



# The Conservation Fund

## 2025 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 Conservation Fund is a conservation nonprofit organization whose mission states “We are in the business of conservation, creating innovative solutions that drive nature-based action for climate protection, sustainable economies and vibrant communities”. The Conservation Fund, working with public, private and nonprofit partners, protects America’s legacy of land and water resources through land acquisition, sustainable community and economic development, and leadership training, emphasizing the integration of economic and environmental goals. The Conservation Fund’s Working Forest Fund team focuses on the acquisition, sustainable management, and conservation of large-scale working forestland. Source: Statement of Purpose-Management Plan-Minnesota Heritage 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 14 August; 19-20 August; 25-27 August; 9 September; 28 October; 10 November 2025 by an audit team headed by Shannon Wilks, Lead Auditor and Chris Bradford, 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. Indicator:	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 consultants, 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 were no (-0-) minor non-conformances and one (1) opportunity for improvement identified during the 2025 audit:

Indicator 1.1.1: Forest management planning at a level appropriate to the size and scale of the operation, including:

up-to-date maps or a *geographic information system* (GIS); and 1.1.5 Documentation of forest management (such as: *planting*, fertilization, and thinning) consistent with assumptions in harvest plans.

OFI 2025.1: There is an opportunity to improve the timeline for updating operations maps.

## 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: Not Audited in 2025.

---

### 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: The Conservation Fund maintains a comprehensive system of plans, procedures and technical platforms to manage the forest health, productivity, reforestation and harvesting operations. Qualified and skilled personnel were confirmed during all phases of forest management operations. Review of field sites confirmed detailed reforestation plans were implemented in all Management Units with multiple forms of site preparation. The use of herbicides was significantly below label-approved application rates within the field sites observed. Records of applications and maps were available for all uses. The organization utilizes a documented monitoring system for the assessment of forest management activities and forest health issues. Field personnel are knowledgeable and demonstrated ability to ensure forest management prescriptions were planned, monitored, and implemented.

---



### **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 2025 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: Not Audited in 2025.

---

### **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: Review of all forest management activities confirmed the implementation of documented procedures and policies. Professional operations for harvesting, site preparation, reforestation and road maintenance was observed during the audit. Organization utilizes a system of monitoring to ensure contract requirements are implemented. The management units are leased for recreational hunting with selected properties leased for apiary activities.

---

### **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: GIS layers are utilized to identify and protect special designated sites within the forest management units. Interviews and observation of documents confirm organization utilizes resources of Natural Heritage databases to review prior to management activities. Guidelines for protection are utilized on occurrences identified within the land-base.

---

### **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: Not Audited in 2025.

---

### **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: Not Audited in 2025..

---

### **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: Risk Assessments have been completed and documented within Management Plans for each geographic region within the forestland portfolio. Climate Change Adaptation Workbook is utilized as a guide. Resources from credible agencies were utilized in the development.

---



### **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: The Conservation Fund has utilized the Landscape Fire and Resource Management Planning Tool (LandFire) to assess the risk of wildfire. Risks are evaluated by TCF and Forestry Consultants on a stand level basis. Membership within state/local collaborative groups to address wildfire impacts was confirmed. Membership within various state forestry associations provide resources for private landowners and community awareness. Field sites confirmed use of forest management practices, Best Management Practices and routine monitoring to maintain healthy forests and prevent adverse conditions.

---

### **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: Not Audited in 2025.

---

### **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: The Conservation Fund contributes financially and in-kind resources to the SIC Committees of California, Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, New York and Georgia. Membership within multiple forestry associations and financial support for research was confirmed.

---

### **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: Detailed training records and a core competence matrix is utilized to ensure all levels of personnel are trained within the certification program. Qualified professional records were observed for contractors that operated across the forest management units.

---

### **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: Memberships within multiple state SIC Committees and Forest Associations provide educational outreach materials for landowners and training guidelines for harvest contractors. The SIC Committees have developed biodiversity assessments for threatened and imperiled species that are publicly available.

---

### **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 the 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.

---

**Contact Information**

Daniel Freeman	Michelle Matteo	Brian Schneider
NSF Project Manager	NSF Forestry Program Manager	Forest Operations Manager
789 N. Dixboro Road Ann Arbor, MI 48105	789 N. Dixboro Road Ann Arbor, MI 48105	P. O. Box 376 Orono, ME 04473
734-214-6228	475-331-1268	828-785-2555
<a href="mailto:dfreeman@nsf.org">dfreeman@nsf.org</a>	<a href="mailto:mmatteo@nsf.org">mmatteo@nsf.org</a>	<a href="mailto:bschneider@conservationfund.org">bschneider@conservationfund.org</a>