

# Florida's Forest Stewardship Program: An Opportunity to Manage Your Land for Now and the Future<sup>1</sup>

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**Forest stewardship** is the wise use and management of resources that maintain and enhance the value of the forest for present and future generations. The goals of the Forest Stewardship Program are to encourage landowners to manage for multiple natural resources, increase public awareness of the importance of Florida's forestlands, and improve cooperation among natural resource agencies and organizations to meet Florida's forest resource conservation and management needs and opportunities.

## Many landowners obtain these benefits from their land:

- Appreciating the aesthetic qualities or the unique natural and/or historical features
- Earning periodic income from timber, pine straw, or other enterprise(s)
- Providing quality forage for grazing animals or habitat for wildlife
- Contributing to the long-term protection of the environment
- Pursuing a recreational activity such as wildlife observation, hiking, horseback riding, or hunting

The **Forest Stewardship Program** can provide assistance to enhance your landowner experience. The program is designed to help landowners manage their forest land for a variety of forest and natural resource objectives.

The Forest Stewardship Program is based upon the strategy of multiple-use land management. With the help of natural resource professionals, a landowner can develop a management plan designed to increase their forestland's value for any combination objectives including timber production, wildlife habitat, hunting leases, recreation, aesthetics, livestock grazing, and soil and water conservation. Each plan is tailored to meet the landowner's priorities while maintaining the ecological diversity of the forest.



Figure 1. Forest Stewards are landowners who are managing their land according to a written plan for long-term environmental, economic, and social benefits. Credit: Daniel Stevens, Florida Forest Service.

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## Organization of the Forest Stewardship Program

The Forest Stewardship Program was developed and initiated in the early 1990s by the National Association of State Foresters and funded by the USDA Forest Service. Each state operates its own tailor-made program to meet specific needs of landowners and their forests. In Florida, five agencies and organizations work together to implement the program: the Florida Forest Service (FFS), the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Cooperative Extension Service (UF/IFAS CES), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Florida Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee. Private natural resource consultants also participate in program operation.

The objectives of the Forest Stewardship Program are to:

- encourage and assist landowners to manage for multiple natural resources,
- increase public awareness of the importance of Florida's forestlands, and
- improve cooperation among natural resource agencies and organizations to meet Florida's forest resource conservation and management needs and opportunities.

## Forest Stewardship Program Benefits to Landowners

The Stewardship Program encourages landowners to manage their land in a sustainable manner that provides multiple-resource benefits. Landowners who manage their land according to the multiple-resource principal deserve recognition for leading the community in good forest stewardship. Landowners who become certified as forest stewards will be rewarded with a plaque and a sign to post on their land.

Benefits include:

- invitations to Forest Stewardship Program farm tours, workshops, and other educational events,
- connection to a growing network of landowners, foresters, Extension and natural resource professionals,
- increased long-term productivity of the land,
- increased economic opportunities and diversification of the timberland investment portfolio,

- public recognition as a leader in wise natural resource management,
- integrated technical assistance from natural resource agencies,
- improved skills in forestland management,
- the satisfaction of contributing positively to the nation's environmental health and economic well-being, and
- improved public perception of landowners as true forest stewards.

The good example set by forest stewards will demonstrate the benefits of multiple-resource management to the public; and other landowners will be encouraged to practice forest stewardship.

## Forest Steward Eligibility

Candidates for forest stewardship are private forest landowners who:

- do not presently actively manage their land but would like assistance in developing a management plan according to the stewardship concept,
- are engaged in single-resource management of their land, such as timber production, and are interested in increasing income opportunities by diversifying their activities, or
- are currently managing their land for multiple resources and deserve recognition.

Any private non-industrial forest landowner with a minimum of 20 acres of forestland who wants to sustainably manage the land and its many resources is eligible.

Those who enroll in the Florida Forest Stewardship Program will develop a multi-resource management plan based on their primary and secondary land management objectives. These objectives are determined by the landowner with the help of any desired professional assistance. Primary objectives are chosen from a list of major resources to manage, including timber, wildlife, recreation, grazing, environmental enhancement, and/or soil and water conservation. To become a certified forest steward, the landowner must meet minimum requirements for the management of their primary objectives.

## How to Enroll in the Program

Interested landowners can contact their local county forester office of the Florida Forest Service (please see the contact information listed at the end of this publication)

and ask to have a forest stewardship plan prepared for their property. The forester will answer any additional questions about the program and ask the landowner to complete a Forest Stewardship Program application. Once the application is completed and returned to the Florida Forest Service, a meeting will be scheduled between the landowner and the appropriate resource professionals to begin developing a plan. The landowner will be enrolled in the program when he or she signs the approved forest stewardship plan, thereby agreeing to implement the plan as time and resources allow.

For more information about what is in a management plan see <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fr126>

For details and application for the Forest Service's Forest Stewardship Program, see <http://FreshFromFlorida.com/ForestStewardship>

To find out more about how to become a forest steward and connect to available resources, contact:

- your Florida Forest Service county forester, directory online at <http://FreshFromFlorida.com/CountyForester>,
- Florida Forest Service conservation programs manager in Tallahassee (850) 681-5874,
- or the UF/IFAS forest stewardship coordinator (352) 846-2375.

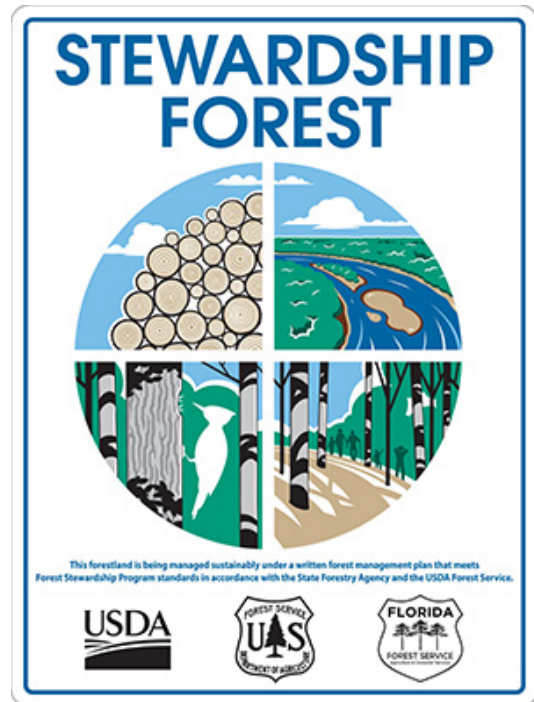


Figure 2. Landowners who have followed the recommendations in their forest stewardship plan and who have practiced good forest management can post the Stewardship Forest sign on their property.