



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources - DNR State Lands

2022 SFI Forest Management Public 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 2022 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 4th Surveillance Audit was performed by NSF on September 19-23, 2022 by an audit team of Shannon Wilks, SFI Lead Auditor, James Tucker Watts, SFI Team Auditor and Kyle Meister, SFI Team Auditor. The audit was conducted in conjunction with the FSC Forest Management audit. 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 Teague Prichard, State Forest Specialist, Wisconsin DNR - Division of Forestry.

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the organization’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 segment of the audit will be 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 to 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 by SFI Lead Auditor. The remaining field sites were selected based on the risk of environmental impact, special features, and other criteria outlined in the NSF-SFI-SOP. Seventy-seven (77) field sites across the Northeast District-Wisconsin Rapids Area covering sixteen (16) counties were audited.

During the audit, the audit team reviewed a sample of the available written documentation as objective evidence of Conformance. The audit team also selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource Specialists and personnel 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

One minor non-conformance and one opportunity for improvement (OFI) were identified during the 2022 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: *Wisconsin DNR maintains a detailed complex management and GIS system for managing State Lands. Management Plans and Interim Management Plans are utilized based on Wisconsin ecological landscapes. Forest inventory is maintained and utilized for guidance on sustainable harvest levels. Personnel are trained, knowledgeable and experienced to develop and implement forest management activities. Review of all field sites in 2022 confirmed accurate maps and ground conditions represented within prescriptions and harvest plans. No conversions to non-forest use was observed.*

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 2022.*

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: *Review of seventy-seven (77) field sites confirmed Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources. Qualified personnel and harvest contractors were confirmed during implementation of forest management activities. No BMP issues were observed and Riparian Management Zones were protected and observed during field site audit of all sites.*

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: *Invasive Species management was reviewed for all field sites during 2022 audit. Wisconsin DNR has a very active program to address specific invasive species with qualified and trained personnel. One opportunity for improvement was noted to help strengthen the program.*

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 2022.*

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: *Interviews with Wisconsin DNR personnel confirmed use of non-public resources to identify and protect sites of archaeological/cultural/historic importance on state lands. Interviews with DNR Archaeologist and DNR forestry personnel confirmed process prior to forest management activities.*

Objective 7 Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

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

Summary of Evidence: *Not Audited in 2022.*

Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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

Summary of Evidence: *Not Audited in 2022.*

Objective 9 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

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

Summary of Evidence: *Wisconsin DNR maintains public website for policies and procedures to meet regulatory requirements. Auditor reviews during randomly selected field sites confirmed access to regulatory postings was publicly available and no adverse, hazardous or regulatory issues were observed.*



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 2022..

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 2022.

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 2022.

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. Public input opportunities are solicited on DNR website.

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 Wisconsin DNR website but not listed on SFI website as required.

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 confirmed compliance.

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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