

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc.

Background and History of Conservation Impact and the Sounding Board

February 2, 2018

About SFI

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting forest sustainability and supporting the linkage between sustainable forests and communities through grant programs, carefully targeted research, direct leadership of critical initiatives, and partnerships that effectively contribute to multiple conservation objectives. Forests certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard cover more than 305 million acres/123 million hectares in the United States and Canada. Millions more acres/hectares benefit from the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard. SFI's Forest Management, Fiber Sourcing and Chain of Custody Standards work to ensure the health and future of forests, and our on-product labels help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions. SFI Inc. is governed by a three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally.

Background on Conservation Impact

To facilitate good decision-making, and to help make the case for the value of sustainability, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative began work in 2015 to quantify the conservation benefits of its work, and the connection between sustainable supply chains and important conservation outcomes. By clarifying these conservation attributes, SFI will help make the link between well-managed forests and the public benefits that affect each of us every day.

The motivations to measure conservation values are diverse: brand owners seek to understand the impact of their sourcing; conservation stakeholders can engage more effectively if they understand the values that certification can provide; and improved tracking will better equip SFI to provide sustainability related metrics, and contribute meaningfully to conservation outcomes.

To ensure focus, SFI reviewed potential topical areas with key non-profit partners, SFI Program Participants, the SFI External Review Panel, and select brand owners to determine areas that would resonate best with the broadest range of constituents. Recognizing the complexity of assessing conservation values across the enormous footprint of SFI's work, SFI determined to focus investigations in three areas:

- Water quality and quantity
- Climate change related values (both carbon sequestration and ecosystem health and resiliency)
- Landscape-level biodiversity

Formally announced at the World Conservation Congress in September of 2016, The **Conservation Impact Project** actually consists of numerous smaller projects, generated by partnerships within the academic, conservation and research community, and including SFI's own Program Participants. Some projects have been initiated through SFI's Conservation and Community Partnership Grants program, while others are being directed by partners working in concert with SFI. Quantifying the critical contributions of these managed forests will enable the SFI community to understand and promote the

conservation values associated with sustainably managed forests, and will facilitate continual improvement.

A list of current Conservation Impact Projects is provided below.

The Sounding Board

The “Sounding Board” was formed to bring together the community of partners engaged in or knowledgeable about SFI’s Conservation Impact work, to help SFI identify specific pathways to clarify and enumerate our conservation contributions. The Sounding Board does not have a formal structure, but is intended as an open process to help shape this important work, and promote interaction directly between project leaders and experts from a diverse variety of backgrounds. There are no long-term participation requirements, just an invitation to lend your expertise. Effective measurement of Conservation Impact will be founded in credible science, but will also be characterized by resonance with key audiences. The Sounding Board will play a critical role in ensuring both.

The first Sounding Board meeting was convened in June of 2015 with 24 participants addressing the following goals:

- Identify existing knowledge regarding metrics relative to these values, and how or if any of those might be applied to SFI managed forestlands
- Determine what attributes may require more thorough and focused studies to render credible measures of the contribution of SFI managed lands
- Help shape SFI’s Conservation and Community Partnership Grants program to encourage studies that build understanding of Conservation Impact

Building on the guidance provided by the Sounding Board, SFI developed protocols for our Conservation and Community Partnership Grants Program, and attracted a number of projects in 2016 to build understanding around key themes. Additionally, SFI initiated “Direct Engagement” projects with several uniquely qualified partners, positioned to help us take some key projects to a large scale.

In July, 2016, eighteen members of the original Sounding Board convened by conference call to plan a second face-to-face meeting, which subsequently took place in Washington, DC in October of 2016. The thirty-seven participants, many considered to be the foremost experts in their field, included representatives from Virginia Tech, Nature Conservancy of Canada, American Forest Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, American Bird Conservancy, Saskatchewan Research Council, American Institute of Biological Sciences, NatureServe, U.S. Forest Service, and Canadian Forest Service, and many others.

The meeting combined aspects of traditional scientific symposia with an interactive workshop format, to facilitate input into ongoing projects. Goals of the meeting included:

- Review the development of SFI’s Conservation Impact project, and the status of selected projects underway
- Provide input into ongoing projects for continual improvement
- Engage in interactive discussions with fellow researchers, academics, and conservation scientists to identify gaps in existing research, and provide insights for future direction

- Share relevant past research with project leaders and peers to provide relevant insights from past research.

Principal Recommendations and Related Actions from the October 2016 meeting

- **Sounding Board Recommendation:** Summarize available sources of metrics for utilization by Conservation Impact Projects. Some participants characterized these as “white papers” to offer a summary of existing understanding, and to ensure that we don’t reinvent existing methodologies.

Actions Taken: Summaries of existing available datasets and past work have been commissioned for the topics of water and carbon.

- **Sounding Board Recommendation:** Through cooperation with SFI Program Participants, explore ways to access and utilize geospatial information to aid in achieving scale across topical areas.

Action Taken: Two of the Conservation Impact projects (ABC and NatureServe) have begun to develop means to utilize geospatial data for analysis in cooperation with NCASI, while protecting the proprietary interests of SFI Program Participants. These projects could offer models for future development across multiple topical areas, and effectively constitute tests for scalable methodologies.

- **Sounding Board Recommendation:** There is a need to apply some attention to the question of ecosystem resiliency in response to climate change, in addition to carbon values.

Action Taken: The new 2017 project started with Manomet addresses resiliency to climate change as a central theme.

- **Sounding Board Recommendation:** Consider dovetailing or collaborating with other metric-development projects.

Action Taken: We have had multiple discussions with other non-profits and with USFS about the potential for collaborating on metric development, or at a minimum, ensuring the compatibility of such efforts across ownerships. This work continues.

- **Sounding Board Recommendation:** There is a need to develop information to help SFI Program Participants understand the value of Conservation Impact projects, and to stimulate their engagement where possible. A related recommendation noted the need to ensure clear communications about purpose and outcomes, tailored to various audiences.

Action Taken: Program Participant meetings this Spring have afforded an opportunity for SFI to highlight the Conservation Impact work, and additional outreach to brand-owners is helping ensure that we bring relevancy through the supply chain. A discussion of relevancy and communication is included in the June 2017 Sounding Board Agenda.

- Sounding Board Recommendation: Future Sounding Board meetings should preserve elements of group discussion and input, but also to provide some opportunity for focused discussion within topical areas.

Action Taken: The June 2017 Sounding Board meeting will provide some opportunity for overarching discussion, as well as focused discussion on the topics of water, biodiversity and climate change. The projects chosen for specific presentation are those that are utilizing creative approaches for achieving scale in describing Conservation Impact, to focus on this critical aspect of the work, which reaches across all topics.

Other important Recommendations to influence future Conservation Impact work:

- One advantage of geospatial analyses will be the ability to track change over time, and to better capture the dynamics of temporal changes. We should look for such opportunities in project development.
- One potential approach to achieving scale involves effective utilization of geospatial or remote-sensed data. Another is the effective utilization of models – we should consider whether modeling may be applied to any existing projects to help achieve scale, and/or consider for future project development.
- We continue to have discussions amongst project managers and Sounding Board participants regarding the need for establishing benchmarks as “baselines” against which Conservation Impact should be measured. There is not likely a single answer to this question, and different projects are taking diverse approaches to this issue.
- Some suggested the development of topical working groups, but consensus is that this should be driven by need over time.
- One advantage of the Conservation Impact work is to provide information to feed continual improvement over time. SFI should identify learnings that can help improve the SFI Program Standards, and other aspects of our work.

Principal Points of Discussion and Related Actions from the June 2017 meeting

Key topics of discussion are noted below, along with any noteworthy actions taken (*in italics*) relative to the topic since the June 2017 meeting.

- There was a good discussion around ensuring that Conservation Impact projects include results that illustrate the value of Fiber Sourcing. It was noted that, relative to BMP implementation, there may be a tipping point where there is such a large proportion of Fiber Sourcing-influenced harvesting, that trained loggers utilize BMP practices with a high rate of consistency, regardless of where the wood is delivered.
 - *University of Georgia will present some preliminary findings from their BMP study in Georgia, which supports the contention the Fiber Sourcing has had a sweeping impact on BMP implementation.*

- *The Virginia Tech project has been initiated to illustrate the direct link between the expansion of Fiber Sourcing influence, and improvements in water quality. Virginia Tech will be presenting their methodology in the “New Approaches to Achieve Scale” segment of the March meeting.*
- *Projects that explore Fiber Sourcing impacts on biodiversity are still lacking, and could be a focus of future work.*
- As projects come to maturity, Sounding Board meetings should create an opportunity to discuss optimization of Conservation Impact outcomes across topical areas. A related idea was the notion that SFI’s Conservation Impact work should be considered in the context of managed landscapes. How are SFI certified lands and Fiber Sourcing areas contributing to conservation outcomes at an even larger scale?
 - *March 2018 meeting will begin to broach the subject of working across topical areas in the discussion of “Trends in Conservation Impact”. However, the question of optimization should be further explored during general discussion, with an eye toward setting up the topic successfully in future meetings as results and methods mature.*
 - *SFI’s work to facilitate engagement of large landowners in conservation outcomes at landscape scale is related to this topic, and the SFI standard includes conservation elements that speak to outcomes at landscape scale (i.e. beyond ownership boundaries). Chief Conservation Officer Paul Trianosky presented at the National Forum on Landscape Conservation in November of 2017, to help bring attention to the role of managed forestlands in attaining conservation outcomes. The contribution of these lands to larger scales should continue to be explored, and could be a focus of future Conservation Impact projects.*
- There is a need to ensure that Canadian and US based projects seek opportunities for engagement, common metrics, and scale.
 - *Several projects are seeking ways to stitch together work across the border, and to try to reconcile differences in data. Some of the discussion in March will reveal this work. Also, some related projects are already operating at a continental or global scale. We’ll review these in the “Trends” part of the March agenda.*
- There were pros and cons offered regarding the utility of topical vs. full group discussions.
 - *We tried topical breakout discussions at the last Sounding Board meeting, but will stick with the full group discussions at this meeting. We continue to entertain ideas about how to use our meeting time most effectively.*
- There was much discussion around intended audiences for the Conservation Impact work, and whether communications need wait for results in order to build value for the project. While the results will be key, particularly to audiences desiring details relative to conservation outcomes, SFI can/should begin communicating the fact that the work is underway, which carries its own

value. SFI had engaged in some “listening sessions” prior to initiating Conservation Impact to investigate the relevance of topics to various audiences, which helped lead to the three principal Conservation Impact topics currently in play. The question of key audiences was addressed once again, and participants agreed that SFI Program Participants, as well as brand-owners, were both key. Additionally, there was much discussion around the importance of engaging youth and educators in order to build a culture of valuing forests, and conservation outcomes.

- *Since the June meeting, SFI staff have continued to illustrate and promote the Conservation Impact project to brand-owner and SFI Program Participant audiences, including targeted presentations at the Sustainable Packaging Coalition meeting in October, and a webinar on selected Conservation Impact projects in December. The March 2018 meeting will feature early results from a number of projects, and continue the discussion on impactful communications.*
- Conservation Impact researchers should be engaged in a way that helps them understand the anticipated end use of this information, and how it will be communicated. Researchers will be aided by considering messaging, audience and framing as they develop projects. We should consider testing research ideas from the research community to determine what sort of metrics we need to be successful.
 - *This suggests an ongoing effort to include communications topics as an integral part of the Sounding Board agenda. The March meeting includes at least two relevant segments – a specific review of the GreenBlue project which links Conservation Impact outcomes to brand-owners, and a targeted communications discussion around overall outcomes and how these link to SFI communications.*
 - *We continue to welcome and encourage the integration of communications as an element of Conservation Impact projects.*
- There was considerable discussion around conveying the value of Conservation Impact through youth and education-related programs. Project Learning Tree (PLT) was specifically cited as an opportunity.
 - *In July of 2017, Project Learning Tree became a program of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, opening doors to creative integration of Conservation Impact outcomes with this award-winning environmental education program, which uses trees and forests to increase youth understanding of the environment. PLT integration is ongoing, but will be a focus of attention for SFI going forward.*

Conservation Impact Projects – March 2018

Conservation Impact Projects underway span the topics of biodiversity, carbon and climate change, water, and communications (which link the other topics). Current and recently concluded projects include:

Biodiversity Projects:

1. American Bird Conservancy: *Bringing Back the Forest Birds*
2. Nature Conservancy of Canada: *Investigating Biodiversity Impacts of Forest Management on Vernal Pools in the Kenauk Reserve*
3. University of Northern British Columbia: *Remote-Sensing LiDAR to Measure Biodiversity on Lands Certified to the SFI Program Standard*
4. NatureServe: *Assessing Biodiversity Conservation Values of Managed Forests*
5. Boreal Avian Modelling Project at Department of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta: *Applying Data-driven Measures to Evaluate and Improve the Conservation Value of Managed Forests for Birds*
6. fRI Research: *Caribou Conservation through Better Cutblock Design*
7. Fraser Basin Council Society: *Monitoring Water Temperatures and Flows for Steelhead in Relation to Forest Management Practices*

Carbon and Climate Resilience Projects:

1. Keeping Maine's Forests: *Preparing for the Carbon Market in Forests Certified to the SFI Standard*
2. Manomet: *The Forest Climate Resiliency Project*
3. Saskatchewan Research Council: *The Canadian Forest Carbon Assessment*
4. Saskatchewan Research Council: *Investigating Carbon Sequestration in Boreal Upland Forests and Wetlands*
5. American Forests: *A Practice-Based Approach to Increasing Forest Carbon Mitigation through Forest Soils*
6. University of Maine System acting through the University of Maine: *Assessing and Monitoring the Influence of Forest Management Practices on Soil Productivity, Carbon Storage, and Conservation in the Acadian Forest Region*

Water Projects:

1. University of Georgia: *Quantifying Impacts of SFI's Fiber Sourcing Standards in Georgia*
2. Conservation Management Institute Conservation at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: *Investigating the relationships between BMP implementation and SFI certification through time*
3. The Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: *Monitoring and Quantifying the Effects of State Forestry BMP Programs on Soil Erosion and Sediment Delivery for the Southeastern United States*

Communication Project

1. GreenBlue Institute: *Addressing Brand Owner Sustainability Goals Through the Responsible Sourcing of Forest Products*