



Planning for the Future of My Land

Why do I need a management plan?

If you've managed so far without a forest management plan, you may wonder why you need one. But having a management plan can bring you greater personal and financial benefits from your woods. Developing a plan makes it possible for you to:

- **Fare better at tax time.** Having a plan reflects your commitment to careful long-term management, which reinforces the idea that your tree farm is a business. The IRS will appreciate that, particularly if you are claiming expenses, losses or income from your tree farm. Your plan can help you avoid tax problems, take advantage of tax incentives and advantages the IRS offers, and satisfy an auditor should you ever be audited.
- **Qualify for programs that can help you.** Many cost-sharing, financial assistance and technical assistance programs that help landowners improve and care for their woods require you to have a forest management plan.
- **Better understand your woods and what they need.** Part of planning will involve mapping your woods and taking stock of its trees—what kinds you have, how mature and healthy they are, and what your goals for the land might be. Knowing this will leave you better prepared to seize new opportunities, such as an uptick in the timber market, and plan for harvests or forest management activities that keep your trees healthy and align with your goals. It can also help you bounce back more quickly when natural disasters and other difficult situations arise.
- **Strengthen your family's connection with the land.** A thorough and well-maintained management plan is a detailed account of your land's history and everything you've done to care for it. It will make it easier for your family or your heirs to understand your dedication to it and what that has involved, and to make informed decisions about the land with you or in your absence.

It's up to you whether to create a management plan for your woods, and what to include in it if you choose to have one. But including certain key elements in it will help you reap the greatest rewards from planning.

What is in a management plan?

Your management plan is unique to you and your woods. It can be basic and only a few pages long, or it can fill a large binder or book. But there are a few basic elements it must contain:

- ✓ **Property information.** Your management plan should include a description of your property as it appears on your deed, with precise locations for your boundary lines. If possible, also include the history of your land. Who owned the land and for how long? How did they use the land (for agriculture, timber, etc.)? What kinds of management activities did they do? This information can help you identify the land's potential uses and plan for its future. Your MyLandPlan.org account allows you to create a Property History, providing questions to help you create the history for your land as well as a place to archive photos and documents related to your property.
- ✓ **A map.** Your plan should also include a map detailing your property boundaries and all the notable features on your land: roads, fence lines, land or structural features, special sites, different forest or vegetation types, and any areas where invasive, threatened or endangered species are found. Aerial photographs and survey or topographical maps are helpful. Your MyLandPlan.org account provides you access to easy to use mapping where you can map your property boundaries as well as the trails, roads, hunting stands, and other features that are found on your property.
- ✓ **An assessment of your resources.** Taking stock of what's on your land is essential if you're planning forest management activities or harvesting timber on your property. With the help of a natural resources professional, you may want to conduct an inventory of the number of trees per acre, the tree species, and the tree diameters on your land. This inventory can help you clarify your goals for the land, and it can add detail to your map and description of the land by revealing potential problem areas or special habitat in your woods.
- ✓ **Your goals and objectives.** This is the most important part of your management plan—a statement of what you want out of your woods. This may mean listing your goals for the land, your desired outcomes, the values you want to protect on your land, or all of these items. For example, your objectives might include generating income from occasional timber harvests, while protecting habitat for deer and turkey and maintaining rich recreation opportunities for your family and friends. We'll explore how to set your goals and objectives in more detail.
- ✓ **Your management recommendations and schedule.** This part of your management plan outlines what you must do to achieve your goals. Where to plant or regenerate tree stands, where to establish wildlife food plots, when and where to burn, which areas to harvest, and how best to conduct each of these management activities—all of these recommendations should be included in your plan, along with a schedule of when these activities are to take place. The Task List tool on MyLandPlan.org helps you keep track of

your upcoming tasks as well as archive previous tasks, including adding pictures and saving those important documents such as receipts or contracts.

- ✓ **You may choose to include additional materials in your management plan.** Some woodland owners list all the details of their management activities (for example, the specific herbicides they used or what kinds of weather conditions were present during a prescribed burn), and include receipts, photographs and other supplementary records in their management plan. It's up to you—but in general, the more information you include, the more useful your plan will be to you and to your family.

The Who and How of Management Plans

Once you decide to create a management plan, you can choose how to do it. Some landowners develop parts of the plan on their own first, and then involve their mentors, family and friends, and foresters and other natural resource professionals as they need to.

Others consult with mentors or professionals from the beginning, and work closely with them throughout the process. Still others leave most of the planning to professionals and review the plan at the end. There is no one right way to create your plan, but it must ultimately be your plan and align with your wishes.

There are several parts of the plan you can develop on your own if you choose to:

- ✓ **Background information.** You can contribute an account of your land's history to the property information section of your plan, if you know that history or learn it from talking with neighbors or reviewing historical records.
- ✓ **Mapping.** You can also annotate any maps with the special sites you value, or sketch your own map to highlight these features.
- ✓ **Documentation.** If you're going to include income and expense information in your plan, you can gather receipts and other key documents, and note professional consultations, management activities and other relevant projects or events that take place.

MyLandPlan.org was developed specifically to help you and other landowners create these elements of your plan. Through your account, you can document the history of your land, set your goals, map your land and keep track of your activities, all in one place.

Many landowners choose to call on a forester or other natural resources professionals for to help with the rest of their plan. For most woodland owners, a forester's assistance will be essential. You may also choose to work with wildlife biologists, soil and water specialists, recreation specialists and others as you develop your plan.

Whether you work on your own or with a team of experts, deciding on the goals and objectives you have for your land will be a personal process. Your goals will guide how you manage your land, so they are your most important contribution to the plan.

Learn More

- Set up your own MyLandPlan.org account: www.mylandplan.org/signup and learn how to easily map your land: www.mylandplan.org/video/how-add-property; and keep track your goals: www.mylandplan.org/video/adding-goal-and-activities
- Principles and Guides for a Well-Managed Forest: [www.forestry.state.al.us/PDFs/Principles and Guides for a Well-Managed Forest%20 NASF .pdf](http://www.forestry.state.al.us/PDFs/Principles_and_Guides_for_a_Well-Managed_Forest%20NASF_.pdf)
- Alabama Forestry Commission Forest Management Assistance: www.forestry.state.al.us/forest_management_programs.aspx?bv=2&s=0
- Alabama Stewardship Program: www.forestry.alabama.gov/stewardship.aspx
- Alabama Extension Forest Management Planning: www.aces.edu/natural-resources/forestry/economics-management/planning.php
- American Tree Farm System: www.treefarmssystem.org/get-started-american-tree-farm
- Management Plan Template for Landowners: www.treefarmssystem.org/tree-farm-management-plan-templates