

## **Florida Forest Service SFI Public Summary Audit Report**

The SFI Program of the Florida Forest Service of Tallahassee, FL has achieved conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 2 – Forest Management Standard, according to the NSF SFIS Certification Audit Process.

The Florida Forest Service manages over one million acres of state forests for multiple public uses including timber, recreation and wildlife habitat and also provide services to landowners throughout the state with technical information and grant programs.

The Florida Forest Service's forestry programs are implemented by its Field Operations staff within 15 field units across the state. Field personnel and equipment provide a more responsive and comprehensive approach to land management and wildfire control statewide.

The Forest Service has a very centralized functionality related to management decisions. All management decisions, plans, procedures and contractual paperwork are handled at the State HQ.

This certification covers the Blackwater River and Tate's Hell State Forests located in the Blackwater and Tallahassee Field Units and containing approximately 210,423 and 202,437 respectively.

The audit was performed by NSF on March 23-24, 2015 by an audit team headed by Norman Boatwright, Lead Auditor. Audit Team members include Tucker Watts and Joe McGlincy. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting SFIS Certification Audits of contained in SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 9 - SFI 2015-2019 Audit Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation.

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 2 – Forest Management.

The scope of the SFIS Audit included forest management operations on the state forests listed above. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management over the planning period of the past 3 years. In addition practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (regeneration and BMP issues, for example). SFI obligations to promote sustainable forestry practices, to seek legal compliance, and to incorporate continual improvement systems were also within the scope of the audit.

Several of the SFIS Section 2 requirements were outside of the scope of Florida Forest Service's SFI program and were excluded from the scope of the SFI Certification Audit as follows:

- Indicator 2.1.3 Plantings of exotic tree species
- Indicator 2.2.4 World Health Organization (WHO) type 1A and 1B pesticides
- Indicator 2.2.5 Pesticides banned under the Stockholm Convention
- Indicator 10.1.2 Research on genetically engineered trees
- Indicator 11.2.3 Logger certification

## **SFIS Audit Process**

NSF initiated the SFIS audit process with a Readiness Review to confirm the scope of the audit, review the SFI Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that Florida Forest Service was prepared to proceed to the SFIS Certification Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. NSF then conducted the SFIS Certification Audit of conformance to the SFIS, Section 2. A report was prepared and final approval was done by an independent Certification Board Member assigned by NSF. Follow-up or Surveillance Audits are required. The initial Surveillance Audit is scheduled for March 2016.

The audit was governed by a detailed audit plan designed to enable the audit team to efficiently determine conformance with the applicable SFI requirements. The plan provided for the assembly and review of audit evidence consisting of documents, interviews, and on-site inspections of ongoing or completed forest practices.

During the audit NSF reviewed a sample of the written documentation assembled to provide objective evidence of SFIS Conformance. NSF also selected field sites for inspection based upon the risk of environmental impact, likelihood of occurrence, special features, and other criteria outlined in the NSF SFI-SOP. NSF also selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers and other interested parties, and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the SFI Standard was understood and actively implemented.

The possible findings of the audit included Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance, Opportunities for Improvement, and Practices that exceeded the Basic Requirements of the SFIS.

## Overview of Audit Findings

Florida Forest Service's SFI Program was found to be in full conformance with the SFIS Standard. NSF did not identify any non-conformances.

An opportunity for improvement was identified, and included:

- Indicator 4.2.1 There is an opportunity to improve the program to protect threatened and endangered species.

These findings do not indicate a current deficiency, but served to alert Florida Forest Service to areas that could be strengthened or which could merit future attention.

NSF also identified the following areas where forestry practices and operations on Company's lands exceed the basic requirements of the SFI Standard:

- The Service has an active program to restore natural hydrology including replacing culverts with bridges and removing existing forests roads that cross ecologically sensitive wetlands, exceeding the requirements to document and implement plans to manage and protect rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, other water bodies and riparian areas as described in CI 3.2.3.
- The Service has a viable program to identify and manage critical species and habitat, exceeding the requirements of CI 4.2.2 to locate and protect known sites associated with viable occurrences of critically imperiled and imperiled species and communities.
- The Service, in partnership with the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, has published the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Geodatabase V1 Final Report. This is a statewide mapping program to identify longleaf pine occurrence across the state, exceeding the requirements of CI 4.4.2 to incorporate research results and field applications of biodiversity and ecosystem research into forest management decisions.
- The Service offers a multitude of recreational opportunities including: public access to all state forests, boat ramps, parking lots, bathrooms, informational material at kiosks and the website that lists recreational opportunities including Facebook and Twitter. The Service also has a Five Year Recreation Plan for both state forests, exceeding the requirements of CI 5.4.1 to provide recreational opportunities to the public.

## **General Description of Evidence of Conformity**

NSF's audit team used a variety of evidence to determine conformance. A general description of this evidence is provided below, organized by SFI Objective.

**Objective 1. Forest Management Planning** - To ensure forest management plans include long-term sustainable harvest levels and measures to avoid forest conversion.

**Summary of Evidence** – The Service's forest management plan and supporting documentation and the associated inventory and growth data were the key evidence of conformance

**Objective 2. Forest Health and Productivity** -To ensure long-term forest productivity, carbon storage and conservation of forest resources through prompt reforestation, afforestation, minimized chemical use, soil conservation, and protecting forests from damaging agents.

**Summary of Evidence** – Field observations and associated records were used to confirm practices. The Service has a program for reforestation, for protection against insects and diseases and wildfire, and for careful management of activities which could potentially impact soil and long-term productivity.

**Objective 3. Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources** - To protect the water quality of rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and other water bodies through meeting or exceeding best management practices.

**Summary of Evidence** – Field observations of a range of sites were the key evidence. Auditors visited portions of many field sites that were proximate to water resources.

**Objective 4. Conservation of Biological Diversity** - To manage the quality and distribution of wildlife habitats and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity by developing and implementing stand- and landscape-level measures that promote a diversity of types of habitat and successional stages, and the conservation of forest plants and animals, including aquatic species, as well as threatened and endangered species, Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, old-growth forests and ecologically important sites.

**Summary of Evidence** – The Service excels in its efforts to conserve and reestablish biological diversity as evidenced by its gopher tortoise and RCW habitat restoration projects and its goal of restoring native habitat where feasible.

**Objective 5. Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits** - To manage the visual impact of forest operations and provide recreational opportunities for the public.

**Summary of Evidence** – Field observations of completed operations were assessed during the evaluation.

**Objective 6. Protection of Special Sites** - To manage lands that are geologically or culturally important in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities.

**Summary of Evidence** – Field observations of completed operations and records of special sites were all assessed during the evaluation.

**Objective 7. Efficient Use of Fiber Resources** - To minimize waste and ensure the efficient use of fiber

resources.

**Summary of Evidence** – Field observations of completed operations, contract clauses, and discussions with supervising field foresters provided the key evidence.

**Objective 8. Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights** -To recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and traditional knowledge.

**Summary of Evidence** – The Service's website and the Land Management website provide links for stakeholders to make comments and/or voice concerns.

**Objective 9. Legal and Regulatory Compliance** - To comply with applicable federal, provincial, state and local laws and regulations.

**Summary of Evidence** – Field reviews of ongoing and completed operations were the most critical evidence.

**Objective 10. Forestry Research, Science and Technology** -To invest in forestry research, science and technology, upon which sustainable forest management decisions are based and broaden the awareness of climate change impacts on forests, wildlife and biological diversity.

**Summary of Evidence** – The Service's investment in forest research and attention to biodiversity provided the key evidence.

**Objective 11. Training and Education** - To improve the implementation of sustainable forestry practices through appropriate training and education programs.

**Summary of Evidence** – Confirmed by the Service's financial and physical support of the FL SIC and its development of education and logger training programs.

**Objective 12. Community Involvement and Landowner Outreach** - To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry through public outreach, education, and involvement, and to support the efforts of SFI Implementation Committees.

**Summary of Evidence** – The Service excels at community involvement and public outreach as evidenced by trails and information available online and at the State Forest offices.

**Objective 13. Public Land Management Responsibilities** - To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

**Summary of Evidence** – Interviews and site visits were used to confirm the requirements.

**Objective 14. Communications and Public Reporting** - To increase transparency and to annually report progress on conformance with the SFI Forest Management Standard.

**Summary of Evidence** – Confirmed the Service is capable of collecting the data necessary to complete the Annual Progress Report.

**Objective 15. Management Review and Continual Improvement** - To promote continual improvement in the practice of sustainable forestry by conducting a management review and monitoring performance.

**Summary of Evidence** – Records of program reviews, agendas and notes from management review meetings.

## **Relevance of Forestry Certification**

Third-party certification provides assurance that forests are being managed under the principles of sustainable forestry, which are described in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standard as:

### **1. Sustainable Forestry**

To practice sustainable forestry to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by practicing a land stewardship ethic that integrates reforestation and the managing, growing, nurturing and harvesting of trees for useful products and ecosystem services such as the conservation of soil, air and water quality, carbon, biological diversity, wildlife and aquatic habitats, recreation and aesthetics.

### **2. Forest Productivity and Health**

To provide for regeneration after harvest and maintain the productive capacity of the forest land base, and to protect and maintain long-term forest and soil productivity. In addition, to protect forests from economically or environmentally undesirable levels of wildfire, pests, diseases, invasive exotic plants and animals and other damaging agents and thus maintain and improve long-term forest health and productivity.

### **3. Protection of Water Resources**

To protect water bodies and riparian areas, and to conform with forestry best management practices to protect water quality.

### **4. Protection of Biological Diversity**

To manage forests in ways that protect and promote biological diversity, including animal and plant species, wildlife habitats, and ecological or natural community types.

### **5. Aesthetics and Recreation**

To manage the visual impacts of forest operations, and to provide recreational opportunities for the public.

### **6. Protection of Special Sites**

To manage lands that are ecologically, geologically or culturally important in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities.

### **7. Responsible Fiber Sourcing Practices in North America**

To use and promote among other forest landowners sustainable forestry practices that are both scientifically credible and economically, environmentally and socially responsible.

### **8. Legal Compliance**

To comply with applicable federal, provincial, state, and local forestry and related environmental laws, statutes, and regulations.

### **9. Research**

To support advances in sustainable forest management through forestry research, science and technology.

### **10. Training and Education**

To improve the practice of sustainable forestry through training and education programs.

### **11. Community Involvement and Social Responsibility**

To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry on all lands through community involvement, socially responsible practices, and through recognition and respect of Indigenous Peoples' rights and traditional forest-related knowledge.

### **12. Transparency**

To broaden the understanding of forest certification to the SFI Standard by documenting certification audits and making the findings publicly available.

### **13. Continual Improvement**

To continually improve the practice of forest management, and to monitor, measure and report performance in achieving the commitment to sustainable forestry.

### **14. Avoidance of Controversial Sources including Illegal Logging in Offshore Fiber Sourcing**

#### **(Applies only to the SFI 2015-2019 Fiber Sourcing Standard)**

To avoid wood fiber from illegally logged forests when procuring fiber outside of North America, and to avoid sourcing fiber from countries without effective social laws.

*Source: Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) Standard, 2015–2019 Edition*