

Forest Certification Study on the National Forest System

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Forest certification has been one of the most significant developments in forestry world-wide in the last decade



Mt Hood National Forest (OR)



The Forest Service began evaluating the implications of NFS certification in 1997



Apalachicola National Forest (FL)

The question raised significant policy issues

FSC certification of NFS lands was also opposed by some environmental groups



Since 1997, the Forest Service has had a policy of not actively seeking certification of NFS lands



Lakeview Federal Stewardship Unit (OR)

After a 1998 conference in Lakeview, Oregon, FSC adopted a “federal lands policy” imposing special requirements for federal land certification, which remains in effect today



In 2005, the Forest Service launched the NFS Certification Study Project

The Forest Service, as a leader in national resource management, has, through its International Programs efforts, encouraged the strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks supporting responsible forest management and has assisted countries interested in certifying their forests. In our interactions with foreign governments -- and even other public agencies within the U.S. -- we are often asked whether and when the Forest Service would seek certification of national forests.



Certification Study Project Goals

- Evaluate potential the benefits and costs of third-party certification of NFs,
- Provide the Forest Service a better understanding of how NFS management policies and practices align with SFI and FSC standards applicable to private, state-owned and DOD/DOE lands in the U.S., and
- Study the lessons learned so as to determine any policy and management implications if forest certification were to be pursued in the future.



What are the potential benefits of National Forest certification?



SCS/NSF-ISR audit team on the LFSU

- Assessment of agency management practices by a credible third-party organization
- Management improvement
- Public and market assurances

But there are also both costs and risks



How was the study implemented?



- The Forest Service and the Pinchot Institute for Conservation (PIC) have entered into a joint venture agreement to implement the test project.
- The Pinchot Institute contracted with auditors who then conducted third party independent assessments of Forest Service lands.
- The auditors used the standards of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) that are applicable to private, state-owned and DOD/DOE lands in the U.S.
- The assessments were designed to simulate full certification audits.
- Pinchot Institute has prepared a lessons learned report which has been posted on the FS and PIC websites.

What management units were evaluated?

- Allegheny National Forest (PA)
Smartwood/PwC
- Lakeview Federal Stewardship Unit on the Fremont-Winema National Forest (OR)
SCS/NSF-ISR
- Mt. Hood National Forest (OR)
SCS/NSF-ISR
- Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (WI)
Smartwood/PwC
- National Forests in Florida
SGS



CS/NSF-ISR audit team on the Mt. Hood NF



Study Approach

- Studies were designed to closely approximate a certification audit
- FSC/SFI accredited audit teams were used
- Process included a scoping visit, full audit, full report write-up, etc.
- A PIC lessons learned report has been completed



Smartwood/PwC audit team on the Allegheny NF



Summary of findings



NFS management is consistent with most FSC and SFI standards designed for private, state-owned and DOD/DOE lands in the U.S.

Strengths noted by auditors included:

- a depth and range of expertise;
- exceptional programs of planning, assessment, and monitoring;
- the integration of complex direction and management considerations;
- a remarkable degree of scientific and consultative review;
- consultation with stakeholders, particularly with respect to culturally important sites; and
- an excellent system for identifying threatened and endangered species and managing for their key habitat requirements across the landscape.

Performance Gaps with Certification Standards



The auditors did cite a number of areas where the study units are not meeting FSC or SFI certification standards. This is normal for initial certification audits.

There were both minor and some major Performance gaps. If certification were sought:

- Minor gaps would not prevent certification, but need to be addressed within a given time period
- Major gaps would need to be resolved in some way prior to certification

FSC Performance Gaps



Non-Conformance	LFSU	ANF	MHNF	CNNF	NFF
Road maintenance backlog	m	C	m	C	C
OHV use planning, access, and impact	C	C	m	m	C
Backlog in vegetation management programs threatens forest health, habitat maintenance and/or community stability	m	O	m	C	M
Forest using highly hazardous chemicals	m	m	m	O	m
Late Successional OG entry/management/retention	C	O	M	m	C
Woods worker's safety and/or training	O	m	O	O	M
Management and monitoring of NTFPs	m	m	O	m	C

M=major; m=minor; O=observation; C=Conformance

SFI Performance Gaps



Non-Conformance	LFSU	ANF	MHNF	CNNF	FNF
Road maintenance and decommissioning	m	OFI	M	C	C
Maintenance of forest health	M	m	M	OFI	m
Requiring use of trained or certified timber harvesters	M	OFI	M	OFI	M
Implementation of planned harvest levels	OFI	C	M	C	M
Utilization of small logs	OFI	OFI	C	C	C
Program to implement state and/or federal BMPs	m	OFI	OFI	OFI	C

M=major; m=minor; OFI=opportunity for improvement; C=Conformance

Summary of Performance Gaps



If it were sought, certification would likely require the Forest Service to address a number of important issues:

- The Forest Service would need to take actions to address forest health and the road maintenance backlog
- Old-growth management will be an FSC issue in some areas
- Inadequate monitoring of NTFP use and terrestrial wildlife is problematic
- Inadequate requirements for logger safety and training are both SFI and FSC deficiencies

Feedback from Forest Service participants



Forest Service participants felt that:

- The audits were broader and more comprehensive than traditional internal management reviews
- Certification standards explored the full range of issues affecting the sustainability of the NFs
- The assessments provided a good test of staff performance
- Some participants felt that certification could enhance public understanding of NFS management performance while aiding communication with stakeholders

This test will NOT result in the actual certification of any national forest

- Each audit has identified a number of “technical non-conformances” that flow from the fact that the Forest Service has not formally committed to SFI or FSC certification
- For FSC certification, a set of NFS specific standards would need to be developed and approved by the Board of FSC-US
- SFI has expressed a willingness to proceed with NFS certification, if the FS wishes to do so
- A Forest Service decision on whether to seek certification will be made by agency leadership after the PIC report is assessed and stakeholder feedback is evaluated

