2018 Public Summary Report

American Tree Farm System (ATFS) Northeast, Southern and West Central Regions

American Forest Foundation 2015-2020 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (AFF Standard)

Report Date – December 21, 2018

Project Scope and Objectives

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) completed an ATFS Surveillance Assessment of the registered American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the Northeast, Southern and West Central Regions (the “ATFS Regions”) to the American Forest Foundation 2015-2020 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification.

NORTHEAST REGION
The ATFS Northeast Region consists of eight state Tree Farm committees and participating non-industrial forest landowners. The Northeast Region includes the states of Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Vermont. The state of New Hampshire was assessed in 2018 with twenty-seven Tree Farms visited.

SOUTHERN REGION
The ATFS South Region consists of eleven state Tree Farm committees and participating non-industrial forest landowners. The South Region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. The states of Georgia and Virginia were assessed with twenty-seven Tree Farms visited in Georgia and twenty-one Tree Farms visited in Virginia.

WEST CENTRAL REGION
The West Central Region consists of eleven state Tree Farm committees and participating non-industrial forest landowners. The West Central Region includes the states of California, Colorado, Idaho, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The states of Kentucky and Missouri were assessed with seventeen Tree Farms visited in Kentucky and fourteen Tree Farms visited in Missouri.

The Surveillance Assessment also included a review of the ATFS Internal Monitoring Program and stakeholder consultation. Twenty-four stakeholder interviews were conducted with a minimum of four stakeholders interviewed in each state assessed. The Lead Assessors for this assessment were Karen Boyd EMS (LA) (Southern and West Central Regions) and Shawn Ellsworth EMS (LA) (Northeast Region), assisted by a competent assessment team.

The primary objective of the assessment was to examine 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.
Summary of Conformance and Good Management Practices

The states chosen for the surveillance assessment conform to the AFF Internal Monitoring Procedures and requirements. Interviews with landowners and/or their representatives and field observations confirmed overall consistent implementation of good forest management.

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

- **Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the Southern Region included:**
  - Several landowners kept journal records of Tree Farm activities including notes, invoices, expenses and photos.
  - One landowner released 1,500 quail on his Tree Farm, and now has at least seven permanent coveys. Another landowner enhanced quail habitat through tilling, seeding of preferred food plants and feathering edges of forest stands adjacent to farm fields.
  - One landowner, who is a combat veteran, provided fishing outings on his property for wounded warriors.
  - Since 1987, the Georgia Tree Farm Committee has supported a Tree Farm Scholarship Program that has earmarked funds from their annual silent auction for 2, $1,500 scholarships to assist dependents of Georgia Tree Farmers to pursue a college education.
  - The Virginia Tree Farm Foundation held education programs for realtors, and created guides for new woodland owners that realtors can give to their clients.

- **Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the Northeast Region included:**
  - One landowner maintained high quality management of the property road system including, frequent inspections, retention of a well-trained dedicated roads contractor and recent road rehabilitation projects that have deactivated roads adjacent to streams and relocated a key section to a better location.
  - One landowner manufactured small “rabbit piles” across the property, which are formed with tops and limbs, and help to create additional habitat areas for rabbits and other small animals.
  - One large landowner recently made efforts to increase the level of research across the land base. This includes participation in a climate change adaption and forest resilience study and various other wildlife study projects with partners of various academic institutions and State and Federal agencies.
  - The New Hampshire Tree Farm Committee pays for inspectors to attend continuing education opportunities in addition to Tree Farm Inspector training. This encourages foresters to obtain and maintain ATFS inspector training.

- **Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the West Central Region included:**
  - Several Missouri management plans included a list of activities to accomplish annually, and reminded landowners to review and update their management plan for needed changes and keep good records. In addition, one management plan clearly explained forestry terminology and management recommendations in basic and easy to understand terms.
  - One landowner arranged meetings with local landowners, inviting wildlife biologists to address the group on management issues.
  - The KY Tree Farm Committee holds inspector training for University of Kentucky forestry students each year to introduce them to the Tree Farm program. These students can then become active inspectors once they graduate. The committee, in partnership with U KY, also developed webinar Tree Farm training.
  - The MO Tree Farm Committee uses a PDF 004 form that can be uploaded to the 004 database for 100% of their inspections, and have been doing so since 2015. This method reduces keying errors, ensures use of the most current form, completion by trained inspectors and reduces administrative costs.
Summary of Findings

Four minor nonconformities were identified, two in the West Central Region and two in the Southern Region. These findings have been addressed by AFF, with action plans developed and accepted by PwC.

A previous nonconformity covering the West Central and Northeast Regions regarding completeness of management plans was closed. Additional observations were made regarding eligibility requirements, and these were promptly corrected. AFF is engaged in a comprehensive database clean-up and landowner engagement effort, and the implementation and effectiveness will be reviewed in two states at the next Surveillance Assessment.

Three new opportunities for improvement (OFI) were identified, remain open and highlighted areas where ATFS could consider the following:

- Encourage the updating plans to reflect current conditions due to plan age, family ownership transition or natural disturbances.
- Clarifying unclear/incomplete/out of date management plan elements.
- Considering the use of appropriate contracts for harvest and other forest management activities.

Conclusion

The American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the Northeast, Southern and West Central Regions have continued to maintain conformance with the requirements of the American Forest Foundation Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification (2015 – 2020 AFF Standard). A copy of the Regional certificates can be obtained at http://www.treefarmsystem.org or by contacting Kristina Duff, Certification Manager, American Tree Farm System at (202) 765-3529 or kduff@forestfoundation.org.