



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – State Lands 2021 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 2021 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 13-17, 2021 by an audit team of Shannon Wilks, SFI Lead Auditor, James Tucker Watts, SFI Team Auditor and Brendan Grady, SFI Team Auditor. The audit was conducted in conjunction with an FSC FM audit and the FSC audit team members included Brendan Grady, FSC Lead Auditor, James Tucker Watts-FSC Team Auditor and Shannon Wilks, FSC Team 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 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 forty percent (40%) 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-one (71) field sites across Southwest District-Black River Falls Area covering twelve (12) 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, adjoining landowners 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

2021 Surveillance Audit Findings

One minor non-conformance was identified during the 2021 surveillance audit. The non-conformance was identified and corrected by DNR personnel prior to closing meeting. Evidence was submitted to Lead Auditor confirming.

Minor NC: Indicator 2.2.8 (h): Use of management practices appropriate to the situation, for example:

h. appropriate transportation and storage of chemicals;

Finding: Review of chemical inventory storage, list of inventory and SDS sheets at Sandhill Wildlife Management Area confirmed 7 chemicals maintained in inventory did not contain the required SDS sheets. Updated SDS sheets were provided to auditor prior to closing meeting. Minor NC will be closed.

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: Not Audited in 2021.

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: Review of WIDNR programs, policies, monitoring records and observations during field site visits confirmed detailed program to ensure Forest Health and Productivity.

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 all 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: WIDNR maintains significant resources for guidance in forest management preparation, planning and implementation. Observation of "The Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin", 2020 Forest Action Plan, Wildlife Action Plan, Timber Sale Notice and Cutting Reports demonstrated resources and development by qualified trained personnel. Interviews and observations during field sites confirmed diversity of habitats, protection of biodiversity and conservation of ecological landscapes.

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: Field observations of completed operations and review of policies/procedures for visual quality were assessed during the evaluation. Auditor review of recreation sites confirmed multiple uses for hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, bird watching and other outdoor benefits. Recreational use and aesthetics were priority concerns where appropriate.

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: Not Audited in 2021.



Objective 7 Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

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

Summary of Evidence: *Review of Timber Sale Notices and Cutting Reports, Monitoring records, Timber Sale contracts and field observations confirmed system to manage use of fiber resources. Field sites confirmed adequate utilization within defined specifications.*

Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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

Summary of Evidence: *Review of Executive Orders, establishment of Tribal Liaisons for all federal recognized tribes and system for collaboration and response to inquiries from Tribal representative confirmed successful program. Personnel were knowledgeable of requirements and demonstrated protection of cultural sites within state lands. Interviews with personnel confirmed no use of traditional knowledge in forest management activities.*

Objective 9 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

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

Summary of Evidence: *Not Audited in 2021.*

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: *Interviews with personnel, review of research projects and implementation during field sites confirmed compliance to requirements. DNR maintains research projects with various NGOs, academic institutions, Federal agencies and other State Agencies. Review of 2021 Research projects confirmed significant investment by organization.*

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 2021.*

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: *DNR has excellent resources for outreach with public. Review of DNR website and interviews with personnel confirm qualified personnel with detailed resources available for all forest management activities including-invasive species, chemical use and guidance, reforestation, protection of biological diversity, protection of Rare, Threatened and Endangered species, use of qualified personnel and various other topics. Resources are widely available on website and within offices.*

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 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 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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