# NSF International Forestry – 2015 SFI Summary Audit Report

# The Conservation Fund

**SFI Forest Management**

The SFI Program of The Conservation Fund of Chapel Hill, North Carolina has demonstrated conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Standard and Rules, Section 2 – Forest Management Standard, according to the NSF Certification Process.

NSF International initially certified The Conservation Fund to the SFIS on July 1, 2007 and recertified the program in 2012. This report describes the 2015 Re-Certification Audit designed to focus on changes in the standard, changes in operations, the management review system, and efforts at continuous improvement. The organization was re-certified to the new SFI requirements, all of which were subject to detailed review. The audit included a review of lands in California, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Georgia comprising 7 of the 38 tracts making up the program.

The Conservation Fund's certified land base includes most portions of its Working Forest Fund, excluding lands slated for sale over the short term. All of the forestland will have working forest conservation easements to ensure long-term forest management and conservation. The fund is described in the Working Forest Fund Policy Digest:

> *The Conservation Fund launched the Working Forest Fund in 2009 to address a major conservation challenge: the loss of America's last big forests. Over the next 20 years, according to the U.S. Forest Service, as much as 26 million acres of our forests will be sold, much of it broken into pieces and either developed or the mature trees heavily logged. As forests become fragmented, their ability to filter our water and air is compromised and there is less space for wildlife to live and migrate.*
> *The Working Forest Fund is a dedicated source of conservation bridge capital that allows us to acquire and sustainably manage working forests with high conservation value, saving them from inappropriate development while working with our conservation partners to get land permanently protected. Support from foundations and private philanthropists makes this possible.*

The program's largest tracts are managed collectively as The North Coast Forest Conservation Program in California. 72,000 acres of working forestland in five major tracts located in the coastal portion of Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, California are included. These forests support second and third-growth stands of coastal redwood, Douglas-fir, pine, and related species, with some areas of oak prairie and pygmy cypress trees. The forests are generally well-roaded, blocked in, and provide an opportunity for demonstrating the conservation of aquatic and upland resources in a working-forest context. Beyond California, the certified portions of the Working Forest Fund consist of properties totaling 74,000 acres in Connecticut, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and New Hampshire.

The Conservation Fund's SFI Program is managed by Trevor Cutsinger, Business Manager and by David Whitehouse, Forest Operations Manager.

The audit was performed by NSF in September, October, and November by an audit team headed by Mike Ferrucci, Lead Auditor supported by Dr. David Capen and by Tucker Watts. 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 3 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.

The following indicators are not applicable:

| **Number** | **Requirement** | **Reason** |
|---|---|---|
| 2.1.3. | Plantings of exotic tree species should minimize risk to native ecosystems. | No exotic tree species are planted. |
| 2.1.5 | Afforestation programs that consider potential ecological impacts of the selection and planting of tree species in non-forested landscapes. | There is no tree planting in non-forested landscapes. |
| 2.5.1 | Program for appropriate research, testing, evaluation and deployment of improved planting stock, including varietal seedlings. | No planting with improved stock. |
| 5.2.2 | Documentation through internal records of clearcut size and the process for calculating average size. | No clearcutting on properties selected for audit in 2015. |
| 8.2 | Program Participants with forest management responsibilities on public lands shall confer with affected Indigenous Peoples with respect to sustainable forest management practices. | The Conservation Fund does not have forest management responsibilities on public lands. |
| 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. | The Conservation Fund is not engaged in research addressing genetic engineering of trees. |
| 11.2.3 | Participation in or support of SFI Implementation Committees to establish criteria for recognition of logger certification programs, where they exist | The Conservation Fund does not participate in an SFI Implementation Committees in states where there is a logger certification program. |
| Objective 13 | To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands. | N.A. The Conservation Fund does not have management responsibilities for public lands. |

## Audit Process

NSF initiated the audit process with a Readiness Review to confirm the scope of the audit, review the SFI Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that Company Name was prepared to proceed to the Certification Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. NSF then conducted the Certification Audit of conformance to the SFI, Section 2. 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 SFI, Section 9. The initial Surveillance Audit is scheduled for September 2016.

The audit was governed by a detailed audit plan designed to enable the audit team to efficiently determine conformance with the applicable SFI 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 also 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 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

The Conservation Fund was found to be in conformance with the standard. NSF determined that there were no non-conformances. As such the program was recommended for an update to the SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

2.4.3. Participation in, and support of, fire and pest prevention and control programs.

There is an opportunity to improve implementation of wildfire-related provisions of the management plan for Success Pond, New Hampshire.

4.1.4. Program Participants shall participate in or incorporate the results of state, provincial, or regional conservation planning and priority-setting efforts to conserve biological diversity and consider these efforts in forest management planning.

There is an Opportunity for Improvement in the efforts to incorporate information from wildlife action plans in NH and Vermont into forest management plans.

**Exceptional Practices**

NSF also identified the following areas where forestry practices and operations of Company Name exceed the basic requirements of the SFI Standard:

4.1.1. Program to incorporate the conservation of native biological diversity, including species, wildlife habitats and ecological community types at stand and landscape levels.

The Conservation Fund's management at the stand and landscape-level are exemplary in the degree to which the conservation of native biological diversity is factored into all forest management actions.

4.1.5. Program to address conservation of known sites with viable occurrences of significant species of concern.

The Conservation Fund's efforts to manage special sites and significant species of concern are exemplary.

4.1.6. Identification and protection of non-forested wetlands, including bogs, fens and marshes, and vernal pools of ecological significance.

The Conservation Fund exceeds the standard by employing an exceptional efforts to identify of non-forested wetlands and ensure their protection.

4.3.1. Use of information such as existing natural heritage data or expert advice in identifying or selecting ecologically important sites for protection.

The Conservation Fund exceeds the standard by conducting on-site surveys to select ecologically important sites for protection.

5.4.1. Provide recreational opportunities for the public, where consistent with forest management objectives.

The Conservation Fund exceeds the standard by providing public recreational opportunities throughout the forests it owns and manages.

## 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**: The forest management plans for each property audited and supporting documentation and the associated inventory data and growth models were the key evidence of conformance.*

### 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. The Conservation Fund 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. Experienced professional foresters oversee all aspects of forest management.*

### 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 many field sites that were close to water resources.*

### 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**: Field observations, written plans and policies, records showing programs and practices that support conservation of biological diversity, the use of college-trained field biologists, availability of specialists, and regular staff involvement in conferences and workshops that cover scientific advances were the evidence used to assess the requirements involved biodiversity conservation.*

### 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 policies/procedures for visual quality were assessed during the evaluation. Further maps of recreation sites, combined with field visits, helped confirm a strong recreation program.*

### 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 observations of completed operations, records of special sites, training records, and written protection plans were all assessed during the evaluation.*

### Objective 7 Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

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

***Summary of Evidence**: Field observations of completed operations, contract clauses, and discussions with supervising field foresters provided the key evidence.*

### Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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

***Summary of Evidence**: A review of policies as well as programs to communicate with tribes were used to find conformance.*

### Objective 9 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

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

***Summary of Evidence**: Field reviews of ongoing and completed operations were the most critical evidence. Professional foresters with training in laws and regulations plan and oversee all projects. No evidence of non-compliance with laws was found.*

### 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**: Financial records were confirmed by receipt from funded organizations.*

### Objective 11 Training and Education

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

***Summary of Evidence**: Training records of personnel, records associated with harvest sites audited, and review of state training database provided confirmation of participation in training programs.*

### 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**: Outreach reports, agendas for meetings, and selected summaries of comments were sufficient to assess the requirements.*

### Objective 13 Public Land Management Responsibilities

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

***Summary of Evidence**: N.A. The Conservation Fund does not have management responsibilities for public lands.*

### 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.*

### 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 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:


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Norman Boatwright | Daniel Freeman | David Whitehouse |
| NSF Forestry Program Manager | NSF Project Manager | Forest Operations Manager, Working Forest Fund®, The Conservation Fund |
| PO Box 4021 | 789 N. Dixboro Road | 410 Market St. Suite 360 |
| Florence, SC 29502 | Ann Arbor, MI 48105 | Chapel Hill, NC 27516 |
| 843-229-1851 | 734-214-6228 | 919-951-0118 |
| nboatwright12@gmail.com | dfreeman@nsf.org | dwhitehouse@conservationfund.org |