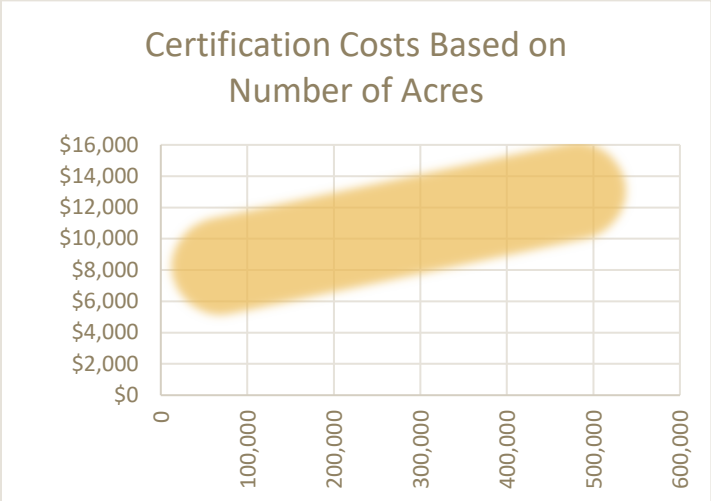
Process for American Tree Farm System ® (ATFS)

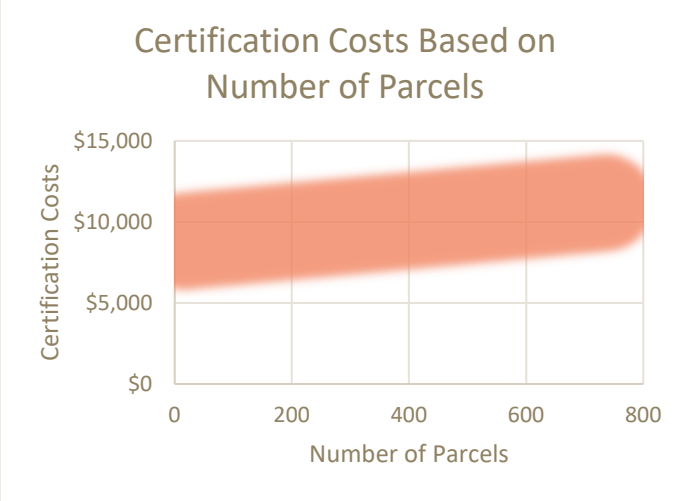
Independently Managed Group (IMG) Establishment

The American Tree Farm System ® (ATFS) is a program of the American Forest Foundation (AFF). The ATFS 2021 IMG Certification Standards contain the requirements for the implementation by, and independent certification of, group organization(s) comprising a number of group member properties under one centrally administered program. A Group Entity holds the single certificate on behalf of the Group Organization and is authorized to represent the Group Members in the implementation of the AFF Standards of Sustainability and ATFS IMG Standards

All lands eligible for ATFS certification may undergo a third-party certification audit to judge conformance to the AFF Standards of Sustainability. The following outlines the process of establishing an Independently Managed Group interested in third-party certification of their forestlands:

1. All documents needed for creating and managing an IMG may be found at https://www.treefarmsystem.org/documents-for-foresters.
2. Review the ***Sample Group Managers Responsibility Checklist [Word]*** document to gain an understanding of what will be required of the group manager and organization. Some items will require policy development for enrolling/expelling group members, defining roles and responsibilities, and other administrative functions of the group entity.
3. Review the management of the properties that will comprise the new group. The member properties that will comprise the new Group Entity should be prepared for an initial audit by ensuring conformance with the ***AFF 2021 IMG Standards of Sustainability*** and the ***ATFS 2021 Eligibility Requirements and Guidance***. The ***Sample Standards Monitoring Checklist [Word]*** may be used to evaluate each property.
4. When the infrastructure has been developed and the enrolled properties meet the requirements of the Standards, the Group Entity submits an application to an ANAB or SCC-accredited Certification Body of their choice and undergoes an audit for conformance.
    - Audit fees payable to the certification body are highly variable based on the total number of acres, the size and number of parcels enrolled, their distribution, and the travel costs associated with the audit. Generally, audit costs are estimated as:
        - $7500-$10,000 for the small (<50,000 acres)
        - $10000-$15000 for medium (50,000-100,000 acres)
        - $15000+ for large (>100,000 acres)





5. Upon positive certification decision, the Certification Body issues a certificate and notifies ATFS. The Certification Body shall also notify ATFS of any changes to a previously issued certificate.
6. The Certification Body shall write the Executive Summary of the certification report and shall include findings on the auditee's conformity with the AFF Standards and ATFS program requirements. The Group Entity must make the Executive Summary of the certification report publicly available.
7. The Group Manager completes the Group Data Reporting Form and the IMG Annual Reporting Summary (provided by AFF) and submits to AFF for uploading into the ATFS Certification and Inspection Tracking System. Group Managers are provided a username and password to the online database to access and manage their profile and property records.
    - 2024 ATFS administrative fees for IMG's are as follows:
        - < 249,999 acres = $0.02 per acre
        - 250,000 – 499,999 acres = $0.03 per acre
        - 500,000 – 1,000,000 acres = $0.04 per acre
        - ≥1,000,001 acres = $0.05 per acre
    - Beginning in 2025, the previous year's fees will be adjusted by the 12-month average consumer price index (CPI) as published by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics in January of each year. If the CPI is zero or negative, the previous rates will remain unchanged.
    - Note: Group Entities may manage their property records in their own system or utilize the ATFS Certification and Inspection Tracking System. Using the ATFS database simplifies the annual reporting process.

8. AFF communicates with appropriate state(s) leadership of the new certification for programmatic purposes. Group Entities are encouraged to coordinate with ATFS State Programs on outreach and educational opportunities.
9. Internal Monitoring of the Group Organization is conducted by the Group Manager per the IMG Certification Standards requirements.

For questions regarding the initial certification process, annual reporting and administrative fees, or the ATFS Standards, please contact ATFS Sr. Certification Manager Stephen Lloyd at SLloyd@forestfoundation.org.