



Delaware Wild Lands SFI Summary 2013 Recertification Audit Report

The SFI Program of Delaware Wild Lands in Delaware and Maryland has achieved conformance with the SFI Standard®, 2010-2014 Edition, according to the NSF-ISR SFIS Certification Audit Process. NSF-ISR initially certified these lands to the SFIS in September of 2010 and conducted annual follow-up surveillance audits in 2011 and 2012. This report describes the first SFI Re-Certification Audit designed to review the full program to determine continued conformance.

The organization's SFI Program is managed by Andrew Martin, supported by Larry Walton of Vision Forestry. "Delaware Wild Lands, a non-profit organization, owns some 10,000 acres of forestland in Sussex County, Delaware and Worcester County, Maryland. The land has been in conservation-oriented management for some 50 years, and is composed largely of the Great Cypress Swamp and surrounding forests. In 2005, DWL turned to Vision Forestry, LLC, to prepare a sustainable forest management plan and oversee the day-to-day management of the sustainable forestry program on the property.

The property comprises the largest contiguous forest ownership on the Eastern Shore, and is highly regarded throughout the region as an important conservation area. It has remnants of bald-cypress, possibly some of the furthest north in the range of that species, as well as Atlantic white cedar. Restoring some of these former stands is a high priority. The land has been managed as a Quality Deer Management property for years, and hunting is a major activity. The main timber production comes from old stands of Loblolly pine that established following major fires in the 1930's and survived the pine bark beetle epidemics that have occurred episodically since. These large trees return good revenue when timber markets are active, but the low, wet nature of the sites can mean a very short season when mechanized operations are possible." Source: *"Plan for Achieving Conformance with the 2010-2014 Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standard"*.

The recertification audit was performed by NSF-ISR on October 3 and 6, 2013 by Mike Ferrucci, Lead Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting SFIS Certification Audits of "Section 9. SFI 2010-2014 Audit Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation" contained in Requirements for the SFI 2010-2014 Program: Standards, Rules for Label Use, Procedures, and Guidance.

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Standard, 2010-2014 Edition. The scope of the SFIS Audit included fee timberland Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been conducted since the previous field audit conducted at the end of August, 2012. In addition practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (regeneration and BMP issues, for example). Use of the SFI logo and the requirement to provide a public of audit reports were also reviewed.

As with the initial audit, several of the SFI Performance Measures were outside of the scope of Delaware Wild Lands' SFI program and were excluded from the scope of the SFI Certification Audit as follows:

- Indicator 2.1.4 involving planting exotic species
- Indicator 2.1.7 involving planting non-forested areas
- Indicator 3.2.5 involving situations where the state lacks BMPs
- Indicator 4.1.8 involving the use of prescribed fire
- Objectives 8 through 13 for procurement
- Indicator 16.2.2 regarding involvement with logger certification programs
- Objective 18 involving the management of public lands
- Indicators 19.2.1 and 19.2.2 involving past reporting

No indicators were modified.

SFIS Surveillance Audit Process

The review was governed by a detailed audit protocol designed to enable the audit team determine conformance with the applicable SFI requirements. The process included the assembly and review of audit evidence consisting of documents, interviews, and on-site inspections of ongoing or completed forest practices. Documents describing these activities were provided to the auditor in advance, and a sample of the available audit evidence was designated by the auditor for review.

During the audit NSF-ISR reviewed a sample of the written documentation assembled to provide objective evidence of SFIS Conformance. NSF-ISR 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-ISR SFI-SOP. NSF-ISR also selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers, landowners and other interested parties, and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the SFI Standard was understood and actively implemented.

The possible findings for specific SFI requirements included Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance, Opportunities for Improvement, and Practices that exceeded the Basic Requirements of the SFIS. Surveillance Audits generally focus on conformance issues and do not generally address exceptional practices.

Overview of Audit Findings

Delaware Wild Lands' SFI Program was found to be in full conformance with the SFIS Standard. There were no new minor non-conformances. A very strong program is in place, with many areas identified where practices exceed the requirements of the SFI 2010-2014 Standard:

SFI Performance Measure 4.1 requires "Program Participants shall have programs to promote biological diversity at stand- and landscape-levels." The management of Delaware Wild Lands' Great Cypress Swamp and surrounding forests demonstrates exceptional management for

conservation of biological diversity. Stand and landscape-level biodiversity conservation practices are at the core of the management program on these lands.

SFI Indicator 4.1.1 requires that “Program to promote the conservation of native biological diversity, including species, wildlife habitats and ecological community types.” Delaware Wild Lands has an exemplary program to promote the conservation of native biological diversity, including species, wildlife habitats and ecological community types.

SFI Indicator 4.1.6 requires “Support of and participation in plans or programs for the conservation of old-growth forests in the region of ownership.” Delaware Wild Lands exceeds the standard in the program for conserving old-growth forests.

SFI Performance Measure 4.2 states “Program Participants shall apply knowledge gained through research, science, technology and field experience to manage wildlife habitat and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity.” Delaware Wild Lands' efforts to protect and restore the Great Cypress Swamp, using research knowledge and experience, are exceptional.

SFI Performance Measure 6.1 requires that “Program Participants shall identify special sites and manage them in a manner appropriate for their unique features.” Delaware Wild Lands has an exemplary program for the identification and protection of special sites.

SFI Indicator 17.2.1 requires “Periodic educational opportunities promoting sustainable forestry.” Delaware Wild Lands exceeds the standard in the education efforts regarding sustainable forestry by providing a venue for many groups to visit and learn about sustainable forestry in general and restoration of degraded swamp forests in particular.

The next surveillance audit is scheduled for October, 2014.

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 broaden the implementation of sustainable forestry by ensuring long-term forest productivity and yield based on the use of the best scientific information available.

Summary of Evidence – The forest management plan for Delaware Wild Lands and supporting documentation and the associated inventory data and growth models were the key evidence of conformance.

Objective 2. Forest Productivity - To ensure long-term forest productivity, carbon storage and conservation of forest resources through prompt reforestation, soil conservation, afforestation and other measures.

Summary of Evidence – Field observations and associated records were used to confirm practices. Delaware Wild Lands 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 water quality in streams, lakes and other water bodies.

Summary of Evidence – Field observations of a range of sites were the key evidence, backed by written procedures and close supervision of all activities.

Objective 4. Conservation of Biological Diversity including Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value 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 habitat diversity and the conservation of forest plants and animals, including aquatic species.

Summary of Evidence – Field observations, written assessments, plans and policies, planning and involvement in monitoring and research by college-trained field biologists and ecologists, 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 – Interviews confirmed recreational access for hunt clubs; visual indicators were reviewed by consideration of maps and by observations in the field.

Objective 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.

Summary of Evidence – Field observations of completed operations and of special sites, and written protection plans were assessed during the evaluation.

Objective 7. Efficient Use of Forest Resources - To promote the efficient use of forest resources.

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

Objectives 8 through 13. NA

Objective 14. Legal and Regulatory Compliance -

Compliance 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 15. Forestry Research, Science, and Technology - To support forestry research, science, and technology, upon which sustainable forest management decisions are based.

Summary of Evidence – Review of documentation revealed a long legacy of basic and applied research on these lands.

Objective 16. Training and Education -To improve the implementation of sustainable forestry practices through appropriate training and education programs.

Summary of Evidence –Records associated with harvest sites audited, and stakeholder interviews were the key evidence for this objective.

Objective 17. Community Involvement in the Practice of Sustainable Forestry -

To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry by encouraging the public and forestry community to participate in the commitment to sustainable forestry, and publicly report progress.

Summary of Evidence – Interviews with staff and review of programs offered (newsletters and brochures on file) were used to confirm these requirements.

Objective 18: Public Land Management Responsibilities - NA

To support and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

Objective 19. Communications and Public Reporting - To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry by documenting progress and opportunities for improvement.

Summary of Evidence –Procedures and interviews provided the key evidence of readiness to conform; the organization has promoted sustainable forestry and the SFI Program in many venues and with all of the many visitors to the lands.

Objective 20. Management Review and Continual Improvement - To promote continual improvement in the practice of sustainable forestry, and to monitor, measure, and report performance in achieving the commitment to sustainable forestry.

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. Vision Forestry’s involvement as the forest management consultant to Delaware Wild Lands was crucial; Vision Forestry has considerable experience in forest certification program design and implementation.

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 zones, and to conform with 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 forests and lands of special significance (ecologically, geologically or culturally important) in a manner that protects their integrity and 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. Avoidance of Controversial Sources including Illegal Logging in Offshore Fiber Sourcing

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.

9. Legal Compliance

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

10. Research

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

11. Training and Education

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

12. Public Involvement

To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry on public lands through community involvement.

13. Transparency

To broaden the understanding of forest certification to the SFI 2010-2014 Standard by documenting certification audits and making the findings publicly available.

14. Continual Improvement

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

Source: Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) Standard, 2010-2014 Edition

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