

Forest*A*Syst:

A Web-based Tool for Woodland Owners

by Kris M. Irwin

As a woodland owner, you may or may not have a management plan for your property. For those who do have a plan, I'm sure you have found it to be a valuable resource as a guide to scheduling management activities. A good management plan is one that is reviewed annually. Don't let your plan sit on a shelf too long.

If you do have a management plan already, are you interested in learning about other management options for your woodlands beyond the focus of timber, wildlife, and protecting water quality? If you don't have a plan, do you need help finding a professional resource manager who can help you create a plan tailored to meet your specific management objectives? Do you wish to print an aerial photo of your property with just a few clicks of your computer mouse? If you answered yes to any of these questions then you should check out the Forest*A*Syst Web site (www.forestasyst.org).

Forest*A*Syst was developed with three objectives in mind:

- To educate woodland owners about woodland-management activities they can implement on their land
- To encourage woodland owners to articulate their land-management objectives in a written management plan
- To facilitate communication between the woodland owner and a natural resource professional (e.g. forester, wildlife biologist, or state extension professional)

A Page at a Time

As a woodland owner you most likely have one or more objectives that guide the management activities on your property. If you do not have objectives, don't worry, keep reading because you will discover how

Forest*A*Syst (FAS) can facilitate the process of helping you to identify one or more objectives that can meet your needs.

The FAS Web site is populated with eight content-rich, topic-specific pages that educate you about predominant woodland management alternatives (see above). The topics are timber management, wildlife management, recreation, forest health, soil and water quality, agroforestry, invasive species, and Firewise. The Management Plan page outlines the value of writing a plan that addresses your specific objectives and the Glossary page provides an alphabetical listing of technical terms and concepts used within FAS Web site. The Profile Your Land and Contact a Professional pages are the interactive pages of the FAS Web site. Let's explore each page to learn more about what you'll find and how you can use the information.

Home Page

The home page is your gateway to the FAS Web site. You are greeted with a short video delivered by the FAS project manager. You are encouraged to listen to the video the first time you visit the Web site. Many options are available for you to navigate from the home page. If you click on "Start Forest*A*Syst," in the middle of the page, you will be directed to the Introduction page where you can start viewing the entire Web site from beginning to end in consecutive order. Or you can select and view any of the topic pages listed in the column on the left-hand side of the page. The home page also gives you the option of going directly to the interactive Profile Your Land page. You'll learn more about how this page functions later in this article.



Introduction

The FAS Introduction page sets the stage. The text on this page is intended to get you to think. When you finish reading this short narrative, it is anticipated that you will ask yourself, "What do I want to gain from my woodland property?"

Timber Management

The content of the Timber Management page is broken into three categories: the young stand, the middle-aged stand, and harvesting the mature forest. Using a combination of photos and short descriptive narratives, you will build your working knowledge about timber management.



must be followed. Ask your extension forester for more information about the BMPs in your state.

Agroforestry

Agroforestry is the intentional combination of trees, crops, and/or livestock. This page describes the various agroforestry practices used by woodland owners in North America. If you want to learn more about agroforestry, contact the USDA National Agroforestry Center (www.nac.unl.edu).

Invasive Species

Land-management practices used for forestry, wildlife, and recreational habitat management involve periodic disturbances that have the potential to introduce and/or spread invasive species. This page will help you develop your level of awareness of invasive species and describe appropriate control measures.

Firewise

This page was recently added to the FAS Web site. From this page, you are encouraged to link with the national Firewise documents that address the risks and learn how to protect your property from wildfire.

Management Plan

This page stresses the importance of developing and following a management plan. Unless you have the knowledge and skills to manage natural resources, you are encouraged to seek the advice and guidance from a skilled natural-resource management professional.

Profile Your Land

This page is filled with interactive opportunities. After selecting the state and then the county where your property is located, you receive information about the eco-region and predominant forest cover type for the county you selected. At the bottom of this page is the Find Your Property section. Read the instructions, and with a few clicks of the mouse, you will be printing an 8.5-by-11 inch aerial photo



Wildlife Management

The wildlife found in your woodlands have four basic requirements to survive and reproduce: food, cover, water, and space. This page provides a few examples of the interactions and what you can do to integrate wildlife management and timber management.

Recreation

An often overlooked management objective is recreation. This page illuminates how you can simultaneously manage your forest for profit while increasing your wildlife habitat and enjoying the beauty of your woodlands. You will learn about common management activities that can enhance the visual appearance of your woodlands.

Forest Health

You must be vigilant and protect your woodlands from forest insects, invasive species, and diseases. While the amount of text on this page is limited, you are provided with a link to the Forest Pests of North America Web site.

Soil and Water Quality

The take-home message for this page is that you, as the woodland owner, have a responsibility to use best management practices (BMPs) to protect water quality and control soil erosion. Each state has an established set of BMPs that

of your property. The self-assessment questionnaire requires your input by asking a series of “yes,” “no,” and “don’t know” questions. You can connect with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Web Soil Survey and print a map of the soils on your property (see the Web Soil Survey article on page 4 for more information).

Contact a Professional

Forest*A*Syst is designed to connect you with a natural-resource professional who can help you put your management ideas into practice. From this page, click on the state where

your property is located, and a listing of state and federal agencies and university contacts will appear. The links on this page will connect you with the Web page for each contact.

Forest*A*Syst is a tool that can help resource professionals,

too. The Web site can be used to educate new woodland owners who are interested in learning more about natural resources and management objectives. The answers provided in the self-assessment questionnaire can guide you toward selecting the management objectives best suited for your property.

Get Started!

Forest*A*Syst is a tool for woodland owners like you. It was created for woodland owners and resource professionals. How you use the Web site depends on your level of technical knowledge, complexity of management objectives, and if you have a management plan or not. You can use Forest*A*Syst to learn more about agroforestry, or a professional forester may use it to help his/her client understand how the soils found on their property are capable of supporting timber production. There is something for everyone at www.forestasyst.org.



Forest*A*Syst provides access to aerial imagery of your property.

How It All Began...

Forest*A*Syst was created in the late 1990s by Rick Hamilton, an extension forester with the North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension Service, and Larry Biles, National Program Leader-Forest Management with the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). The Forest*A*Syst program was modeled after the existing Farm*A*Syst and Home*A*Syst extension programs. Hamilton is now retired, and Biles is the state forester for Kansas.

While the paper-based version of Forest*A*Syst was in its early stages of adoption, the World Wide Web technology was steadily increasing the ability of state and federal natural resource agencies to reach more and more woodland owners across the country. Internet technology and graphical design software provided an effective mode of creating and delivering interactive and dynamic educational materials that allowed users to read text, view videos, and access additional resources. These positive characteristics associated with the Web were the driving force behind the decision to create a Web-based version of Forest*A*Syst.

A collaborative team was formed to build the Forest*A*Syst Web site. The team included the original authors—Hamilton and Biles—and three service and outreach faculty from the University of Georgia—Dr. Kris Irwin, Dr. David Moorhead, and Chuck Barger. The goal for the new Web site was for it to be interactive, allowing users to assess their management priorities, print documents, search other Web sites, and develop a line of communication with natural-resource professionals. Converting the paper version of FAS to a Web site was made possible with grants from the USDA CSREES and Forest Service, Forest Stewardship programs.

About the Author:

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