

Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Forest Management Audit Report

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – County Forest Program

Certificate #SCS-SFI/FM-000083

*SFI 2022 Standards and Rules®, Forest Management
Re-Evaluation Audit*

Client Address	<u>Wisconsin DNR - Forestry Division 101 S Webster Street PO Box 7921</u>
Client Contact	<u>Jake Walcisak</u> <u>Phone: (715) 657-5812</u> <u>jacob.walcisak@wisconsin.gov</u>
Client Website	<u>https://wisconsincountyforests.com</u>

SCS Contact:

Maggie Schwartz

Managing Director, Forestry

Natural Resources Division

mschwartz@scsglobalservices.com



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Public Summary Report

SFI® Forest Management Standard

SECTION A – PUBLIC SUMMARY

Foreword

Organization of the Report

This report of the results of your audit assessment is divided into two sections. Section A provides the public summary and background information that is required by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative®. Section A is made available to the public and is intended to provide an overview of the audit process, the management programs and policies applied to the forest, and the results of the audit. Section A will be posted on the SFI website and Section B contains more detailed results and information for required SFI record-keeping or for use by the Certified Organization.

Principles of SFI Forest Management

The SFI 2022 Standards and Rules® for Forest Management promotes sustainable forestry and includes measures to *protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk and Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value.*

The 13 *SFI Principles* for Forest Management are:

- 1. Sustainable Forestry:** To practice sustainable forestry to meet the needs of the present while promoting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by practicing a land stewardship ethic that integrates reforestation and the managing, growing, nurturing and harvesting of trees for useful products and ecosystem services such as the conservation of soil, air and water quality, climate change mitigation, biological diversity, wildlife and aquatic habitats, recreation and aesthetics.
- 2. Forest Productivity and Health:** To provide for regeneration after harvest and maintain the productive capacity of the forest land base, and to protect and maintain long-term forest and soil productivity. In addition, to protect forests from economically or environmentally undesirable levels of wildfire, pests, diseases, invasive species and other damaging agents and thus maintain and improve long-term forest health and productivity.
- 3. Protection of Water Resources:** To protect water bodies and riparian areas, and to conform with forestry best management practices to protect water quality, to meet the needs of both human communities and ecological systems.
- 4. Protection of Biological Diversity:** To manage forests in ways that protect and promote biological diversity, including animal and plant species, wildlife habitats, ecologically important species and native forest cover types.

5. **Aesthetics and Recreation:** To manage the visual impacts of forest operations, and to provide recreational opportunities for the public.
6. **Protection of Special Sites:** To manage lands that are ecologically important, geologically or culturally important in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities.
7. **Responsible Fiber Sourcing in North America:** To use and promote among other forest landowners sustainable forestry that is both scientifically credible and economically, environmentally and socially responsible.
8. **Legal Compliance:** To comply with applicable federal, provincial, state, and local forestry and related environmental laws, statutes, and regulations.
9. **Research:** To support advances in sustainable forest management through forestry research, science and technology.
10. **Training and Education:** To improve the practice of sustainable forestry through training and education programs.
11. **Community Involvement and Social Responsibility:** To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry on all lands through community involvement, socially responsible practices, and through recognition and respect of Indigenous Peoples' rights and traditional forest-related knowledge.
12. **Transparency:** To broaden the understanding of forest certification to the Forest Management Standard by documenting certification audits and making the findings publicly available.
13. **Continual Improvement:** To continually improve the practice of forest management, and to monitor, measure and report performance in achieving the commitment to sustainable forestry.

1. General Information

1.1 Name, Contact, and Certificate Information

Organization Name	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – County Forest Program	
Certification Representative	Jake Walcisak 715-657-5812 jacob.walcisak@wisconsin.gov	Doug Brown 715-966-0157 Douglas.brown@wisconsin.gov
Phone Number	715-657-5812	
Address	Wisconsin DNR - Forestry Division 101 S Webster Street PO Box 7921	
Audit Dates	5-9 August 2024	
SFI Certificate Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Single <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multi-site. This Audit covered the requirements of the central organization and a subset of sites. These sites were selected based on proximity and length of time since previous audits. See Summary of Audit Itinerary for details of sampling.	

2. Summary Description of the Management Unit(s)

Description of Ownership	A history of the Wisconsin County Forest program is included here: https://wisconsincountyforests.com/about/history/ All area is publicly owned by counties included in the certificate scope as described here: https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/timbersales/countyforests		
Total Forest Area (Acres)	2,229,329 acres		
Description of Sites and Group Membership under Scope	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SFI: List of all sites/FMUs under scope of the certificate, including certified acres.		
	County	SFI-only certified acres	FSC- and SFI-certified acres (dual certification)
	Ashland		40,305
	Barron		16,304
	Bayfield		178,387
	Burnett	111,516	
	Chippewa		
	Clark		
	Douglas		281,958
	Eau Claire		52,712
	Florence		37,003
	Forest		15,251
	Iron		175,422
	Jackson		122,685
	Juneau		17,799
Langlade	130,839		

	Lincoln		100,843
	Marathon	30,714	
	Marinette	230,103	
	Oconto		43,792
	Oneida		82,871
	Polk	17,183	
	Price		92,294
	Rusk	89,253	
	Sawyer		115,199
	Taylor		17,728
	Vilas		41,151
	Washburn		150,191
	Wood		37,826
	TOTALS	609,608	1,619,721
	Management Unit Maps	Provide a link to any public maps. https://wisconsincountyforests.com/ and https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/CountyForests	
Forest Types and Key Ecological Features	<p>General description of major timber types with a general characterization of management approaches used (natural regeneration vs. planting, thinning regimes, even-aged vs. uneven-aged silvicultural).</p> <p>Wisconsin County timber types are similar to other publicly managed lands in the state. Refer to the Timber Sale Handbook cited on this webpage: https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/countyforests/timber. Other information on forest types is available from these sources: Wisconsin's Forest Resources and Wisconsin County Timber Management.</p>		
Forest Management Planning	<p>The management plan outlining forest management policies and objectives: A general description of the overarching management system and all county FMPs are available via in links on this webpage: https://wisconsincountyforests.com/forest-management/</p>		
Sustainable Harvest Level Assessment	<p>Public Summary of how long-term harvest levels are determined, maintained, and monitored. <i>Note: Details supporting this description are provided with evidence under Performance Measure 1.1, when evaluated.</i></p> <p>Land reconnaissance (recon) is utilized in all the county forestry programs to assess geographical, structural, and compositional attributes of existing resources. Gathered field information is stored in the Wisconsin Forest Inventory & Reporting System (WisFIRS) management application. The database is used to analyze existing resources, evaluate management alternatives, and assist in the development and implementation of management plans. Recon is used to assess forest resource information at the property level. All annual forest management activities done by any program (fish, wildlife, parks, endangered resources, etc.) that alters vegetation in any way (e.g., invasive species treatments, timber stand improvement, site preparation, tree planting, timber sales, and wildlife habitat management) is identified by compartment and stand within WisFIRS. Needs listed in the database, in addition to other multi-disciplinary input, is used in determining property budgets and annual work plans.</p> <p>Minor changes to annual harvest rates occur each year when planning is conducted for each county forest. During planning, if harvest intervals or early or late constraints are changed, the calculated annual allowable harvest changes accordingly. If harvest dates are updated on</p>		

	<p>a large amount of the property, then the AAC can also be impacted.</p> <p>Harvest rates are established using area control methods and the data from WisFIRS. County forestry committees and county boards develop budgets annually, during which AAC acres are considered.</p>
Monitoring Program Description	<p>WisFIRS is the main monitoring tool for tracking harvest volumes and harvest scheduling. The DNR conducts wildlife surveys on county forests: nesting bird surveys, grouse transects, summer deer observations, winter track surveys, bear surveys, and a variety of other wildlife and plant monitoring. Wisconsin County Forestry Program (WCFP) also requires annual reports and annual work plans for each county. These annual plans routinely include information on the system of forest roads. Wisconsin’s Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality includes the need for inspection at regular intervals for active roads and inspection of inactive roads.</p> <p>The Natural Heritage Information (NHI) database is updated based on the results of statewide inventories, data generated by NHI cooperators at universities, nonprofit organizations, federal and state agencies and individuals; and published literature and reports submitted to the DNR.</p> <p>Foresters are trained to assess sites for invasive plants during routine forest reconnaissance. Invasives are on the recon datasheet to allow for retention of this information. Several counties participate in Cooperative Weed Management Associations. Additionally, DNR also has a system for gathering invasives information (aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial) from the public.</p> <p>Forest health monitoring, including spongy moth and EAB surveys, occurs at the state level. During routine forest reconnaissance, foresters are trained to assess sites for invasives. Some counties locate incidents of invasive species detections via GPS for use when controlling and monitoring.</p> <p>As part of monitoring active harvest sites, as well as closing out such sites, county foresters ensure that protected areas, set-asides, BMPs, and buffer zones are implemented according to the prescription. Notes from visits to active sites were reviewed, as were harvest close-out checklists.</p> <p>FECVs are monitored regularly, which was verified through document review and interviews with county staff. DNR wildlife monitoring can be found on several of its websites, such as http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/reports.html and http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/report.html.</p>

3. Audit Process

3.1 Applicable Standards and Audit Objectives

Certificate Code	SCS-SFI/FM-000083	
Audit Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 1, Preliminary Review Audit	<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 2, Certification Audit
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Re-Certification	<input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19 Additional Surveillance
	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 st , <input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd , <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rd or <input type="checkbox"/> 4 th Surveillance	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Transfer	<input type="checkbox"/> Expansion of Scope

	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>describe</i>):		
Applicable Standards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SFI: 2022 Forest Management. <i>Objectives 1-17. Exclusions, if applicable:</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SFI: Rules for Use of SFI On-Product Labels and Off-Product Marks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SFI: Audits of Multi-Sites <input type="checkbox"/> ATFS: Forest Management, 2021. <i>Standards 1-8</i> <input type="checkbox"/> ATFS: AFF 2021 Standards for Independently Managed Groups. Sections 1-4 <input type="checkbox"/> ATFS: ATFS 2021 Logo Use Guidelines		
Multiple Standards	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A, this is not a multi-standard nor a multi-CB audit. List/Describe other schemes		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Combined	<input type="checkbox"/> Joint	<input type="checkbox"/> Integrated
	<i>A combined audit is when a client is being audited against the requirements of two or more</i>	<i>A joint audit is when two or more auditing organizations cooperate to audit a single client.</i>	<i>An integrated audit is when a client has integrated the application of requirements of two or more management systems standards into a single management system and is being audited against more than one standard.</i>
SFI Substitute or Modified Indicators	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None, <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Substitute or Modified Indicators used and justification:		
Certificate Scope/ Statement	The scope of the certificate includes all forest management activities associated with the Organization's sustainable forest management system within defined county-owned- and - managed forest lands located in the State of Wisconsin and includes the harvest, transport, and sale or trade of forest products, and other forest management system activities for the Audit Objectives. The Organization has sufficient control over any contracting or outsourcing of forest management planning and activities to ensure conformance to applicable certification requirements.		
Description of Sampling Approach	Four counties were sampled based on sampling formulae in accreditation requirements. Within each county, the audit team visited examples of management activities completed within the past four years.		
Deviations from the Audit Plan	Were there any significant deviations from the Audit Plan? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. If yes, provide a description and explanation.		

3.2 Audit Team

Auditor name:	Kyle Meister	Auditor role:	Lead Auditor
Qualifications:	<p>Kyle Meister is an SFI and FSC Forest Management (FM) and Chain of Custody (COC), and Sustainable Biomass Partnership Lead Auditor. He has conducted FSC FM pre-assessments, evaluations or surveillance audits in Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain, and all major forest producing regions of the United States. He has conducted COC assessments in Bolivia, Canada, Panama, and the United States (California, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia). Mr. Meister has successfully completed CAR Lead Verifier, ISO 9001:2008 Lead Auditor, SA8000 Social Systems Introduction and Basic Auditor, RSPO Supply Chain Lead Auditor, SBP Lead Auditor, and FSC Lead Auditor and Trainer Training Courses. He holds a B.S. in Natural Resource Ecology and Management and a B.A. in Spanish from the University of Michigan; and a Master of Forestry from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.</p>		
Auditor name:	Sterling Griffin	Auditor role:	Team member
Qualifications:	<p>Sterling Griffin, Technical Specialist, Forest Certification – Sterling is a California Registered Professional Forester living in southern Oregon. He is a graduate of Purdue University with a degree in Forest Management. His career began with the U.S. Forest Service where he</p>		

	participated in long-term ecosystem productivity research in the Pacific Northwest. He later founded a consulting firm serving private landowners managing timber, water, recreation, fuels, and biodiversity. In 2007, he helped SCS establish its GHG verification program and later founded one of the largest U.S. developers of forest carbon credits. He is a FSC FM Lead Auditor, SFI FM auditor, and has evaluated over 20 million acres of forestland around the world.		
Auditor name:	Tom Harlan	Auditor role:	Team member
Qualifications:	Tom Harlan graduated from North Carolina State University in 1983 with a BS in Forestry. He has over 40 years' experience in the forestry profession including experience in timber procurement, timber sale administration, forestry consulting and TIMO land management. While working at a consulting firm, Tom conducted SFI-FM audits and was also a Lead ATFS auditor. Tom was a water quality engineer with the Virginia Department of Forestry where he worked with loggers and landowners to protect water quality and enforce the Chesapeake Bay Act provisions concerning forest operations. Tom managed land that was certified to SFI and FSC forest management standards and was audited to those standards. He was an FSC COC administrator for a small timber company on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Tom joined SCS Global Services in October 2023 as a Technical Specialist.		

3.3 Total Time Spent on Audit

A. Number of days spent on-site for the Audit	5
B. Number of auditors participating in on-site audit	3
C. Number of days spent by any technical experts (in addition to amount in line A)	0
D. Additional days spent on preparation, stakeholder consultation, and follow-up	2
E. Total number of person days used in audit	17

3.4 Summary of Audit Itinerary and Site Visits

Location(s) sampled	Oneida, Price, Rusk, and Vilas Counties
Number of field sites	36
Summary of Cover Types visited	Field sites included following cover types: Aspen, Red Pine, Northern Hardwoods, Swamp hardwoods, Oak, Special Sites, FECV Site, Jack Pine and Recreation Trails.
Summary Description /Number of Silviculture Activities inspected	Field sites included following silviculture activities: Active harvesting, wildlife habitat, interim harvest operations, harvest sale preparations, shelterwood, no management activity, completed thinning operations, regeneration, salvage harvesting operations, select harvesting operations, recreation, and protection.
Summary Description /Number of Harvest Areas inspected	Field sites included 3 active harvest operations, 2 interim harvesting operations, 4 shelterwood, 6 thinning operations, 2 salvage operations, 7 selection harvests, 13 clearcut/coppice, 4 recreation sites, and 3 road/stream crossing upgrades. Most stands contained multiple harvesting prescriptions as described within field site notes.
Summary Description of Road infrastructure inspections	Main access and interim roads were observed during field sites. Multiple uses of water diversion aspects were confirmed including water-bars, fords, logging debris, wing ditches, crowned and ditched roads and use of rock for soil and water protection.

3.5 Evaluation of Management Systems

SCS deploys teams with expertise in forestry and other relevant fields to assess the certified organization's conformance to SFI standards and policies. Audit methods include reviewing documents and records, interviewing personnel and contractors, implementing sampling strategies to visit a broad number of

forest cover and harvest prescription types, observing implementation of management plans and policies in the field, and collecting and analyzing relevant stakeholder input. When there is more than one team member, each member may review parts of the standards based on their background and expertise. Applicable aspects of the Management System under evaluation, such as Management System Review and other relevant Objectives, Performance Measures, and Indicators will also inform the audit team. On the final day of an evaluation, team members convene to deliberate the findings of the audit jointly. This involves an analysis of all relevant field observations, interviews, reviewed documents and records, and relevant stakeholder input. Where consensus among team members cannot be achieved due to lack of evidence, conflicting evidence or differences of interpretation of the standards, the team is instructed to report these in the certification decision section and/or in observations.

3.6. Changes to Management System

- There were no significant changes in the management and/or harvesting methods that affect the FME's conformance to the SFI standards, rules, and policies.
- Significant changes that affect the management system occurred since the last audit described as follows (describe):

3.7 Confirmation of Meeting Audit Objectives

1. Determination of the conformity of the client's management system, or parts of it, with audit criteria (Selected Objectives, Performance Measures, and/or Indicators).
2. Determination of the ability of the management system to ensure the client meets applicable statutory, regulatory and contractual requirements.
3. Determination of the effectiveness of the management system to ensure the client can reasonably expect to achieve specified objectives.
4. As applicable, identification of areas for potential improvement of the management system.

The objectives for this audit included: all (re-evaluation audit).

Audit Objectives were met	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If no, provide an explanation:
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4. Results of Audit

4.1 Grading of Possible Findings

Once a consensus is reached by the audit team, determinations of grading are made as to the level of findings. Grading of findings may occur as follows:

- *Major CARs:* Major Corrective Action Requests (CARs) occur when one or more of the SFI 2022 Standard(s) performance measures or indicators has not been addressed or has not been implemented to the extent that a systematic failure of a Certified Organization's SFI system to meet an SFI objective, performance measure or indicator occurs.
- *Minor CARs:* An isolated lapse in SFI 2022 Standard(s) implementation which does not indicate a systematic failure to consistently meet an SFI objective, performance measure or indicator.

- *Opportunities for Improvement:* Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) are identified by audit team members where the client is in conformance, but there is a risk to conformance in the future. Nonconformance with the standard requirements cannot be recorded as OFIs.
- *Exceeds:* Practices that exceed the basic requirements of the SFI 2022 Standards and Rules for Forest Management or Fiber Sourcing.

4.2 Table of Audit Results and History of Findings for Certificate Period

This table lists Findings to the Performance Measure and/or Indicator level for each year of the certificate period and is updated annually.

SFI Objective	Cert/Re-cert Evaluation (2024)	1 st Annual Evaluation (2025)	2 nd Annual Evaluation (2026)	3 rd Annual Evaluation (2027)	4 th Annual Evaluation (2028)
No findings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1					
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12					
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14					
15					
16					
17					
COC					
Trademark					
Group					
Other					

4.3 General Description of Evidence of Conformity

This section summarizes the general evidence found to verify conformity that is detailed in Appendix 5.

SFI Objective	Summary of Evidence
Objective 1. Forest Management Planning. To ensure forest management plans include long-term sustainable harvest levels and measures to avoid forest conversion or afforestation of ecologically important areas.	Each county has a publicly available Management Plan on its website. These all follow a standardized template that relies on common management planning tools, such as WisFIRS and the Silvicultural Manual, to ensure conformance. The organization

	does not afforest or convert natural forests to other uses.
Objective 2. Forest Health and Productivity. To ensure long-term forest productivity and conservation of forest resources through prompt reforestation, afforestation, deploying integrated pest management strategies, minimized chemical use, soil conservation, and protecting forests from damaging agents.	Review of guidance documents, policies, interviews with field personnel and auditor observations during field sites confirmed active Integrated Pest Management program. Adequate reforestation utilizing primarily natural regeneration with isolated stands of conifers requiring artificial regeneration was confirmed. Organization has a consistent method for monitoring regeneration and maintaining records within GIS system. No afforestation projects were observed. Field site observations confirmed protection of soils and maintenance of healthy forests.
Objective 3. Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources. To protect the water quality and water quantity of rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, and other water bodies.	The organization adheres to the Wisconsin BMP Water Quality manual for all timber harvests. Riparian buffers are based on the size, type, and slope of water courses and bodies, as well as timing of harvest (i.e., dry or frozen ground). All Riparian Management Zones (RMZs) inspected met or exceeded minimum recommendations.
Objective 4. Conservation of Biological Diversity To maintain or advance the conservation of biological diversity at the stand- and landscape- level and across a diversity of forest and vegetation cover types and successional stages including the conservation of forest plants and animals, aquatic species, threatened and endangered species, Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, old-growth forests and ecologically important sites.	Documented plans, policies, interviews with personnel & contractors and field site observations confirmed protection of biological diversity. Multiple cover types, riparian buffers, system for evaluating the occurrence of endangered species of flora and fauna and protection of historical, cultural and archaeological sites was confirmed during audit.
Objective 5. Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits. To manage the visual impact of forest operations and provide recreational opportunities for the public.	Each county FMP has chapter 835 called "Aesthetics" and 840 on "Landscape Management". These two programs help address the visual impacts of harvesting, as confirmed through field observation. For example, green tree retention areas within harvest units were located near roadsides or even rivers with high recreational use to control the visual impacts of aspen harvests.
Objective 6. Protection of Special Sites. To manage lands that are geologically or culturally important in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities.	Auditors' review of detailed procedures within policies, GIS mapping technology, archaeological and ecological evaluations and observation during field sites confirmed protection of Special Sites is a high priority within program.
Objective 7. Efficient Use of Fiber Resources. To minimize waste and ensure the efficient use of fiber resources.	The organization regularly monitors progress of timber harvests, including through weekly checks of scale tickets and observation of log decks. Multiple

	<p>log sorts were observed on timber sales inspected in 2024.</p> <p>Slash is managed to secure optimal regeneration based on dominant species desired. For example, slash is crushed and moved away from crop trees in oak shelterwood harvests.</p> <p>Counties allow for firewood harvesting via a permit system, and salvage operations in case of significant fire or insect damage to allow for utilization of lower value timber. Confirmed via review of websites of counties sampled (e.g., firewood permits) and review of timber sale documentation for harvest sites inspected.</p>
<p>Objective 8. Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights. To recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and traditional knowledge.</p>	<p>The organization incorporates the rights of indigenous peoples into each county's FMP. The DNR also has a tribal resources manual that helps guide consultations with tribes and best practices to protect tribal resources based on feedback received.</p> <p>DNR provided evidence of some meetings held to enhance interactions with local tribes. Vilas and Oneida county representatives were present.</p>
<p>Objective 9: Climate Smart Forestry To ensure forest management activities address climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.</p>	<p>Organization has conducted a detailed risk assessment and adaptation plan for each county within the scope of certificate. Training was conducted for field personnel to develop resources for identification of strategies.</p>
<p>Objective 10. Fire Resilience and Awareness To limit susceptibility of forests to undesirable impacts of wildfire and to raise community awareness of fire benefits, risks, and minimization measures.</p>	<p>The organization includes a section on its website on prescribed fire, and cites DNR resources on prescribed fire and fire management. Since the organization has a high level of cooperation with the DNR, including through DNR liaison foresters assigned to counties, the DNR resources are relevant to the organization. Field-level observation confirms that fuel loads are controlled during harvesting via slash crushing and dispersal, clearing of firebreaks, and brush control along county roads.</p>
<p>Objective 11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance To comply with all applicable laws and regulations including, international, federal, provincial, state, and local.</p>	<p>Auditors' review of policies, handbooks, contracts and observations of regulatory postings were the main evidence confirming compliance. Interviews with personnel and contractors, review of web and observations were also conducted. No adverse regulatory issues were identified.</p>
<p>Objective 12. Forestry Research, Science and Technology. To invest in research, science, and technology, upon which sustainable forest management decisions are based.</p>	<p>Organization participates extensively in SFI State Implementation Committee (SIC), as evidenced in meeting minutes and agendas for meetings held in 2023-24. The organization also is a partner in</p>

	several DNR-led initiatives on BMP implementation and monitoring, wildlife management, invasive species control, and other topics. Refer to WFCA and DNR websites.
Objective 13. Training and Education. To improve the implementation of sustainable forestry through appropriate training and education programs.	Observed on DNR certification website and each county FMP, which has a section on commitment to sustainable forestry standards. Interviews with staff at each county sampled confirm that there is a clear organizational structure that includes assignment of roles and responsibilities between county staff and DNR liaisons.
Objective 14. Community Involvement and Landowner Outreach. To broaden the practice of sustainable forestry through public outreach, education, and involvement, and to support the efforts of SFI Implementation Committees.	Organization participates extensively in SFI State Implementation Committee (SIC), as evidenced in meeting minutes and agendas for meetings held 2023-24. The organization also is a partner in several DNR-led initiatives on BMP implementation and monitoring, wildlife management, invasive species control, and other topics. Refer to WFCA and DNR websites.
Objective 15. Public Land Management Responsibilities. To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.	Review of County Forest websites confirmed planning for Comprehensive Land Use Plans are posted for public review. Interviews with personnel and recreational user groups confirmed communication and planning coordination during forest management activities.
Objective 16. Communications and Public Reporting To increase transparency and to annually report progress on conformance with the SFI Forest Management Standard.	Review of SFI website confirms Public Summary Report for previous audit was posted. Required submission of Annual Progress Report was completed prior to deadline.
Objective 17. Management Review and Continual Improvement: To promote continual improvement in the practice of sustainable forestry by conducting a management review and monitoring performance.	Auditor review of annual County Partnership Meeting agendas and Annual Management Review conducted by senior management in July 2024.

4.4 Existing Corrective Action Requests, OFIs, and Exceeds

Finding Number: 2023.1	
Finding and Deadline	<input type="checkbox"/> Major: Pre-condition to certification <input type="checkbox"/> Major: 3 months from Closing Meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Minor: Next audit (surveillance or re-evaluation) or 12 months from closing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OFI: no deadline <input type="checkbox"/> Exceeds: no deadline <input type="checkbox"/> Other deadline (specify):
SFI Indicator:	3.2.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Conformity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Background/ Justification in the case of OFI or Exceeds Indicator: 3.2.1- <i>Program</i> addressing management and <i>protection</i> of water quality of rivers, streams, lakes,	

<p>wetlands, other water bodies and riparian areas during all phases of management.</p> <p>Finding: 2023.1- Tract 37-20: Harvest area in a minor section of riparian buffer zone (RMZ) did not retain recommended 60 square feet of basal area of long-lived trees species. Sale was established in the winter of 2020 with 3+ feet of snowfall on ground, which was prior to the revision of the 2460 form in late 2022. Therefore, no deviations from recommended RMZ practices were noted. Observation for overall buffer around riparian zone appeared to meet recommendations with the aforementioned exception. Opportunity to improve protection of entire buffer on RMZs with recommended basal area retention.</p>		
<p>Action Plan and Root Cause Analysis (to be prepared by Organization)</p>	<p>N/A-OFI</p>	
<p>SCS Review of Action Plan</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejected (<i>explain</i>):
	<p>SCS representative:</p>	<p>Date:</p>
<p>Evidence and Actions Implemented by Organization</p>	<p>Certificate Manager Comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review sold timber sales prior to operations starting to ensure BMPs particularly for RMZs, buffers and such are being applied/applicable and no changes to the sale since established. More guidance to come from WCFA Legislative/Certification committee. 2. For FY24/25 Partnership meeting between CF and DNR, OFI discussed at every county to address within their program as well as other certification items that come up in audit findings. 3. WCFA Legislative/Certification Committee meeting - Tuesday, September 12, 2023. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, the audit this year went great. Only 2 very minor issues/ OFIs that need to be addressed. The first OFI is regarding implementing BMPs correctly. This is a good one as a reminder of how important BMPs are. Need to tighten up BMP implementation and monitoring. • Discussion with administrations in response to OFI in working with their staff for reviews of all timber sale aspects prior to sale operations beginning, recommended in pre-sale meeting. This includes checking paint lines, paint itself, any changes to sale sites. <p>Email follow up with County Forest Administrators, Jacob Walcisak – Forest Certification Coordinator, January 25th, 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One observation (OBS) and one opportunity for improvement (OFI) were issued regarding BMP’s. Specifically, these revolved around the consideration for a thorough pre-sale walk-through addressing the condition of BMP’s before the pending harvest. • This review should include but is not limited to RMZ’s, buffer areas, filter strips, forested and non-forested wetlands within and adjacent to the harvest units. It is best for these features to be clearly delineated on the sale map and on the ground. Other BMP’s to review may include road conditions (road base, culverts, fords, water bars, broad based dips, ditches, etc.). • These checks are intended to verify that BMP’s were properly installed during initial sale establishment and to check if any site conditions have changed which now require the addition or modification of BMP’s. • Most properties will review the sale area prior to giving the contractor approval to 	

	<p>move onto the job. The second opportunity is during your traditional onsite pre-sale meeting with the contractor. Please include a means for documenting these checks. This could be as simple as adding a checkbox or new line item on your pre-sale checklist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe this OFI/OBS is an opportunity to implement a change which improves our programs.
SCS Review of Implemented Actions	<p>Reviewed WCFA’s legislative/forest certification committee meeting minutes (9/12/23), in which the OFI for BMPs was reviewed in item 2 a. Reviewed email from 1/25/24 in which a pre-sale measure for addressing the OFI was discussed and agreed upon. Specifically, the pre-sale checklist was revised to include a more detailed review of BMP issues prior to the commence of operations. Reviewed updated pre-sale checklists for Rusk and Price Counties.</p>
Status of Finding:	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Upgraded to Major <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other decision (refer to description above)</i></p>

4.5 New Corrective Action Requests, OFIs, and Exceeds

No new findings were issued in 2024.

5. Certification Decision

<p>The certificate holder has demonstrated continued overall conformance to the applicable Sustainable Forestry Initiative standards. The SCS annual audit team recommends that the certificate be sustained, subject to subsequent annual audits and the Certified Organization’s response to any open CARs.</p>	<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Comments:</p>	

