

SC Certified Tree Farm Program Communications Plan

Objectives

1. Recruit and retain members.
2. Support landowner advancement from Pioneer to fully Certified members.
3. Engage membership in education, networking, and fellowship opportunities.
4. Inform membership with regular contact via state newsletters, email updates, and Woodland Magazine.

Priorities

1. Provide information and follow-up contact for members to get updated management plans and inspections as needed to become fully certified.
2. Target former Tree Farm recognition program participants who will be decertified at the end of 2015 if they do not join the new SC Certified Tree Farm program.
3. Target SC Tree Farmers who last completed a Tree Farm inspection prior to 2010.
4. Ensure members are aware of their Tree Farm status and certification requirements.

Audiences

- SC Certified Tree Farm program members
- SC Tree Farm recognition program participants
- Forest landowners interested in active management of their forest land

Key Messages

- Value of being a Tree Farmer - membership, education, networking, recognition, advocacy, certification.
- Resources and support available to help improve forest management.

Materials and Channels/Timeframe

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|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. SC Tree Farm newsletter | 2 times/year |
| 2. Email | 4 times/year |
| 3. Direct mailing | variable |
| 4. Landowner events and meetings | 2-4 per year |
| 5. Personal contact | continuous |
| 6. Awards and recognition | 2 times/year |
| 7. SC Tree Farm legislative day | 1 per year |

Regional Coordinators

Regional Coordinators have been contracted to contact members who do not meet the 2015-2020 Tree Farm Standard. Coordinators will assist those landowners with identifying a forester, getting management plans completed or updated, and getting an inspection done, as needed.

March 2016

Tree Farm Membership

We have two problems we need to address. First, existing Tree Farmers and new Tree Farmers are not as engaged as we need them to be in seeing their land qualifies for certification. When they join the South Carolina Certified Tree Farm Program (SCCTFP) we send them a letter welcoming them to the program and outlining what they need to do to become a fully certified Tree Farm. Depending on their membership category, we tell them they have a year or two years to complete the steps for certification. We need the landowner to be seeking the assistance of a forester to develop a management plan for their property. If a landowner does not have a forester they seem to be at a loss as to what action they need to take. We have identified 240 landowners in this category. We are undertaking a program to build a bridge for landowners to become fully certified. The Tree Farm Committee members have reviewed the list and identified 40 landowners members will contact and build a bridge to working foresters. This leaves 200 to be addressed in another manner.

We propose contracting with three Coordinators who would serve as an interface between foresters and landowners. After the letter to landowners, a coordinator would contact the landowner and determine where the landowner is in meeting certification requirements. Where necessary, the coordinator would work with the landowner to establish a forester – landowner relationship and monitor progress in developing an acceptable management plan. Once this is accomplished the coordinator would ask the forester to complete the Tree Farm Inspection for the property. If the forester is not an Inspecting Forester the District Chair would be asked to assign an Inspector. In either case the coordinator would continue to monitor the process until a completed Inspection is presented to the State Tree Farm Administrator.

The Coordinators will be paid for their services on the basis of the amount of work required to move the landowner through the steps needed to complete the process. Support for this project is from three sources. They are one third from the State Tree Farm budget or \$9,550, one third from an ATFS grant or \$9,500 and one third from the State SIC Committee or \$9,500. Projected total cost for the project is \$28,550 have been approved.. Tree Farm grant funds will not be available until March 2016.

Two coordinators are engaged and under contract. A third is being pursued. Letters have been sent to two groups of 60 Tree Farmers.

Our second problem is Inspector participation in developing management plans and in performing inspections. We have communicated with our inspectors and with interested foresters how they can assist with engaging landowners and assisting with management plans and with inspections. A survey has been conducted of 165 trained Tree Farm Inspectors to obtain a commitment toward management plans and Tree Farm inspections.

The project time line is October 2015 through December 2016

March 2016

TOOLS FOR ENGAGING LANDOWNERS EFFECTIVELY

The State Tree Farm Committee participated in this ATFS/USFS sponsored workshop in July 2015. We evaluated our SC Certified Tree Farm membership program. While we were being successful we easily identified errors we were making in recruiting landowners. First, we were making too many assumptions about landowner attitudes and their responses to our efforts. Second, we were making the transition to full certification too indefinite by making the time line too long for completion. Landowners saw no reason for prompt action since we told them they had one or two years to complete their membership requirements. A third problem was our assumption landowners would know how to proceed with the limited information we provided them with.

We are making changes. We need to be more about persuasion and not so much about informing. We want to build relationships that lead to mutual exchange over and over again. Our exchanges need to be mutually beneficial to the landowners and to the Committee.. We need to recognize our audience is more than one group and that each group or segment will likely respond differently. We need to be very specific with each group and what we want them to do.

March 2016

Tree Farm Interest Response Plan

It is crucial to respond to landowners inquires in a timely manner and complete the certification quickly and efficiently.

Initial Contact

A Landowner's initial contact regarding the Tree Farm Program will be handled immediately by an administrator whether in person or by phone. Administrator will determine needs and objectives and respond accordingly. Mail and email enquires will be replied to within 5 working days.

Landowner Recruiting Meetings

Fascinator will collect completed Tree Farm applications with dues payments and forward them to administrator within 5 working days.

Tree Farm Inspectors

They will collect completed applications with dues payments and forward them to the Tree Farm administrator within 5 working days.

Complete Applications will be copied and entered into the database.

Applications will be sent to the district chair, who is responsible for getting landowner management plans and Tree Farm inspections completed.

District chairs will complete 004 form and send to the administrator. The administrator will review and enter into database.