



## **2014 Public Summary Report**

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

### **American Forest Foundation 2010-2015 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 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification.

#### **NORTHEAST REGION**

The ATFS Northeast Region consists of eleven state Tree Farm committees and as of August 27, 2014 had 8,870 participating non-industrial forest landowners. The Northeast Region includes the states of Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia.

#### **SOUTHERN REGION**

The ATFS South Region consists of twelve state Tree Farm committees and as of August 27, 2014 had 22,297 participating non-industrial forest landowners. The South Region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

#### **WEST CENTRAL REGION**

The West Central Region consists of nineteen state Tree Farm committees and as of August 27, 2014 had 13,076 participating non-industrial forest landowners. The West Central Region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming.

The Surveillance Assessment also included a review of the ATFS Internal Monitoring Program and stakeholder consultation. The Lead Assessors for this assessment were Joann Cox EMS (LA) (South Region and Northeast - MD) and Shawn Ellsworth EMS (LA) (West Central Region and Northeast - NH), assisted by several technical specialists.

The primary objective of the assessment was to assess 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 transition assessment.

#### **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 November 18, 2014.

## **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 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:
  - comprehensive management plans that included expanded information on pertinent plan elements as well as an overview of the Standard, ATFS certification, information on cost incentive programs, and tax and estate planning;
  - establishing comprehensive conservation easements and/or long-term family trust agreements;
  - landowners hosting numerous community and educational outreach activities
  - landowners establishing buffers around special sites and taking extra measures to enhance wildlife habitat and biodiversity; and
  - innovative practices such as employing prescribed burning without creating excessive smoke and potential wildfire and safety issues on his highway-adjacent property through the use of annually alternating small burns.
- Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the Northeast Region included:
  - utilization of local biomass for district heating;
  - enhancement of public wellness, including wheelchair accessible trails, lakeshore and providing hunting opportunities for disabled persons;
  - comprehensive management plans that included details on timber cruise intensity, forest descriptions, and long range management prescriptions; and
  - landowners commitment to preserving/conserving ancestral family lands for social and environmental benefits, including one 50 year Tree Farmer long term commitment to sustainable forestry.
- Examples of commitment to sustainable forestry by Tree Farmers in the West Central Region included:
  - Utilization of wooden stakes adjacent to planted walnut saplings to effectively deter antler rubbing on trees by deer;
  - landowner provided scholarships to local high school for students to conduct biological surveys;
  - development of a comprehensive cataloging of plant and animal communities on one tree farm;
  - voluntarily cleaned up trash left by users of rail to trail corridor transecting tree farms;
  - scheduling of timber harvest during winter to provide forage for wildlife;
  - landowner who maintains encroaching brush on about 5 miles of state-owned, public use trail at his own expense;
  - provision of hunting opportunities for disabled individuals, veterans and handicapped persons including lodging and access to the property at no cost; and
  - protection of historic sites and efforts to enhance biodiversity.
- Several examples of support by state agencies for the ATFS state program, including supporting the implementation of landowner outreach.
- Efforts of the Alabama (AL) Tree Farm committee to update the ATFS database by sending a letter to the 3600+ ATFS members requesting confirmation of interest and updating Tree Farm information.
- Significant inspection efforts by the Alabama, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri and Kansas Tree Farm Committees to maintain a 5 to 6-year cycle of contact with Tree Farmers in their respective states.

## **Summary of Findings**

Three new minor nonconformities were identified. These findings have either been already addressed by AFF, or have been agreed to in an action plan acceptable to PwC.

- While the two states sampled in the Northeast Region had well written management plans, there were some plans that did not address invasive species.
- An active harvest operation (temporarily shut down due to wet ground conditions) had an improperly installed temporary crossing with sedimentation entering the perennial stream.
- In one state, the assessment of sampled management plans and the 004 Verification Forms completed by trained inspectors were observed to not fully correspond to some standard elements (e.g. identification of invasive species) based on field observations.

One previous open minor nonconformity that relates to ATFS database quality was re-classified to a major nonconformity due to ongoing ATFS database integrity issues. Two states required several replacement samples where Tree Farms after being selected as a sample and being contacted by the state ATFS committee, were identified as needing to be removed from the certification program indicating a weakness in the ATFS database.

Six new opportunities for improvement (OFI) were identified where ATFS could:

- consider providing guidance to forest owners to outline the appropriate action when a state listed species of special concern is found on the property.
- consider providing guidance on the requirements to forest owners who enter into a CREP contracts.
- develop further guidance specifically tailored for areas with limited wood product markets to assist landowners who infrequently conduct harvest operations.
- develop further guidance on invasive species and the requirements of the standard.
- clarify the process to locate and protect special sites such as cemeteries.

## **Conclusion**

The American Tree Farm System nonindustrial and privately owned lands within the Northeast, South and West-Central Regions have maintained conformance with the requirements of the Forest Foundation Standards of Sustainability For Forest Certification (2010 – 2015 AFF Standard). A copy of the Regional certificates can be obtained at <http://www.treefarmssystem.org> or by contacting Michael J. Burns, Certification Manager, American Tree Farm System (202) 459-1702.