

ATFS Audit Report
American Tree Farm System Regional Group Certification



for

Northeast Region Tree Farm Program
FRS # C0027067

June 21, 2011

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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

The program updated the requirements in 2009; these were required to be in place by the end of 2010 and were the basis for the 2011 audit.

ATFS Audit Process

The audit was performed by NSF-ISR between March and May, 2011 by an audit team headed by Mike Ferrucci, NSF Lead Auditor supported by Keri Yankus. 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 2010 Minor Non-conformance.

The scope of the audit included Tree Farms in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York, 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 2010 Minor Non-conformance regarding management plans has been closed. The program has made good 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. More work remains to be done, but sufficient progress has been made to close this non-conformance.

The NSF-ISR ATFS 2011 Certification Audit determined that there were three new minor non-conformances:

1. Management Plans: Although sufficient progress has been made on this issue to close the related 2010 Minor Non-conformance, some Tree Farms audited did not have plans that fully met the requirements.
2. BMPs: Best Management Practices (BMPs) were not being implemented effectively on three TFs inspected in New York.

3. Rare and Threatened Species: One of 7 Connecticut Tree Farms included in the sample did not include a review of available information on R&T species.

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

Opportunities for Improvement

Three opportunities for improvement (OFI) were also identified, which alert the program about areas that could be strengthened or which could merit future attention:

1. There is an opportunity to improve the descriptions of desired forest condition and the implementation strategy in many of the forest management plans.
Indicator 1.1.2 states that “Management plans must: clearly state landowner’s objectives, describe desired forest condition, include management activities aimed at reaching the desired forest condition and landowner’s objectives, document a feasible strategy for activity implementation, and include a tract map accurately depicting significant forest related resources.”
2. There is an opportunity to improve efforts to prevent, eradicate or otherwise control invasive species.
Indicator 5.3.1 states that “Forest owner should make practical efforts to prevent, eradicate or otherwise control invasive species using a range of integrated pest management methods.”
3. The system for required inspections is not being consistently implemented in New York

Follow-up or Surveillance Audits are required annually. The next Surveillance Audit is scheduled for May, 2012 to cover the final three states of the northeast region (Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania).

END OF PUBLIC REPORT