

FOREST MASTERS

An Education, Motivation and Recognition Program for Forest Landowners and Stakeholders in Alabama

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HOW would you like to earn Bronze, Silver and Gold medals for learning how to better manage forests resources and for sharing your time and love for Alabama's forests?

Forest Masters is a new program that rewards you for your education and service efforts. There has been interest for several years in an Alabama "Master Woodland Owners" program. States such as Oregon and Pennsylvania have programs that require participation in a fixed series of courses as well as service activities. This approach works well but has some shortcomings, particularly for Alabama. A large commitment of coordinated manpower is required to teach these courses. Manpower and time are in relatively short supply for most forestry organizations in the state. Participants must also dedicate several days or weekends to attend the courses, usually taught on a rigid schedule. These two situations can limit the number of sessions offered and may limit the number of participants willing to commit to a specific time schedule.

Forest Masters was designed to take advantage of the many educational opportunities that already exist in Alabama. Presentations, workshops and field trips are offered by many organizations in the state, such as the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the Alabama Forestry Commission, county forestry planning committees, the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association (state level and county chapters), the Alabama Forest Owners Association, the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Alabama Wildlife Federation, the Longleaf Alliance, the Center for Forestry, Paper and Chemical Technology, companies such as American

Cyanamid, and others. All of these programs may be certified for Forest Masters credits.

Topic Groups

Six defined topic groups cover the wide range of forest-related subjects (see Table 1 or the Forest Masters web site at www.pfmt.org/fm for details). Any program that includes a technical forest resource-related presentation (lecture or field trip) can be submitted for evaluation. Program organizers send the agenda, with an explanation of program content, to the Forest Masters coordinator. Programs can also be submitted via the

Forest Masters web site. Forest Masters "credits" (FMC) are assigned by topic group to each presentation or portion of a field trip in a similar procedure to continuing forest education credits used by the Society of American Foresters. One FMC is earned for each 15 minutes in a certified lecture or presentation (to nearest 1.0 FMC) and one FMC is earned for each 30 minutes on a certified field trip, not including travel time (to nearest 0.5 FMC). Programs and field trips must be certified before they occur by the meeting organizers (allow a two-week lead time). Individuals attending a meeting cannot request certification.

Table 1. Forest Masters Topic Groups

Topic Groups	Example Subjects
1. Forest Stand Management	Planning Harvesting and roads Stand establishment Stand management Inventory, growth and yield
2. Education/Public and Private Programs	General forestry Forest tree and plant identification Public and private programs Educational and leadership training
3. Wildlife Habitat Management	Game management Non-game management Animal damage control
4. Recreation and Aesthetics	Forest trails Fishing Hunting Management for aesthetics
5. Environment and Water Quality	Wetlands and water quality Best Management Practices (BMPs) Wildflowers and native plants
6. Forest Policy and Economics	Economics of forestry Legislative issues Legal aspects of forestry Forest industry and mills (not an exhaustive list)

Table 2. Credits required to achieve each recognition level

Recognition Level	Education	Service
Bronze Forest Master	20 FMC in each of four Topic Groups	None
Silver Forest Master	40 FMC in each of four Topic Groups	20 hours of applicable service
Gold Forest Master	60 FMC in each of four Topic Groups	40 hours of applicable service

Landowners, stakeholders and forest resource professionals who apply to Forest Masters are added to a credit-accumulation database. Registered participants attending a certified meeting or field trip sign a verification form giving their name, identification number and portions of the program attended. Sponsors of the program send the completed forms to the Forest Masters coordinator for credit. When a specified number of credits are earned in a given topic group, the participant is awarded a certificate and medal signifying their level of accomplishment. Each topic group has a Bronze (20 FMC minimum), Silver (40 FMC minimum) and Gold (60 FMC minimum) achievement level.

Recognition Levels

When a participant achieves a given recognition level (Bronze, Silver or Gold) in four of the six topic groups, they receive the designation of Bronze, Silver, or Gold Forest Master (see Table 2 for specific requirements). The Bronze level can be achieved with education alone. Silver and Gold levels require service activities as well. Forest Masters is a recognition program only in that no exams are administered to evaluate competency.

Example opportunities that can fulfill the service requirement of the Silver and Gold levels of Forest Masters include, but are not limited to:

- Mentoring other forest landowners to help them better manage their forest.
- Serving as an officer in a forest landowner organization.
- Participation in FAWN program, Project Learning Tree, Alabama TREASURE Forest Association's Classroom in the Forest, 4-H or FFA forestry and wildlife judging programs, or other school and student related programs.

- Hosting a forest landowner field trip.
- Directly assisting in or planning a regional or statewide forest landowner meeting.

A form is available to record service activities. Credit is given for the time actually spent in the activity, not including preparation time. Contact the Private Forest Management Team coordinator or see the Forest Masters web site for service forms.

In addition to recognition by certificate, participants receive a sign in the appropriate color (bronze, silver or gold) that can be mounted below or above their existing TREASURE Forest sign, Tree Farm sign, or elsewhere that designates their level of Forest Masters accomplishment. Recognition, certificates and signs can be given at Alabama TREASURE Forest Association county chapter meetings, Alabama Forest Owner Association meetings, county forestry planning committee meetings at or other appropriate venues. Photographs and suitable local publicity should accompany the Forest Masters presentation. Participants

achieving each Forest Masters level may be recognized at the Alabama Landowner and TREASURE Forest Conference.

Summary

Forest Masters is flexible and provides recognition for a wide range of forest resource-related interests and service activities, yet ensures a broad forest resource education. Forest Masters will collaborate with traditional and non-traditional forest-related groups to provide educational opportunities and a structure for identifying and rewarding educational and service programs. As the database of programs grows, analysis will identify topics that are being well represented and those that are not being sufficiently offered. This information can help the education and service providers in the state plan their activities better.

Sign up today! An application form is included with this article or you can apply on-line at the Forest Masters web site (www.pfmt.org/fm). There is no cost for participating in Forest Masters, but some programs may have associated fees. For more information, applications, certification and service forms contact:

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334-844-1019 or 334-844-1043

E-mail: glover@forestry.auburn.edu
or jeannie@auburn.edu

Web site: www.pfmt.org/fm 

Forest Masters Application Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Last 4 digits of your Social Security Number: _____
(This will be combined with your initials to create your Forest Masters ID)

Return form to: Forest Masters Coordinator
School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences
Auburn University, AL 36849
FAX: 334-844-1084