Storytelling interview guide for ATFS committees

Why have we created this guide?
*While statistics and numbers are great to show change over time, personal stories are compelling and offer readers the opportunity to truly see the individual landowner behind these numbers. Reading about the individual helps put a face onto the value of the ATFS program by unveiling an actual person who benefited from his/her involvement in ATFS.

Story collection and sharing is a key part of the ATFS communication strategy. Storytelling helps ATFS:

- Bring to life its success as a program. For more than 75 years, ATFS has been successfully helping landowners achieve their goals. Storytelling can help us celebrate and share these accomplishments by highlighting amazing landowners in your state!
- Raise the profile of family forest owners countrywide to help policymakers, partners and supporters see the value in supporting these landowners.
- Directly connect with landowners and Tree Farmers to move them to action by giving them a way to relate to other landowners, to inspire them to try something new on their land, or to connect with their community to share their successes and learn from others – people learn from their peers!
- Showcase the importance of fundraising for increased landowner tools and resources by highlighting exactly how these folks have used these funds to do good on their land.
- Increase recruitment by inspiring new landowners to join the program.
- Inspire landowners to become volunteer leaders in their program.

Types of stories we want to tell (or the themes/main point of your stories):
*All stories should showcase the value of the American Tree Farm System and how landowners utilize it for not only their benefit, but also show how it benefits people nationwide who rely on sustainably managed forests to provide clean water, wildlife habitat and sustainable wood supplies. Showcasing the value of the program makes what you all do on the ground tangible!

- ATFS helps connect you to the resources and expertise you need to manage your forests
- ATFS helps provide the knowledge and best practices for sustainable forest management
- ATFS certification helps add value to your wood fiber and timber
- Sustainable forest management works to provide all forest benefits (wood, wildlife and clean water)
- Forest owners can overcome challenges (wildfire, hurricane, invasives, regulations, etc.) when they have the right tools (knowledge and information, funds) and trusted resources (foresters, biologists)
- The right policies can help landowners overcome barriers (cost, lack of access to experts) to forest management
- Markets incentivize landowners and give them the funds to conduct management

Questions to ask landowners to help you gather the full story:

1. **Determine what the main focus or point of the story is**
   - **Who is the protagonist?**
   - **What is the setting? What are (or were) the circumstances?**
   - **How long has the property been in the family or how was it acquired? Other family members involved?**
   - **How many acres? Types of trees?**
   - **Wildlife? Endangered species?**
   - **Lake? Stream, flowing water? Where does the water go?**
   - **What was it like when you purchased it?**
   - **Why? What inspired family/dayou to invest in land? What was your initial goal?**

2. **Give us some context/help us set the stage**
   - **Who is the protagonist?**
   - **What is the setting? What are (or were) the circumstances?**
   - **How long has the property been in the family or how was it acquired? Other family members involved?**
   - **How many acres? Types of trees?**
   - **Wildlife? Endangered species?**
   - **Lake? Stream, flowing water? Where does the water go?**
   - **What was it like when you purchased it?**
   - **Why? What inspired family/dayou to invest in land? What was your initial goal?**

3. **What is/are the big barrier(s) that the individual encounters?**
Wildfire? Invasive species? Hurricane? Tornado? Too much development around?
Trust? Don’t believe land management works?
Lack of funds? No markets? No cost share?
No resources? Not enough staff/personal? Physical help? No one to pass land onto? Can’t find knowledge?
Regulation? Red tape? Opposing party lines? No skills with officials?

4. What does the individual do to overcome the big barrier(s)? (this step is CRUCIAL!)
   a. How does ATFS help him overcome his challenge?
      - Who helped them from ATFS? What standards did they use/apply? Did he learn something at a Field Day or committee event? Was it his inspector or forester who helped him?
   b. What actual actions did he take?
      - Work with neighbors?
      - Lobby legislators?
      - Apply for and use cost-share dollars (that AFF lobbied for)?
      - Find new markets? Pellets? Cross-laminated timber, custom furniture, sugar maple?

5. What was the resolution in the end?
   a. Was the barrier overcome?
   b. Forest back to health?
   c. Seeing an increase in wildlife? Seeing the return of a wildlife species?
   d. Water is now flowing? Seeing fish, amphibians and other fish in water? Enough water?
   e. Became certified?
   f. Has a partnership established? Partnership is helping landowners?
   g. Increase in number of ATFS landowners in area?
   h. New law or regulation passed?
   i. Has the needed income? Found a new source of income? A new mill being built?