Wisconsin DNR State Lands
2020 SFI Forest Management Summary Audit Report

Introduction

The SFI Program of the Wisconsin DNR has achieved continuing conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules®, Section 2, according to the NSF SFI FM Certification Audit Process.   This report describes the 2020 annual Surveillance Audit designed to consider all of the applicable program and requirements, including any changes in operations, the management review system, and efforts at continuous improvement. The Wisconsin State Forests have been certified to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) Standard since May 5, 2004 (SFI certificate #NSF-SFI-FM-1Y941). In 2009, the scope of the Wisconsin SFI Program was expanded, and the program was recertified including programs for the management of several categories of state lands beyond state forests, such as parks, wildlife lands, and other categories of generally forested lands. DNR land included in the project includes approximately 1,543,367 acres. Excised acreage includes predominantly special purpose lands (such as fish hatcheries, tree nurseries, communications towers, and administrative sites) and land under easement where DNR does not have land management authority. The program was recertified to the SFI 2010-2014 Standard in 2012 and recertified to the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules®, Section 2 in 2015 and 2018 (an out-of-phase audit to align with the FSC FM audit cycle).

Audit Process

The Surveillance Audit was performed by NSF on September 14-18, 2020 by an audit team headed by Shannon Wilks, SFI Lead Auditor. The audit was conducted in conjunction with an FSC FM audit and the FSC audit team members included Beth Jacqmain, FSC Lead Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting Certification Audits found in Section 9 – SFI 2015-2019 Audit Procedures and Auditor Qualifications contained in Requirements for the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules. The Wisconsin DNR's management representative is Mark Heyde, Sustainable Forestry Certification Coordinator, Wisconsin DNR - Division of Forestry.

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules, Section 2. The audit served to assess conformance for parts of the standard to determine conformity. The audit was conducted in conjunction with an FSC audit covering the same lands and organization and by the same audit team. The two processes (SFI and FSC) shared teams and reviewed much of the same evidence, but each program had a different team leader and audit objectives. This report is intended to describe the SFI portion of the evaluation only (more information about the FSC portion of the evaluation is available from WIDNR).

The Indicators and Performance Measures of the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules®, Section 2 were utilized without modification or substitution.

The audit was governed by an audit plan and by NSF audit protocols 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 and lists of management activities were provided to the auditors in advance, and a sample of the available field sites was designated by the lead auditor for review. Approximately twenty-five percent (25%) of the sites visited were randomly selected. The remaining field sites were selected based on the risk of environmental impact, special features, and other criteria outlined in the NSF-SFI-SOP. Thirty-six (36) field sites across seventeen (17) management areas within the Peshtigo and Woodruff Areas were audited.

During the audit, the audit team reviewed a sample of the available written documentation as objective evidence of Conformance. The lead auditor also selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the SFI Standard was understood and actively implemented.

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

Overview of Audit Findings

Wisconsin DNR State Lands was found to be conformance with referenced standards. NSF did not find any non-conformances or opportunities for improvement during the 2020 surveillance audit.

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: Management Plans for selected tracts visited in 2020 were reviewed. All tracts with active or recently-completed timber sales (sold after March 15, 2015) are covered by Master Plans or Interim Forest Management Plans (IFMP); this is consistent with policy. WDNR is working through a backlog of Master Plans and have completed the less complex plans and moving to ones with greater complexity. Interim Forest Management Plans are developed for properties too small to have master plans, or where management actions are needed but the master plan has not been completed. The audit team reviewed several Interim Forest Management Plans. These plans included the required elements needed to supplement wider scale plans. The Management Plan process was significantly changed in 2018. Previously based on properties (over 640), the process was changed to take ecological landscape approach. The program uses "The Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin" as a key resource to ensure that management is consistent with a landscape level understanding of the ecological environment. For example, Chapter 13 - Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape provides descriptions of the Physical Environment, the Biotic Environment, Management Opportunities for Important Ecological Features of the Northeast Sands, History of Human Settlement and Resource Use, Resource Characterization and Use, Current Socioeconomic Conditions, and Integrated Opportunities for Management. Appendix 13.E. Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) is found in the Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape. Master plans are developed or are being developed for each Ecological Landscape. Master Plans/Interim Forest Management Plans were reviewed for all sites visited .Progress since 2019 audit includes new plans on approximately 56,855 acres. Northeast Sands and Western Prairies Ecological Landscape plans have been completed since the 2019 audit. Plans are on track to complete by 2025 timeline.

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: Not Audited in 2020

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. Observations included use of water control measures such as rock, debris, water bars, crowned roads and wing ditches to minimize soil movement. No BMP issues were observed and Riparian Management Zones were protected and observed during field site audit.

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: Not Audited in 2020

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: Not Audited in 2020

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 site visits to Barrens and other protected sites confirm management of habitat to protect unique qualities. Detailed records, trained personnel and management plans were utilized to guide management.

Objective 7   Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

To minimize waste and ensure the efficient use of fiber resources.

Summary of Evidence: Not Audited in 2020

Objective 8   Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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

Summary of Evidence: Not Audited in 2020

Objective 9   Legal and Regulatory Compliance

To comply with applicable federal, provincial, state and local laws and regulations.

Summary of Evidence: Observations during field site visits and interviews with personnel confirmed compliance to all regulations. No BMP or water quality issues observed. Review of all contracts contained compliance to regulation requirements. Trained contractors records were observed for forest management activities.

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 Audited in 2020

Objective 11   Training and Education

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

Summary of Evidence: Not Audited in 2020

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 Audited in 2020

Objective 13   Public Land Management Responsibilities

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

Summary of Evidence: Public input opportunities during Master Forest plan development are very detailed including: Local stakeholder outreach, community outreach, annual stakeholder meetings, listening sessions, newsletters, integrated property management meetings; outreach is scaled to the public's level of interest and relative risk.

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: Public Reports are available on SFI website.

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 confirmed detailed process for review. Review of internal and external audits documented and 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 *Fiber Sourcing* 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*

For Additional Information Contact

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