



Maryland DNR Forest Service

2020 SFI® Forest Management Summary Report

Introduction

The SFI Program of the Maryland DNR Forest Service of Annapolis, Maryland has achieved continuing conformance with the SFI® 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard, including the sustainable harvest level requirement (Performance Measure 1.1), according to the NSF SFI-FS Certification Audit Process.

The Maryland DNR Forest Service initially obtained SFI Certification from NSF on July 24, 2003 and the program was re-certified in July 2006. Initially only the Chesapeake Forest Lands were certified, with the Pocomoke State Forest added in 2009 as part of an expansion of scope that included other recently acquired lands. In 2011 the organization sought and was granted recertification to the current scope based on an audit of the six largest state forests against the SFI 2010-2014 Standard. The state forests included in the current scope were re-certified to the SFI 2015-2019 Standards in April of 2014 and again in April 2019. The most recent audit was a partial surveillance audit conducted July 2021.

The multi-site certificate covers 6 different State Forests (Chesapeake Forest, Pocomoke State Forest, Green Ridge State Forest, Garrett State Forest, Potomac State Forest, and Savage River State Forests) also including the central office located in Annapolis MD. The 2019 audit included office reviews in the following Chesapeake Forest, Pocomoke State Forest, Green Ridge State Forest, and the central office located in Annapolis, MD. Field visits were conducted in 2 out of a total of 6 State Forests. This sample size was determined using the guidelines set forth in IAF-MD1. The State Foresters were selected based on a date rotation of total 6 different Forests. Approximately half of the field sites visited were randomly sampled. Within the 2 selected forests, NSF's lead auditor selected field sites for inspection based upon the risk of environmental impact, likelihood of occurrence, special features, and other criteria outlined in NSF's protocols and procedures. 2 field offices, 1 central office and 14 field sites were visited.

The 14 field sites consisting of the 2 active timber harvest, 2 recently closed sale with wildlife considerations, 2 with herbicide application, 2 High Conservation Forest, 1 planting site, and 2 research sites (some sites met multiple considerations and are noted for each of those above). Both thinnings and final harvests were viewed for multiple sites. There were also several roads, several smaller road-trail/stream crossings with cross drains and BMPs being applied. Harvest levels are documented in Annual Work Plans and have been at or below levels identified in plans for MD DNR associated inventory and growth data as well as harvest-related planning documents are used to ensure that plans include long term harvest level and consistent with the growth and yield model generated by the PGSF and SRSF. Data from the 5-year stand-level inventory project was used to develop a volume-control target based allowable harvest levels for western forests.

Maryland DNR Forest Service has an extensive program for harvest planning and approval. A Sustainable Forest Management Plan has been developed for each forest, and these plans are regularly updated. Harvests levels have been modeled by forest type for sustainability by area control for a 50-year planning horizon. Based on the Sustainable Forest Management Plan an Annual Work Plan is developed for each forest including planned harvests and other management activities. The Annual Work Plan is reviewed by various agencies in the Maryland DNR, and a Citizen's Advisory Team. It is also posted on the Maryland DNR Forest Service website for public comment for a period of 30 days. Following review of comments, the finalized plan is approved and posted on the Maryland DNR Forest Service website.

This report describes the results of the 2021 Surveillance Audit which considered changes in operations, the management review system, and efforts at continuous improvement. A sample of the SFI requirements were selected for detailed review.

Maryland's State Forests

Maryland DNR Forest Service is responsible for the management of the 209,207 acres of Maryland State Forests through a variety of designations. The Forest Service is supported by other agencies within the Department of Natural Resources including Wildlife, Fisheries, Heritage, and the Natural Resources Police. Various management plans provide a useful summary of the importance of these forestlands and the broad policy goals:

Excerpted from the Savage River State Forest Management Plan:

'The resources and values provided from state forests reach people throughout the State and beyond. These resources and values range from economic too aesthetic and from scientific too inspirational. The Department of Natural Resources is mandated by law to consider a wide variety of issues and uses when pursuing a management strategy for these forests. The importance of considering these factors is acknowledged in the Annotated Code, which establishes the following policy pertaining to state forests and parks:

"Forests, streams, valleys, wetlands, parks, scenic, historic and recreation areas of the state are basic assets. Their proper use, development, and preservation are necessary to protect and promote the health, safety, economy and general welfare of the people of the state. It is the policy of the state to encourage the economic development and the use of its natural resources for the improvement of the local economy, preservation of natural beauty, and promotion of the recreational and leisure interest throughout the state." (Annotated Code of Maryland, Natural Resources Article §5-102)

The Department recognizes the many benefits provided by state forests and has established a corresponding management policy in regulation.

"The state forests are managed to promote the coordinated uses of their varied resources and values for the benefit of all people, for all time. Water, wildlife, wood, natural beauty and opportunities for natural environmental recreation, wildlands experience, research demonstration areas, and outdoor education are major forest benefits." (Code of Maryland Regulations 08.07.01.01)

The 2021 Surveillance Audit was performed by NSF on July 20-22, 2021 by an audit team headed by Michelle Matteo Sr. Lead Auditor. Beth Jacqmain was the FSC Lead Auditor and supported the NSF lead auditor for SFI. 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.

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 2 – Forest Management.

The scope of the audit included forest management operations. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management over the planning period of the past 2 years. In addition, practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (regeneration and 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 scope of the audit.

The SFI Standard was used without modifying any requirements. SFI requirements that are outside of the scope of Maryland's SFI program were excluded from the scope of the SFI Certification Audit as follows:

- Indicator 10.1.2. Research on genetically engineered trees via forest tree biotechnology shall adhere to all applicable federal, state, and provincial regulations and international protocols ratified by the United States and/or Canada depending on jurisdiction of management. Maryland DNR Forest Service does not participate in research on genetically engineered trees.

Audit Process

NSF initiated the SFI audit process with a series of planning phone calls and emails to reconfirm the scope of the audit, review the SFI Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that Maryland DNR Forest Service was prepared to proceed to the SFI Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan.

The audit was governed by a detailed audit plan designed to enable the audit team to efficiently determine conformance with the applicable requirements. The plan provided for the assembly and review of audit evidence consisting of documents, interviews, and on-site inspections of ongoing or completed forest practices.

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, landowners and other interested parties, and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the SFI Standard was understood and actively implemented. The activities of the central office were reviewed against the multi-site requirements as well.

The possible findings of the audit included conformance, major non-conformance, minor non-conformance, opportunities for improvement, and practices that exceeded the requirements of the standard.

A report was prepared and final approval was done by an independent Certification Board Member assigned by NSF. Follow-up or Surveillance Audits are required by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standard[®]. The next Surveillance Audit is scheduled for the third week of July 2022.

Overview of Audit Findings

Maryland's SFI Program demonstrated conformance against the SFI 2015-2019 Standard. There was one major non-conformance, two minor non-conformances, and one "Opportunity for Improvement" in 2021. As such, the program has earned continuing certification with the plans in place to address the non-conformances.

OFIs identified in the 2020 audit have been resolved:

- OFI SFI 11.1.3:** Staff education and training sufficient to their roles and responsibilities. OFI was originally issued in 2019. While the seed mix used on landings and roads has been previously approved by State Wildlife staff for food plots and for the Erosion and Sediment Control plan, there is an opportunity to improve staff education and training as it relates to the seed mixture (species and ratios) currently being applied on landings and roads, as only non-native, naturalized species are being used. 2020 audit note: Communications with other DNR staff confirm that native seed mixes are available as an option and are worth discussing with Forestry – this OFI remains open for the 2020 audit.
 MD-DNR 2020 response: The primary purpose for these seed mix is to provide a quick, reliable covering for disturbed soils and it provides that. It has been used for many years without an incident of being invasive. This seed mix was suggested by our Wildlife & Heritage Service as a good mix for wildlife benefits. It is preferred by our State Forest managers since it is readily available for purchase by logging contractors from local sources and based on its quality, price and productivity. It has been our experience that this planting falls out (diminishes) after about 5-years and must be disked and replanted to maintain these open areas that also serve as wildlife food plots. One of these re-establishment sites was visited during the 2019 audit at Green Ridge State Forest. **Closed:** Interviews with multiple DNR staff, including the State Botanist and Southern Region Ecologist, as well as the Nature Conservancy Conservation Ecologist show that multiple options have been discussed, and the MD DNR BOF is aware of the current seed mix and others that could be used.

One Minor CAR identified in the 2020 audit has been resolved:

Minor CAR 2020.1: SFI 14.1.1: A *Program Participant* shall provide a summary audit report, prepared by the *certification body*, to *SFI Inc.* after the successful completion of a certification, recertification or surveillance audit to the *SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard*. The April 2019 Recertification Audit is not present on the SFI website, no confirmation was provided that it has been submitted. Progress in implementing this corrective action plan will be reviewed in subsequent surveillance audits. **Closed:** 2019 and 2020 Audit reports are currently posted on the SFI website.

There was 1 Opportunity For Improvement (OFI) identified in the 2021 audit:

- SFI FM Std, Section 13.1.2: OFI** - There is an opportunity to improve the contact with local stakeholders, to clarify how the Compartment and Stand Silvicultural proposals noted in the Annual Work Plan (AWP) link to the corresponding Timber Sale Contract #s (TS#) that are enacted.
 This finding does not indicate a current deficiency but served to alert Maryland DNR Forest Service to areas that could be strengthened, or which could merit future attention.

There were three new Non-Conformances identified in the 2021 audit, two Minor corrective actions (CARs) and one Major corrective action:

Minors:

- SFI FM Std, Section 1.1.1: MINOR CAR** – For the Pokomoke-Garrett SF (PGSF) and Savage River SF (SRSF) Forest Management Plans (FMP), the sections that describe forest modeling are not consistent with descriptions by field staff on how those are being implemented in operational planning. See SRSF – Section 5.12 - Forest Modeling, pg. 70, and PGSF – Section 5.12 - Forest Modeling, pg. 70.
- SFI FM Std, Section 11.1.3: MINOR CAR** – Staff education and training sufficient to their roles and responsibilities. During the document review, it was found that Forest managers had multiple instances of not using the most recent template for contract documents. They did not follow the system documentation / procedures as prescribed by the MD Forest Service.

Major:

- SFI Multi-site Standard, Sec. 4.1.1: MAJOR CAR, repeat issue** - Templates used for Harvests are maintained by the Central Office – multiple templates available for download contained errors or omissions. 352D – Special Conditions

NSF also identified the following area where forestry practices and operations of Maryland DNR Forest Service exceed the basic requirements of the standard:

- SFI 11.1.2** Assignment and understanding of roles and responsibilities for achieving *SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard objectives*.
 Excellent communication exists between the MD-DNR Forest Service staff and loggers. On the ground practices looked good and were consistently above average, in part resulting from the clear communications.

General Description of Evidence of Conformity

NSF's audit team used a variety of evidence to determine conformance. The 2021 audit included State Forest reviews in the following by the NSF audit team, Savage River State Forest, Potomac-Garret State Forest, and the central office located in Annapolis, MD; the Central Office audit was completed off-site. Field visits were conducted in 2 out of a total of 6 State Forests. 2 field offices, 1 central office and 15 field sites were visited. The 15 field sites consisted of the 2 active timber harvests, 4 recently closed sale with wildlife considerations, 2 with herbicide application, 3 High Conservation Forests, 1 planting sites, 4 thinning sites, 3 regeneration/final harvests, 1 restoration site, and 1 deer enclosure site (some sites met multiple considerations and are noted for each of those above). Both thinnings and final harvests were viewed for multiple sites. There were also several roads, several smaller road-trail/stream crossings with cross drains and BMPs being applied. A further description of the audit evidence is provided below, organized by SFI Objective. NSF's audit team used a variety of evidence to determine conformance.

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: *While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included field observations of a range of sites. The forest management plans for both the Savage River State Forest and Potomac-Garret State Forest and supporting documentation and the associated inventory data and growth analyses were the key evidence of conformance for eastern forests.*

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 including annual work plans and "State Forest Database" reports were used to confirm practices. Maryland DNR Forest Service has programs for reforestation, for protection against insects, diseases, and wildfire, and for careful management of activities which could potentially impact soil and long-term 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: *Field observations of a range of sites were the key evidence. Auditors visited the portions of field sites that were close to water various types of water resources, (primary waterways, secondary streams and drains) generally riparian buffers, and confirmed that these buffers were flagged during planning, painted prior to harvests and noted for input into GIS.*

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: *Evidence included field observations, written plans and policies for the protection of old growth, High Conservation Value Forests sites.*

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: *While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included field observations of active and completed harvesting operations and policies/procedures for visual quality. Visits to recreation sites and contacting various stakeholder seeking input and obtaining feedback on how the DNR balances public interests while providing various recreational opportunities.*

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: *Evidence included field observations of completed operations, assessments of GIS maps and other records of special sites, training records, and written protection plans. Partners within the DNR and outside stakeholders participate in identification of special sites and participate during audits.*

Objective 7 Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

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

Summary of Evidence: While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included field observations of recently completed operations, contract clauses, and discussions with supervising field foresters and interviews with loggers.

Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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

Summary of Evidence: While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included review of the management plans to confirm the policy statement developed to recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and interviews with MD-DNR staff.

Objective 9 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

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

Summary of Evidence: Field and office reviews of ongoing and completed operations were the most critical evidence. Foresters are licensed and have access to legal and regulatory listing electronic and hard copy.

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: While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included discussions with stakeholders and support for research on state forest lands. Forests are used for several ongoing research projects such as research projects involving, pollinators and prescribed burning, which are visited.

Objective 11 Training and Education

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

Summary of Evidence: While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included review of training records, and the records of support for the Maryland Master Logger Program.

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: While this Objective was not audited in 2021, in the past evidence included records provided by the audited organization and interviews.

Objective 13 Public Land Management Responsibilities

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

Summary of Evidence: The Citizen Advisory Committee confirms the involvement with the public inputs does occur.

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: Reports filed with SFI Inc. and the SFI Inc. website provided the key evidence. The state forests web site includes the complete certification reports from the past years.

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: The state forests web site includes the organization's Sustainable Forestry Initiative Management Reviews for the past 10 years. The most recent of these program reviews, agendas and notes from field reviews, 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 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 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

For Additional Information Contact

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