

LANforge WiFi RF Attenuator User Guide

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Overview

The LANforge-Attenuator is designed to add RF attenuation on 2.4Ghz and 5Ghz WiFi connections. It supports 3 attenuator modules, each capable of adding attenuation to one connection. The attenuation range is 0 to 95.5 dB (see notes on signal strength below). The attenuation may be controlled by knobs on the front of the system, and may also be adjusted programatically over a USB-serial port. Currently, the serial-port option is only available on Linux. Each attenuaton module may be configured independently of the others.

The LANforge software suite can also control the attenuator through its GUI and/or CLI for integrated testing scenarios. This includes built-in scripting to automatically adjust attenuation over time.

1. Features

The LANforge-Attenuator uses the [ATS0760-95](#) modules from EUBUS. A summary of the technical specifications is below:

Type:	ATS0760-95
Impedance:	50 Ω
Frequency Range:	0.7 GHz - 6.0 GHz
Attenuation Range:	0 - 95.5dB
Attenuation Steps:	0.5 dB increments
Attenuation Accuracy:	1-15db: ± 1 dB, 16-95.5 dB: ± 1.5 dB or 4% ref. to Ins. Loss
Insertion Loss:	8dB nominal, 10dB max
max. VSWR:	2:1
Maximum Input Power:	+ 20 dBm
Operating Temperature:	0°C to +70°C

The LANforge-Attenuator contains 3 of these modules, for a total of 6 RP-SMA connectors on the front panel. Each pair of connectors provides one attenuation path. A micro-controller provides a control interface over a USB plug that appears as a USB-Serial adapter to the operating system. The attenuator does not require an external computer to function: It can be manually adjusted with two knobs, and has a small LCD screen to provide information to the user.

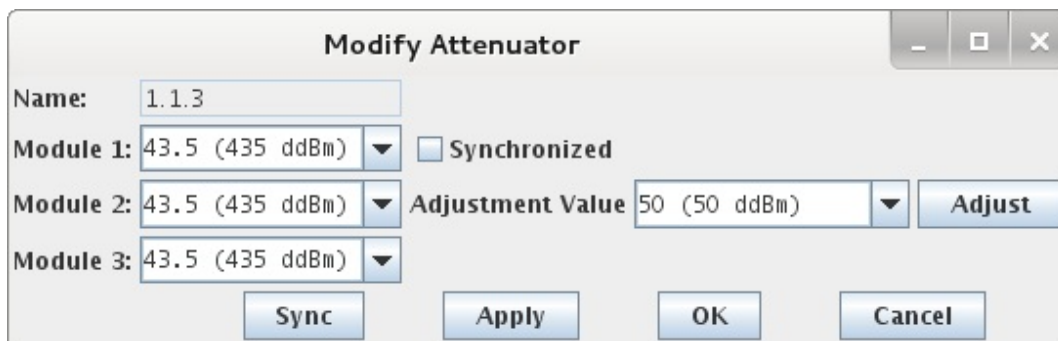
The top knob adjusts the LCD menu items. The first menu is Information, the second is to adjust all

attenuator modules in lock-step, and the rest of the menus are for adjusting individual attenuator modules.

The bottom knob adjusts the attenuation when the selected menu is All or individual attenuator modules. Pressing the knob down activates a button that toggles between each click adjusting by 5dBm or by 0.5dBm. Enabling the x5 mode enables quick adjustments over larger ranges, and the 0.5 mode allows fine tuning.

The system may be powered off of a 500ma USB plug, but many computers only provide 100ma USB plugs, so it is suggested that the external DC power-brick (9v 1-Amp) be used at all times.

The LANforge software can manage the attenuator over the USB-Serial interface. It can be scripted in the 2544 and Hunt scripts in the LANforgeGUI. The LANforge CLI can also control one or more attenuators. Here is a screen-shot of the Attenuator control screen in the LANforge-GUI:



Users may also prefer to directly interface with the attenuator over the USB-Serial interface using minicom or some other serial-console application. **The serial port will be named something like: /dev/ttyACM0, and the settings are: 115200 8N1.** The LANforge-Attenuator provides a text-based interface, and supports these commands:

info

Display information and current settings.

eeprom read

Display EEPROM information and current settings.

atten get [index]

Display attenuator configuration for specified module.

atten set [index] [dBm tenths]

Set attenuator configuration for specified module. The attenuation is in tenth's of a dB, but the modules support 0.5dB steps, so you could use '55' to set 5.5dBm, but setting it to '51' would round down to 5.0dBm.

atten eeprom set [key] [val]

Set attenuator eeprom configuration. This should normally not be done except by Candela engineers.

- **acount [attenuator-count]:** Set number of attenuator modules available in attenuator.
- **test [0 | 1]:** Enable (1) or Disable (0) test mode. Test mode is only useful when the attenuator connector cables have been connected to attenuator-4 and one of the other attenuator connectors on the adapter board. The test is to verify the cables and shield were manufactured properly.

When testing, first connect attenuator 1 header to attenuator 4, press the bottom button to start the test. Each time you click it, a different header will be tested. So, when testing attenuator 3 header, expect 1 and 2 to fail, but 3 should pass. Attenuator 4 header is tested indirectly when testing any of the others.

serrno [serial-number]: Set the serial number.

The micro-controller in the LANforge Attenuator is configured to reset itself each time a new serial

connection is made to the Attenuator. It only takes a second or two to boot, but this could cause interruption of testing if your application often opens and closes the serial connection. If you are controlling the attenuator over the serial connection, it is suggested that you program it in such a way that the serial connection remains up for the duration of the test. Please contact support if you have any questions on this.

2. Accuracy and RF Isolation

The LANforge Attenuator has been designed with RF Isolation and accuracy in mind, but in testing with the LANforge CT520 WiFi traffic generator systems, we still see a bit of signal leakage even when attenuation is set to 95.5. We suspect that the CT520 systems leak a bit of signal out of their NICs and communicate directly, bypassing the attenuator.

The internal attenuator modules are **tested by their vendor** and should have excellent isolation. The SMA cables connecting the attenuator to the face plate are double-shielded **KSR-100** with > 90 dB isolation.

The LANforge attenuator comes with 6 cables to connect the attenuator to systems under test. These cables use **LMR-195** cable which also has isolation of > 90 dB. If you use your own cables, be sure they are of high quality for optimal performance. Our testing indicates that even these double-shielded LMR-195 cables may be leaking more than we hoped, so we will continue to investigate different cable types.

Our primary test setup is one 3-antenna AP connected to another 3-antenna Station system (3x3 MIMO Atheros/Qualcom radio). The AP and Station system are about 3 feet apart, and the attenuator system sits between them. The maximum attenuation gives a signal level of about -84 dB, and noise floor of about -92. This is right at the cut-off point for the AP and Station to communicate and they may lose association from time to time. Here is a graph of signal level v/s attenuation settings for this configuration. In this case, the signal went to about -86 and then lost connection (and so reported signal as 0).

The graph below shows the attenuation v/s rx-rate. The connection was lost at max attenuation and reported a zero signal. That makes the right-hand side of the graph a bit weird.

3. Upgrade Attenuator Firmware

The LANforge-Attenuator uses an Arduino-Mega as the controller. The firmware is stored on flash in the controller and may be updated using the 'avrdude' program on a Linux machine. The firmware can be downloaded from the [Downloads page](#). It will be named something like: `attenuator-1.0.hex`.

To upgrade, do the following steps. Do the console commands as the root user.

1. Stop LANforge

```
cd /home/lanforge; ./serverctl.bash stop
```

2. Un-plug the USB cable, then power cable, and plug power and USB back in again.

Check the kernel messages to figure out what serial port the Attenuator is using:

```
[root@lec2010-ath9k-1 lanforge]# tail -10 /var/log/messages
Oct 19 11:25:17 localhost dhclient[25360]: DHCPRELEASE on rddVR15 to 99.88.77.2 port 67
Oct 19 11:25:34 localhost kernel: [1276937.250169] usb 2-2: >USB disconnect, device number 23
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost kernel: [1276941.370134] usb 2-2: >new full-speed USB device number 24 using uhci_hcd
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost kernel: [1276941.571176] usb 2-2: >New USB device found, idVendor=2341, idProduct=0042
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost kernel: [1276941.584803] usb 2-2: >New USB device strings: Mfr=1, Product=2, SerialNumber=220
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost kernel: [1276941.599345] usb 2-2: >Manufacturer: Arduino (www.arduino.cc)
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost kernel: [1276941.608628] usb 2-2: >SerialNumber: 74934303030351118071
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost kernel: [1276941.620586] cdc_acm 2-2:1.0: >ttyACM0: USB ACM device
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost mtp-probe: checking bus 2, device 24: "/sys/devices/pci0000:00/0000:00:1d.0/usb2/2-2"
Oct 19 11:25:39 localhost mtp-probe: bus: 2, device: 24 was not an MTP device
```

In this case, it is using `/dev/ttyACM0`

3. Upload the new image using avrdude (use the serial device that matches your system)

```
avrdude -patmega2560 -cstk500v2 -P/dev/ttyACM0 -b115200 -D -Uflash:w:attenuator-1.0.hex:i
```

4. You may now restart LANforge, or use some other means of accessing the serial port to control the Attenuator.

4. Install Drivers (Windows Only)

When using the LANforge-Attenuator on Windows, a driver must be installed before the attenuator can be accessed over the USB-Serial port. There is no need to install any drivers on Linux.

First, [install the LANforge-Server package](#) for Windows (version 5.2.8 or higher). It has the needed driver, and will be used to manage the LANforge-Attenuator.

Install Drivers on Windows 7 and later

Install Drivers on Windows XP

1. Connect USB cable from Attenuator to PC.
2. Click Start→Control Panel and choose the 'Add Hardware' option.
3. It should find a new USB device in the Ports (COM & LPT) section. If not, continue on to the next step anyway, perhaps it was already discovered automatically.
4. Right-Click on 'My Computer' in the start menu, and choose 'Properties'
5. Select the Hardware Tab.
6. Click Device Manager
7. Look for a new or unknown USB device in the Ports (COM & LPT) section.
8. Right-Click on this device and choose Update Driver.
9. Select the 'Install from a list or specific location' option and click 'Next'.
10. Select the 'Include this location in the search' checkbox and choose the LANforge-Server directory (C:\Program Files\LANforge-Server by default).
11. Click 'Next'. It should find the "LANforge Attenuator (Arduino Mega 2560 R3) driver. This driver is not signed, so click the 'Continue Anyway' option in the warning dialog.
12. Click Finish.
13. Start (or re-start) the LANforge Manager and/or LANforge Resource processes that were previously installed. Connect the LANforge-GUI to the LANforge Manager and select the 'Attenuators' tab. You should see the Attenuator listed in the table.

5. Open Source code and Hardware Files

The LANforge Attenuator control logic is based on the [Arduino Mega](#) micro controller. Candela Technologies releases the Arduino source code used to program the Arduino Mega as well as the Eagle PCB layout and routing files. The source code is released under the GPL (GNU Public License), and the Eagle hardware files are released under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike license. You may download the code and Eagle files on the [Downloads](#) page after creating an account on our web site.