

THE SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE OF THE AMERICAN FOREST & PAPER ASSOCIATION

Chris Barneycastle¹

Abstract—The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) is a comprehensive program of forestry and conservation practices designed to ensure that future generations of Americans will have the same abundant forests that we enjoy today. The SFI was developed by the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA), the national trade group that represents forest and paper companies. The SFI was implemented on October 14, 1994, and consists of forest principles that spell out five broad elements of sustainable forestry and 12 implementation guidelines that translate the principles into action by providing forest managers with the means to achieve sustainable forestry. The principles and guidelines, which include requirements for sustainable forestry practices, long-term forest health and productivity, prompt reforestation, protection of water quality and the promotion of sustainable forestry on private nonindustrial lands, are mandatory for continued membership with AF&PA. Since the SFI was implemented approximately 2 years ago, the industry has made tremendous progress toward achieving sustainable forestry. Examples include a reduction in the average size clear-cut to 61 acres for AF&PA member companies, reforestation of 2.4 million acres, expenditures of \$114 million on research related to forestry, wildlife, and the environment, the training of some 37,000 loggers, and an information and education program that has reached 41,000 private nonindustrial landowners. An independent panel of forestry experts, who review industry's compliance with the SFI each year, summed up industry's progress to date by stating: There is a significant change underway in America's forests—a change for the better in the forest products industry, through the SFI as a leader of that change. This change will not occur overnight, but through incremental progress, it will occur.

INTRODUCTION

The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) is the national trade association for the forest products and paper industry. Its some 200 members represent about 84 percent of the country's paper production, 50 percent of solid wood production (which includes lumber, plywood, etc.) and 90 percent of the industrial timberland. AF&PA is headquartered in Washington, DC.

The close of 1994 marked the end of one era and the start of another for members of the American Forest & Paper Association and many other members of the forestry community. This new beginning was ushered in by AF&PA's members when they established a major industry goal: to enhance the environment by visibly changing the practice of forestry on industrial forest land, especially as it pertains to water quality, wildlife, and biodiversity. Equally important, AF&PA members set out to work with loggers and private nonindustrial woodland owners to encourage reforestation, the use of environmental Best Management Practices (BMPs), and to improve the appearance of harvesting operations, particularly in highly visible areas.

This is called the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, a program of forestry and conservation designed to ensure that future generations of Americans will have the same abundant forests that we enjoy today. This goal is based on the premise that AF&PA members could integrate responsible environmental policy and sound business practice to the benefit of companies, shareholders, customers and the

people they serve. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative is the product of more than 2 years of deliberations among hundreds of professional foresters, State officials, academics from leading forestry schools, leaders of conservation groups, and scores of loggers and small woodland owners.

Since the SFI's inception on October 14, 1994, AF&PA members and the forestry community are on their way toward meeting the goal of sustainable forestry. Members are dedicated to practicing responsible environmental stewardship of the forest they own or manage, as well as the wildlife and water resources those forests support. These members are also promoting the same stewardship ethic among the entire forest products industry as well as nonindustrial private landowners.

THE SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE—DEFINED

Before reviewing the highlights of the forest industry's accomplishments under the SFI during the past 2 years, sustainable forestry must be defined and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and SFI principles and guidelines described.

First, the definition: "Sustainable forestry means managing our forests 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, which integrates the growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees for

¹ Executive Vice President of the Arkansas Forestry Association, Little Rock, AR.

useful products with the conservation of soil, air and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, and aesthetics.” This definition was spelled out by AF&PA to ensure that it was both complete and scientifically correct. It was based largely on the Bruntland Commission on sustainable development adopted by the International Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

SFI FOREST PRINCIPLES AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Now I would like to briefly explain the SFI forest principles and implementation guidelines. The forest principles spell out five broad elements of sustainable forestry. These principles are:

1. Meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations by practicing a land stewardship ethic, which integrates the reforestation, managing, growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees for useful products with the conservation of soil, air, and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and aesthetics.
2. To use in its own forests, and promote among other forest landowners, sustainable forestry practices that are economically and environmentally responsible.
3. To protect forests from wildfire, pests, diseases, and other damaging agents in order to maintain and improve long-term forest health and productivity.
4. To manage its forests and lands of special significance, (e.g., biologically, geologically, or historically significant) in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities. (Examples include wetlands, Native American sites, old-growth stands, special eco-systems, etc.)
5. To continuously improve the practice of forest management and also to monitor, measure, and report the performance of AF&PA’s members in achieving their commitment to sustainable forestry.

While the principles lay out the broad elements of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, the implementation guidelines translate these principles into action by providing forestry professionals with a specific road map for the best way to achieve sustainable forestry. I will briefly review the details of the 12 implementation guidelines starting with the objective and performance measures for AF&PA members’ forests. For a detailed description of the guidelines, please pick up a copy of the booklet the *SFI Principles and Implementation Guidelines*.

Throughout the document, beginning with Guideline One, is a call for member companies to document their programs, policies, and plans. This documentation is not intended for AF&PA, but rather to ensure that member companies clearly define and communicate to their employees what their own company’s programs, policies, and plans are for each objective.

The guidelines call for reforestation by a time certain after final harvest—2 years for example, if replanting is used. Natural regeneration will occur within 5 years of final harvest. Protecting water quality is an opportunity to get

third parties involved in the performance measure. Member companies may collectively or individually consult experts in water quality protection to identify forest management measures needed to better protect perennial lakes and streams. Some companies are cooperating at the state level to conduct water quality workshops to help fulfill this objective.

Guideline Four is a call for members to enhance wildlife habitats by developing and implementing measures that promote habitat diversity and the conservation of plant and animal populations found in forest communities. Minimizing impact on visual quality was one of the most hotly discussed issues throughout the development of the implementation guidelines. The performance measures identify a maximum average clear-cut size for AF&PA member companies of 120 acres. The document also incorporates a ‘green-up’ requirement so that adjacent clear-cuts do not create significant visual impacts. The green-up provision states that clear-cuts adjacent to past clear-cuts will not be undertaken until the previous harvests have trees that are at least 3 years old or 5 feet tall. The purpose is for aesthetics so the public can see a new forest established before the adjacent forest is harvested.

Protecting special sites involves companies’ commitment to identify sites that have special significance, such as those with unique historic or biologic values. This also creates an opportunity to involve independent experts. Many members already have good working relationships with The Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and similar organizations. Guideline Six involves the protection of special sites where companies will manage lands of ecologic, geologic, or historic significance in a manner that accounts for their special qualities.

Finally, in the area of objectives or performance measures on AF&PA members’ lands, the guidelines identified biological diversity, good wood utilization, and prudent use of chemicals as necessary objectives and performance measures.

Since 59 percent of the forest land in the United States is owned by nonindustrial landowners, it is important that we reach these landowners, both directly and through the loggers who harvest their timber. The guidelines ensure that each landowner who sells timber directly to a member company receives information from the member on the advantages of BMPs (Best Management Practices) and reforestation. The guidelines require logger training and education programs to have been in place by January 1, 1996, and that progress be reported annually.

Guideline Eleven commits AF&PA members to an annual report that identifies collective membership performance in implementing the principles and guidelines. This is another area where AF&PA is involving third parties, namely, an independent expert review panel on the SFI annual report. The National Forum of Loggers, Landowners, and Member Companies is a very important component of public and forestry community participation, which is Implementation Guideline Twelve. The suggestion for a National Forum was

made by the loggers as a means to ensure that landowners and loggers can communicate with industry leaders.

To demonstrate that AF&PA is serious about the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, the organization made compliance with the principles and guidelines mandatory for continued AF&PA membership. AF&PA's member companies are required to file an annual progress report to AF&PA regarding compliance with the principles and guidelines. During the first reporting year (January 1, 1995, to January 1, 1996), 17 companies were suspended from membership in AF&PA for failure to confirm their participation in the SFI. Again, this demonstrates that AF&PA is serious about compliance with the SFI.

INDUSTRY PROGRESS

Now that the principles and guidelines of SFI have been reviewed, it is time to report on the progress that has been made since SFI was implemented 2 years ago.

Recently, the second annual progress report on the SFI was published. Some highlights of the report include:

1. A drop in the average size of clear cuts from 66 acres in 1995 to 61 acres in 1996 (remember that the maximum average under the SFI guidelines is 120 acres). Thinning and salvage harvests account for half of the total acreage that the companies harvested whereas clear cuts accounted for slightly less than 40 percent, and shelterwood and selective harvesting made up the balance.
2. Some 2.4 million acres have been reforested during the past 2 years. Member companies on average completed planting or seeding within 1 year after the final harvest on 60 percent of the acres harvested, compared with 57 percent in 1995. Within 2 years of harvesting, reforestation was completed on 97 percent of the acres in 1996 (same for 1995).
3. AF&PA member companies spent \$62 million on research last year alone, bringing the 2-year research expenditures to more than \$114 million. This research was related to forestry wildlife and the environment. An example is an amphibian survey that has been underway since 1995 on industrial forest lands in the Southeastern Coastal Plain (Georgia, Florida, and Alabama). Scientists are surveying these forest lands for new populations of flatwoods salamanders, striped newts, and gopher frogs. All of these species are being reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding their population status.
4. To ensure that AF&PA member companies are aggressively promoting sustainable forestry on lands other than their own, hundreds of workshops nationwide have been conducted to train thousands of loggers. About 11,000 loggers have completed training and some 37,000 have received partial training during the past 2 years.
5. Here in Arkansas we are particularly proud of our logger-training program, where over 100 workshops have been held, and more than 5,000 participants have attended the workshops including loggers, procurement foresters, and others. Four modules or courses are offered including Timber Harvesting and Transportation Safety, Best

Management Practices, Business Management, and Environmental Considerations. Arkansas' logger education and training program is currently the number one logger-training program in the country in numbers of loggers trained. To date, about 90 loggers have completed all four modules of the program. This is impressive in light of the fact that the program is just over 1 1/2 years old.

6. Almost 41,000 private nonindustrial landowners received information from foresters and loggers on economically and ecologically sound sustainable forestry. This compares to 35,500 in 1995. Here again, Arkansas is taking an active lead in the area of landowner education, having conducted several landowner information clinics and having published a landowner education brochure entitled *Your Land Your Options: What You Should Know Before You Sell Your Timber*. In addition, AFA has established a toll-free number (1-888-MY TREES) through which landowners can request information on how to get on-the-ground assistance, as well as information on planting trees, wildlife and forest management, use of Best Management Practices, the Tree Farm Program, and other items.

Since about 60 percent of the nation's forest land is owned by some 9 million nonindustrial private landowners, it is critical that we take measures to ensure that sustainable forestry is practiced on these lands as well as industry lands. This is Arkansas Forestry Association's primary role in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and we are committed to reaching loggers and individual landowners with the sustainable forestry message through our educational efforts.

CONCLUSION

Although the Sustainable Forestry Initiative is still in its infancy, the forest industry has made tremendous progress in the 2 short years that the SFI has been in existence. I'll leave the final words to the AF&PA independent panel of forestry experts—public and private officials and academicians—who each year review industry's compliance with the SFI and make their evaluation public. Here's what the panel said about the progress to date: There is a significant change underway in America's forests—a change for the better—in the forest products industry, through the SFI, as a leader of that change. This change will not occur overnight, but through incremental progress, it will occur.

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