



Michigan DNR SFI Audit Summary

The SFI Program of the Michigan DNR has achieved conformance with the SFI Standard®, 2005-2009 Edition, according to the NSF-ISR SFIS Certification Audit process.

The Michigan DNR manages 3.9 million acres of State Forest land throughout the northern two-thirds of Michigan, using an interdisciplinary approach to integrate the harvesting of forest products, the provision of wildlife habitat, the protection of special sites, and the provision of extensive recreational opportunities. A variety of forest products are produced, including timber, pulpwood, firewood, cabin logs, poles, and other specialty products.

The NSF-ISR audit was performed on September 19-30, 2005, by an audit team including Mike Ferrucci (Lead Auditor), Dr. Robert Hrubes, Dr. David Capen, and Jodi Kaiser. The audit team fulfilled the qualification criteria of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Audit Procedures and Qualifications (SFI APQ).

The objective of the audit was to assess conformance of Michigan DNR state forest management to the requirements of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Standard, 2005-2009 Edition (SFIS). The scope of the audit was land management on 3.9 million acres of Michigan State Forests and the related sustainable forestry activities covered by the SFIS. Field inspections focused on active forest management since 2003. In addition, SFI obligations to promote sustainable forestry practices, to seek legal compliance, and to incorporate continual improvement systems were within the scope of the audit.

All of the Performance Measures within SFIS Objective 8 (involving procurement of wood) were outside of the scope of the Michigan DNR SFI program and were excluded from the scope of the SFI Certification Audit. No indicators were modified from the standard set in the other SFIS Objectives (1-7 and 9-13).

SFIS Audit Process

NSF-ISR initiated the SFI audit process with a readiness review to confirm the scope of the audit, to review the SFI Indicators and the evidence to be used to assess conformance, to verify that the Michigan DNR was prepared to proceed to the SFIS Certification Audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. The four-person audit team then conducted the audit of conformance to the SFI Standard. Annual follow-up surveillance audits are tentatively scheduled to commence in the first quarter of 2006.

The actual NSF-ISR certification audit was governed by a detailed audit plan designed to enable the audit team to determine conformance with the applicable SFIS requirements.

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The plan included detailed provisions for the assembly and review of audit evidence consisting of documents, interviews, and on-site inspections of ongoing or completed forest practices. The possible findings of the audit included Full Conformance, Major Non-conformance, Minor Non-conformance, Opportunities for Improvement, and Practices that exceeded the Basic Requirements of the SFIS.

Overview of Audit Findings

Michigan DNR's SFI Program was found to be in conformance with the SFIS Standard. There were six isolated lapses in implementation, termed "Minor Non-conformances," that are described herein:

1: Performance Measure 5.1: "Program Managers shall manage the impact of harvesting on visual quality." In some cases, visual management techniques were not implemented as prescribed.

2: Indicator 5.3.3: "Green-up" requirement (adjacency issue). On one harvest, adjacent blocks were clear cut before trees were at least 3 years old or 5 feet tall.

3: PM 1.1 Indicators 1a, 3, 4, and 5 involve the forest inventory and management planning. In some cases, differences between inventory and prescriptions (data coding errors) have affected or could affect implementation of sustainable forest management practices.

4: Indicator 3.1 requires a program to implement BMPs during all phases of management activities. Michigan DNR has developed a system of internal checks against BMP requirements. The system is not yet mature, in that suggested repairs are not yet all implemented. This system will be subject to re-audit when it matures sufficiently to assure continuing conformance.

5: Indicator 12.3.4 requires providing recreation opportunities for the public consistent with forest management objectives. The Michigan DNR provides an extensive array of recreation opportunities, and natural resources are generally well-protected. In some cases, illegal ORV use is causing damage that may be compromising environmental protections.

6: Indicators 10.2.1, 12.2.1, 12.2.1, and 12.5.1 require involvement by the Michigan DNR in SFI Implementation Committee activities. Thus far, such involvement has been limited.

Michigan DNR has developed plans to address all these issues. Progress in implementing these corrective action plans will be reviewed in subsequent surveillance audits.

NSF-ISR also identified the following areas where forestry practices on Michigan DNR's lands exceed the basic requirements of the SFI Standard:

- Sustainable harvest levels are conservative, and can clearly be sustained;
- No exotic species are planted;

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- Michigan DNR programs in forest health and protection are exemplary examples of Integrated Pest Management;
- Protection of rare, threatened, or endangered species is a major focus throughout the program;
- Biodiversity protections are robust and well-designed;
- Clearcut size is far lower than the 120-acre maximum average;
- Utilization and marketing of forest products is a clear program strength relative to the SFI Standard;
- Education and training of DNR Personnel is superb; and
- Public recreation opportunities are high-quality, diverse, and widely available.

Fourteen opportunities for improvement were also identified. These findings do not indicate a current deficiency, but serve to alert Michigan DNR to areas that could be strengthened or which could merit future attention:

- There is an opportunity to improve the training in and effective use of the Kotar habitat classification system by field foresters in making silvicultural decisions.
- There is an opportunity to improve understanding of current age-class structure in northern hardwood stands, allowing field foresters to more carefully adjust prescriptions.
- There is an opportunity to improve the level of detail of Operations Inventory (OI).
- There is an opportunity to improve protection of regeneration.
- There is an opportunity to improve implementation of strategic planning, including long-term and large-scale factors.
- Decisions regarding the time of year for harvest are not always made explicit.
- There is an opportunity to better understand implications of logging impacts on soils in mechanically-harvested northern-hardwood stands, and for greater attention to minimizing skid trails on some sites.
- There is an opportunity to improve the compilation of the BMP Non-Conformance Reporting at the district and Lansing levels.
- There is an opportunity to improve the process for developing recommendations for habitat management in the compartment review process.
- There is an opportunity to improve the timely appointment of Regional Biodiversity Conservation Planning teams to facilitate progress on designating a network of areas managed to conserve old-growth forests and unique communities.
- There is an opportunity to improve training for land managers in the FMFM and Wildlife divisions in identifying invasive plants, vectors for translocating such plants, and methods for control.
- There is an opportunity to improve staffing for prescribed burning for species such as red pine and to restore some semblance of the landscape disturbances historically attributed to wildfires.
- BMP monitoring at the state level has not recently been updated or implemented.
- Improved mechanisms for consultations with tribes at the FMU and State-wide levels should be considered.

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 with the conservation of soil, air and water quality, biological diversity, wildlife and aquatic habitat, recreation, and aesthetics.

2. Responsible Practices

To use and to promote among other forest landowners sustainable forestry practices that are both scientifically credible and economically, environmentally, and socially responsible.

3. Reforestation and Productive Capacity

To provide for regeneration after harvest and maintain the productive capacity of the forestland base.

4. Forest Health and Productivity

To protect forests from uncharacteristic and economically or environmentally undesirable wildfire, pests, diseases, and other damaging agents and thus maintain and improve long-term forest health and productivity.

5. Long-Term Forest and Soil Productivity

To protect and maintain long-term forest and soil productivity.

6. Protection of Water Resources

To protect water bodies and riparian zones.

7. Protection of Special Sites and Biological Diversity

To manage forests and lands of special significance (biologically, geologically, historically or culturally important) in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities and to promote a diversity of wildlife habitats, forest types, and ecological or natural community types.

8. Legal Compliance

To comply with applicable federal, provincial, state, and local forestry and related environmental laws, statutes, and regulations.

9. Continual Improvement

To continually improve the practice of forest management and also to monitor, measure and report performance in achieving the commitment to sustainable forestry.

Source: Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) Standard, 2005–2009 Edition

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