

Components to be considered in a *program* could include mapping and identifying watershed features that contribute to water quantity (e.g., lakes, streams, *riparian areas, wetlands, vernal pools*, beaver ponds), *practices* that maintain natural drainage patterns and *minimize* adverse effects of roads and *skid trails* on water yield, harvesting *practices* that *minimize* ground disturbance and retain non-merchantable timber or other vegetative cover, *practices* that *protect* and maintain soil *productivity* and *soil health*, and prompt *reforestation* where consistent with other *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* Objectives. The *program* can also include meeting or exceeding applicable *best management practices* for protecting and maintaining water quality in ways that contribute to protecting and maintaining water quantity.

Objective 4. *Conservation* of *Biological Diversity*

Conservation* of *Biological Diversity

The intent of Performance Measure 4.1 is to ensure that *Certified Organizations* use the *best scientific information* available to inform their action at multiple scales, for the purposes of *biodiversity conservation*. The individual indicators specify how this should be executed.

Several *indicators* suggest the use of *best scientific information.* This is intended to drive the utilization of credible sources to determine *landscape*-level priorities, facilitate assessments, and ultimately maximize the potential of the managed area to contribute to *landscape* level *biodiversity,* within the context of management objectives. Credible sources of science information include (but are not limited to) The Nature Conservancy ecoregional plans, NatureServe *biodiversity* metrics, and others.

Assessments conducted under Performance Measure 4.1, or any assessments consulted to meet the requirements of Performance Measure 4.1, should inform efforts to maintain or advance *biodiversity conservatio*n at multiple scales, including *landscape* scale. Indicator 4.1.3 references documentation of *biodiversity* at *landscape* and ownership levels, and incorporation of such documentation "to ensure the contribution of the managed area to the diversity of conditions that promote *biodiversity.*" Such documentation is increasingly available through remote sensing sources, NatureServe *biodiversity* metrics (a project of SFI), The Nature Conservancy, Forest Inventory and Analysis (U.S.), and/or Canadian Forest Service. It may be possible for a *Certified Organization* to develop its own documentation of diversity at this scale, though credibility is likely enhanced by participating in a broader collaborative process.

To achieve the intended goal of contributing to *biodiversity conservation* at *landscape* scale, managers will need to evaluate the required "documentation of *biodiversity* at *landscape* and ownership/tenure levels" in the context of their own management strategies and objectives, to determine whether there may be opportunities to fill gaps in their *biodiversity* outcomes, or to provide certain forest composition, age-classes, or conditions that may be lacking on the *landscape.* Indicator 4.1.4 cites "planning and priority-setting efforts" to help managers understand *conservation* priorities that have been independently and scientifically established, and "incorporating results" into their own planning. Indicator 4.1.4 provides a list of credible sources to aid in that process — these sources often intersect or dovetail with the *landscape biodiversity* assessments noted above.

One example of a credible prioritization effort at large scale is the "Forests for the Birds" project, collaboratively developed by SFI, the American Bird Conservancy, and multiple *Certified Organizations.* The results of this project should be considered appropriate to meet the intent of Indicator 4.1.4 by informing management strategies for the *conservation* of wide-ranging bird species.

A credible analysis of the contributions of a given managed area to *biodiversity conservation* may contain certain commonly understood forest metrics, such as stand age and size-class distribution. Certain imperiled species, such as the Red Cockaded Woodpecker (in the U.S. South), may have life cycle requirements related to tree size and distribution — in this case, larger diameter trees. Analysis and planning therefore could include an assessment of the range maps or *habitat* prediction models of species that may be dependent on such conditions. In this way, managers can develop strategies to enhance *habitat* for species with known requirements, and potentially elevate the contribution of their managed area toward *landscape* goals within the context of overall management objectives, using well-established metrics beyond just the *forest cover type.*

An advantage of using credible planning and priority-setting frameworks, such as those noted above, is that multiple elements and scales of *biodiversity* analysis are already inherent to these constructs. For example, the NatureServe *biodiversity* metrics approach (a project in collaboration with SFI and multiple *Certified Organizations*) includes metrics relative to "*landscape* condition" and "species assemblages," effectively addressing "connectivity" and "natural communities" respectively. The metric of "*Landscape* Spatial Pattern" effectively speaks to both "fragmentation" and "connectivity" as inherent attributes of *biodiversity* at multiple scales.

Analyses of *landscape* conditions and opportunities may be conducted collaboratively by multiple *Certified Organizations*, or in partnership with *SFI Implementation Committees* that operate across multiple certified ownerships. Forest managers can use these analyses to implement more efficient strategies for addressing *landscape* scale *conservation* or *biodiversity* assessments, improving outcomes while remaining true to the management objectives of individual *Certified Organizations.*



Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value

Objective 4 of the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* extends the *biodiversity* requirements to *Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value* (FECV).

Indicator 4.2.2 requires that *Certified Organizations* with FECVs have a *program* to locate and *protect* known sites of flora and fauna associated with viable occurrences of *critically imperiled* and *imperiled* species and communities. An imperiled or critically imperiled plant, animal, or community is one that is globally rare or vulnerable to extinction. *Protection* plans may be developed independently by *Certified Organization* management, or in cooperation with other *stakeholders,* and may include the use of easements, *conservation* land sales, exchanges, or other *conservation* strategies.

Definition of *Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value*: *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.

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 4047 hectares), or linear miles (10 to 50 miles or 16 to 80.5 kilometers) exist.

In the United States and Canada, *Certified Organizations* can use the NatureServe database to identify species and communities for *protection*. Learn more about NatureServe Conservation Status Assessments.

NatureServe Resources for Global and Occurrence Ranks

Identification and *protection* of *critically imperiled* and *imperiled* species and communities is a stepwise process. First, NatureServe determines the global rank, which reflects the rarity/imperilment of the species or community. Then it assesses the estimated viability, or probability of persistence, of particular occurrences of *critically imperiled* and *imperiled* species and communities. A viable species or community is one that is of sufficient quality to likely survive *long-term*. Clearly, little *conservation* benefit is gained unless protected occurrences have a good likelihood of *long-term* survival.

NatureServe inventory and *conservation* activities focus on locating, maintaining records on, and working with partners to conserve viable occurrences of *conservation* elements. NatureServe and its network of natural heritage programs rank the viability of element occurrences (either community or species) using standard methodologies to yield an element occurrence ranking. They develop and maintain a standard set of element occurrence rank specifications for each element, and then apply them against individual occurrences of the element.

The basic element occurrence ranks are:

- A: Excellent estimated viability
- B: Good estimated viability
- C: Fair estimated viability
- D: Poor estimated viability
- E: Verified extant (viability not assessed)
- H: Historical
- F: Failed to find
- X: Extirpated

The *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* requires that *Certified Organizations* have a "*program* to address *conservation* of *ecologically important* species and *natural communities*, including those that are locally rare."

Under the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard*, occurrences of *critically imperiled* and *imperiled* species and communities ranked as A and B are to be protected. C-ranked occurrences should be reviewed and addressed on a case-by-case basis. If they have greater potential to be viable (C+), they should be protected. If they have less potential for viability (C-), they should be managed at the *Certified Organization's* discretion.

Element occurrences with poor estimated viability (D) would not be protected under the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard*. A D rank might result because the acreage of a community or the population of a species is too small, the quality is very low, and/or the ecological processes required to maintain the occurrence are fundamentally altered and un-restorable. E-ranked occurrences (viability not assessed) should be presumed viable and protected until they are assessed, and then protected or not accordingly. Occurrences ranked F are not covered under the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* since only known occurrences are included. Historical (H) and extirpated (X) occurrences are clearly nonviable, and no *protection* activity is warranted.

In determining the viability and potential to *protect* occurrences, *Certified Organizations* are encouraged to seek additional information on occurrence ranking from NatureServe and/or collaborate with qualified *conservation* experts.



Occurrence Quality

The following material provides additional information on the standards and methodologies employed by NatureServe in determining the quality or viability of occurrences.

For an ecological assessment, scientists and managers want to know if each occurrence is of sufficient quality, or feasibly restorable, before including it in management planning. With adequate information, ecologists evaluate and rate the quality of element occurrences using criteria grouped into three categories: size, condition, and *landscape* context. Characterizing these qualities provides the basis for assessing the stresses that occurrences may be experiencing (such as degradation or impairment) at a given site.

To assess the quality of element occurrences, ecologists must identify the key ecological factors (ecological processes, population abundance, disturbance regimes, composition, structure, etc.) that support them. Once these are identified, it is possible to describe their expected ranges of variation and assess whether the on-site factors are within those ranges or require significant effort to be maintained or restored to their desired status.

Key ecological factors vary by element type, but all are grouped into the three categories of size, condition, and *landscape* context. Each category is reviewed and ranked for each occurrence as A (excellent), B (good), C (fair), and D (poor). The break between C and D establishes a minimum quality threshold for occurrences. Occurrences ranked D are typically presumed to be beyond practical consideration for ecological restoration. In subsequent management planning, these ranks and underlying criteria aid in focusing *conservation* activities and measuring progress toward local *conservation* objectives.

The categories are defined as follows:

Size is a measure of the area or abundance of a *conservation* element's occurrence. It may simply be a measure of the occurrence's patch size or geographic coverage, or it may include an estimate of sub-population size or density. One aspect, the minimum dynamic area, is the area needed to ensure the survival or re-establishment of a population or community after a natural disturbance.

Condition is an integrated measure of the composition, structure, and biotic interactions that characterize an occurrence. This includes factors such as reproduction, age structure, biological composition (e.g., presence of *native* versus *invasive species*; presence of characteristic patch types), physical and spatial structure (e.g., canopy, understory, and groundcover; spatial distribution and juxtaposition of patch types or seral stages in an ecological system), and biotic interactions that directly involve the element (e.g., competition and disease).

***Landscape* context** measures two factors: the dominant environmental regimes and processes that establish and maintain the element occurrence, and connectivity. Dominant environmental regimes include hydrologic and water chemistry regimes (surface and groundwater), geomorphic processes, climatic regimes (temperature and precipitation), fire regimes, and natural disturbances. Connectivity includes such factors as species elements having access to *habitats* and resources needed for lifecycle completion, the fragmentation of ecological communities and systems, and the ability of any element occurrence to respond to environmental change through dispersal, migration, or re-colonization. The criteria for ranking ecological communities vary by type. In many instances, criteria are developed for ecological systems, then modified (mostly with size attributes) for application to occurrences of individual rare plant associations that may occur among the more broadly defined ecological system.

Guidance on Incorporation of Ecosystems in the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard*

In the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard*, the term "ecosystem" or "ecosystems" is referenced in several different *objectives* and *indicators*, yet guidance on how the concept of ecosystems should be integrated into *sustainable forestry* is lacking. Ecosystems represent the integration of biotic (e.g., plants, animals) and abiotic (e.g., soils, water) elements of the environment. In the context of *sustainable forestry*, key components of ecosystems include: 1) forest composition; 2) forest structure; 3) connectivity across *landscapes*; and 4) how ecological processes like competition, nutrient cycling, or herbivory influence the sustainability of forest ecosystems.

Sustainable forestry is based on applying management at multiple scales, with most *Certified Organizations* operating at *stand* to *landscape* scales. The guidance provided is not a template for ecosystem management – it relies on the currently accepted *SFI* definitions and approved requirements of the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* to demonstrate how ecosystems are an integral component of sustainable forest management. However, the guidance is consistent with the four key components of ecosystems listed above.

Integrating the Biotic and Abiotic Elements of the Environment

The foundation for *landscape* scale mapping and planning that incorporates ecosystems into sustainable forest management includes a combination of *forest cover type* and soils maps, supplemented by non-timber information like *non-forested wetlands* and *Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value*. *Certified Organizations* are required to have a *land classification* system (Indicator 1.1.1c), soils inventory and maps, where available (Indicator 1.1.1e, Performance Measure 2.3), up-to-date maps or a *geographic information system* (Indicator 1.1.1g), and information on non-timber resources (Indicator 1.1.1i, Performance Measure 3.2, Indicators 4.1.6, 4.2.2, 4.2.3) as part of their forest planning processes. *Certified Organizations* also are required to integrate biotic and abiotic elements in forest conversion decisions (Indicator 1.2.2), forest regeneration (Performance Measure 2.1), and during implementation of forest *protection* activities (Performance Measure 2.4). Additionally, the *conservation* of *biological diversity* inherently integrates the biotic and abiotic elements of the environment through the accounting of *wildlife habitats* (Indicators 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.5), ecological community types (Indicators 4.1.1, 4.2.2, Performance Measure 4.3), *biological diversity* (Indicator 4.1.1), and *Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value* (Performance Measures 4.2 and 4.4).



Forest Composition

Forest composition is closely linked to abiotic factors like soil, microclimate, and moisture availability. Forest managers tend to think of composition at three levels: 1) *forest health* and *productivity* (e.g., high growth rates, drought resistant, disease resistance) of planting or regeneration stock (the "genetic" level"); 2) *stand* level considerations, including tree species composition, management of competing vegetation, and structural retention practices (Indicator 4.1.2); and 3) *landscape* scale considerations (across ownerships or across multiple ownerships – Indicators 4.1.3, 4.1.4) in terms of *forest cover types* or other land cover classes.

Forest Structure

Within forest *stands*, structure refers to several different characteristics, including the physical arrangement of trees, snags, and down woody debris. Within a *stand* and depending on the situation, *Certified Organizations* have criteria for the desired forest composition (Performance Measure 2.1), tree stocking (Indicator 2.1.2), size distributions (Indicators 1.1.1a, 1.1.1h), retention of *habitat* elements (Indicator 4.1.2), *protection* of *ecologically important sites* (Indicators 4.1.5, 4.1.6, Performance Measure 4.3), and p*rotection* of *special sites* (Objective 6). At larger scales, such as with multiple forest *stands,* forest structure is often based on differences in size/density or stand age (in even-aged management systems), as portrayed by a *land classification* system (Indicator 4.1.3). This *land classification* system often includes information on *riparian zones* and *wetlands* (Performance Measure 3.2). At even larger scales (e.g., *landscapes*), forest managers tend to portray the diversity of size, density, or age classes in management blocks, across entire ownerships, or in some instances across multiple ownerships (Indicator 4.1.3).

Connectivity

Integration of connectivity into sustainable forest management occurs through *protection* of *wetlands* and *riparian zones* (Performance Measure 3.2), provision of diverse *forest cover types* and structures (Indicators 4.1.2, 4.1.3), and *protection* of other *ecologically important* sites (Indicators 4.1.5, 4.1.6, Performance Measure 4.3). Connectivity can be assessed at multiple scales and can be thought of as "structural" or "functional." Structural connectivity refers to *forest cover types* or *habitats* that are geographically adjacent , facilitating the ability of genes and species to move through a managed forest *landscape.* Functional connectivity refers to *forest cover types* or *habitats* that are not physically adjacent but are arranged in a *landscape* such that genes and species can move. The *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* contains *indicators* that both directly and indirectly influence connectivity via requirements for prompt forest *reforestation* (Performance Measure 2.1), limitations on clearcut harvest area sizes (Indicator 5.2.1), limitations on forest conversion (Performance Measures 1.2, 1.3), the *protection* of *wetlands* and *riparian zones* (Performance Measure 3.2), non-forested areas, and other ecological sites (Indicators 4.1.5, 4.1.6, Performance Measure 4.3), and through aesthetic considerations (Objective 5). In certain situations, some *Certified Organizations* may explicitly identify species of *conservation* concern that warrant direct assessments of connectivity (Performance Measure 4.2).

Ecological Processes

Ecological processes help sustain forest composition, structure, and connectivity. The *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* explicitly recognizes numerous important ecological processes that are important to *sustainable forestry,* including *reforestation* (Performance Measure 2.1), *forest health* (Performance Measure 2.4), hydrological function (Objective 3), and consideration of the role of natural disturbances (Indicator 4.1.8). In many certified forest *landscapes*, the ecological processes that sustain composition and structure are influenced by active or passive management activities including harvesting, *reforestation*, and maintenance or enhancement of *biological diversity* and *wildlife habitat.*

Wildlife Habitat* Diversity, *Ecologically Important Species*, and *Invasive Species

Objective 4 in the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* includes *performance measures* and *indicators* for *conservation* of *biological diversity*. Additional information is provided here for *wildlife habitat* diversity and *invasive species.*

***Wildlife Habitat* Diversity**

Performance Measure 4.1 in the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* includes *programs* to incorporate *conservation* of *biological diversity* and recognize the value of a diversity of *habitats* to support *aquatic species* and *wildlife*. Early successional forest stages, for example, are particularly lacking in certain regions of the U.S. and Canada, and managing for them can aid in preventing the decline of species dependent on them (e.g., ruffed grouse). Historically, fires and other natural disturbances created forest openings and the types of *habitat* needed by these early succession forest dependent species. As forests across the *landscape* mature, this type of *habitat* declines in abundance. However, it can easily be created by the proper selection of harvesting methods, including clearcutting and the use of prescribed fire.

***Ecologically Important* Species**

Indicator 4.1.5 requires a *program* to address *conservation* of *ecologically important* species and *natural communities.* Such *ecologically important* species or communities could include those that are locally rare in the area of operation, at the discretion of the *Certified Organization.* "Locally rare" is a term intended to give managers flexibility in interpretation, though managers are encouraged to consult objective sources (such as NatureServe G and S rank systems) to achieve consistent application of the concept. Specifically, "locally rare" could include species with a high "S-Rank," indicating relative rarity within that jurisdictional area (e.g., state or province), or it could mean species that are at the fringes of their range, and thus relatively uncommon to that locality.

The intent of Indicator 4.1.5 is for *Certified Organizations* to; (1) evaluate *conservation* opportunities relative to species or communities that are not officially designated for *protection* by state, provincial, or federal law, or ranked G1 or G2 (and thus addressed through *Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value*);



(2) identify *ecologically important* species for management attention; and (3) incorporate *conservation* actions for the selected species into management.

The term "*ecologically important* species" replaces the former term "viable occurrences of significant species of concern." *Ecologically important* is a defined term, which can be applied to either species or *natural communities* (which is also now a defined term).

The intent is for *conservation* to occur on *Certified Organization* lands. Although *Certified Organizations* are not required to do surveys to determine known occurrences, they should refer to available sources to identify the presence of *ecologically important* species or *natural communities. Certified Organizations* should look to the definition of *ecologically important* to help determine which species or *natural communities* should be considered under this indicator, in addition to considering their rarity, regional importance, and sensitivity to, or reliance upon, forest management activities. Resources for determining rarity may include NatureServe G or S ranks, the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, and federal, provincial, or state lists. Resources for determining regional importance may include The Nature Conservancy ecoregional plans, State Wildlife Action Plans, or other credible *conservation* plans. Information regarding known occurrences (i.e., presence) can be drawn from NatureServe, state/provincial natural resource agencies, Conservation Data Centers, or other regional mapping efforts or assessments.

It should be noted that *non-forested wetlands*, bogs, fens, marshes, and *vernal pools* (cited for identification and *protection* in Indicator 4.1.6) are characterized by distinct *natural communities* and can thus be identified using the methods and sources noted above.

Ecologically important species or *natural communities* could include species that that are ranked G3 or S1-S3 by NatureServe, at the discretion of the forest manager, and may be based on potential opportunities for the managed area to aid in the recovery or perpetuation of that species (note that G1-G2 species are already afforded *protection* by definition and related requirements under *Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value*). For example, the Gopher tortoise (Goperhus polyphemus), ranked G3, is considered an *ecologically important* species across much of its range. Many forest managers in the Gopher tortoise's range in the U.S. South include specific attention to the needs of that species in management planning.

Lists of "special concern species," "rare species," "species of greatest conservation need," and other similarly described lists have been published by state, provincial, and federal agencies, and others. This indicator is not intended to imply that any particular species on such lists should require management or *protection*, but that such lists should serve as a resource for the identification of *ecologically important* species or *natural communities*.

Ensuring that *programs* are in place for *ecologically important* species and *natural communities* provides forest managers with opportunities to address vulnerable, and locally rare, species in multiple ways. *Certified Organizations* are encouraged to work closely with non-governmental organizations, and state, provincial, and federal agencies, to advance *conservation* efforts collaboratively, and to mitigate the need for formal listing and regulatory protections under the Endangered Species Act (US), or the Species at Risk Act (Canada).

Invasive Species

Indicator 4.1.7 addresses *invasive species.*

Certified Organizations should become knowledgeable about *invasive species* within their area of operation. The expectation is that they will participate in cooperative efforts by others (e.g., government agencies or non-government environmental organizations) and work proactively within their own *programs* (e.g., through erosion control or seed selection for *wildlife* plots) to limit the introduction, impact, and spread of *invasive species.* Indicator 4.1.7 does not require a *Certified Organization* to eliminate *invasive species* on their land. In some places, *invasive species* are well established and eradication by the *Certified Organizations* is unrealistic.

Experts in this area believe the most effective means of addressing *invasive species* include:

- awareness building,
- monitoring,
- preventing new introductions, and
- eliminating new occurrences.

Certified Organizations should emphasize these as priorities in their *programs.* Forest practices that reduce the abundance of *invasive species* are preferred if they can be addressed within the context of the *Certified Organization's* overall management objectives.

Application of Research to Forest Management Decisions

The intent of Performance Measure 4.4 is to ensure that the substantial investment of *Certified Organizations* toward research is resulting in advancements in the application of practices toward *biodiversity conservation. Certified Organizations* can participate in advancing this knowledge in multiple ways. Performance Measure 4.4 suggests the need for acquiring *biodiversity*-related data through inventory processes, mapping, and interaction with natural heritage programs, data centers, or NatureServe. The implication is that *Certified Organizations* can both utilize such data and also participate in the advancement of general understanding, by contributing their own data to be widely shared, where feasible and appropriate. This could include, for example, sharing element occurrence data with NatureServe data centers to augment understanding of species' distribution. Participation could further include direct engagement in collaborative projects with non-governmental organizations, academic partners, and other *Certified Organizations* to increase



understanding and advance common practice. Modes of implementation could include (but are not limited to):

- collaborative research participation, and sharing results, through *SFI Implementation Committee* engagement;
- participation in research projects with external partners, through direct engagement, *SFI* Conservation Grant projects, multilateral partnerships, etc.; or
- sharing of proprietary research results, as appropriate, to support the elevation of forest practices across the sector.

Objective 8. Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights

Indigenous Title

SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard Performance Measure 8.1 requires that *Certified Organizations* recognize and respect *Indigenous Peoples'* rights. Additionally, Objective 11 requires *Certified Organizations* to comply with all applicable federal and provincial/state laws and regulations. This includes applicable laws and regulations pertaining to engagement, communication, and/or consultation with *Indigenous Peoples,* as they exist within the *Certified Organization's* province(s) or state(s) of operation and apply to the *Certified Organization's* private forest lands or public tenures.

Further to legal compliance under Objective 11, *Certified Organizations* should take additional measures to demonstrate recognition and respect for *Indigenous Peoples'* rights and traditional forest-related knowledge. Such measures are intended to help build a strong foundation for meaningful relationship-building and collaboration between *Certified Organizations* and *Indigenous Peoples*, whose rights may be affected by the *Certified Organization's* forest management activities.

Demonstrating an understanding and recognition of established frameworks of legal, customary, and traditional rights is one such measure that can further support relationship building processes. Within their Objective 8 *program* (Indicator 8.1.1), *Certified Organizations* should include actions that demonstrate their efforts to understand and recognize established frameworks of legal, customary, and traditional rights as they pertain to their private forest lands or public tenures which may be of importance to *Indigenous Peoples* whose rights may be affected by the *Certified Organization's* forest management activities.

Reference to resources such as (i) the UN Declaration on the Rights of *Indigenous Peoples*, (ii) federal, provincial, and state laws and regulations, and (iii) relevant treaties, agreements, or other constructive arrangements among governments and *Indigenous Peoples* can be used to demonstrate efforts to recognize such frameworks. In all cases, *Certified Organizations* shall respect the processes, laws, and direction received from relevant government agencies derived through the nation-to-nation relationships where the certification takes place.

Certified Organizations are encouraged to investigate opportunities to implement aspects of such frameworks that fall outside of those required under Objective 11 and are identified as being of importance to affected *Indigenous Peoples,* as a means of further supporting meaningful relationship-building processes.

Communications with Indigenous Communities

The *2022 Forest Management Standard* Indicator 8.2.1 d. requires a *Certified Organization* with public forest tenures to communicate with *Indigenous Peoples* whose rights may be affected by forest management *practices* through processes that respect their representative institutions and cultural preferences. At a minimum, *Certified Organizations* with forest management responsibilities on public lands must fulfill their legal requirements arising from relevant federal, state, or provincial regulations. Many jurisdictions have existing legislation or regulations that guide communications with *Indigenous Peoples* in the context of sustainable forest management. Areas of consideration and levels of prescriptiveness vary by jurisdiction but may include:

i. timing of communications;
ii. subject matter of communications;
iii. delivery method(s) of communications;
iv. timelines for responses to communications;
v. necessary recipients of communications; and,
vi. ability to modify prescribed communication procedures to accommodate *local* preferences.

Early, often, and ongoing communication with *Indigenous Peoples* can enhance relationship-building efforts, promote trust and collaboration, and enable all parties to proactively address potentially contentious issues before they become sources of disruptive conflict. As such, *Certified Organizations* are encouraged to implement communications programs that build on regulated requirements and are aimed at supporting open, respectful, and locally relevant communication with affected *Indigenous Peoples.*

Certified Organizations are encouraged to identify communications protocols that have been previously developed and endorsed by affected Indigenous communities and integrate them into their broader communications programs. These protocols can often be obtained by checking a nation, tribe, or community's website; calling the nation, tribe, or community's administrative office; or, contacting relevant federal, provincial, or state authorities who have responsibilities to communicate with *Indigenous Peoples.* Many Indigenous communities will appoint an individual or department to lead external communication, consultation, and engagement activities who can advise *Certified Organizations* on appropriate protocols.

Where community-endorsed communications protocol does not already exist and/or where regulated requirements or existing communications protocols