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 states of Maine and Maryland were assessed in 2017 with twenty Tree Farms visited in Maine and eighteen Tree Farms visited in Maryland.

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 North Carolina and South Carolina were assessed with twenty-one Tree Farms visited in North Carolina and eighteen Tree Farms visited in South Carolina.

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 Colorado and Montana were assessed with ten Tree Farms visited in Colorado and fifteen Tree Farms visited in Montana.

The Surveillance Assessment also included a review of the ATFS Internal Monitoring Program and stakeholder consultation. Thirty stakeholder interviews were conducted with a minimum of 4 stakeholders interviewed in each state assessed. The Lead Assessors for this assessment were Karen Boyd EMS (LA) (Southern and Northeast Regions) and Shawn Ellsworth EMS (LA) (West Central 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:**
  - Enhancing wildlife habitat and increased utilization by deer, turkeys and bobwhite quail, the landowner planted pine to screen areas where food plots and openings bordered public roads. He also established a strip of preferred forage species for quail along the edges between fescue fields and forest stands.
  - The North Carolina Tree Farm committee planned and held a Forest Landowner Outreach Summit – a roundtable discussion that included 29 organizations who all have engaged in outreach to forest landowners. The goal was to collectively develop and leverage human and financial resources, and coordinate outreach efforts.
  - One Consultant, who wrote one plan, included the following: “Please note: Informal updates to the plan can be made with handwritten notes. Be sure to include a date and initials these notes throughout the plan.”
  - Keeping detailed records of all activities on the property, including notes on every visit to the Tree Farm and keeping documentation on contracts and agreements with vendors.
  - The South Carolina Tree Farm Inspector trainings include a mock plan and map to facilitate teaching and discussion about Standard requirements.

- **Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the Northeast Region included:**
  - One Landowner, an active duty veteran, giving hunting permission to other veterans, who often do not have a place to hunt.
  - On one Tree Farm, thinning corridors were not marked in rows, but were strategically placed near seed trees to foster natural regeneration. On another Tree Farm, thinning corridors were tracked with GPS and uploaded to the GPS on the cutter, and were positioned parallel to walking trails.
  - A Landowner is participating in a program to enhance habitat for Golden-winged warbler.
  - The Maine Tree Farm Committee developed a comprehensive procedure for completing required inspections that includes sending a letter to landowners with contact information for their county Tree Farm chair and inspector, and encourages landowners to contact them and set up and inspection.
  - The Maryland Tree Farm Committee developed a geospatial program, and shapefiles of all Maryland Tree Farms are included. Shapefiles and associated data are used to facilitate inspections, create maps and other applications.

- **Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the West Central Region included:**
  - A Landowner installed a small kiosk at the entrance to her property where a written description of Tree Farm certification and associated landowner documents are available to visitors.
  - One Landowner collects slash resulting from thinning/sanitation operations and using an excavator, places the slash in a created pit, compacts it and covers it with the excavated soil, removing the fuel and beetle hazard, leaving the ground level and allowing rapid revegetation.
  - Colorado’s Tree Farm Committee’s website, treefarmer.com hosting clips of interviews, quiz questions and links to state Tree Farm videos.
  - On one Tree Farm, a stream restoration area includes a water gap to allow cattle to drink without disturbing the riparian area.
  - An ArcGIS layer containing shape files of all Montana Tree Farms was developed that is used to facilitate inspections, create maps for Tree Farmers among other uses. This GIS layer was used to efficiently choose the field sample for the 2017 assessment.
Summary of Findings

One new minor nonconformity was identified in the West Central Region. This finding has been addressed by AFF, with an action plan being developed and accepted by PwC.

Additional observations were made regarding two previous minor nonconformities, and these previous minor nonconformities will remain open. Although significant improvements were made regarding eligibility requirements and completeness of management plans, the following observations were made:

- Non-contiguous parcels were found in Maryland, Maine, North Carolina and Colorado.
- A few management plans in the Northeast Region, specifically Maine, did not include all required management plan elements.

A previous nonconformity for the Southern Region regarding best management practices (BMP) compliance was closed. Previous nonconformities in the Southern and West Central region regarding completeness of management plans were also closed.

Four new opportunities for improvement (OFI) were identified, two of which have been closed based on action taken by AFF. The two remaining open OFIs identified areas where ATFS could consider the following:

- working with the Colorado state forestry department on solutions to untreated slash
- providing ongoing guidance to reinforce the definition of Forests of Recognized Importance (FORI) for landowners and foresters

Conclusion

The American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the Northeast, Southern and West Central Regions have continued to maintain overall 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 (202) 765-3529.