



St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department

2020 SFI Forest Management Public Summary Report

Introduction

The SFI Program of the St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department has achieved conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules®, Section 2, Forest Management Standard according to the NSF Audit Process.

St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department was originally certified to the SFI Standard in 2004 and has undergone successful surveillance and re-certification audits annually as required. This report describes the 2020 Surveillance Audit. The audit was designed to focus on field forestry operations, on changes in programs or operations, on the management review system, and on efforts at continuous improvement. In addition, a subset of SFI requirements were selected for detailed review.

The mission of the St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department is to promote, enhance and protect St. Louis County Tax Forfeited Trust lands by providing professional expertise in the use of sound land management principles for:

- Financial return to the county and taxing districts
- Performing public services
- Maintain and improving forest health and productivity
- Providing raw material for local industry
- Providing opportunity for tourism and recreation
- Protecting wildlife habitat, soil resources, and water quality
- Providing for scientific research

The Department is dedicated to long-term management of the Tax Forfeited Trust for the economic, social and ecological benefit of the people of St. Louis County. The Land and Minerals Department's vision hinges on the concept of sustainability.

In other words, protecting the natural environment while enhancing economic opportunity and community well-being.

Over half the resource is in the northern mixed forest type – aspen, birch, spruce, fir. Within this mix, stands dominated by aspen are by far and away the most prevalent. Lowland conifers (not including stagnated stands) are next largest group at 23%. Although their percentages are small, due to the County's large land base, there are considerable acreages in white/red pine (3.6%) and jack pine/upland black spruce. Northern hardwoods/oak are limited by inherent ecological conditions. Some of the aspen and birch stands may likely be northern hardwood types.

Audit Process

The 2020 Surveillance Audit was performed by NSF on August 17-20, 2020 by an audit team headed by Gerald Grossman, Lead Auditor. The auditor fulfills the qualification criteria for conducting Certification Audits contained in SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules, Section 9 - Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation. The objective of the audit was to assess continuing conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules®, Section 2 – Forest Management and a sample of the other existing requirements. The scope of the audit included the entire St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department system – excluding urban lands and mining leases.

The audit was governed by a detailed audit plan designed to enable the audit team to efficiently determine conformance with the applicable SFI requirements. The plan provided for the assembly and review of audit evidence consisting of documents, interviews, and on-site inspections of ongoing or completed forest practices. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management over the past year, in order to include planned, ongoing, and completed operations. Practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (regeneration and BMP issues, for example).

The multi-site certificate covers 6 forest zones (sites) organized into two areas. The 2020 audit included office reviews in both the, Pike Lake Area and Main office Duluth. Field visits were conducted in the Pike Lake Area. The sample size was determined using the guidelines set forth in IAF-MD1.

The two zones were selected based on a date rotation of the population of 6 zones. Within the two selected zones NSF's lead auditor selected field sites for inspection based upon the risk of environmental impact, likelihood of occurrence, special features, and other criteria outlined in NSF's protocols. Twelve field sites were visited and assessed during the 2-day audit, including 3 completed timber harvest blocks, 3 active timber harvest blocks, 1 road, several minor road-trail/stream crossings, 2 herbicides/planting, 4 leases and the active seed orchard. Auditors also observed extensive sections of St. Louis County forest while traveling between field stops, but it is not possible to quantify this portion of the sample into discrete field sites.

The SFI Standard was used without modifying any requirements. The following indicators are not applicable:

- Indicator 2.1.3: St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department doesn't plant exotic trees.



- Indicator 2.1.5: There is no afforestation program
- Performance Measure 8.3: Working with Indigenous Peoples on private lands.
- Indicator 10.1.2: The department is not engaged in research addressing genetic engineering of trees.

The possible findings of the audit include Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance, Opportunities for Improvement, and Practices that Exceeded the Requirements of the Standard.

Overview of Audit Findings

SLC's SFI Program was found to be in overall conformance with the SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard. There were no minor non conformances issued and there were three areas of "Exceptional Practices". In addition, the corrective action plan developed for the previously issued minor nonconformance was reviewed, and the minor non-conformance was closed.

Exceptional Practices:

SFI Indicator 1.1.5 requires "Documentation of forest practices (e.g., planting, fertilization and thinning) consistent with assumptions in harvest plans." Documentation of all practices is detailed (planting & thinning), well-organized, and contributes to program success in meeting harvest plans.

SFI Indicator 5.1.2 states: "Incorporation of aesthetic considerations in harvesting, road, landing design and management, and other management activities where visual impacts are a concern." Not only incorporating but implementing aesthetic management and addressing other management activities where visual impacts are a high public concern are exemplary.

SFI Objective 15, Performance Measure 15.1 states: "Program Participants shall establish a management review system to examine findings and progress in implementing the SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard, to make appropriate improvements in programs, and to inform their employees of changes." The management system, including monitoring, internal audits, and management reviews help the organization to continually identify and improve their processes in the office and field applications is exemplary.

General Description of Evidence of Conformity

NSF's audit team used a variety of evidence to determine conformance. A general description of this evidence is provided below, organized by SFI Objective.

Objective 1 Forest Management Planning

To ensure forest management plans include long-term sustainable harvest levels and measures to avoid forest conversion.

Summary of Evidence: selected management plans, the St. Louis County Land Department long term resource plan supporting documentation and the associated inventory and growth data as well as harvest-related planning documents were the key evidence of conformance

Objective 2 Forest Health and Productivity

To ensure long-term forest productivity, carbon storage and conservation of forest resources through prompt reforestation, afforestation, minimized chemical use, soil conservation, and protecting forests from damaging agents.

Summary of Evidence: Field observations and associated records were used to confirm practices. St. Louis County Land Department has programs for reforestation, for protection against common insects and diseases and wildfire, and for careful management of activities which could potentially impact soil and long-term productivity. Harvests are carefully planned, with winter logging or processor systems used on sensitive soils.

Objective 3 Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources

To protect the water quality of rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and other water bodies through meeting or exceeding best management practices.

Summary of Evidence: Field observations of a range of sites were the key evidence. During inspections of completed harvests auditors reviewed measures implemented to protect water resources. Compliance with MN BMP's for the protection of these features provided additional evidence.



Objective 4 Conservation of Biological Diversity

To manage the quality and distribution of wildlife habitats and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity by developing and implementing stand- and landscape-level measures that promote a diversity of types of habitat and successional stages, and the conservation of forest plants and animals, including aquatic species, as well as threatened and endangered species, Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, old-growth forests and ecologically important sites.

Summary of Evidence: Field observations, interviews and SOP such “Wildlife Plan”, “Landscape Management Strategy”, “Special Sites”, were the evidence used to assess the requirements involved biodiversity conservation

Objective 5 Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits

To manage the visual impact of forest operations and provide recreational opportunities for the public.

Summary of Evidence: Field observations of completed operations and policies/procedures for visual quality were assessed during the evaluation. Further involvement with the multi user recreational groups helped confirm a strong recreation program

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.

Summary of Evidence Confirmed on field sites visited that the State Natural Heritage Database was considered and documented information into the GIS database. Foresters interviews confirmed they checked the data base during all the planning phases all information confirmed and provided key evidence.

Objective 7 Efficient Use of Fiber Resources

To minimize waste and ensure the efficient use of fiber resources.

Summary of Evidence: Field observations of completed operations, contract clauses, and discussions with supervising field foresters and with loggers and documented reports were provided the key evidence

Objective 8 Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples’ Rights

To recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples’ rights and traditional knowledge.

Summary of Evidence: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES Procedure is posted to the St. Louis County Intranet for use by staff-reviewed during 2019 audit. Interviews at Cook and Ely Lake confirmed knowledge regarding the use of policy and understanding of 1854 Treaty obligations were provided the key evidence.

Objective 9 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

To comply with applicable federal, provincial, state and local laws and regulations.

Summary of Evidence: Intranet portal was reviewed and section containing laws and regulations were posted. Reviewed random sample of topics and all links functioned properly. Observed Labor, OSHA and other regulatory documents posted field offices. Field visits regulatory compliance continues to be very strong.

Objective 10 Forestry Research, Science and Technology

To invest in forestry research, science and technology, upon which sustainable forest management decisions are based and broaden the awareness of climate change impacts on forests, wildlife and biological diversity.

Summary of Evidence: Financial support was confirmed by documented recipients of research support. Interviews of foresters confirmed conformance.

Objective 11 Training and Education

To improve the implementation of sustainable forestry practices through appropriate training and education programs.

Summary of Evidence: Random training records selected, documents associated with MN state applicator licensures and landscape planning education, logger and forester interviews were key evidence.

Objective 12 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.

Summary of Evidence: Documented evidence of letters, memos showing outreach to the community and landowners. Interviews with foresters were sufficient to seek conformance.



Objective 13 Public Land Management Responsibilities

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

Summary of Evidence: St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department's website were used to confirm the requirements.

Objective 14 Communications and Public Reporting

To increase transparency and to annually report progress on conformance with the SFI Forest Management Standard.

Summary of Evidence: Copies of reports filed with SFI Inc. and the SFI Inc. website provided evidence of conformance.

Objective 15 Management Review and Continual Improvement

To promote continual improvement in the practice of sustainable forestry by conducting a management review and monitoring performance.

Summary of Evidence: Records of program reviews, agendas and notes from management review meetings, and interviews with personnel from all involved levels in the organization were assessed.

Relevance of Forestry Certification

Third-party certification provides assurance that forests are being managed under the principles of sustainable forestry, which are described in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standard as:

1. Sustainable Forestry

To practice sustainable forestry to meet the needs of the present without compromising 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, carbon, 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 exotic plants and animals 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.

4. Protection of Biological Diversity

To manage forests in ways that protect and promote biological diversity, including animal and plant species, wildlife habitats, and ecological or natural community 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, geologically or culturally important in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities.

7. Responsible Fiber Sourcing Practices in North America

To use and promote among other forest landowners sustainable forestry practices that are 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 SFI 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.

14. Avoidance of Controversial Sources including Illegal Logging in Offshore Fiber Sourcing

(Applies only to the SFI 2015-2019 Fiber Sourcing Standard)

To avoid wood fiber from illegally logged forests when procuring fiber outside of North America, and to avoid sourcing fiber from countries without effective social laws.

Source: Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) Standard, 2015–2019 Edition

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