

Genesis 2:15

# Landowner Foundations

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## Before we get started with anything,

let me just share my congratulations on your willingness to grab the reins for your family land's management decisions! Whether you desired to take on this role by choosing to invest into land or were thrust into the position like Esther (*Esther 4:14*), I want to emphasize the reason to celebrate in deciding to be an intentional landowner by becoming an informed steward of your land.

So now that we've decided to make intentional decisions regarding our land, it is important that you don't just gather information and knowledge and do nothing on your property. But when there are literally hundreds of opportunities out there how can you determine what is the right and best option for you? Because not every opportunity is going to be *right for you*. (*Proverbs 16:1,3, Matthew 7:7*) That's where your forester and natural resource professionals come alongside with you and help direct you to the most appropriate opportunities. There are some questions they'll ask off the bat, and these answers and characteristics narrow down, or eliminate, possibilities and options for your future, and can provide insight to any expected challenges you might encounter.

### *So what are these questions you should know?*

They're the "what factors" to your property. These are conditions you cannot change and are simply "*is what it is*" but to fully step into your stewardship role, you must be able to answer.

And if you're thinking, "What's the big deal about knowing these answers? Aren't these things that a forester could easily figure out?" The answer is yes, they could... but knowing these answers is the foundational point of grasping the reins as a landowner turned steward of your land by taking responsibility and truly KNOWING what it is you're managing. Proverbs shares the importance and wisdom of "knowing the condition of our flocks" (*Proverbs 27:23*).

**So let's get started...**



## First things first: **How MANY acres do you own?**

This is a crucial first question for your opportunities. Size of a tract often presents any initial challenges or complexities which may be expected for your management of the tract. And we're going to keep it simple and group things as a "small", "medium" or "large" landowner which is categorized based on contiguous acreages.

In the US Southeast, having more than 10 acres, but less than 50 acres is considered a small landowner. This is because operationally it is inefficient and financially unsustainable to move from tract to tract with large equipment for many traditional forest management activities. If you fall within the small landowner category, this by NO MEANS that you shouldn't intentionally manage your property. But rather your options for diversifying the tract itself are limited and it is often more challenging to get traditional operational work done in a timely manner and can be expected to have higher cost rates for operations.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a large landowner is anyone that has 1,000 or more contiguous acreages. This size landowner doesn't have as many operational challenges, and there are ample opportunities to effectively diversify the landscape. The complexities and amount of management work consistently needed can cause analysis paralysis for new landowners or the continuous amount of work to reach goals can often be underestimated. Also with large acreage opportunities often come large investment requirements to get management work done.

And that leaves the medium landowner, which is anyone between 50 and 1,000 acreages in the Southeast.

***None of these size opportunities or limitations mean one size tract or size landowner is better or worse than another.***

But rather it is good to be self aware of the different complexities and challenges with whatever size holding you may have to understand the perspective your forester is coming from.



The very next, most important question you need to be able to answer is:

## **Where is your property located?**

Besides being able to provide directions to your forester on location, your tracts location can also provide a wealth of knowledge such as: market opportunities, program eligibility, and accessibility challenges OR opportunities.

Your markets are key to understanding what you can grow towards, as well as price expectations you can receive. You never want to “out grow” your market but also want to have the right expectations of price comparisons to grow timber for. There are also a variety of uniquely niche opportunities based on your markets and tract locations. If you’re in the mountains for example you will have a separate set of niche options compared to being on the coast. Many programs are geographically located or may have a higher preference for some states or counties, which can drastically reduce your management investment costs! Accessibility is another underappreciated characteristic which can make operations on your land even more appealing or more challenging.

We’ve got the first two questions you will almost always be asked when talking to any new forester or resource, but it doesn’t stop there. To truly start taking on the reins you also need to know what your **current landscape** looks like, or **what your timber type is**. This question can often seem overwhelming when first asked, but when answered appropriately it can really help you and your forester hit the ground running! Again, can they go out there and see for themselves, or even get the jest through aerial imagery? Sure. But knowing what your forest type is, is a quick way to give your forester a ton of important information! Your timber type can share whether the site is generally wetter or drier, managed or natural (unmanaged), and how each of these can affect your future, or upfront work cost and expectations.

Many times the biggest hesitancy is the expectation to be precise and identity specific, when that’s not the case at all! A general description of “hardwoods” or “pines” is a helpful answer! Any further detail is always better, but again doesn’t have to be as pin-point specific as you may think! Answering “mature pine plantation” or “young planted pines” is a big difference compared to “forest.” Giving simple details like “harvested pines 15 years ago and nothings been done” paints a visual picture of expectations for your landscape. When it comes to hardwoods, if you can share a “bottomland hardwood” or simply explain it as a swampy forest tells a different story than if you state “oak forest.” You don’t need to know all the forestry terminology, the scientific names or super specific details. Simply describe your current forest stand or tract using descriptions that make sense to you!

**Remember: it’s important for you to simply state WHAT you currently have, and not describe what you want it to be.**



Bonus points : **What wildlife is present on your property?**

Now, you likely won't actually be asked this question. But if you can share what wildlife you have seen on your property, like describing the forest and timber type, it provides more information about your property than you might think. If you have a wide range of different wildlife species, it may be an indication of high quality habitat and more likely a healthier ecosystem and understory. If you express only seeing wildlife sparingly it can be an indication of the opposite: an overcrowded forest with poorer ecosystem qualities with little to no understory vegetation. If you are aware of any significant or threatened/endangered species present on your property it's important to share so you can ensure that any management practices recommended won't be detrimental to those habitat needs. It may also increase your program opportunities and eligibility to get more management work accomplished. Significant/threatened species also tend to have very specific habitat types and knowing their presence expresses a vital forest description and quality type you have on your property, even without being able to formally describe it.

**Now that we've gone through the questions you should know about your property, let's take the time and write down your answers!**



**How many acres do you own:**

**Where is your property located** *(Write down everything: county and state, street address if applicable or street address to access the property, any access need-to-knows like gates and combination locks, GPS coordinates if known!):*

**Describe your forest type:**

**What wildlife is present:**



**We've got the What-factors *known*, and those again are things that cannot be changed OR are current facts about the property.**

**Let's talk about WHY...**

Why are we putting the investment and effort into intentionally managing this property? And the first answer is because it's our *biblical duty and responsibility* to! We've been given authority over all the earth to subdue it (**Genesis 1:28**), but not just subdue but to WORK the land (**Genesis 2:15**). So now that we understand it's our God-given **responsibility**, let's talk about why you're managing the land more specifically. Because WHY you're managing the land is your foundation for all your decisions moving forward.

**This moment forward, you** get to decide how you will set your foundations to build upon. Jesus warns about building foolishly (**Matthew 7:24-27**). Sometimes we get caught up in just doing something, anything to "move forward" that we build a whole system on unstable foundations. So when we go through hardships and trials, due to our poor foundational purpose we laid, *or more so didn't lay*, we are not able to follow-through on the work or worse, sustain our family lands to the next generation. We are promised to go through storms, as the wise and foolish man BOTH go through the winds and rains and storms of life, and that is most definitely true and evident when it comes to land management! If your why-factor is not built on a solid rock foundation, the house will "fall with a great crash" (**Matthew 7:27**).

**Hard decisions won't get any easier**, but these decisions can become much clearer if you align them to your why-factor. It will help ensure that you're moving forward not in just any ol' direction but in the right direction. Having that why-factor now gives you an end goal and a clearer picture of results and expectations. You now have a set of parameters to work towards which will give you more clarity in the right opportunities in front of you AND confidence in all your decisions! A clear and strong why-factor will often help you stay on budget, keep you from making contradictory financial mistakes and give you clarity in your investments decisions.

You'll often hear land management is a marathon. Even I have said this myself! But it's more similar to *training* for a marathon, **taking small steps of improvement everyday** while keeping your eye on the prize. And like training for a marathon, we are most effective when we take intentional and planned action towards our goal (**1 Corinthians 9:25-26**).



**So what is your WHY-factor with your land?** *And remember, this is personalized for you and your family.*

### ***Let's bring it back to forester talk though....***

Whenever you're talking with any forester, the very first question out of their mouth should be **"what are your objectives?"** What does this mean exactly? Why can't I just share my above why statement I spent all this time thinking through and writing out?

It's important for you to understand what a forester means when they're saying objectives so you are on the same page with expectations and recommendations. The more specific we can be the stronger our relationship can develop and confidence can grow in the plans we are receiving to implement on our land.

*The mouths of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives.*

**Proverbs 18:7**



What are objectives and why do foresters communicate with these words rather than just a “what’s your why?”

**Objectives are professionals way to prioritize writing their recommendations for your property.**

With every decision and management activity there is a give and take scenario happening, and setting objectives ensures they are writing the proper recommendations for the right place at the right time to help you achieve the results you expect to happen!

**There are FIVE objectives specifically that are standard across the profession: timber (income), wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, and soil and water conservation.**

Do not feel pressured to pick only one objective for your entire tract. Most people have ALL objectives operating at the same time, because we are acting as Godly stewards of the land which means *managing sustainably across all areas*. **BUT** we must **prioritize** these objectives **to match** our **why-factor**. Because if you try to meet all objectives equally at the exact same time you will *fail to thrive in* any area which tends to leave most feeling unsatisfied in their management efforts.

*Are any objectives better than the other?* Again, absolutely not! In fact, ALL objectives are biblical stewardship principles! Check them out....



## Timber

While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. **Genesis 8:22**

"Send me also cedar, juniper and alnum logs from Lebanon, for I know that your servants are skilled in cutting timber there. My servants will work with yours to provide me with plenty of lumber, because the temple I build must be large and magnificent. I will give your servants, the woodsmen who cut the timber, twenty thousand cors of ground wheat, twenty thousand cors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine and twenty thousand baths of olive oil." **2 Chronicles 2:8-10**

## Wildlife

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." **Genesis 1:28**

The righteous care for the needs of their animals, **Proverbs 12:10**

## Recreation

Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. **Ecclesiastes 5:19**

## Aesthetics

And God saw that it was good. **Genesis 1:12**, And God saw that it was good. **1:18**, And God saw that it was good. **1:25**, And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. **1:31**

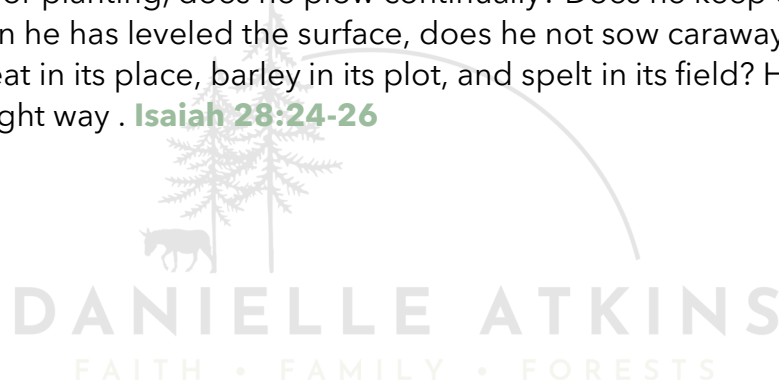
The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **Genesis 2:9**

## Soil and water

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. **Genesis 2:7**

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. **Hebrews 6:7**

When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. **Isaiah 28:24-26**



And that in mind, we can feel confident in our decisions, no matter what or how we have prioritized our objectives, as long as we continue to intentionally work the land as we were always meant to do (**Genesis 2:15**)

So how do we prioritize objectives with our forester and ensure we're picking the right ones?

The question you must ask yourself is **what are you willing to give up** when comparing two options. Which is *more important* to achieve, *that aligns with your why-factor*.

Here's an example of how that might sound:

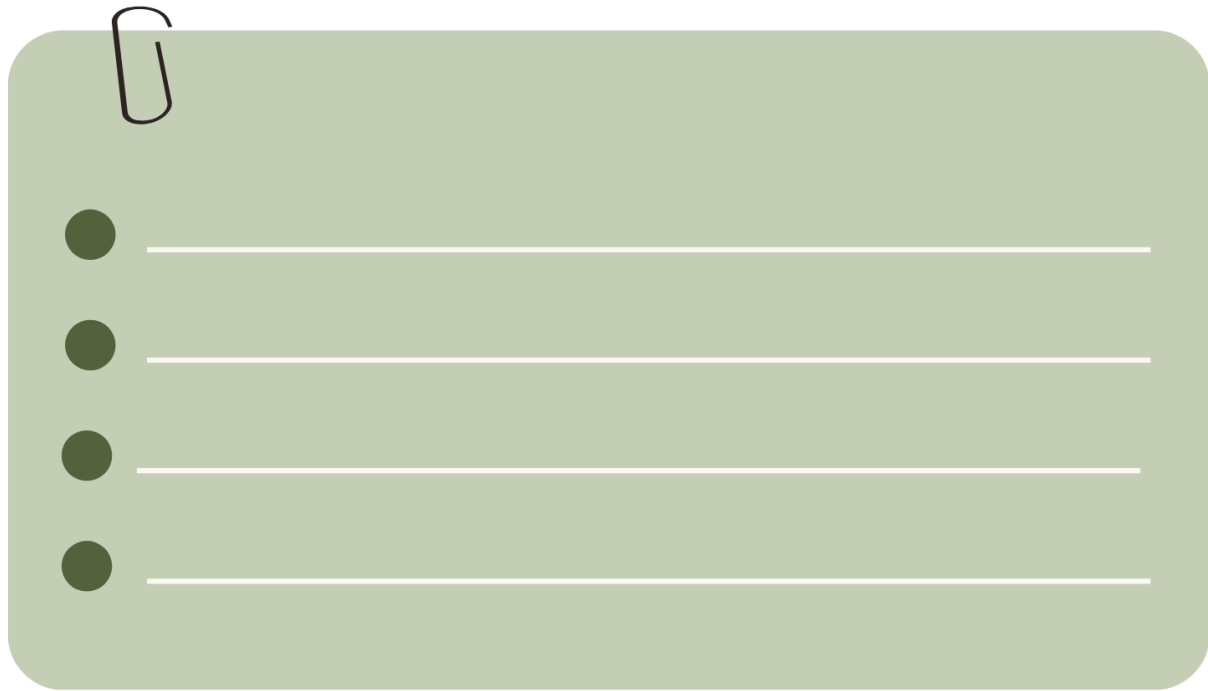
IF my objectives are first for timber income to maximize profits, then wildlife habitat for deer hunting, and then aesthetics, and IF I'm looking at management options, this might be how I would make my decisions:

- Maximizing profit from my timber will always ultimately lead in my decision
- I will not significantly delay harvesting or reforestation efforts to adhere to wildlife ideal habitat OR aesthetics.
- Rather, I will add in supplemental practices or choose options that complement deer habitat, as long as it doesn't cost my expected final return significantly.

Again, there are *no wrong decisions* in how you choose to prioritize, but rather these are **intentional decisions** to give you clarity and confidence in your decisions and actions on the land by understanding the goal you are aiming for and understanding how different operations and practices will help you reach them.

**Final note when it comes to objectives:** remember this is how foresters communicate to prioritize their recommendations to reach desired results, based on your what factors (those questions we answered in the beginning.) A professional may provide *their* perspective and opinion on what objectives might be best suited for your property based on their *professional opinions*. In the end, it is your property and ultimately your choice and decision.





**So now it's back to you, which **THREE** objectives align with your why-factor the best?** *Be sure to list them in priority.*

Now your what and why's are going to give you the clarity to make the best decisions and allow you and your forestry partner pursue the RIGHT recommendations and programs.

### **But what do you need to really hit the ground running?**

And this is the **number one mistake** that keeps family land from really *thriving*, especially for the next generation. Let's look at the warnings from Proverbs....

*A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.* **Proverbs 10:4**

*Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.* **Proverbs 18:9**

*Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.*  
**Proverbs 19:2**

So what does this all come down to? Plans. And in our case, physical written out plans.

There are two types of plans specifically every good steward should keep up with. They may go by different names depending on who you are interacting with and which state you live in. But we are going to refer to them as our **brief management plan** and our **stewardship plan**. What's the difference?

Brief management plans are essentially one and done event plans. These are short and to the point on exactly what you need to do, when you need to do it, and how you need to do it. Think of when you go to the doctor because you're feeling ill and receive an immediate prescription to address those specific symptoms. Your brief management plan does the same for your land. You receive a specific prescription that allows you to *successfully* get the RIGHT operations, with the RIGHT doses and within the RIGHT timeframes. These are something you will and should periodically receive for ALL your operations and are a great reference point to show the history of the property.

These are typically the most overlooked plans as many operations are completed by word-of-mouth agreements, understandings and *kept in their head*. But getting these plans written down will greatly **reduce any misunderstandings** between you and contractors or the forester and is an easy to reference document if there needs to be any adjustments made in the future. It will also help keep you on track by having something in front of you to refer to regularly.



So if I need to get regular brief management plans for all of my operational work to be completed, what does a stewardship plan do for me?

**The stewardship plan** is your **long-term guide** for your entire property. This is especially true and important for medium to large landowners who have multiple operations going on simultaneously. But the stewardship plan does provide one HUGE benefit, no matter what size landowner you are....

## **It shows your history and your future intentions for the land.**

I've always phrased it like this: *If something was to happen to you tomorrow, would anyone in the family know WHAT was done in the past to the property or what you INTENDED to be done in the future?* (**Proverbs 14:22, Ecclesiastes 9:12**)

A stewardship plan is a 10-year management plan that takes your objectives, your why-factor and ALL of your current timber conditions and puts them on paper to show the land's starting point and vision to steward towards. Yes, it will provide specific prescriptions for operations to be done on each area of your property, covering a 10-year timespan. Sticking with our doctor analogy, your stewardship plan would be your entire medical history, current medical conditions, and would include a prescription plan to help you reach your overall unique health goals in the future. You would be able to see any red flags from the past that you might need to be careful to avoid which could cause problems, as well as having your own specific steps and benchmarks for the future to show what adjustments you should make to reach your overall goal.

***We each have our own situations that impact our abilities and options as well as unique set of goals we're working towards.***



Your stewardship plan lays out everything in black and white to ensure you're working towards the **right vision** and staying on the **right path**. Without this plan, even with a multitude of brief management plans, it can be easy to drift away from your ultimate why-factor and purpose. (**Proverbs 21:5**) This is especially true when exploring financial sustainability opportunities such as cost-share programs or timber harvesting rotations or alternative revenue streams. Money has a way of swaying our decisions and can easily fog our vision for the long-term plan.

*Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness. **Proverbs 23:4***

And of course, if the worse-case scenario was to happen, **a stewardship plan is like a "will"** for your land to show your plans and intentions that the next generation of beneficiaries can easily carry out.

So this is your quick checklist: **Do you have either of the following for your land?**

☐ **Brief Management Plan(s)**

☐ **Stewardship Plan**

**What plans do you need to get created?**



Extra Notes:

