American Tree Farm System Honors Michigan Forest Stewardship Coordinator with 2017 National Leadership Award

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The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) recognized Mike Smalligan, a forester for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), with its 2017 National Leadership Award. Smalligan was presented this award on February 23 in front of 220 ATFS committee volunteer leaders from across the country at the 2017 ATFS National Leadership Conference in Greenville, SC. The award recognizes the efforts of extraordinary volunteers, the backbone of ATFS, who have been instrumental in motivating other volunteers, educating landowners and accomplishing his or her committee’s on-the-ground goals.

The ATFS program works to give people the tools that they need to be effective stewards of America’s forests, a role that Smalligan personifies in his leadership as an ATFS volunteer and as the Forest Stewardship Program Coordinator for the Michigan DNR. Smalligan has been an ATFS Inspector since 2008 and has served on his state Tree Farm committee since 2014. In that time, he has made a huge impact to his state program.

“Mike is the epitome of the selfless volunteer that makes ATFS a better organization,” said Tom Martin, the president and CEO of the American Forest Foundation. “As the Michigan Tree Farm Committee said in its nomination of Mike, ‘the Tree Farm program in Michigan is being invigorated because [he] is actively supporting the program behind the scenes, regardless of who gets the credit... He is always upping his own ante to promote and improve the delivery of the American Tree Farm System in Michigan.’”

Most recently, he developed the new “Wheels to Woods” program that provides transportation funding for students in Michigan to go on an educational field trip to a nearby public or private forest. The program has been highly successful, helping to send 8,279 students, teachers and parents in 2016 on 92 educational field trips to nearby forests at a cost of just $4.61 per student.

He has been instrumental in developing partnerships and securing funding with many local and national agencies and organizations, securing approximately $48,000 in funding for “Wheels to Woods.” He also wrote a successful proposal to the US Forest Service, State and Private Forestry, for a three-year project called “Forests for Fish.” This project will provide an additional $30,000 to the Michigan Tree Farm Committee to help pay $100 to foresters when they provide a free Tree Farm Inspection to landowners and verify that forests are well-managed to provide clean water and quality fish habitat.

Smalligan is also a prolific trainer for both Tree Farm and the Forest Stewardship Program. He has trained most of Michigan’s 138 Tree Farm inspectors to the new 2015-2020 ATFS Standards. He has also trained many forestry students at Michigan State and Michigan Tech, many of whom have become ATFS Inspectors in other states. He has also tripled the number of Forest Stewardship Plan writers in Michigan from 50 to 180 in the past three years. Smalligan is training foresters in Michigan to develop Forest Stewardship Plans that meet ATFS and USFS
requirements so that landowners have multiple options and resources to help them manage, protect and enjoy their forests.

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_The American Tree Farm System® is a network of 82,000 family forest owners sustainable managing 24 million acres of forestland. ATFS is the largest and oldest sustainable woodland system in the United States, internationally recognized, meeting strict third-party certification standards. The American Tree Farm System® is a program of the_ [American Forest Foundation](https://www.americanforestfoundation.org) _.