Forest Certification
Auditing
An Overview

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Forest Certification Auditing
An Overview

- How is an audit conducted
- What are the consequences
- Has it made a difference
- Opportunities
Background

- B.S Forest Management-University of Missouri
- M.S. Forest Economics-Stephen F. Austin State Univ.
- Employed by forest industry for 22 years
- Involved primarily in wildlife management activities while employed by industry
- Chairman of the Black Bear Conservation Committee for 6 years
- Began forest certification auditing upon departure from industry in 2001
- Conduct audits to all forest management standards throughout the U.S; SFI, FSC, ATFS
Forest Certification Auditing

- An evaluation, by an independent third party, of forest management activities against a set of requirements (criteria)
- Audit criteria—the requirements against which audit evidence is evaluated
  - Criteria as set forth by the Standard
  - The organization’s own procedures
Forest Certification Standards

- Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
- American Tree Farm System (ATFS)
Forest Certification Auditing

- Does the organization have procedures in place that meet the requirements of the Standard?
- Does the organization follow its own procedures in the way in which it conducts management activities?
- Audit conformance, not compliance
Forest Certification Auditing

An audit is an evidence-gathering process

• Interviews
• Document reviews
• Observation of activities
  • Timber harvesting
  • Site preparation and regeneration
  • Road construction activities
  • Chemical use
  • Special sites
  • RTE sites
Audit findings - results of the evaluation of audit evidence against the criteria

- Conformance: meets the requirement
- Opportunity for Improvement (Close call)
- Minor non-conformance: Deviation from a requirement that does not pose substantial risk
- Major non-conformance: Significant deviation from a requirement that could pose substantial risk
Audits are based on a systematic approach

- Isolated deviations from a requirement that do not pose risk to either the system or to the environment do not necessarily constitute a finding

- Patterns of minor deviations, or a single instance that represents a risk to the system or the environment, will result in a finding
Forest Certification Auditing

OFI  → Better pay attention

Minor NC  → Better figure out how to fix it

Major NC  → Better fix it NOW

Suspension  → Better fix resume’
Forest Certification Auditing

- Initial audit followed by annual surveillance audits
- Renewal audit every 3 years (SFI, ATFS) or 5 years (FSC)
- All sites or regions covered during the certification cycle
Forest Certification Auditing

- Audits conducted under ISO requirements (19011, 17021)
- Audits only conducted by accredited certification bodies (CB)
- Auditors must meet qualification and training requirements established by the CB
- Strict oversight by accreditation bodies
  - ANAB (SFI, ATFS)
  - ASI (FSC)
- On-site witness audits
Has It Made a Difference?

- Major focus areas
  - Chemical applications
  - Soil productivity
  - BMPs for water quality protection
  - Stand- and landscape-level wildlife habitat
  - Identification and protection of RTEs
  - Petroleum spills
  - SFI fiber sourcing standard requires compliance with BMPs and consideration of G1/G2 species when purchasing wood from private landowners

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Has It Made a Difference?

- Provides assurance
- Narrows sideboards and reduces outliers
- Creates internal accountability
  - Internal audit requirements
  - Personnel accountability for environmental performance and success of certification efforts
- Employee and contractor training
- Public input
  - SFI-Inconsistent practices programs
  - FSC-Stakeholder consultation

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Opportunities

- Since the audit process evaluates a company’s own procedures, the development of procedures to protect a species or suite of species not specifically covered under the forest certification standard would be subject to third-party audit.