

The American Forest Foundation is delivering on the promise of sustainability assurance solutions

By **Sarah Crow**, Senior Director, Sustainability Assurance, American Forest Foundation

Increasingly, governments, brand owners, consumers, and communities are requiring a higher level of assurance and more transparency when it comes to sustainability practices. This assurance and transparency must be backed by measurement and verification that wood harvesting is sustainable and low risk and, where family forest owners are involved, they are supported. Where risk exists, mitigation measures must be taken and verified.

The American Forest Foundation's (AFF) suite of sustainability assurance solutions provides customized, credible, and proven sustainability solution options for any entity in the global forest products supply chain sourcing from the US. Whether it is assessing and managing risks in the wood supply, navigating complex requirements, or implementing mitigation, AFF has the expertise and capacity to deliver the transparency and credibility required to compete in today's marketplace.

Building a transparent and verified narrative of sustainability

Many of those looking for assurance are also interested in driving positive outcomes in areas like biodiversity protection, high conservation value forests, and carbon storage. AFF's sustainability solutions tailor these on-the-ground activities to a company's unique sourcing profile and allow



Figure 1. AFF, through its sustainability assurance solutions, offers opportunities for companies to drive positive and measurable conservation outcomes such as biodiversity, high conservation value forests, and carbon storage.

for tracking conservation impact and measuring risk mitigation on the ground. This data can be used to tell compelling stories about the benefits of sustainable forestry as well as to illustrate individual initiatives that a company is taking.

Sustainability assurance solution services tailored to meet standards, regulations, and policies

AFF sustainability assurance solutions are tailored for company-specific needs. These services may be used in the context of existing voluntary sustainability assurance systems, such as

the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Controlled Wood Standard, regulatory requirements, or individual corporate sustainability policies and goals.

Risk assessment—This service uses both publicly available and proprietary datasets, in tandem with AFF's expertise. We identify and evaluate risks in a supply area against an established sustainability framework or set of indicators, voluntary standards, or regulatory requirements. AFF can also support developing sourcing goals and policies relative to existing risks.

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Risk mitigation identification and threshold establishment—This customizable service leverages AFF’s unique expertise to help interpret risk assessment results. This includes determining what kinds of mitigation are needed, where, and how much is required in order to appropriately address market requirements based on a company’s specific circumstances and sourcing profile.

Risk mitigation or conservation impact—This service provides measurable, verifiable mitigation, or conservation action on the ground around critical issues like forest conversion, high conservation values, biodiversity, and watershed quality.

Measurement, monitoring, and verification—This service provides reporting or receipts of on-the-ground conservation action and effectiveness for customers to prove or demonstrate they have met market requirements or their own goals.

Dutch Biomass Certification Foundation awards AFF multi-year support

In March, the Dutch Biomass Certification Foundation (DBC) initiated a three-year funding program to support AFF to develop a comprehensive sustainability assurance program. The project includes two concurrent and complementary workstreams and meets DBC’s objective to promote compliance SDE+, the Dutch biomass sustainability requirements, among small forest owners in North America.

First, the Dutch funding will contribute to further building tools and technologies to engage small forest landowners in sustainable forest management and grow certification, including the expansion of the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) certification among small forest owners (defined as less than 500 hectares or 1,200 acres) in the US South. ATFS is approved as compliant with elements of SDE+ that apply to family forests.

Second, AFF will use DBC’s investment to spearhead a longer-term project to develop a risk-based approach (RBA) to sustainability risk assessment, verification, and mitigation, following the Dutch Verification Protocol. According to the protocol, a biomass producer can demonstrate compliance with applicable SDE+ sustainability requirements using an RBA for small forest lands by following the procedures through the end of 2022.

AFF’s Core Strategy:

Mobilizing Landowners On the Journey To Impact Clean Water, Wildlife, and Sustainable Wood Supplies

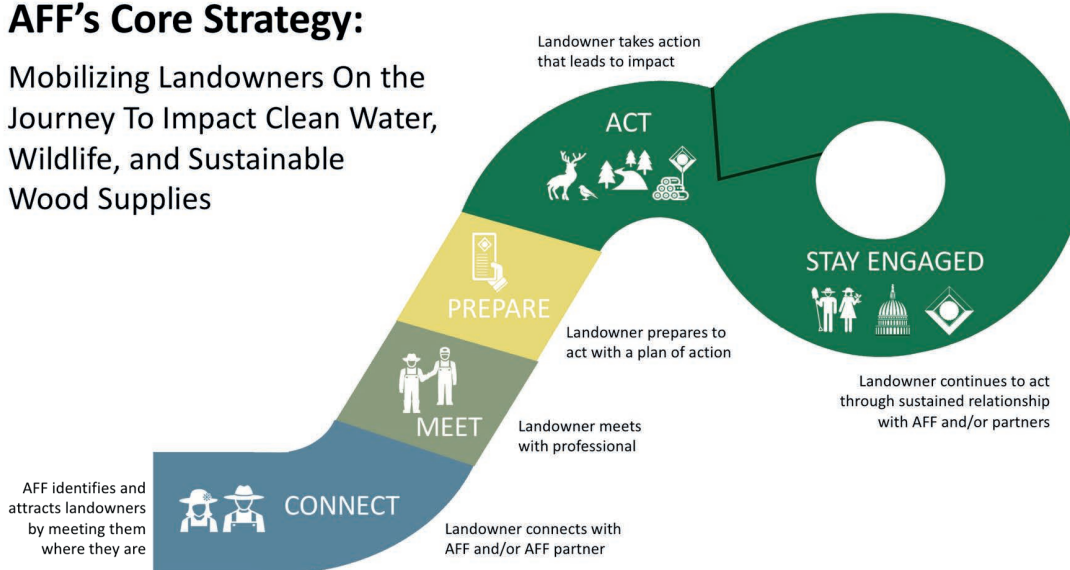


Figure 2. Mobilizing landowners on the journey to impact clean water, wildlife and sustainable wood supplies.

AFF is the partner of choice for family forest owners

AFF works with family forest owners and elected officials to promote forest stewardship and protect the health and future of forests. AFF works especially closely with the 72,500 members of the [American Tree Farm System®](#), who sustainably manage more than 18.5 million hectares (20.5 million acres) of forests.

The American Tree Farm System is the oldest and largest family forestland sustainability program in the US. It offers tailored technical support and certification to engage family landowners and help them overcome barriers. This valuable program addresses a wide range of key issues linked to forest health, from enhancing biodiversity to protecting species at risk, and practising reforestation.

AFF solutions for FSC-specified risk mitigation

As part of its national risk assessment (NRA) published in 2018, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) identified several areas of specified risk in the US Southeast. Under the Controlled Wood Standard, FSC-certified companies that buy roundwood must either avoid regions of risk or implement mitigation to protect the identified high conservation values (HCVs). To effectively mitigate these specified risks, AFF built a robust and trusted program to implement, monitor, and verify conservation practices that serve as measurable and verifiable mitigation, satisfying FSC's controlled-wood requirements.

Family landowners, who supply more than 50% of the wood flowing into supply chains, are the most significant source of controlled wood. Drawing on AFF's distinctive expertise and on-the-ground infrastructure, in areas where specified risks and sourcing basins overlap, AFF is engaging and cultivating landowners to implement specific activities that protect, enhance or restore important HCVs like native longleaf pine and late-successional bottomland hardwoods across the Southeast US.

To meet FSC's requirements, AFF's program draws on established behavior change research and focuses on the steps a landowner takes in their "journey" from being unengaged with regard to sustainable forest management to consistently and sustainably stewarding their land. This approach meets landowners where they are and provides the support they need to take specific actions on the ground that directly benefit the conservation outcomes needed to mitigate risk.

In contrast to imprecise or fuzzy metrics, AFF's mitigation is clearly and effectively measured in acres restored protected, enhanced, or restored. This provides a credible, demonstrable, and definitive measure for a company's impact and influence on these important sustainability metrics.

AFF risk-mitigation project example: native longleaf pine systems

This mitigation project requires a three-year commitment to mitigate specific risks in a way that moves landowners through the AFF Landowner Journey to desired management action on the ground. Examples of landowner activities on the ground to restore longleaf pine may include prescribed burning, planting of longleaf pine, invasive species, and competing vegetation control.

Year 1

Connect with landowners and recruit them to join the program. Landowners agree to conduct forest management practices for the longleaf forest ecosystem.

Year 2

Foresters meet with landowners, make recommendations for activities related to longleaf restoration on their land, and landowners prepare to complete those activities.

Year 3

Landowners act on implementing activities that lead to longleaf stands that are maintained, restored, and established.



Figure 3. The American Tree Farm System is the oldest and largest family forestland sustainability program in the US.

With our deep connections to family forest owners, AFF is uniquely suited to assess and monitor sustainability, as well as determine mitigation needs and develop, implement, and verify mitigation practices on the ground. We leverage our deep expertise and significant forest and conservation sector network on behalf of entities looking for sustainability assurances.

Through its vast, nationwide network of family forest owners, forest professionals, conservation organizations, and public agencies, AFF provides measurable and credible mitigation that can deliver change on the ground. This provides forest product companies, conservation organizations, regulatory authorities, and companies that use forest products, a higher assurance level, and the opportunity for credible conservation impact.

AFF WoodsCamp engages landowners in targeted areas to support risk mitigation and other needs

AFF's [WoodsCamp](#) is a free online

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tool designed to help family forest owners connect with programs, services, and professionals that help them care for their land. WoodsCamp also efficiently pinpoints forest owners who might be a good fit for [conservation projects](#), certification, or other opportunities in sourcing regions.

Landscape Management Plan

A [Landscape Management Plan](#) is a forest management plan written to support family landowners across an entire region. This significantly reduces costs and streamlines the forest stewardship and certification process by reducing the need for a traditional forest management plan to be written for each landowner.

Collaborating with partners to engage more landowners in forest stewardship

AFF is working with [national and regional partners](#) alike to bring together the right resources and expertise, remove barriers, and engage more landowners in active stewardship.

AFF is the logical choice for sustainability assurance solutions

At the American Forest Foundation, we see firsthand how deeply family forest owners care about the land. We also see how they work and manage their forests not just in their own interests, but for the greater good of our shared environment and future generations.

AFF's suite of sustainability assurance solutions offer a proven pathway to integrate these families into a sustainable global forestry supply chain. Contact us to learn more about why AFF is your logical choice for sustainability assurance solutions.

For more information on AFF's sustainability assurance solutions, please contact Sarah Crow, Senior Director, Sustainability Assurance, at scrow@forestfoundation.org or 202-765-3440.

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About the American Forest Foundation

AFF works on-the-ground with families, partners, and elected officials to promote forest stewardship and protect America's forest heritage. A commitment to the next generation unites our nationwide network of forest owners working to keep our forests healthy and producing the clean water, biodiversity, and sustainable wood supplies that all Americans count on from forests.



American Forest Foundation

Family forest owners are key players in the US forest sector

Most US forests are privately owned, and of these, 95% of them are owned by families and individuals. In total, that's nearly 118 million hectares (290 million acres) of forestland, owned by 21 million family forest owners. AFF focuses on helping these private individuals ensure their forests continue to be productive for all the benefits Americans count on.

As the largest ownership group of forestland in America, forest stewardship by family forest owners is key to protecting the values that come from well-managed forests: clean water and air, wildlife habitat, wood products, and a place for outdoor recreation. The forestry sector also supports more than 1.3 million sustainable rural jobs in the US South.



Figure 4. AFF works alongside local, regional, and national partners to bring technical assistance and resources to family forest owners.