



2012 Public ATFS Public Audit Report

The Northeast Region of the ATFS Program has achieved continuing conformance with the AFF Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification of Private Lands, according to the NSF-ISR ATFS Certification Audit Process.

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

ATFS Audit Process

The audit was performed by NSF-ISR between March and May, 2012 by an audit team headed by Mike Ferrucci, NSF Lead Auditor and which included Keri Yankus, Norman Boatwright, and Dave Lombardo. These auditors fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting ATFS audits. The objective of the audit was to assess conformance to the requirements of the American Tree Farm Program and to consider progress in addressing the 2011 Minor Non-conformances.

The scope of the audit included Tree Farms in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, 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.

NSF-ISR initiated the ATFS surveillance audit process with a series of emails and planning phone calls to confirm the scope of the audit, review the ATFS Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that each state’s program was prepared to proceed to the ATFS Certification Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. NSF then conducted the ATFS

Surveillance 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.

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 ATFS 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 ATFS-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.

The possible findings of the audit included Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance, and Opportunities for Improvement.

Overview of Audit Findings

The Northeast Region of the ATFS Program was found to be in general conformance with the ATFS Standard.

The 2011 Minor Non-conformances have been closed. The program has made excellent progress in ensuring that each of the state-level programs in the northeast region is making increased efforts to regularly contact participants and to provide guidance and resources for the development of compliant management plans. Efforts included provision of additional web-based tools and resources such as the webinar series with wildlife management, forest management, and planning topics, revisions to the training programs for tree farm inspectors, distribution of informational packets, and the “Review Your Management Plan” campaign. The full effect of some of these efforts has not been felt, but sufficient progress has been made to resolve the following 2011 non-conformances:

1. **BMPs:** In 2011 the audit found that Best Management Practices (BMPs) were not being implemented effectively on four TFs inspected in New York. These farms have either had the issues corrected or they have been dropped from the program.
2. **Rare and Threatened Species:** In 2011 the audit found that review of information about threatened and endangered species had not always occurred. Tree farms with this deficiency were offered an opportunity to address it, re-inspected, and retained or dropped as appropriate.
3. **Management Plans:** In 2011 some Tree Farms audited did not have plans that fully met the requirements. Some plans were old, some are incomplete, and some Tree Farms have no plan. Tree farms with this deficiency were offered an opportunity to address it. They were then re-inspected and retained or dropped as appropriate.

The NSF-ISR ATFS 2012 Certification Audit determined that there were three new minor non-conformances:

1. Compliance with Laws and Regulations

Indicator 2.1.1 requires that “Forest owner must comply with all relevant laws, regulations and ordinances and will correct conditions that led to adverse regulatory actions, if any.”

Minor Non-conformance J0249319-1:

One farm with a large stream and with a lessee in charge of maintaining the trails on the property had an activity associated with removing a windblown tree from the stream bank resulted in a tractor being stuck in a tributary of the creek. The ensuing rescue operation resulted in significant soil deposition in the creek and disturbance to the stream bank. This is a direct violation of PA Clean Stream Law. Condition described on the tree farm had not been corrected at the time of the site visit.

2. Special Sites

Indicator 7.1.1 requires that “Forest owner must make a reasonable effort to locate and protect special sites appropriate for the size of the forest and the scale and intensity of forest management activities.” Efforts to locate some types of special sites were quite good (see Indicator 5.1.1). Cultural/historic sites were not included in this strong performance.

Minor Non-conformance J0249319-2: Special sites were not identified nor any reasonable effort to locate on 5 of 13 field sites visited in New Jersey. Common terminology in the Forest Stewardship plan under cultural resources is as follows: “This plan does not require any significant soil disturbance that would disturb any cultural resources.”

3. Management Plan

Performance Measure 1.1 requires that “Forest owner must have and implement a written forest management plan consistent with the size of the forest and the scale and intensity of the forest activities.”

Minor Non-conformance J0249319-3:

One Tree Farm inspected in Pennsylvania did not have a forest management plan.

The program will develop plans to address these issues, subject to approval by NSF on August 30. Progress in implementing these corrective action plans will be reviewed in subsequent surveillance audits.

Opportunity for Improvement

One opportunity for improvement (OFI) was also identified:

There is an opportunity to improve landowner awareness of “Best Management Practices” (BMPs). Indicator 2.1.2 indicates that “Forest owner should obtain advice from appropriate professionals, or contractors who are trained in, and familiar with, relevant laws, regulations and ordinances.”

Management plans prepared by consulting foresters made reference to NJ BMP’s. Interviews showed that many landowners in New Jersey had not been given the BMP manual by their consulting forester or had never seen it (6 of 13 landowners).

Future Audits

Audits are required annually. The next Audit required is a recertification audit designed to assess whether a new three-year certificate can be issued.

END OF PUBLIC REPORT