

## INTRODUCTION

Forests are more than just trees; they are an integrated community of plants, animals, soils, and water. As a forest owner, you are more than just a guardian or investor, but also a steward who pursues personal goals by caring for and using the forest today while sustaining long-term forest health and continuity.

This publication will help Mississippi forest owners answer three basic questions:

1. How will you develop a plan to manage for a healthy forest over the long term?
2. How do you as a forest steward set priorities?
3. How will you recognize on-the-ground results of good stewardship?

Your personal objectives are key to answering these questions, and the stewardship principles presented here are a template for addressing your personal objectives and priorities. A stewardship plan is the best way for you to capture the full benefit of blending personal goals with stewardship principles. Such a plan, geared to the size and condition of your forest, is a blueprint for action, confirms your objectives, guides your progress, and targets change as your forest and knowledge grow.

Note: Professional assistance in your stewardship plan development efforts can prove very helpful and is available from your local Mississippi Forestry Commission service forester, Mississippi State University Extension Service agent, or a professional consulting forester.

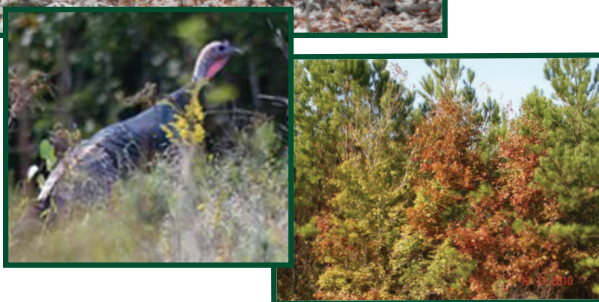
## STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES

The following set of stewardship principles can guide the achievement of your forest stewardship goals. To the extent that your personal goals are consistent with these principles, you are practicing forest stewardship. Since Mississippi forests are living and ever changing, stewardship is a “work in progress”—the sooner begun, the more regularly tended, the better the results. The stewardship principles presented here address how your objectives, plans, and actions achieve each principle, and suggest ways to measure your success.

## PRINCIPLE 1

**Maintain or improve plant, animal, and tree diversity in the forest and landscape.**

- Your forest includes both trees and other plant life such as shrubs, groundcover, mosses, and algae in shady places, seeps, and springs. Your forest is also a habitat for native wildlife, songbirds, insects, and microscopic organisms.
- Your forest’s community of plants and animals is part of a broader mix of communities across the surrounding landscape (or watershed), like a patch in a quilt. Your measures of success include responding to forest change, maintaining standing dead trees for wildlife, and monitoring management activities to maintain and enhance diverse plants, animals, and trees.



## PRINCIPLE 2

**Maintain or improve forest productivity for diverse values.**

- Your forest could provide income from timber sales, as well as from a broad range of other goods and services. Productivity logically includes market values (for example, timber and recreation) and nonmarket values (shaded streams, natural beauty, conserved rare habitat).
- On a broader scale, your forest’s productivity contributes to the local potential to attract and sustain economic investment. Resources such as lumber or paper mills, tourism for fishing and hunting, and clean water sustain your local community. Your measures of success include maintaining the overall long-term vigor of your forest and improving wildlife habitat and water quality.



## PRINCIPLE 3

**Maintain or improve the health and vigor of the forest and its landscape/watershed.**

- The life cycles of your forest’s plants and animals ebb and flow with age and climate, as well as with the cycles of natural events, such as storms, insect invasions, wildfire, and drought. These same cycles also impact adjacent lands and watersheds.
- Your forest’s potential to influence, and be influenced by, the health and vigor of its surrounding landscape varies with its history and general condition (for example, its mix of tree species and forest ages). Reducing invasive plant species, managing tree species mix, and ensuring long-term forest health are signs of success.

## PRINCIPLE 4

**Improve soil and water resources.**

- Your forest plays an important role in the fertility of its own soils, as well as in the health and vigor of the plants and animals that rely on that soil.
- Your forest’s role as a filter—catching waterborne sediment, softening the impact of storm-driven rain, and holding stormwater for gentle release over time—serves critical needs on both your own and your neighbors’ property in your watershed.
- Taking time to learn about your forest’s soil and factoring this into overall management, developing riparian areas, and mapping streams are signs of success.



## PRINCIPLE 5

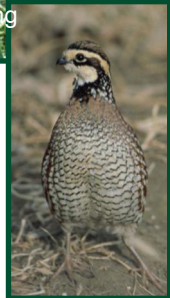
**Manage forests for growth and energy storage.**

- Our reliance on fossil-based fuels releases carbon into the atmosphere. Your forest can counter these impacts because trees use carbon for growth and energy storage. All forest plants and soils store carbon, so your management influences the natural cycles of storage in both living and dead plant material.
- Your management for firewood as a substitute for fossil fuel heat sources can slow the addition of “new” carbon into the atmosphere.
- Your signs of success include taking carbon release into account when harvesting timber and marketing wood for fuel.

## PRINCIPLE 6

### *Manage for community, cultural, and economic benefits.*

- Your personal goals should take into consideration your forest's contribution to your community's economy and quality of life.
- Measures of success are considering your community's value of aesthetics when implementing your forestry practices and, where feasible, allowing public access.



## BECOMING A GOOD STEWARD

Forest stewardship is an ongoing, long-term, and adaptive process; you will learn from your actions, investments, and even inaction as you see the results of your decisions.

Progress, however, can be complex because many variables govern a forest's health and vigor. These include climate, soils, and the interaction among the forest's trees, plants, and animals. These and other factors often make progress subtle, intermittent, and difficult to gauge. Take the time to consider what efforts, events, milestones, or accomplishments you might use to track your plan's success. This can help focus your work and avoid surprises, as well as maximize satisfaction and returns on your investment.

### SUMMARY

Forest stewardship is as challenging as it is rewarding. Like most other worthy undertakings, you measure successful stewardship both in steps along the journey as well as in reaching your personal goals. Good stewards pay at least as much attention to the forest that remains as they pay to harvests. They discover that forests respond to stewardship practices. Good stewards are rewarded with good forests and all the pleasure that comes along with working and spending time in good forests. The work you do, the information you gather, the plans you make, and the goals you meet will sustain your forest and preserve its benefits.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

*Best Management Practices for Forestry in Mississippi* (2008), available as a free PDF at:  
[http://www.mfc.ms.gov/pdf/Mgt/WQ/Entire\\_bmp\\_2008-7-24.pdf](http://www.mfc.ms.gov/pdf/Mgt/WQ/Entire_bmp_2008-7-24.pdf)

Mississippi State University  
Extension Forestry  
Box 9681  
Thompson Hall  
Mississippi State, MS 39762  
(662) 325-3905  
<http://msucare.com/forestry>

Mississippi Forestry Commission  
660 North Street, Suite 300  
Jackson, MS 39202  
(601) 359-2841  
<http://www.mfc.ms.gov>

*A Stewardship Handbook for Family Ownerships*, available as a free PDF at: [http://www.stateforesters.org/stewardship\\_hand-book](http://www.stateforesters.org/stewardship_hand-book)

This brochure has been modified from original publications by:

The Pennsylvania State University. *Forest Stewardship Principals for Landowners*, UH 186 by L. Schoonhoven & J. Finley (2008).

National Association of State Foresters with support from the US Forest Service. *Stewardship Handbook for Family Forest Owners* (2009).



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By Jason S. Gordon, Assistant Professor, and Linda W. Garnett, Extension Associate I, Forestry. Images by Randy Rousseau, John Kushla, John Auel, Linda W. Garnett, all Extension Forestry, and <http://www.public-domain-image.com>.

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## PRINCIPLE 7

### *Comply with laws and state Best Management Practices.*

- Your forest is subject to laws and guidelines designed to serve your community and the State of Mississippi.
- A measure of success is complying with Mississippi Best Management Practices.