

# Sustainable Forests

A resource for Georgia landowners, sponsored by the SFI Implementation Committee.

## Water Tops List

Water scarcity due to the recent drought and the water wars with neighboring states has elevated water concerns in Georgia. Water quality and quantity topped the list of public concerns in the recent Statewide Assessment of Forest Resources, conducted by the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Forests and water have a mutually beneficial relationship. While water is needed for forest health and growth, Georgia forests help supply clean water for aquatic habitat, safe drinking water and recreational activities. Forests also protect water quality by reducing the amount of sediment, nutrients and other pollutants that enter streams, lakes and other surface waters.

The loss of forestland to development and urbanization is a major threat to Georgia's water quality. Removal of forest cover results in increased stormwater runoff and increased stream flow that may cause erosion, sedimentation and flooding.

**Protecting water quality is an important part of the practice of sustainable forestry**, and the forestry community in the state adheres to and promotes the use of Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs) to minimize the impacts of harvesting or any forestry activities on the state's water quality.

## Forestry BMP Survey Shows Improvement

*Overall, forest operators (and landowners) as a whole appear to be doing a very good job of implementing forestry BMPs.*

*Compliance across all acres was 99.8%.*

*Observed water quality risks decreased 75.6% from the past survey ... a huge improvement.*

That was the bottom line of the 7th Statewide Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs) Implementation and Compliance Survey, designed to ensure that forestry activities are being conducted in a way that protects the state's water resources.

The survey, which is conducted every two years by the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC), tracks compliance and demonstrates the commitment of Georgia's forestry community to protecting water quality by adhering to Forestry BMPs.



## BMP Improvement by the Numbers

Since the first survey in 1991, BMP Compliance has steadily improved, going from 86% percent compliance across all acres to 99.8 percent compliance in 2009. The surveys along with several decades of BMP education and training has no doubt contributed to the improvement.

In 2009, the BMP survey included 221 sites, totaling 22,732 acres that had some type of forestry activity. In addition to measuring compliance by acres, the survey examined 6,217 individual BMPs.

## Individual BMP Implementation Up 29.3%

1991.....64.9%

**2009..... 94.15%**

The 2009 survey evaluated 6,217 individual BMPs ranging from haul roads and streamside management zones to fire breaks and regeneration.

## Overall BMP Implementation

(NIPL\*)

2002.....82%

**2009.....92%**



## Stream Crossing Compliance

(NIPL\*)

2002.....30%

**2009.....52%**



\*Non-Industrial Private Landowners

## Private Lands See Great Improvement; Stream Crossings Biggest Challenge

Since individual landowners in Georgia own some 56 percent of the states forests, the BMP survey includes a proportionate number of sites owned by individuals. In 2009, 133 of the 221 sites surveyed were on private lands.

Overall BMP Implementation has improved significantly on private lands, going from 82 percent in 2002 to +92 percent in 2009. The biggest area for improvement on all lands was related to stream crossings, but this was particularly true across private non-industrial ownership.

*What's hindering improvement in this area?* Several factors could be at play. Skidder fords or crossings made with debris are immediately non-compliant, because they are not the recommended BMPs for stream crossings.

Cost may be a concern for landowners or loggers, particularly, if the site being logged is small and the road or crossing is only temporary. Building a culvert instead of a ford for your stream crossing or a simple wooden bridge may not be as costly as you think and will go a long way towards eliminating problems. Make sure the correct pipe size is specified for a culvert as that can often lead to non-compliance.

If you're one of those forest landowners who have a portion of Georgia's 70,000 miles of streams on your land, make sure you consider all of your options to protect your land and water quality.

## Proactive Steps You Can Take

If you're planning a timber harvest or any forestry activity, consider the following steps:

- Consult a professional forester, whether it's a state forester, consulting forester or industry forester.
- Use a Georgia Master Timber Harvester. A searchable database is available (<http://ga-mth.forestry.uga.edu>) or call 706-542-7691.
- Make sure your plan includes the appropriate forestry BMPs that protect water quality and prevent erosion. Call the Georgia Forestry Commission at 1-800-GATREES or log on to [www.gatrees.org](http://www.gatrees.org).

# Why Forest Certification is Right For You



**T**here are literally dozens of forest certification programs that exist worldwide. A few examples include the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, the American Tree Farm System, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification and the Canadian Standards Association. In Georgia, the most common programs are the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the American Tree Farm System.

Back in the 1990's there was a growing concern among the general public concerning illegal logging and the overall management of the world's forest resources, primarily those in developing countries. The forestry community listened to these concerns and in 1994 the Sustainable Forestry Initiative was created to satisfy consumer demand that its certified products come from responsible sources.

Typically the SFI Standard is the choice for forest certification by industrial forestland owners, timberland investment management organizations (TIMOs) or other large-scale landowners.

## American Tree Farm System

For the private, non-industrial landowner the American Tree Farm System is the best choice. All a forest landowner needs is a minimum of ten acres, a written management plan that details how their objectives are to be met, and a passion for managing their lands in a sustainable way.

The numerous benefits of this program include networking with other landowners who share the commitment to sustainable forestry, free professional forestry advice from Tree Farm inspectors, literature concerning pending legislation that affects landowner interests, invitations to field days and workshops, and recognition from fellow landowners and forestry professionals.

At the current time, there are no financial incentives for landowners who have the certification designation, but many experts anticipate it could become a tool for savvy landowners in the future. Much of the federal policy discussion involving standards related to "renewable biofuels" have included requirements for forest management plans and perhaps certification to gain access to these new markets.

If you are interested in leaving your forestland in a healthy state for future generations, then the SFI Landowner Outreach Committee encourages you to become involved in a forest certification program.



**Georgia landowners Earl and Wanda Barrs have certified their 1,200-acre Tree Farm and were recognized as National Tree Farmers of the Year in 2009.**

GEORGIA FORESTRY  
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## Georgia Assesses Forest Resources

In 2010, the Georgia Forestry Commission, along with over 50 stakeholders, completed a Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy as mandated by the 2008 Farm Bill. The assessment updated forest conditions and trends to help prioritize rural and urban forest landscape areas and issues. The results of the 2010 assessment will be used to determine priorities and key issues for various forestry programs, and collaboration between federal, state and private groups, and agencies.

In the past, the Farm Bill and the State and Private Forestry Program of the U.S. Forest Service have provided funding for the Conservation Reserve Program, natural disaster relief, and other programs that provide assistance to private landowners.

The complete Georgia Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy is available at [www.gatrees.org](http://www.gatrees.org) or log on to the Association of State Foresters website, <http://www.stateforesters.org>, which includes links to most state plans.



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## SFI Focus on Logger Training Makes a Difference

Since 1995, the SFI Implementation Committee in Georgia has provided financial and staff support for the Georgia Master Timber Harvester, a logger education program offered by the University of Georgia's Center for Forest Business.

The program objective is to foster improvement in the professionalism of wood producers, and it satisfies the logger education requirement of the SFI Program. To-date, more than 3,000 loggers and foresters have been trained.

"We have to believe that the continued improvements in BMP compliance across all lands are, in part, related to our emphasis on BMPs and focus on training," said Phillip Exley, Chairman, SFI Landowner Outreach. "Along with the educational efforts of the Georgia Forestry Commission and the continuous BMP surveys, we have created focus and increased awareness around the need to continue to improve, and have improved the knowledge and professionalism of loggers, foresters and other forest operators."

For more information, log on to [www.sfi-georgia.org](http://www.sfi-georgia.org) or <http://ga-mth.forestry.uga.edu>.



For More Information about SFI, call 706-542-7691 or log on to [www.sfi-georgia.org](http://www.sfi-georgia.org).

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