

## Ohio Division of Forestry

### 2016 SFI® 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard Summary Audit Report

The SFI® Program of Ohio Division of Forestry for the state forests throughout Ohio has demonstrated continuing conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 2 – Forest Management Standard, according to the NSF Certification Process.

NSF initially certified the Ohio Division of Forestry to the SFIS on October 28, 2010 and re-certified the program in 2013 and in 2015 based on review of the program against all of the SFI requirements in place at the time. Surveillance audits against a sample of requirements have been done each intervening year. This report describes the 2016 Surveillance Audit which also included the relevant requirements of the SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources – Division of Forestry manages 21 state forests covering more than 200,000 acres in 21 Ohio counties, mostly in Ohio's un-glaciated southeastern region. The Chief of the Division/State Forester of Ohio is given statutory authority for multiple-use management of state forests through Ohio Revised Code (ORC), Section 1503. The following additional background on the certification goals and on the Ohio State Forests is taken from Ohio Division of Forestry's web site:

*“Ohio has 21 state forests covering more than 200,000 acres. Ohio State Forests vary in size from nearly 64,000 acres to less than 500 acres and are located in 21 Ohio counties. These forests are managed for multiple uses including sustainable timber production, wildlife habitat, soil and water protection, and recreation.*

*Some 88% of Ohio's forested land is owned by private landowners, most owning less than 50 acres. Ohio State Forests provide a unique opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of long-term management to an increasing number of private landowners. These lands are managed on a landscape scale not possible with small land holdings.*

*Ohio's State Forests were mostly acquired in the form of degraded forest lands. The majority of state forest acreage was purchased prior to 1950, but acquisitions continue to be made to the present day (Vinton Furnace Experimental Forest acquisition). Forestry in Ohio began during the early years of the national conservation movement in the late 1800's, and the state forest system began in 1916 (see History of Ohio State Forests).*

*The Division of Forestry is committed to achieving and maintaining this important state forest certification.”*

The Ohio Division of Forestry is responsible for forest management and land administration for the Ohio State Forests. The organization's SFI Management Representative is Chad Sanders.

The 2016 audit was performed by NSF on October 24-26, 2016 by an audit team headed by Mike Ferrucci, Lead Auditor and supported by Dave Wager. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting audits contained in SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules, Section 9 - Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation.

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

management operations. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management over the planning period of the past 2 years. Practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (regeneration and Best Management Practices 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.

The SFI Standard was used without modifying any requirements. Several of the SFI Section 2 requirements were outside of the scope of Ohio Division of Forestry's SFI program and were excluded from the scope of the SFI Re-Certification Audit as follows:

- Indicator 2.1.4 involving planting exotic species

- Performance Measure 2.5 and Indicator 2.5.1 involving improved planting stock

- Objective 8 because there are no federally-recognized tribes in Ohio

- Indicator 10.1.2 because there is no research on genetically engineered trees via forest tree biotechnology

## **Audit Process**

NSF initiated the audit with a planning process to confirm the scope of the audit, review the SFI Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that Ohio Division of Forestry was prepared to proceed to the Re-Certification Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. NSF then conducted the Certification Audit of conformance to SFI 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 by SFI, Section 9. The next Surveillance Audit is scheduled for the week of October 23, 2017.

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 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 protocols. NSF also selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers, interested citizens, 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 standard.

## **Overview of 2016 Audit Findings**

Ohio Division of Forestry was found to be in overall conformance with the standard. There are no new non-conformances.

## 2016 Exceptional Practices

NSF identified the following areas where forestry practices and operations of Ohio Division of Forestry exceed the basic requirements of the SFI Standard:

SFI Indicator 5.4.1 requires the organization to “Provide recreational opportunities for the public, where consistent with forest management objectives.”

The Ohio Division of Forestry provides excellent recreational opportunities for the public including walking and horse trails, camp sites, shooting ranges and other types of recreational development.

SFI Indicator 11.2.1 requires “Participation in or support of *SFI Implementation Committees* to establish criteria and identify delivery mechanisms for *wood producer* training courses and periodic continuing education.”

Ohio Division of Forestry provides an exceptional level of support for logger training and for programs which foster improvement in the professionalism of wood producers.

SFI Indicator 4.1.8 requires participants to “Consider the role of natural disturbances, including the use of prescribed or natural fire where appropriate, and *forest health* threats in relation to *biological diversity* when developing forest management plans.

Ohio Division of Forestry has an exceptional program to consider natural disturbance ecology and to implement prescribed fire where appropriate to enhance biodiversity and sustain oak-hickory types critical to threatened and endangered species while also supporting other multiple use values such as hunting and timber production.

## 2016 Opportunities for Improvement

SFI Indicator 4.1.2 requires “Development of criteria and implementation of practices, as guided by regionally based best scientific information, to retain stand-level wildlife habitat elements such as snags, stumps, mast trees, down woody debris, den trees and nest trees.” There is an Opportunity for Improvement in the program for reserving large trees with hollow sections or other features that could develop into wildlife dens.

SFI Indicator 4.1.7 requires “Participation in programs and demonstration of activities as appropriate to limit the introduction, spread and impact of invasive exotic plants and animals that directly threaten or are likely to threaten native plant and animal communities. There is an Opportunity for Improvement in the program for invasive control by considering possible impacts of site disturbance related to trail creation and trail maintenance.

These findings do not indicate a current deficiency, but served to alert Ohio Division of Forestry to areas that could be strengthened or which could merit future attention.

## Review of Past Audit Findings

In 2015 NSF determined that there were 2 minor non-conformances, both of which were closed and the corrective actions verified:

SFI Indicator 3.1.1 requires a “Program to implement federal, state or provincial water quality best management practices during all phases of management activities.” In 2015 at Richland Furnace State Forest on the All-Purpose Vehicle Trail re-constructed waterbars were directing road water and sediment towards a man-made pond. The trail had previously been deeply incised into the hillside, so large waterbars were re-constructed to drain the trail. Three of the waterbars directed water to the side of the road where the pond is located and some sediment from one of the waterbars had traveled through the filter strip and entered the pond. The Lead Auditor reviewed evidence of implementation of corrective actions, including a written description and 3 photos. Efforts to stabilize the site and prevent further sedimentation appeared appropriate and the CAR was resolved and closed.

SFI Indicator 2.2.8 requires “Use of management practices appropriate to the situation, for example: (portions deleted) Sub-Indicator h. appropriate transportation and storage of chemicals.”

The 2015 CAR at the Shawnee State Forest the pesticide storage shed had one unlabeled bottle with a defective cap. (Sub-indicator h). The issue was resolved by disposing of the container, developing additional training, and inspecting all pesticide storage areas.



## 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:*

Forest management plans for these lands consists of many interlocked documents, with the most integral listed:

- a. The Ohio Land Management Manual
- b. 5-year management plans covering all forests
- c. Forest-Specific Annual Work Plans, and
- d. Project plans or Harvest plans.

Supporting documentation provided by the Ohio Division of Forestry and the associated inventory data and growth models provided additional 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:*

Observations at numerous field sites and associated records were used to confirm practices. Ohio Division of Forestry has programs for reforestation, for protection against insects, 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 the portions of field sites that were close to water resources and reviewed documentation associated with ongoing or completed harvests. Programs, procedures, and harvest inspection forms for the 12 harvest sites as well as observations of several road sections, trail sections, or combined road/trail sections contributed to a finding that water quality is protected.

### **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:***

Field observations, written plans and policies detailed in the Ohio Land Management Manual, use of college-trained field biologists, availability of specialists, and regular staff involvement in conferences and workshops that cover scientific advances were the evidence used to assess the requirements involved biodiversity conservation.

### **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 and policies/procedures for visual quality were assessed during the evaluation. Further maps of recreation sites, combined with recreation-oriented field sites that were extensively reviewed helped confirm an exemplary recreation program.

### **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, records of special sites, training records, and written protection plans were all assessed during the evaluation. The program has implemented a land management program that protects special sites while managing for a range of uses and natural resources.

### **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 and with loggers provided the key evidence supporting a finding of minimized waste and efficient use of harvested trees, consistent with the need to retain some wood for habitat and nutrient conservation.

### **Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights**

To recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and traditional knowledge.

#### **Summary of Evidence:**

This objective does not apply because there are no federally-recognized tribes in Ohio

### **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 of an overall record of legal compliance. No evidence of regulatory problems was found.

### **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:**

Not reviewed during the 2016 SFI Audit. In past audits teams visited research or research and demonstration sites and interviewed key research partners. A sample of products of research support (publications) was also reviewed. This evidence showed that support for and use of scientific research is a notable strength of the program.

### **Objective 11 Training and Education**

To improve the implementation of sustainable forestry practices through appropriate training and education programs.

#### **Summary of Evidence:**

Training records of selected personnel, records associated with harvest sites audited, and stakeholder interviews were the key evidence for this objective. Training and education programs were found to be superb, with efforts to support logger training particularly noteworthy.

### **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:**

Not reviewed during the 2016 SFI Audit. In past audits teams used stakeholder comments and interviews, mailing lists, agendas for meetings, and selected summaries of comments were sufficient to assess the requirements. The programs for public outreach, education, and involvement meet or exceed all requirements.

### **Objective 13 Public Land Management Responsibilities**

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

**Summary of Evidence:**

Auditors reviewed open house records and planning documents for selected Ohio State Forests. The Ohio Division of Forestry posts detailed information regarding planned practices on its web site.

**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:**

Interviews, copies of reports filed with SFI Inc. and the SFI Inc. website provided evidence of conformance.

**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, and interviews with personnel from all involved levels in the organization were assessed. Follow-up actions for internal audit findings were also reviewed.



**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



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