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South Carolina Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value

**An Assessment by the
SC Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee
In partnership with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Natural Heritage Program**

SUMMARY

In South Carolina, landowners and forestry professionals have a long record of conserving natural resources through sustainable management and providing a broad range of environmental, economic, and social benefits. This assessment of Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value was conducted to promote conservation of biodiversity and assist those in the wood supply chain with conservation of critically imperiled and imperiled species and communities in conformance with Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) 2022 Fiber Sourcing Standards.

Active Forest Management and Conservation

Modern forest management and forestry practices commonly promote environmental quality at multiple scales. Forestry activities in compliance with South Carolina's Best Management Practices for Forestry (SC BMPs) will meet state and federal rules for protecting clean water, wetland function, and endangered species. These guidelines are designed to prevent erosion and sedimentation, and in turn, ensure clean and healthy waterways upon which many species depend. SC BMPs address all aspects of forestry activities including riparian buffer zones, stream crossings, road construction, harvesting, reforestation, chemical application, prescribed burning, and more. The overall SC BMP compliance rate on harvesting operations has consistently been above 90%. Adherence to BMPs supports conservation of many species that depend on aquatic and riparian habitats.

Active management of forestland includes the growing, managing, and harvesting of forest products. Healthy forest products markets help to reduce the loss of forest land by providing an economically viable opportunity for many landowners who would otherwise consider conversion of forest land to other uses. With development threatening 23 million acres of southern forests (Southern Forest Futures Report, USDA Forest Service), proactive steps to help landowners maintain forest use and keep land forested will be essential for natural resource conservation.

Some critically imperiled and imperiled species require active management to maintain habitat conditions. Some may require early successional habitat, frequent burning, vegetation management, or other activities common in managed forests. Control of invasive and exotic species, and restoration of habitat following natural disasters further contributes to biodiversity. Forest landowners have a broad spectrum of objectives and goals, management intensities, and acreages. This variety results in a wide range of forest ages, species diversity, stand sizes, and habitat types throughout the state.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standards

SFI Standards have become the fastest growing, highly trusted solution that can support a growing need for products from the forest, as the drive to reduce carbon pollution and waste intensifies. SFI is working to shape markets today and ensure that sustainably managed forests will continue to play a crucial role

in keeping the planet healthy. The SFI 2022 Fiber Sourcing Standard distinguishes SFI from all other forest certifications programs in that it governs how SFI-certified organizations procure fiber from non-certified forestland.

The SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard is purposefully designed to influence millions of additional landowners through promotion, education, training, and outreach. For sources originating from within the United States and Canada, SFI-certified organizations must comply with all applicable laws and also broaden the practice of responsible forestry. This is accomplished in multiple ways, including addressing the conservation of biodiversity for Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value in harvests of purchased stumpage, and utilizing the services of qualified logging professionals, certified logging professionals, and resource professionals. SFI-certified organizations must also invest in forestry research, science and technology, and develop verifiable monitoring systems to evaluate the use of best management practices across the wood and fiber supply area.

This assessment is intended as a resource for SFI certified organizations to address the SFI 2022 Fiber Sourcing Requirement 1.2.1 for Biodiversity in Fiber Sourcing, Promotion and conservation of Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value:

Certified Organizations shall conduct an assessment, individually and/or through cooperative efforts involving SFI Implementation Committees, of Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, defined as critically imperiled and imperiled species and ecological communities, within their wood and fiber supply area(s) and make the summary of the assessment available to wood producers.

Methods and Definitions

This assessment was completed by the South Carolina Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee, in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program. All species data is provided by SCDNR, and assessments of potential impacts of forestry activities were made by SCDNR specialists for those particular species. Data on ecological communities is publicly available online from NatureServe Explorer.

Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value are defined as forests with critically imperiled (G1) and imperiled (G2) species and ecological communities.

- Critically imperiled: A plant or animal or community, often referred to as G1, that is globally extremely rare or, because of some factor(s), especially vulnerable to extinction. Typically, five or fewer occurrences or populations remain, or very few individuals (<1,000), acres (<2,000 acres or 809 hectares), or linear miles (<10 miles or 16 kilometers) exist (Further information can be found in Section 7 of the SFI 2022 Standards and Rules).
- Imperiled: A plant or animal or community, often referred to as G2, that is globally rare or, because of some factor(s), is very vulnerable to extinction or elimination. Typically, six to 20 occurrences, or few remaining individuals (1,000 to 3,000), or acres (2,000 to 10,000 acres or 809 to 4,047 hectares), or linear miles (10 to 50 miles or 16 to 80.5 kilometers) exist.

Appendices A and B with species and ecological community data in Microsoft Excel format are available at <https://www.scforestry.org/sfi-forestry-programs.htm>

Appendix A

Appendix A includes 199 G1 and G2 species which occur in South Carolina, and an additional 62 species which are state or federally protected but not G1 or G2 ranked.

The table includes scientific and common names, global (G) and state (S) ranking, state and federal listing status, counties of potential occurrence, and links to more detailed information through the SC State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and NatureServe. Also included is the priority status from the State Wildlife Action Plan. An assessment of whether each species could potentially be impacted by forestry activities is provided by SC Department of Natural Resources.

Appendix B

Appendix B shows available data from NatureServe Explorer for G1 and G2 ranked ecological communities that occur in South Carolina. This listing includes 127 ecological associations organized within 15 ecological groups.

Additional Information

For the most up-to-date information, please consult the SC Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage program at <https://schtportal.dnr.sc.gov/portal/apps/sites/#/natural-heritage-program>, or visit NatureServe at <https://www.natureserve.org/>.

The State Wildlife Action Plan provides a comprehensive reference to address those species that the state deemed as having the greatest conservation need. The State Wildlife Action Plan is available on the SC DNR website at <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/swap/index.html>