

NSF International Forestry Program Public Summary Audit Report Georgia Biomass

Introduction

The SFI Program of Georgia Biomass Corp. (GBP) of Waycross, Georgia has demonstrated continuing conformance with the 2015-2019 Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Standards and Rules, Section 3, according to the NSF audit process.

Georgia Biomass was initially certified to SFI in 2011 and was recertified in 2014. This report describes the second Surveillance Audit designed to focus on changes in the standard, changes in operations, the management review system, and efforts at continuous improvement. In addition, a portion of the SFI requirements were selected for detailed review.

Georgia Biomass supplies wood fiber to its pellet mill located in Waycross, Georgia. The company sources roundwood, in-woods chip, sawmill residuals and hog fuel from the states of Georgia and Florida. Pine is the primary component although some hardwood is utilized. Georgia Biomass's SFI Program is managed by Barry Parish.

The Surveillance Audit was performed by NSF on August 2-4, 2016 by an audit team headed by Norman Boatwright, Lead Auditor and Carey Potter, Team Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting SFI audits contained in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Audit Procedures and Qualifications (SFI APQ). The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the 2015-2019 Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Standard and Rules, Section 3.

The scope of the audit included procurement operations. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management since August 2015. In addition, practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (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 audit scope.

As with the initial certification, several of the SFI Performance Measures were outside of the scope of the Georgia Biomass' program and were excluded from the scope of the audit as follows:

- Core Indicator 4.1.5 Program to address significant risk of illegal logging
- Core Indicator 5.2.2 Research on genetically engineered trees
- Core Indicator 6.2.3 Logger certification programs
- Objective 8 Public land management responsibilities

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 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. A sample of procurement operations since the last surveillance audit was also reviewed to ensure that SFI Standard was met. The Lead Auditor made a random selection of 6 sites and worked with the staff to select the remaining sites using risk based criteria. A total of 16 sites were visited.

The possible findings for specific SFI requirements included Exceptional Practices, Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance and Opportunities for Improvement.

Overview of Audit Findings

Georgia Biomass' SFI Program was found to be in conformance with the 2015-2019 SFI Standards and Rules, Section 3. The NSF Audit team did not identify any nonconformances or opportunities for improvement.

The following minor nonconformities were identified during the 2015 audit:

Section 5 CI 3.4 *The SFI label identification number must be added under the logo mark.*

Finding: The SFI/PEFC trademarks on the business card did not contain the required SFI or PEFC license codes.

Resolution: The Company has obtained approval from SFI Inc. to use the trademarks on business cards and the license code is included.

Section 5 CI 3.5 *Program Participants must seek approval from the SFI Office of Label Use and Licensing for use of the off-product marks.*

Finding: The trademark on the Company's website is correct but it and the business card trademark use haven't been approved by SFI Inc.

Resolution: The Company has obtained approval from SFI Inc. to use the trademark on its website.

The next Recertification Audit is scheduled for the week of August 1, 2017.

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. Biodiversity in Fiber Sourcing - To address the practice of *sustainable forestry* by conserving *biological* diversity.

Summary of Evidence – Review of records, interviews with landowners and participation in the GA SIC.

Objective 2. Adherence to Best Management Practices - To broaden the practice of *sustainable forestry* through the use of *best management practices to protect* water quality.

Summary of Evidence – Field observations, review of BMP monitoring records and state BMP audits.

Objective 3. Use of Qualified Resource and Qualified Logging Professionals - To encourage forest landowners to utilize the services of *qualified logging professionals, certified logging professionals* (where available) and *qualified resource professionals*.

Summary of Evidence – Training records of selected personnel, records associated with harvest sites audited, and landowner interviews were the key evidence for this objective.

Objective 4 - 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. State BMP state foresters were also contacted.

Objective 5. 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 – Confirmed by review of records that the Company has sponsored forestry research.

Objective 6. Training and Education - To improve the implementation of *sustainable forestry* practices through appropriate training and education *programs*.

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

Objective 7. 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 – Confirmed by the Company's financial and physical support of the GA SIC and its development of handouts for forest landowners.

Objective 9. Communications and Public Reporting - To increase transparency and to annually report progress on conformance with the *SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard*.

Summary of Evidence – Confirmed audit report was filed on time with SFI Inc. and that the Company maintains copies of previous reports.

Objective 10. 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, internal audits and interviews with personnel from all involved levels in the organization were assessed.

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 landowner's 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