard. Woodland owners can request a management plan from their state forestry agencies or use the proceeds from the timber sale to have a private consulting forester complete the plan. If this full management plan is not completed for the rest of the property in the required three years the woodland owner will no longer be certified. Woodland owners are also not permitted to implement another woodland management activity (harvest, chemical usage, etc.) and remain certified until a management plan is completed for the rest of the property.

Another requirement is for woodland owners to pay for three years' worth of certification fees up front before enrollment through the Progressive System is permitted. Fees are based upon the total forested acreage (not just the harvested area). As an example, the cost for a woodland owner with 300 acres would be \$130 including the \$50 initial fee plus the next two years of \$40 for annual fees. These fees demonstrate that the landowner is committed to long-term sustainable woodland management and will not immediately drop certification as soon as the initial harvest is completed.

Any harvest planning completed under the Progressive System still has to satisfy the standards of the American Tree Farm System and Forest Stewardship Council. This means that certification requirements still have to be right for the individual woodland owner and their management



objectives. The biggest impediment for woodland owners is normally land use conversion. If a woodland owner plans on converting the woodlands to pasture land or row crops after it is harvested, certification cannot be obtained. The American Tree Farm System and the Forest Stewardship Council do not permit woodland conversion in their standards.

The Progressive System is potentially not useful for woodland owners that already have some form of a management plan. For example, if a woodland owner has a management plan that was prepared by a state agency service forester or a consulting forester, but it is ten years old, it is advisable to update the older management plan. It would generally be more cost effective to simply update the old management plan to include the harvest than to prepare new detailed harvest planning documentation and pay three years' worth of fees upfront. The Progressive System would also not be beneficial for a woodland owner where the harvest encompasses almost all the acreage that is owned. Woodland owners in this situation should prepare a full management plan because the required planning documentation of the Progressive System would be the same as completing a comprehensive management plan.

If you are interested in certification, but do not have a management plan and need to complete a harvest quickly, the Progressive System might be right for you. Please consult with your forester to determine if certification fits your objectives. More information can be found at www.forestcertificationcenter.org or by calling toll-free 855.579.2690.

About the Author:

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Photo courtesy: Jeff Sringer



Certified Master Logger undergoing an onsite audit of his operation.