

AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION



FINAL REPORT TO THE DUTCH BIOMASS CERTIFICATION
FOUNDATION (DBC) FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
AFF'S 2018 DBC STIMULATION PROGRAM IN ALABAMA,
ARKANSAS, FLORIDA, AND LOUISIANA

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD: JULY 2018 THROUGH JANUARY 2019

ABOUT AFF

The American Forest Foundation (AFF), a leading U.S. forest conservation organization, works on the ground with family forest owners, partners and elected officials to promote stewardship and ensure healthy, more resilient forests.

AFF offers certification focused on family forests and other small forest holdings through its program the American Tree Farm System. The ATFS helps landowners sustainably manage their forests to improve the ongoing benefits they provide--such as wildlife habitat, clean water, and wood supplies.

With its partners, AFF is working to reduce barriers to landowner participation in forest certification while ensuring rigorous sustainability standards are met, and long-term engagement of family woodland owners that leads to improved forest stewardship. Innovations through technology, marketing, and improved tools for foresters are increasing the number of certified acres and the impact that family forest owners have on their land.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the American Forest Foundation's work for DBC was to lay the groundwork for a future project that would expand certification through two primary strategies: (1) tackling barriers and (2) leveraging existing investments and structures.

As a leader in family woodland owner conservation and certification, we are intimately aware of barriers to expanding certification among this demographic, as DBC's own research has also found. In assessing the elements that are preventing or slowing certification of family lands in high priority regions that would support the Dutch market, we tackled the following primary challenges present in the expansion of certification:

1. Landowners are generally unengaged in the management of their woodlands and unaware of forest certification
2. Certification requires a management plan, which also requires investment of time and resources for both landowners and foresters
3. Even once they become aware of certification, landowners generally do not see value, relative to their own goals
4. Certification is time intensive for foresters and does not provide an adequate value proposition

AFF's approach was to address each of the barriers using a suite of related and complementary tactics: (a) mobilization of tools that streamline and enable certification, (b) promotion of certification to family landowners, (c) deepening partnerships and (d) the certification of more acres in the short-term maintained with sustainable growth.

Taken together, the actions taken by AFF over the implementation period have effectively set the stage for the implementation of a future DBC project to promote and expand SDE+ qualifying certification systems for family landowners in the Southeast US and North America, generally. This has happened in a couple of key ways. First, with funding from DBC, AFF has been able to strengthen and engage its core network of volunteers, foresters and partners who can be mobilized for certification. Second, we have been able to expand the infrastructure of landscape management plans (LMPs) and digital tools to hasten, streamline and efficiently deliver certification. Lastly, we have gained additional insight to improve implementation and growth of certification into the future.

LEVERAGING EXISTING INVESTMENT AND ADDITIONALITY OF DBC'S IMPACT

Recognizing that DBC does not have the resources to construct from scratch the systems needed to deliver on the demand for certification by the Dutch market and further seeks results as quickly as possible, AFF sought to take advantage of and build on its existing infrastructure, partnerships and projects to deliver on DBC's aims in a truncated period. DBC's contribution leverages investments by partners in each of the four implementation states, in addition to AFF's investment in the WoodsCamp tool. DBC funds were applied to this system, enabling extension of the timeline of landowner outreach campaigns; development and testing of new landowner marketing materials; new or additional training and workshops to engage foresters and stakeholders to elevate awareness and use of AFF tools, including mobile technologies and landscape management plans; evaluation of LMPs and mobile technologies to improve implementation in the future; and completion of certifications for backlogged landowner requests. DBC funds also enabled additional AFF staffing and travel support for all of the above activities.

To maximize results in the relatively short period of this grant's implementation, AFF implemented tactics in north Alabama, the Panhandle of Florida and, to a lesser extent, Arkansas and Louisiana. These geographies were selected for the following strategic reasons:

- Proximity to one or more pellet facilities
- The presence of AFF's active investment and partnerships that would support DBC's aims and funded activities
- In-situ network of partners that could be activated to support DBC funded certification expansion activities
- Unmet landowner response and demand for certification
- Existing or planned development of landscape management plans (LMP) infrastructure
- Different scales and institutional settings to inform replication in the future
- An existing test and deployment of the WoodsCamp platform (in Alabama)

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

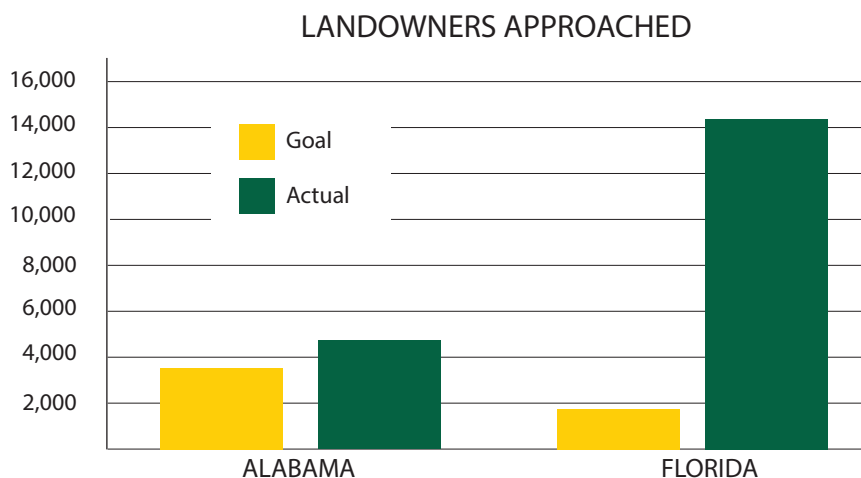
With DBC funding, AFF was able to achieve the overall aim of the project to facilitate future expansion of forest certification. While many of our goals were met or exceeded, some deliverables related to inspector trainings and stakeholder meetings were not fully met, due to the need to attend to immediate response to hurricanes and lack of partner availability, including government workers. Compared to recent years' performance, certification growth and efficiency were tremendously improved in Alabama and Florida over 2018, including the second half of the year in which DBC funds were employed to provide additional landowner engagement, forester training, promotion, and support activities.

DBC grant commitments and progress report (landowner and acreage certified)								
STATE	Certified Landowner Goal	July-November	December	Total Landowners Certified	Certified Acreage Goal	July-November	December	Total Acreage Certified
Alabama	16	161	15	176	2,400	50,319	4,578	54,897
Florida	16	53	5	58	2,394	9,685	361	10,046
TOTAL	32	214	20	234	4,794	60,004	4,939	64,943

DELIVERABLE: APPROACH 5,452 SMALL FOREST OWNERS FOR PARTICIPATION IN CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS.

Compared with past performance and available funds, we sought to approach and engage 5,452 landowners in Alabama and Florida about active forest management in general, and certification specifically, using messaging, marketing, and educational materials distributed via direct mail, social media, e-mail, and other media as appropriate. However, after testing new messaging and platform, we were able to identify more effective engagement techniques via social media, deploying DBC funding, helping us to exceed our goals. Further, DBC funding enabled the extension of landowner campaigns. As a result, the total landowners approached far surpassed our goal by almost four times.

State	Goal	Total Landowners Approached
Alabama	3,634	4,912
Florida	1,818	14,308
Total	5,452	19,220



DELIVERABLE: ORGANIZE 10 TRAININGS, SUPPORT ACTIVITIES, AND OTHER PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES.

AFF and partners organized field days for landowners, trainings for foresters and certification inspectors, and meetings of stakeholders to develop tools for certification. This engagement was very constructive to growth across the geographies and provided important learning for the future of innovative certification tools. DBC funds enabled AFF and local staffing to ensure these needs were met and deep engagement took place, which supported successful formal multi-stakeholder meetings in each state. However, second stakeholder meetings, slated for the first quarter of 2019, were not able to be executed during the implementation timeline.

With these adjustments and DBC funding, AFF was able to support the ATFS network in providing two additional workshops in each region, which contributed to additional landowners engaged and certifications completed.

State	Field Days for Landowners		Inspector Trainings		Stakeholder Meetings	
	Target for 2018	Completed	Target for 2018	Completed	Target for 2018	Completed
AL	1	4	1	3		0
AR			1	0	2	1
FL	1	4	1	2		0
LA			1	0	2	1
TOTAL	2	8	4	5	4	2

DELIVERABLE: SMALL LANDOWNER CERTIFICATIONS

Using DBC funds, AFF and partners connected with and certified small landowners who had received messaging and educational materials about certification. Due to the short time-frame for this project, and the relatively long time required to lead a landowner through the certification process, we anticipated that efforts would yield modest results. However, with insights for landowner engagement and messaging testing, as well as deployment of new digital tools, including WoodsCamp and the AFF mobile on-line administrative tool (not financially supported by DBC) and greater engagement of foresters (deliverable above), we were able to respond to incoming and backlogged landowners in our pipeline. DBC funds enabled the deployment of foresters to address demand and support administrative functions in processing certifications.

STATE	Certified Landowner Goal	Total Landowners Certified	Certified Acreage Goal	Total Acreage
Alabama	16	176	1,600	54,897
Florida	16	58	1,600	10,046
TOTAL	32	234	3,200	64,943



DELIVERABLE: DEVELOP AND DISTRIBUTE MATERIALS FOR LANDOWNERS ON CERTIFICATION

To further address barriers to small holder certification, AFF and its partners added new components to ongoing landowner outreach programs in Alabama and Florida, approaching landowners specifically about certification to build a pipeline of landowners who are aware of and “ready for” or building readiness for certification, which could be supported in a future project. This also allowed for the testing of new messages and methodologies of certification messaging, education and engagement.

These activities leverage existing marketing and outreach efforts Florida and Alabama where AFF and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are already working to engage landowners. These marketing efforts are also based on extensive market research AFF has conducted, in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, to identify the most effective messages to reach and engage the target population.

To this end, as outlined in monthly reports, with DBC funds, we developed and tested new marketing materials, distributing to landowners using various platforms, as noted above. Evaluation for effectiveness continues and is designed to inform marketing in association with further LMP implementation in 2019, with anticipated support from DBC.



DELIVERABLE: CREATE NEW TOOLS TO DECREASE THE ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS TO CERTIFICATION, AND ENABLE DBC'S CURRENT AND FUTURE PARTNERS TO MORE EASILY ENROLL LANDOWNERS INTO CERTIFICATION.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLANS (LMPS)

As outlined in our proposal, research by AFF and others has demonstrated that the chief barrier for most landowners to participating in forest certification is the requirement to have a forest management plan. To address this significant challenge, AFF has developed an innovative tool, the Landscape Management Plan (LMP). An LMP is a document produced through a multi-stakeholder process that identifies, based on an analysis of geospatial data and existing regional conservation plans, forest conservation priorities at a landscape scale and management actions that can be applied at a parcel scale. This approach also utilizes publicly available datasets on a range of forest resources, including forest types, soils, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources and others, as well as social data regarding landowner motivations and practices. As a document, it meets all of the requirements for ATFS certification and is fully supported by PEFC and could be used in support of other programs such as other certification systems, alongside ATFS. Once an LMP has been developed for a region, and once foresters are trained in its use, the LMP allows landowners to use the landscape plan and derive a customized set of conservation practices to implement on their properties. This eliminates the need for a forester to write a complete individualized plan, saving the forester time and the landowner money. The forester is able to devote the time he or she would have spent writing the plan interacting with the landowner and making specific management recommendations, and / or visiting additional landowners.

With DBC support, AFF sought to leverage two existing LMPs in Alabama and Florida and successfully expanded certification in those states. In addition, AFF combined DBC funds with pre-existing commitments to contract with forestry consultants to design new LMPs in Arkansas and Louisiana. DBC grant funds were used to cover LMP activities between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018 for these states, namely stakeholder engagement, two stakeholder workshops (one in each state Arkansas and Louisiana) and staffing.

Further, to gain a better understanding what limitations the LMP posed culturally, operationally and from auditability perspective, we sought to gain insight through multiple vehicles, which could inform future implementation of DBC forest certification expansion projects. To this end, with DBC support, we conducted interviews with foresters and landowners using the LMP conducted to understand better how experiences and effectiveness may be improved. In addition, we contracted with a well-known accredited, auditor to conduct an audit of the LMP implementation, along with mobile on-line administrative tool integration. Based on this feedback and observations in implementation, we are further developing training, education and outreach materials for all audiences and considering multiple mediums. The LMP appears to be a valuable tool that produces results on the ground; however, implementation is key to family forest certification and landowner engagement. Continuous evaluation and improvements at this stage remain ongoing and will continue throughout winter and into spring for replication elsewhere.

DELIVERABLE: DEVELOP TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS TO FURTHER REDUCE PROCESSING TIME, ELIMINATE DUPLICATION OF WORK, AND IMPROVE USER EXPERIENCE. TOOLS WILL ALSO TEST VARIOUS IMPLEMENTATION METHODS FOR LMP WITHIN ATFS CERTIFICATION.

To further streamline the certification process, enable rapid action following landowner response and more completely leverage benefits of with the LMPs, AFF has developed a mobile on-line administrative tool that automatically syncs LMP information and support fluid completion of certification workflow, including rapid and in-field approvals, integration with ATFS data and other benefits.

With DBC support, AFF was able to support beta testing of the tool via forester engagement and evaluation by third-party consultants. This tool proved to be invaluable to delivering certification faster, cheaper and easier than traditional methods, contributing to the overall performance during the project's implementation period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on AFF's experiences over the implementation period, we recommend the following to advance DBC's goals in the US South in 2019 and future years:

- Building and deploying of tools to continue to address barriers to certification and build value for landowners, foresters and partnering organizations
 - Expansion and continued development of LMPs
 - Forester tools and technologies
 - Tailored tools for landowners
- Increasing awareness of certification via sustained and broad-based marketing
 - Direct and digital marketing
 - Print and events
- Address administrative and capacity barriers to address backlogged landowners
 - Contracting with foresters to conduct certifications
 - Dedicated staffing to relieve burdens

These are elements that AFF is keen to explore in future partnership with DBC, including via the 2019 request for proposal process and related processes, as well as longer-term projects and collaboration.

