



2012 Public Summary Report

American Tree Farm System (ATFS) South and West-Central Regions American Forest Foundation 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (AFF Standards)

Project Scope and Objectives

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) completed a Re-registration Assessment of the registered American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the South and West-Central Regions (the "ATFS Regions"), to the American Forest Foundation 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification.

SOUTH REGION

The ATFS South Region consists of twelve state Tree Farm committees and as of July 17, 2012 had 18,037 participating non-industrial forest landowners. The South Region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

WEST-CENTRAL REGION

At the end of 2011, the AFF combined the ATFS North Central Region and West Region to form the new ATFS West-Central Region. The West-Central Region consists of nineteen state Tree Farm committees and as of July 17, 2012 had 10,159 participating non-industrial forest landowners. The West-Central Region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming.

The Re-registration Assessment also included the ATFS Internal Monitoring Program and Public Consultation. The Lead Assessors for this assessment were Joann Cox, EMS (LA) (South Region) and Shawn Ellsworth EMS(LA) (West-Central Region), assisted by several technical specialists.

The primary objective of the assessment was to assess the ATFS management system at the national and regional levels and to evaluate the implementation of the AFF Standard on the ground.

Indicators

All of the indicators in the AFF Standard were within the scope of the assessment. There were no substitute indicators.

Assessment Process

The assessment teams conducted interviews and reviewed appropriate documentation to assess policies and procedures, and tested implementation of ATFS program requirements in the field. The report was dated July 29, 2012.

Summary of Conformance and Good Management Practices

The review of AFF's Internal Monitoring procedures concluded that the states chosen for the re-registration assessment conform to the AFF Internal Monitoring Procedures. Interviews with landowners and/or their representative, as well as field observations, demonstrate consistent implementation of good forest management practices. While improvements were noted, continued weakness was found in the preparation of written management plans in accordance with the requirements of the Standards.

Several examples of good and innovative management activities were observed, including:

- A Tree Farmer maintained the integrity of a waterfall of a creek by building a concrete low water bridge crossing the stream above the falls, to facilitate silvicultural activities.
- A Tree Farmer established a conservation easement to support a charitable environmental education camp that has served disadvantaged youths since the 1980's.
- Several Tree Farmers went well beyond the respective state Best Management Practices leaving wider buffers along sensitive areas.
- Many forestry operations were conducted with an acute awareness of other forest values such as water quality, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem restoration.
- Consulting foresters responsible for managing Tree Farms helped landowners to think about safety at all times while managing their Tree Farm, to enroll their properties in state tax incentive programs which required documentation of implemented forest/wildlife activities, and to enlist hunting lease members to help report locations of forest pests and invasive species.
- Despite limited marketing opportunities, Tree Farmers utilized harvested trees and thinnings for a variety of uses resulting in little waste.
- One Tree Farmer has taken an entrepreneurial approach to reclaim/rehabilitate poor agriculture fields, creating habitat and using timber from the property for some impressive wood works and lumber.

Summary of Findings

There was one new minor nonconformity and one new opportunity for improvement. These findings have been addressed by AFF, through action plans that have been accepted by PwC.

While implementation of the action plans on previous findings are continuing to show positive improvements, four previous nonconformities and three opportunities for improvement remain open.

Due to the merger of the West and North Central Regions, one nonconformity was closed by merging it with another open nonconformity. In addition, the implementation of corrective actions resulted in the closure of two nonconformities and six opportunities for improvement.

Non-conformities identified during the assessment:

- A nonconformity was issued in one state where several Tree Farms had steep road sections that showed signs of erosion where water bars had not been established. In addition, several Tree Farms had substandard culvert installations.
- Two previous nonconformities remain open, which relate to Tree Farms without management plans, plans that did not address all the requirements of the AFF Standard, or plans that were not detailed enough for the size and scale of the tree farm.

- One previous nonconformity from remains open, which relates to one state that did not fully complete its required internal monitoring sample, which contained a significant population of ineligible ATFS IMG Group members.
- One previous nonconformity remains open, which relates to maintenance of the ATFS database. While the database fluctuates with Tree Farmers entering/exiting the program, the accuracy of the central database of certified forest properties still requires improvement.

Opportunities for improvement were identified in the following areas:

- Encourage Tree Farmers to improve the quality of maps and photos used in management plans.
- A previous opportunity for improvement remains open, which encourages land owners' to further document actions identified to address management of special sites or High Conservation Value Forests.
- A previous opportunity for improvement remains open, which encourages land owners' to note in their management plans if rare species exist and sources of information.

Conclusion

The American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the South and West-Central Regions have maintained conformance with the requirements of the Forest Foundation Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (2010 – 2015 AFF Standard). A copy of the Regional certificates can be obtained at <http://www.treefarmssystem.org> or by contacting Sarah Crow, Certification Manager, American Tree Farm System (202 463 2738).