2016 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)

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 nine 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, Vermont and West Virginia. The states of Pennsylvania and Vermont were assessed with sixteen Tree Farms visited in Pennsylvania and nineteen Tree Farms visited in Vermont.

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 Arkansas and Texas were assessed with thirty-four Tree Farms visited in Arkansas and thirty Tree Farms visited in Texas.

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 California, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming were assessed with seventeen Tree Farms visited in California, eight visited in South Dakota, twelve visited in Wisconsin and six visited in Wyoming.

The Surveillance Assessment also included a review of the ATFS Internal Monitoring Program and stakeholder consultation. Thirty-five 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 Region and Northeast) 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. The Northeast Region was a Re-registration Assessment and the West Central and Southern Regions were Maintenance Assessments.

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 October 14, 2016.
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 representative and field observations showed 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:
  - Landowners leasing their tracts to the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission as part of the Big Timber Wildlife Management Area as community goodwill foregoing more lucrative hunting club leases;
  - consulting forester doing a prescribed burn by using a leaf blower to effectively install fire breaks eliminating the chance of soil disturbance and minimizing the potential impact on water quality;
  - landowners in Texas are involved in numerous outreach programs, including serving on the following committees/boards: TX ATFS Committee, Texas Forestry Association, Trinity-Neches Landowner Association (LOA), Project Learning Tree (PLT) Committee, Tyler County LOA, etc.;
  - landowner in Texas was just awarded the Agricultural Pioneer of the Year Award at the Nacogdoches Agricultural Banquet for doing an outstanding job of managing his land and contributing to the community; and,
  - Landowner was chosen by Texas Parks & Wildlife Department as the suitable site in Rusk County to release 80 wild turkey as a means of reintroducing wild turkey to the area.

- Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the Northeast Region included:
  - Landowners in Pennsylvania are involved in various outreach programs, including providing access for research by some well-known colleges and universities and wildlife organizations; assisting the Pennsylvania Environmental Council on a cleanup of trash, and opening their properties for educational tours;
  - Landowner in Pennsylvania has a fisheries biologist who is implementing the Rosgen stream classification system of natural channel design to better maintain stream channels on select trout streams;
  - landowners in Vermont are involved in outreach programs including working with AFF and Vermont Tree Farm committee on a grant for a demonstration forest for landowner education focusing on invasive species control and silvicultural techniques to improve hi-graded stands, and hosting guest programs that include forest walks with a naturalist, birding and other outdoor programs;
  - a landowner was honored with the Stewardship Award by the Winooski Soil Conservation District and another was honored as the recipient Vermont’s 2016 Tree Farmer of the Year;
  - landowners using trees harvested from their properties to build family homes, as for firewood for lodge guests, to heats homes and build barns;
  - landowner put land in Vermont Land Trust - conservation easement – and also created a trust with the purpose of the property becoming the Town Forest in the future;

- Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the West Central Region included:
  - Landowner utilizing trees cut for fuel reduction on site as mulch for garden and cover for water bars; lumber made into furniture by Tree Farmer, an artist;
  - landowner investing many hours and substantial capital in fire abatement activities across the property;
  - landowner creativity in producing additional revenue streams from the lands which include: cell tower revenue, slash disposal service, Manzanita harvesting, firewood cutting and potentially camping revenue
  - landowner working with Southern California mountain lion survey; also working collaboratively with NRCs, USF&W, USFS to collect and grow and plant big cone Douglas fir on property;
  - landowner with an excellent road maintenance program which includes extensive work on adjacent USFS and industrial forest lands, also has a highly vigilant program for identifying and salvaging trees under insect attack in their current attack year; and
  - landowner identifying educational opportunities in conjunction with the stand descriptions and management prescriptions for each stand in the management plan for a school-owned property.
Summary of Findings

One new minor nonconformity was identified. This finding have either been addressed by AFF, or action plans have been developed and accepted by PwC.

- In two isolated incidents BMP deficiencies were observed.

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 Vermont and Texas.
  - A few management plans in the Southern, Northeast and West Central Regions did not include all required elements.

A previous nonconformity related to required samples not being completed by the year-end deadline was closed. At the state level, West Central Region states of California and Wisconsin are to be commended for management plans of the assessment population that satisfied the requirements of the Standard. A previous opportunity for improvement was closed.

Eight new opportunities for improvement (OFI) were identified, five of which have been closed based on action taken by AFF. The remaining open OFIs (three new and three previous from 2015) were identified where ATFS could:

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- consider other ways to communicate standard changes and direction to the state committees when significant standard changes occur.
- consider additional training of inspectors and committee leadership to review field inspection and signature approval requirements of the internal monitoring program.
- consider providing additional information and suggested management practices to address undesired species.

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- consider providing guidance for management plan writing to detail resources present and necessary/desired protective measures recommended in order to achieve more consistent and thorough documentation of key resource elements that should be reflected in management plans.
- consider providing further guidance on the implementation of BMPs, especially where defined streams may not be fully considered under state BMPs (e.g. are not designated on USGS maps, steep terrain and/or highly erodible soils).
- consider other/further guidance for landowners when seeking and hiring services of loggers, foresters and other forest management contractors.

Conclusion

The American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the Northeast, Southern and West Central Regions have maintained 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) 459-1702.