



## The Conservation Fund

### 2023 SFI® Forest Management Public Summary Audit

#### Introduction

The Conservation Fund of Chapel Hill, North Carolina has demonstrated conformance to SFI® 2022 Forest Management Standard in accordance with the NSF certification process.

The Conservation Fund's certified land base includes most portions of its Working Forest Fund, excluding lands slated for sale over the short term. Almost all of the forestlands will be encumbered with working forest conservation easements to ensure long-term forest management and conservation, or will be sold in fee to State, Federal or other conservation partners committed to the management of working forestland. The Forest Management General Strategy is described in the Working Forest Fund Policy Digest: the following strategic goals will be consistent across every Working Forest Fund project:

- 1) Create a sustainable forestry project that is economically self-supporting and contributes to the state and local economy; while respecting all workers, members of the community, and indigenous people;
- 2) Perpetuate a healthy and productive forest by maintaining vegetative and structural diversity, supporting ecological resilience, and limiting the introduction and spread of invasive and exotic plant species;
- 3) Maintain water quality and protect the riparian and aquatic ecosystems supported by healthy, intact forestland;
- 4) Provide a sustainable source of forest products as is consistent with the long-term conservation of the property;
- 5) Enhance the wildlife habitat value of the forest by providing a range of successional stages across the landscape;
- 6) Promote timber harvesting practices that are aesthetically compatible with the local landscape;
- 7) Contribute to the local economy through forest jobs, forest products, and compatible outdoor recreation opportunities
- 8) Implement land management strategies that will result in the Property being eligible for forest certification by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and/or Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC).

The program's North Coast Forest Conservation Program in California includes working forestland in five major tracts located in the coastal portion of Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, California. These forests support second and third growth stands of coastal redwood, Douglas-fir, pine, and related species, with some areas of oak prairie and pygmy cypress trees. The forests are generally road accessible, blocked in, and provide an opportunity for demonstrating the conservation of aquatic and upland resources in a working-forest context.

The management objectives are summarized in this paragraph from one representative Forest Management Plan:

- Perpetuate a healthy and productive forest by maintaining vegetative and structural diversity, supporting ecological resilience, and limiting the introduction and spread of invasive and exotic plant species.
- Maintain water quality and protect the riparian and aquatic ecosystems supported by healthy, intact forestland
- Provide a sustainable source of forest products as is consistent with the long-term conservation of the property
- Enhance the wildlife habitat value of the forest by providing a range of successional stages across the landscape
- Comply with all certification principles promulgated by SFI
- Promote timber harvesting practices that are aesthetically compatible with the local landscape
- Create and maintain positive, viable collaborations with other landowners to achieve individual and common objectives across the landscape
- Contribute to the local economy through the creation of forest jobs, forest products, and compatible outdoor recreation opportunities.

Source: Bly Hollow Forest -Vermont Subset Forest Management Plan

The audit was performed by NSF on 11-13 July; 6-7 September; 5-6 October 2023 by an audit team headed by Shannon Wilks, Lead Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting audits contained in SFI 2022 Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation.

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of the firm's SFI Program to the requirements of the SFI Forest Management Standard.

The scope of the audit included forest management operations. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management over the planning period of the past 3 years. In addition, practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate (regeneration and BMP issues, for example), SFI obligations to promote sustainable forestry practices, to seek legal compliance, and to incorporate continual improvement systems were also within the scope of the audit.



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

Indicator 2.1.3	Plantings of native or non-invasive naturalized tree species are preferred. In exceptional circumstances where exotic tree species are being planted, they should not increase risk to native ecosystems.	No exotic tree species are planted.
Indicator 2.2.5	The World Health Organization (WHO) type 1A and 1B pesticides shall be prohibited, except where no other viable alternative is available.	No use of prohibited pesticides.
Indicator 2.2.6	Use of pesticides banned under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001) shall be prohibited.	No use of prohibited pesticides.
Performance Measure 8.2	Certified Organizations with forest management responsibilities on public lands shall confer with Indigenous Peoples whose rights may be affected by the Certified Organization’s forest management practices. Indicator:	No Public Land Management Responsibilities.
Objective 15	To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.	No Public Land Management Responsibilities.

**Audit Process**

The audit was governed by a detailed audit plan designed to enable the audit team to efficiently determine conformance with the applicable 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.

During the audit NSF reviewed a sample of the written documentation assembled to provide objective evidence of conformance. NSF also selected field sites for inspection based upon the risk of environmental impact, likelihood of occurrence, special features, and other criteria outlined in the NSF protocols. NSF selected and interviewed stakeholders such as contract loggers, landowners and other interested parties, and interviewed employees within the organization to confirm that the SFI Standard was understood and actively implemented.

The possible findings of the audit included conformance, major non-conformance, minor non-conformance, opportunities for improvement, and practices that exceeded the requirements of the standard.

**Overview of Audit Findings**

The Conservation Fund was found to be in conformance with the standard. NSF determined that there were no non-conformances or opportunities for improvement identified.

**General Description of Conformity to SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard Objectives**

A summary of the evidence of the organization’s conformance to the SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard Objectives follows:

**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.

Why it Matters: Ensures that we grow more trees than we harvest, guaranteeing that forests will last for future generations.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.



## **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.

Why it Matters: Ensures that forests remain healthy and resilient which means better forest productivity including providing a reliable and renewable source of sustainably managed fiber for consumer products.

Notes: Review of Forest Management Plans and field sites confirmed healthy and productive forests. Regeneration was confirmed with adequate stocking and survival levels. Soils were identified and protected during forest management activities. The Conservation Fund has a documented system to ensure forest health and productivity. No adverse conditions were observed.

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## **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.

Why it Matters: Protects water quality and quantity helps provide safe and abundant drinking water for all.

Notes: Review of Forest Management Plans, Timber Harvesting prescriptions and observations during field sites confirmed proper use of protections during forest management activities. The use of mats, portable bridges or the avoidance of crossing water was observed during management activities. Riparian buffers were established and the use of harvest debris was observed to prevent soil movement. Professional and qualified personnel implemented forest management activities. No adverse conditions were observed.

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## **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.

Why it Matters: Ensures that forests are managed to protect wildlife habitat and conserve biological diversity.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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## **Objective 5. Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits**

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

Why it Matters: Ensures that the public can continue to enjoy the aesthetic values and recreation opportunities of forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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## **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.

Why it Matters: Protects special sites that have important geological or cultural values.

Notes: Review of all Forest Management Plans contain requirements for the Protection of Special Sites. Special Management Areas are designated for the protection of rare, threatened, or endangered species. Observation during field sites confirmed protection of habitat for protected species.

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## **Objective 7. Efficient Use of Fiber Resources**

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

Why it Matters: Ensures the economic well-being of communities that live and work near forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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## **Objective 8. Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights**

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

Why it Matters: Recognizing and respecting the Indigenous Peoples' rights supports relationship building and shared benefits from sustainably managed forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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**Objective 9: Climate Smart Forestry**

To ensure forest management activities address climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

Why it Matters: Ensures that SFI-certified forests make an important contribution to addressing the effects of climate change.

Notes: Review of Climate Smart Forestry Risk Assessments confirmed detailed procedures have been developed and greenhouse gases within operational control have been identified. Climate Change and Risk Assessment has been developed for each geographic region of forestland portfolio.

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**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.

Why It Matters: Ensures that forests are managed proactively relative to fire risk in the face of climate change, so that they can continue to store carbon, provide habitat for wildlife, and are a source of clean air and water while protecting public safety and human health.

Notes: Review of SFI Forest Management Program Guidelines confirms fire regimes and management requirements are identified based on wildfire characteristics for each property. Organization utilizes Landscape Fire and Resource Planning Tool developed by US Forest Service and Department of Interior during management planning.

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**Objective 11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance**

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

Why it Matters: Compliance with all laws ensures the protection of the environmental and social values of forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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**Objective 12. Forestry Research, Science and Technology**

To invest in research, science, and technology, upon which sustainable forest management decisions are based.

Why it Matters: Forest research means healthier, more productive forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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**Objective 13. Training and Education**

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

Why it Matters: Training and educating foresters means forest management plans are more accurately implemented, ensuring the well-being of our forests.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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**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.

Why it Matters: Outreach and education improves the public's understanding of how important sustainable forestry is to local and global issues.

Notes: Not Audited in 2023.

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**Objective 15. Public Land Management Responsibilities**

To participate and implement sustainable forest management on public lands.

Why it Matters: Protects the environmental, social, and economic values of public forests.

Notes: Not Applicable.

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**Objective 16. Communications and Public Reporting**

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

Why it Matters: Reporting the results of third-party audits increases the public’s understanding of forest certification.

Notes: Review of SFI website confirms public summary reports are available for previous audit. Annual Progress Report was submitted 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.

Why it Matters: Encourages continual improvement of sustainable forestry practices, a cornerstone of sustainable forestry.

Notes: Review of certification guidelines, policies, commitments, internal audits, and management reviews confirmed compliance to SFI requirements.

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