

# Silvicultural Greenbelt Guidelines



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Silviculture (the practice of forestry) in Florida means producing raw material (trees) that eventually can be harvested for monetary value. Those raw materials serve as the manufacturing base for multiple forest products used by a wide variety of consumers. Common raw materials from Florida's forest lands, and the consumer products for which they are used, can include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Fence Posts or other Fencing Materials
- Firewood
- Flooring
- Lumber
- Timber Piling
- Oriented Strand Board (OSB)
- Paneling
- Particle Board
- Pine Straw or Mulch Wood for landscaping
- Plywood
- Pulp and Paper
- Trees grown for the Sequestration of Carbon/Sale of Carbon Credits
- Utility Poles
- Veneer for Crates or Other Products
- Wood for Energy Production

The preceding list should not be construed as being all-inclusive: there are other forest products, but these are the most common. For forestland to be considered "bona fide" silviculture, the land should be growing trees and the landowner should periodically be harvesting and selling some forest products, based on available markets. Bona fide silviculture operations, however, often exhibit extended periods where harvests do not occur. Therefore, periods of harvest inactivity should not necessarily disqualify a property, assuming future plans include commercial harvests.

Silviculture in Florida is generally comprised of two types of forest management regimes: Planted Forests (also known as “plantations”) and Natural Forests as described below. These regimes may be employed individually or in combination.

1. **Planted Forests.** While the intensity of management can vary, planted forests generally involve some sort of site preparation, and either hand or machine planting of the seedlings or, rarely, direct seeding. Other more intensive cultural treatments such as herbicide and fertilization treatments may or may not be applied to the planted trees depending on economic considerations and the management objectives for the forest. It should be recognized that some planted forests are managed more intensively than others. For example, more intensive management regimes may include practices such as regular applications of fertilizer and herbicide treatments, while less intensive regimes may forego this activity. Both intensive and non-intensive management of planted forests should be considered bona fide silvicultural practices.
2. **Natural Forests.** Natural forest production is characterized by forests established by natural seeding of trees or coppice (stump sprouting). These forests can be found on wetland or upland sites and can include pine and non-pine species. Tree spacing is not necessarily optimized for growth, and size and age-classes may vary widely among species and forests. Management activities between the establishment of the forest and the eventual harvest tend to be minimal or even non-existent. Timber harvesting occurs less frequently and unpredictably, and may be driven more by markets and landowner objectives than by a planned harvest age. Because these natural forest management regimes are regenerated by natural seeding and coppicing, recently harvested natural forests do represent a continuing silvicultural use, assuming no conversion to another use takes place.

## **Greenbelt Guidelines**

When evaluating forestlands as bona fide silviculture, the evidence revealed by an inspection of the property should be the primary indicator whether a property is being used for silviculture. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, a forested property with trees that have (or eventually will have) market value should be considered as strong evidence that the property is a bona fide silvicultural operation. While the property inspection should provide all the information needed to determine that a property is being used for silvicultural purposes, the condition of some properties may require follow up with the particular landowner. An example would be a property in a developing area that has recently been clearcut and there is no evidence of reforestation activities. In

such a case, the landowner should be contacted to determine if he/she has plans to reforest the property or to convert it to another use.

Below are some suggested questions that could be asked to further evaluate a questionable property. While answering “yes” to all of the questions is not practical, an affirmative answer to numbers 1 and 2 is probably most indicative that the property is being used for silviculture. It should be kept in mind, however, that many landowners, especially those with small properties, may not have (and do not necessarily need) a written management plan for their silvicultural operation. Affirmative answers to the other questions provide additional evidence that a forest management plan is being implemented for bona fide silviculture. When evaluating a natural forest as bona fide silviculture, keep in mind that a natural forest can be young growth (seedling or sapling size trees) or old growth (trees over a century old). It can be lightly stocked (less than 50 trees/acre) or so thick so as to seem almost impenetrable, and it can be predominately pine or hardwood, or a mixed forest.

### **Considerations for Property Evaluation**

1. Is there a forest management plan for the property?
2. Is the plan being implemented?
3. What is the size of the property? Typically, a forest should be at least 10 acres in size to be viable for commercial silviculture and sustainable forest product removal. However, it should be noted that in some cases smaller tracts, especially those with exceptionally large timber, can be harvested commercially and should qualify as bona fide silviculture.
4. Is there other documentation to substantiate bona fide silviculture as referenced in Florida Statutes, Section 193.461(3)(a)?
5. Is the property enrolled in any type of third party certification program such as the American Tree Farm System, Florida Forest Stewardship Program, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, etc.?

These guidelines should benefit both the property appraiser's office and landowners in understanding what constitutes bona fide silviculture. As with any set of guidelines, unique conditions may warrant a variance. However, those variances should be the exception – not the rule.