



The Conservation Fund 2024 SFI® Forest Management Public Summary Audit

Introduction

The Conservation Fund of Arlington, Virginia has demonstrated conformance to SFI® 2022 Forest Management Standard in accordance with the NSF certification process. The Conservation Fund's certified land base includes most portions of its Working Forest Fund, excluding lands slated for sale over the short term. Almost all of the forestlands will be encumbered with working forest conservation easements to ensure long-term forest management and conservation, or will be sold in fee to State, Federal or other conservation partners committed to the management of working forestland. The following general forest management objectives, common to nearly all WFF projects, will guide our forestry operations:

- Perpetuate a healthy and productive forest by maintaining vegetative and structural diversity, supporting ecological resilience, and limiting the introduction and spread of invasive and exotic plant species.
- Maintain water quality and protect the riparian and aquatic ecosystems supported by healthy, intact forestland.
- Provide a sustainable source of forest products as is consistent with the long-term conservation of the property.
- Enhance the wildlife habitat value of the forest by providing a range of successional stages across the landscape.
- Comply with all certification principles promulgated by SFI and/or FSC®.
- Promote timber harvesting practices that are aesthetically compatible with the local landscape.
- Create and maintain positive, viable collaborations with other landowners to achieve individual and common objectives across the landscape.
- Contribute to the local economy by providing jobs in the woods, the raw material for a diversity of forest products, and opportunities for outdoor recreation compatible with the conservation of the forest.

Source: Multi-Resource Management Plan-White Pine Forest

The program's North Coast Forest Conservation Program in California includes working forestland in five major tracts located in the coastal portion of Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, California. 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 road accessible, blocked in, and provide an opportunity for demonstrating the conservation of aquatic and upland resources in a working-forest context.

The audit was performed by NSF on 16-18 July; 24-25 October and 5-7 November 2024 by an audit team headed by Shannon Wilks, Lead Auditor and Kyle Meister, Team Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting audits contained in SFI 2022 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 Forest Management Standard.

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.

Several of the SFI Section 2 requirements were outside of the scope of The Conservation Fund's SFI program and were excluded from the scope of the audit as follows:

Indicator 2.1.3	Plantings of native or non-invasive naturalized tree species are preferred. In exceptional circumstances where exotic tree species are being planted, they should not increase risk to native ecosystems.	No exotic tree species are planted.
Indicator 2.2.5	The World Health Organization (WHO) type 1A and 1B pesticides shall be prohibited, except where no other viable alternative is available.	No use of prohibited pesticides.
Indicator 2.2.6	Use of pesticides banned under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001) shall be prohibited.	No use of prohibited pesticides.



Performance Measure 8.2	Certified Organizations with forest management responsibilities on public lands shall confer with Indigenous Peoples whose rights may be affected by the Certified Organization's forest management practices.	No Public Land Management Responsibilities.
Objective 15	To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.	No Public Land Management Responsibilities.

Audit Process

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, 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 conformance, major non-conformance, minor non-conformance, opportunities for improvement, and practices that exceeded the requirements of the standard.

Overview of Audit Findings

The Conservation Fund was found to be in conformance with the standard. NSF determined that there was one (1) minor non-conformance:

Indicator 11.1.3: Demonstration of commitment to legal compliance through *available regulatory action information*.

Finding: Interview with contract hand-felling crew and observations during field audit of forest management activities on Fishmonger FFPE operations confirmed no eye protection was utilized by two (2) contractors felling trees with chainsaws. The requirements are documented within California OSHA regulations documented within Title 8, Section 3382. Interviews and observations confirmed all regulatory requirements were met, with the exception as noted. Additional information is also documented within Tree Work Safety Guide.

General Description of Conformity to SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard Objectives

A summary of the evidence of the organization's conformance to the SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard Objectives follows:

Objective 1. Forest Management Planning

To ensure forest management plans include *long-term* sustainable harvest levels and measures to avoid forest conversion or *afforestation of ecologically important areas*.

Why it Matters: Ensures that we grow more trees than we harvest, guaranteeing that forests will last for future generations.

Notes: The Conservation Fund maintains detailed plans for each Management Unit. The plans contain guidelines for all forest management activities, biological diversity, protection of imperiled/threatened species, protection of soils, water and ecological communities as an example. The organization maintains a complex system of documents, policies, training, infrastructure and a system of reviews to ensure forest management planning is implemented and achieves certification requirements.

Objective 2. Forest Health and Productivity

To ensure *long-term forest productivity* and *conservation* of forest resources through prompt *reforestation, afforestation*, deploying *integrated pest management strategies, minimized chemical use, soil conservation*, and protecting forests from damaging agents.

Why it Matters: Ensures that forests remain healthy and resilient which means better forest productivity including providing a reliable and renewable source of sustainably managed fiber for consumer products.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.



Objective 3. *Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources*

To *protect* the water quality and water quantity of rivers, streams, lakes, *wetlands*, and other water bodies.

Why it Matters: Protects water quality and quantity helps provide safe and abundant drinking water for all.

Notes: Review of all field sites confirmed accurate maps identifying rivers, streams and other riparian features. Buffers and protection areas were identified on ground with monitoring during management operations confirmed. Water control features were observed on all field sites, main access roads, temporary roads and trails. No evidence of BMP violations was observed during the 2024 audit.

Objective 4. *Conservation of Biological Diversity*

To maintain or advance the *conservation of biological diversity* at the *stand-* and *landscape-level* and across a diversity of forest and vegetation cover types and successional stages including the *conservation* of forest plants and animals, *aquatic species, threatened and endangered species, Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, old-growth forests* and *ecologically important sites*.

Why it Matters: Ensures that forests are managed to protect *wildlife habitat* and conserve *biological diversity*.

Notes: Review of field sites included well defined buffers along water features, irregular shaped harvest areas, retention of snags and tree-islands for diversity, use of downed woody debris and seeding of roads/decks for wildlife. Various ages of stands were observed across the management units creating diversity and habitat for multiple wildlife species. Prescribed burning was utilized to improve habitat for various species. Organization utilizes credible resources to identify sensitive species of flora or fauna prior to implementing forest management activities. GIS layers are available to identify occurrences for protection.

Objective 5. *Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits*

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

Why it Matters: Ensures that the public can continue to enjoy the aesthetic values and recreation opportunities of forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

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.

Why it Matters: Protects *special sites* that have important geological or cultural values.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

Objective 7. *Efficient Use of Fiber Resources*

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

Why it Matters: Ensures the economic well-being of communities that live and work near forests.

Notes: Reviews conducted during field sites confirmed The Conservation Fund utilizes contractual requirements within Timber Sales agreements for the efficient use of fiber resources. Monitoring is conducted with compliance reviews to ensure contract compliance. Observations during field sites confirmed adequate utilization and protection of residual species.

Objective 8. *Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights*

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

Why it Matters: Recognizing and respecting the *Indigenous Peoples'* rights supports relationship building and shared benefits from sustainably managed forests.

Notes: The Sustainable Forestry Commitment contains a requirement to recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples Rights. The document is available upon request. The organization maintains a complaint system for responding to concerns and complaints. Contact request is available on the organizations public website.



Objective 9: Climate Smart Forestry

To ensure forest management activities address *climate change adaptation* and *mitigation* measures.

Why it Matters: Ensures that SFI-certified forests make an important contribution to addressing the effects of *climate change*.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

Objective 10. Fire Resilience and Awareness

To limit susceptibility of forests to undesirable impacts of wildfire and to raise community awareness of fire benefits, risks, and minimization measures.

Why It Matters: Ensures that forests are managed proactively relative to fire risk in the face of *climate change*, so that they can continue to store carbon, provide *habitat* for *wildlife*, and are a source of clean air and water while protecting public safety and human health.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

Objective 11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

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

Why it Matters: Compliance with all laws ensures the *protection* of the environmental and social values of forests.

Notes: The Conservation Fund maintains a documented set of procedures with contractual requirements for vendors to comply with all regulations. Monitoring is conducted on all forest management activities to ensure compliance. The organization maintains a system of internal audits and management reviews to assess performance. One minor non-conformance was identified during the 2024 audit.

Objective 12. Forestry Research, Science and Technology

To invest in research, science, and technology, upon which sustainable forest management decisions are based.

Why it Matters: Forest research means healthier, more productive forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

Objective 13. Training and Education

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

Why it Matters: Training and educating foresters means forest management plans are more accurately implemented, ensuring the well-being of our forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

Objective 14. 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*.

Why it Matters: Outreach and education improves the public's understanding of how important *sustainable forestry* is to local and global issues.

Notes: Not Audited in 2024.

Objective 15. Public Land Management Responsibilities

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on *public lands*.

Why it Matters: Protects the environmental, social, and economic values of public forests.

Notes: N/A-The Conservation Fund does not have Public Land Management Responsibilities.



Objective 16. Communications and Public Reporting

To increase transparency and to annually report progress on conformance with the *SFI Forest Management Standard*.

Why it Matters: Reporting the results of third-party audits increases the public's understanding of forest certification.

Notes: Review of SFI website confirms public summary reports are available for previous audit. Annual Progress Report was submitted prior to deadline.

Objective 17. Management Review and Continual Improvement

To promote continual improvement in the practice of *sustainable forestry* by conducting a management review and monitoring performance.

Why it Matters: Encourages continual improvement of *sustainable forestry practices*, a cornerstone of *sustainable forestry*.

Notes: Review of certification guidelines, policies, commitments, internal audits and management reviews confirmed compliance to SFI requirements.

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