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# American Forest Foundation
# 2026 AFF® Standards of Sustainability Public Summary Audit

## Introduction

American Forest Foundation of Washington, D.C. has demonstrated conformance to AFF® 2021 Standards of Sustainability in accordance with the NSF certification process.

American Forest Foundation and the National Group of American Tree Farm System non-industrial and privately-owned lands in state Tree Farm programs includes the Programs in the following USA States: Alabama, Arkansas, **California**, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, **Kentucky**, Louisiana, **Maryland**, Massachusetts, **Michigan**, Missouri, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, **Oregon**, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, & Wisconsin.

This program was formed to assist in the certification of Tree Farmers in State recognized programs by integrating with the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and using the American Forest Foundation (AFF) Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification of Private Lands as the basis for certification.

The audit was performed by NSF on 20 January 2026 through 13 July 2026 by an audit team headed by Tucker Watts, Lead Auditor. Audit team members fulfill the qualification criteria for conducting audits contained in AFF Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation.

The scope of the audit included land management practices of all program members within the AFF requirements. Forest practices that were the focus of field inspections included those that have been under active management over the past year. In addition, practices conducted earlier were also reviewed as appropriate including regeneration and BMP issues, promotion of sustainable forestry practices, legal compliance, and incorporation of continual improvement systems.

The AFF Standards were used without modifying any requirements.

## Audit Process

NSF initiated the audit process with a Zoom meeting to confirm the scope of the audit, review the Indicators and evidence to be used to assess conformance, verify that AFF was prepared to proceed to the audit, and to prepare a detailed audit plan. NSF then conducted the audit of conformance. A report was prepared and approved by an independent certification board member assigned by NSF. The next audit is scheduled for January 2027.

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 AFF Standards were 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

AFF was found to be in conformance with the standard. NSF determined that there was one (1) Major non-conformance and three (3) Minor non-conformances:

- **Major CAR 1 - ATFS2021, 2.3 Eligibility**: Non-contiguous parcels were found in a number of tree farms, where a separate ownership of land that is greater than 84 feet wide exists. This was found on the following tree farms: **MI6161, CA2108**. Ranked as Major, as this is a repeat finding from prior years. ATFS is continuing to implement the corrective action plan developed in 2023.
- **Minor CAR 1 - AFF Clause 2.1.1:** A stream crossing was installed without a permit for Michigan Parts 303 and 301 on Tree Farm **MI4766**. The illegal installation was self-reported. The regulatory body conducted a site visit on May 15, 2026. Email and phone communication between the auditor and Michigan Regulator confirmed the crossing was illegally installed.

- **Minor CAR 2 - AFF Clause 4.1:** A stream crossing was installed to cross a riparian wetland area on Tree Farm **MI4766**. Rip rap was placed in the wetland area (in contravention of MI Part 303). Communication between the auditor and Michigan Regulator confirmed that the preferred approach would be to use a boardwalk. The Michigan Regulator confirmed the approach taken by the certificate holder would not have been approved had they applied for a permit with the approach taken. The Michigan Regulator rightly directed the certificate holder to not remove the rip rap as it would create more damage. The stream crossing did not meet Michigan BMPs and contravened Michigan Parts 303 and 301.
- **Minor CAR 3 - AFF Clause 4.2.2:** Several landowners did not maintain records of pesticide use. This was found on the following tree farms: MI7811, MI1944, MI1709, KY2001, CA459.

State programs are developing plans to address these issues. Some of the NCRs identified early in the audit process have been resolved. Progress in implementing these the remaining corrective action plans will be reviewed in subsequent surveillance audits.

One (1) opportunity for improvement were also identified, and included:

- **OFI 1 - AFF Clause 5.3.1: MD2563** - Landowner has in their forest management plan designated monitoring and control of invasive species on an ongoing basis. Auditor noted many invasive species on the property, often encroaching on the trails. These included Japanese barberry, garlic mustard, Japanese honeysuckle, Japanese stilt grass, multiflora rose, autumn olive, and oriental bittersweet. There exists an opportunity for the landowner to implement their invasive species monitoring and control activities as stated in their management plan.

These findings do not indicate a current deficiency but serve as an alert to areas that could be strengthened, or which could merit future attention.

No areas were identified where the forestry practices and operations exceed the basic requirements of the standard.

Planning for the next Surveillance Audit will begin in January 2027.

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