
Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Forestry

2019 SFI and ATFS Forest Management Surveillance Audit

Public Summary Audit Report

Introduction

The SFI and ATFS Programs of the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOP) with state forest headquarters at the Cumberland State Forest in Cumberland, VA has demonstrated conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 2 – Forest Management and to the American Forest Foundation (AFF) 2015-2020 Standards of Sustainability, according to the NSF certification process. This is VDOP's first annual surveillance audit to the referenced standards and this report describes the audit findings. This audit included a detailed review of all of the applicable SFI and ATFS requirements.

VDOP manages 25 State Forest totaling 69,441 acres with 69,288 acres of forestland and wildlife food plots under certification. The State Forests of Virginia are self-supporting and receive no taxpayer funds for operation. Operating funds are generated from the sale of forest products. In addition, up to 25 percent of the revenue received from the sale of forest products is returned to the counties in which the forests are located. The formation of the State Forest System created a way for the commonwealth to manage the forest land for a steady supply of timber, ensure the operation and maintenance of this natural resource, help maintain a stable local economy, provide recreation opportunities to the public, maintain aesthetics for Virginians, maintain wildlife habitats, create natural reserves and preserve water quality. State Forests provide a working demonstration of forests and forest management techniques. The Virginia State Forest System follows these forest management guidelines:

- Contribute to the conservation of biological diversity of the forest and the landscape in which it resides.
- Maintain or improve the productive capacity of the forest.
- Maintain the health and vigor of the forest, its landscape and its watershed.
- Provide resources for cleaner air by absorbing carbon dioxide, known as carbon cycles.
- Provide socioeconomic benefits.
- Protect soil productivity and water quality.

The SFI & ATFS FM Programs are managed by Harvey Darden.

VDOP uses the area method to determine annual harvest acreage and forest types. Harvest volumes are reported annually. Long term schedules are developed using 10 Year Management Plans to insure sustainable yields from the forest over time.

The audit was performed by NSF on June 10-13, 2019 by an audit team headed by Norman Boatwright, Senior Lead Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting audits contained in SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules, Section 9 - Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation and the AFF standard requirements.

The audit involved four days on-site and included visits to the following state forests: First Mountain, Lesesne, Niday, Hawks, Matthews, Channels and Old Flat.

Several of the SFI Section 2 requirements were outside of the scope of VDOP's programs and were excluded from the scope of the Certification Audit as follows:

- SFI CI 2.1.3 – VDOP does not plant exotic tree species.
- SFI CI 10.1.2 – VDOP is not involved with research on genetically engineered trees.

Audit Process

During the audit NSF reviewed a sample of the written documentation assembled to provide objective evidence of conformance. NSF 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 protocols. NSF selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers, Forest Service Providers and other interested parties, and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the SFI and ATFS Standards was understood and actively implemented.

The possible findings of the audit 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

VDOF was found to be in full conformance with the referenced standards. NSF did not identify any non-conformances or opportunities for improvement:

The next Surveillance Audit is scheduled for the June 1-4, 2020.

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 2019.

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: Field observations and associated records were used to confirm practices. Programs for reforestation, for protection against insects and diseases and wildfire, and for careful management of activities which could potentially impact soil and long-term productivity, were all observed. Site visits included final harvests, thinnings, chemical site prep, herbaceous weed control, wildlife and pollinator plots and plantings.

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. Auditor visited the portions of many field sites that were closest to water resources. Audit confirmed the rigorous implementation of BMPs including SMZs along waterbodies, water bars on haul roads and skid trails, water turnouts and skid trail construction to minimize impacts to water quality.

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: VDOF uses the VA Heritage Trust data as a planning layer in its GIS to identify important species and habitat types and has procedures in place to maintain snag trees and a diversity of forest cover types and age classes.

Objective 5 Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits

To manage the visual impact of forest operations maintain snag trees and provide recreational opportunities for the public.

Summary of Evidence: Not audited in 2019.

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 2019.

Objective 7 Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

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

Summary of Evidence: Not audited in 2019.

Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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

Summary of Evidence: Not audited in 2019.

Objective 9 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

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

Summary of Evidence: Not audited in 2019.

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: VDOF supports and participates in the NCSU Tree Improvement Coop, VaTech Forest Productivity Coop and the VaTech Forest Modeling Research Coop. Review of the VA Department of Forestry Research Project List – June 11, 2018 confirms there are currently 59 research locations. VDOF periodically publishes the Forest Research Review (August 2013). VDOF has a full time Research Program Manager that develops and implements research plots on state forests.

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 2019.

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: Reviewed multiple examples of VDOF personnel conducting educational field tours. VDOF's website has a substantial amount of relevant information and VDOF frequently hosts logger training events on state forests. Reviewed multiple examples of VDOF foresters conducting educational sessions. There are over 293 miles of VDOF maintained hiking trails and roads on the State Forests. State Forest offices and trail head kiosks contain numerous educational brochures. Many of the examples reviewed included participation of the 4-H clubs, VaTech Coop extension and others. VDOF tracks occurrences of personnel conducting education opportunities and there were 40 occurrences with a total of 990 public participants in 2017. Educational opportunities are also addressed in each State Forest 10 Year Management Plan.

Objective 13 Public Land Management Responsibilities

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

Summary of Evidence: VDOF staff at all levels participates in multiple activities, associations and committees related to public land planning. VDOF serves in leadership capacity in many of these avenues such as the Virginia Forestry Association, Virginia Outdoors Plan Advisory Committee, Virginia Statewide Trails Advisory Committee as well as multiple conservation groups such as Virginia United Land Trusts and Virginia Forest Conservation Partnership. Review of the VDOF website confirms that the revised 10 year management plans for the Paul and Whitley State Forest are posted with a link to leave comments.

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: Confirmed the 2018 audit Public Summary Report is posted on the SFI Inc. website and that the 2018 Annual Progress Report was completed on time and correctly.

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, and interviews with personnel involved in management review 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 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

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



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