

ATFS Audit Report

American Tree Farm System Regional Group Certification



for

**Northeast Region Tree Farm Program
FRS # C0027067**

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ATFS Public Audit Report

The Northeast Region Tree Farm Program has achieved conformance with the AFF Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification of Private Lands, according to the NSF-ISR ATFP Certification Audit Process. This includes the Tree Farm Programs of 12 states in the Northeast Region: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia (roughly 8800 Tree Farms total).

Overview of the American Tree Farm Program

“The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS), a program of the American Forest Foundation’s Center for Family Forests (AFF), is committed to sustaining forests, watershed and healthy habitats through the power of private stewardship. Since 1941, ATFS has educated and recognized the commitment of private forest owners in the United States. Currently, ATFS has 24.3 million acres of privately owned forestland and 91,000 family forest owners who are committed to excellence in forest stewardship, in 46 states.

Family forest landowners share a unique commitment to protect wildlife habitat and watersheds, to conserve soil and to provide recreation for their communities while producing wood for America. These individuals hold the key to the kinds of forests, forest activities, and forest resources future generations of Americans will enjoy.

ATFS is administered through a network of forest landowners, volunteer members of state and local committees and associations, national and state government agencies, inspecting foresters, forestry consultants, natural resource professionals and private industry.”

Source: http://www.forestfoundation.org/cff_atfs.html

ATFP Audit Process

The audit was performed by NSF-ISR from May 26 to June 4, 2009 by an audit team headed by Mike Ferrucci, NSF Lead Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting ATFP Certification Audits contained in the AFF requirements. The objective of the audit was to assess conformance to the requirements of the American Tree Farm Program.

The scope of the audit included Tree Farms in three of the 15 states within the Northeast Region. Forest management plans and past and ongoing forestry practices were the focus of field inspections. In addition Tree Farm Inspector training and AFF obligations to administer the program were within the scope of the audit.

The AFF requirements for tree farms listed in “P&P-01 – AFF Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification of Private Land” were reviewed to assess conformance with the Core Performance Measures and Primary Indicators. The standard

was followed as published; no requirements were modified, and there were no additional self-imposed requirements assessed.

NSF-ISR initiated the ATFP audit process with a Readiness Review to confirm the scope of the audit, review the ATFS Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that AFF was prepared to proceed to the ATFP Certification Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. NSF then conducted the ATFP Certification Audit of conformance to the ATFS 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 Standard Operating Procedures for Regional State Program Forest Owner Group Certification*. The initial Surveillance Audit is scheduled for May, 2010.

The actual NSF-ISR ATFS Certification Audit was governed by a detailed Audit Plan designed to enable the audit team to determine conformance with the applicable ATFS requirements. The plan included detailed provisions 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-ISR reviewed a sample of the written documentation assembled to provide objective evidence of ATFP Conformance. NSF-ISR 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-ISR ATFP-SOP. NSF-ISR also selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers, landowners and other interested parties, and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the ATFS Standard was understood and actively implemented.

According to NSF's procedures "6.4.1 Conformance is judged against the overall program; a pattern of conformance or non-conformance is the basis for findings." The possible findings of the audit included Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance, and Opportunities for Improvement.

Overview of Audit Findings

AFF's Northeast Region Tree Farm Program was found to be in overall conformance with the ATFP Standard. The NSF-ISR ATFS Certification Audit Process determined that there were four minor non-conformances that are described herein:

1. ATFS-2009-01: Management plans consistent with the scale of forestry operations are not always in place.
2. ATFS-2009-02: Efforts to secure information on the the location of special faunal and floral communities do not consistently occur. For example Tree Farms in Maine have not been checked against the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP), with similar concerns in WV and VT.

3. ATFS-2009-03: The harvest recommendations in the management plans were not followed consistently, with late or no treatment more common than instances of cutting more than recommended in the plan.
4. ATFS-2009-04: Records are not consistently updated to reflect inspection results.

AFF has developed plans to address these issues. Progress in implementing these corrective action plans will be reviewed in subsequent surveillance audits.

Eight opportunities for improvement were also identified. These findings do not indicate a current deficiency, but served to alert AFF to areas that could be strengthened or which could merit future attention. The opportunities for improvement are listed below:

Indicator 1.1.2: Tree Farm inspectors will audit certified properties every five years. Properties that fail to meet AFF's standards and guidelines will be decertified.

There is an opportunity to improve the timeliness of the additional Tree Farm inspections.

Indicator 3.1.1: Management plans include: title page; type of ownership (e.g., fee simple, limited partnership, etc.); owners goals appropriate to the management objectives; tract map noting stands and conditions, important features including special sites, and management recommendations that address wood and fiber production, wildlife habitat, owner-designated fish, wildlife and plant species if desired, environmental quality, and, if present and desired by the landowner, recreational opportunities.

There is an opportunity to improve the content of management plans.

Indicator 3.1.2: Management plan is active, adaptive, and embodies the owners' current objectives, remains appropriate for the land certified, and reflects the current state of knowledge about forestry and natural resource management.

There is an opportunity to improve the currency of management plans.

Indicator 3.2.1: On-site visit, interviews, and records confirm management activities are being conducted in accordance with the plan.

There is an opportunity to improve consistent implementation of plans.

Indicator 5.1.3: On-site visit confirms that landowner is conducting management activities in accordance with BMPs and all relevant forest practices act (s) and ordinances.

There is an opportunity to improve consistent use of BMPs.

Indicator 5.2.2: Management plans consider integrated pest management as a preferred means of controlling insect pests, pathogens, and vegetative competition.

There is an opportunity to improve consistent inclusion of integrated pest management in written plans.

Indicator 6.1.2: The forest owner or forester responsible for developing the owner's management plan has made a reasonable effort to locate and secure information that denotes the location of rare species and species of concern. Appropriate sources of information include, but are not limited to county, state and federal agencies, university and extension programs and local knowledge. There is an opportunity to improve consistent efforts to locate and use information on rare species and species of concern.

Indicator 8.1.1: Management plan and forest operations identify and manage for special sites in a manner consistent with forest owner's objectives, the unique features of the site, and the size and scale of the property. There is an opportunity to improve consistent efforts to locate and use information on special sites of all types.

END OF PUBLIC REPORT