



2024 Conservation Impact Engagement Session

Results and Input

KEY POINTS

- ~ 65 individuals participated in the 2024 SFI Conservation Impact Workshop held in Atlanta, GA.
- Participants offered over 120 suggestions for work projects, covering a wide range of topics that spanned across SFI pillars (Standards, Conservation, Community, and Education).
- Top suggested priorities derived from participant engagement included:
 - o *Demonstrating* the sustainability value of the SFI-certified working forests through case studies and knowledge transfer of scientific findings.
 - o *Cataloging and interpreting* conservation data resources and tools and collaborating with partners to address identified gaps.
 - o *Advancing* key topics like biodiversity and Forests of Exceptional Conservation Value (FECV) and climate smart forestry.
 - o Promoting data sharing, collaboration, and standardization of reporting practices.

BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI®) Inc. is an independent, non-profit organization that provides supply chain assurances, delivers conservation leadership, and supports environmental education and community engagement. SFI collaborates with various stakeholders, including the forest and fiber sourcing sector, brand owners, conservation groups, resource professionals, landowners, educators, local communities, Indigenous peoples, governments, and universities. SFI standards and on-product labels help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions.

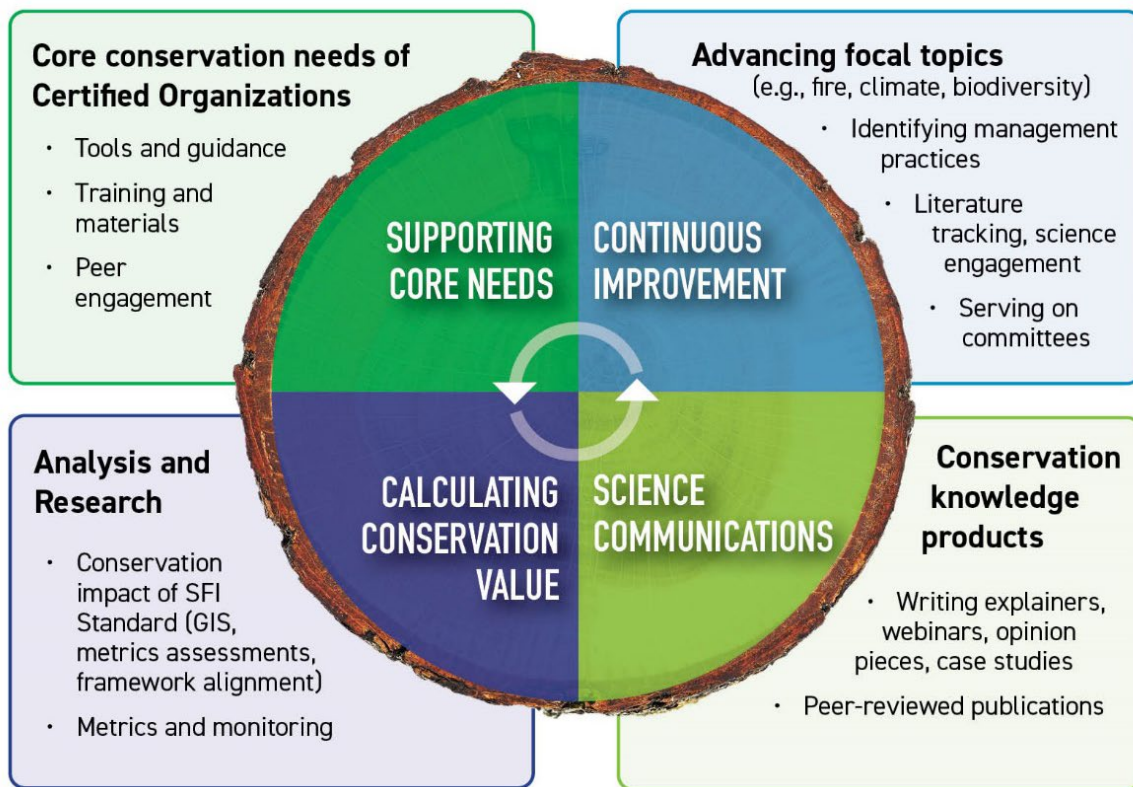
The SFI Conservation Pillar advances conservation objectives in forests throughout the U.S. and Canada through the values expressed in our standards, through carefully targeted research, through direct leadership of critical initiatives, and through partnerships that effectively contribute to multiple conservation objectives.

The Conservation Impact “Sounding Board” was formed in 2016 to harness and focus the community of partners engaged in or seeking to inform the SFI Conservation Impact Project work, and to help SFI identify specific pathways to clarify and enumerate the conservation contributions of managed forests. The Sounding Board had an “open-door” policy with an informal structure to facilitate the broadest engagement; in this way, it shaped our Conservation Impact Project work and promoted interaction directly between project leaders and experts from a diversity of backgrounds. The Sounding Board helped to ensure credibility of the science and resonance of results with key audiences.

To continue the legacy of the Sounding Board, the SFI Conservation Pillar hosted a Conservation Impact Workshop in conjunction with its Annual Conference in June 2024. The purpose of the workshop was to advance a technical discussion on conservation topics, provide an update on the Conservation Pillar, and invite feedback on the evolving SFI conservation program. Approximately 65 participants attended, including representatives from SFI certified organizations, local and regional conservation organizations, and SFI staff. In addition to those in attendance, an online forum was hosted to get input from those unable to attend the in-person event.

The engagement session opened with a presentation on the emerging strategy of the Conservation Pillar in support of the [2025-2030 SFI Strategic Direction](#) by Chief Conservation Officer Lauren T. Cooper. This introduction provided a foundation for the breakouts and discussions, highlighting a new framework that focuses on meeting the core conservation needs of certified organizations, advancing on sustainability topics, creating conservation knowledge products, and advancing analysis and research efforts (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Preliminary draft of SFI Conservation Pillar cohesive strategy for programmatic delivery, presented at the 2024 Conservation Impact Workshop



During the second part of the engagement session, participants brainstormed ideas of themes that are important to them, their organizations, or sustainability and society more broadly that fall within forest certification and forest management. Participants then identified work that the SFI Conservation Pillar is uniquely positioned to support or lead. Participants were invited to suggest ideas for future work and

direction in the following three categories (Table 1), and then to vote on posted ideas using provided stickers.

Table 1. Focal categories discussed in the 2024 Conservation Impact Engagement Session

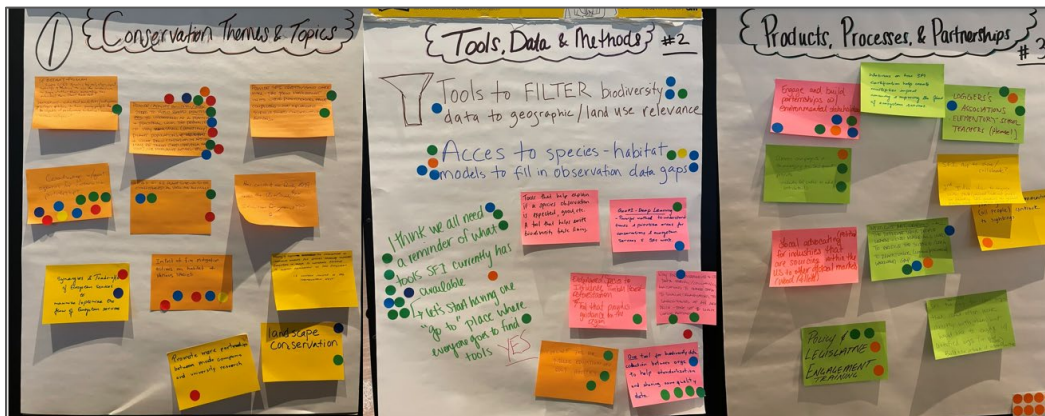
Conservation Themes & Topics	Tools, Data, & Methods	Products, Processes, & Partnerships
Priority topics for the SFI conservation team to focus on. Considering the SFI standard, where should SFI be focusing expertise and strengths? What are the topical themes that are important to certified organizations and/or to sustainability and society more broadly that fall within SFI certification and forest management.	Tools, data, or methods that SFI should utilize that would be helpful in meeting sustainability objectives or to address pressing conservation issues that fall within forest management and fiber sourcing. Includes considering how certified organizations would use these tools.	Products, processes, and partnerships that the SFI Conservation Program is uniquely positioned to assist with or facilitate/convene. For example, grant making for targeted topics, research and research collaborations, webinars, symposia, or workshops, or developing synthesis documents.

ENGAGEMENT INPUT AND RESULTS

Two SFI staff members facilitated at each topical breakout group, as well as one staff member facilitating the online discussion. The facilitators focused on ensuring that feedback focused on concrete actions the SFI Conservation team could take to support their programming. Feedback was collected on flipcharts, with participants writing their ideas on sticky pads. Participants were asked to place a dot sticker on notes with ideas or suggestions they supported. At the end of the session, all notes were collected for review.

SFI received over 120 suggestions for collaborative research, outreach, and tools. Comments were relatively equally distributed across the three focal categories (see image below).

Engagement session results in the three groups: “Conservation Themes & Topics”, “Tools, Data, & Methods”, and “Products, Processes, & Partnerships”



Notes were then digitized and organized thematically. The number of “votes” for each were documented as well. This full spreadsheet was then assessed by the team to identify unique recommendations and interpret the relevance of the recommendation in the Conservation Pillar as well as collaborative activities with other pillars in SFI (Community, Standards, Education, Indigenous Relations, and Communication). Two main recommendations for the Conservation Pillar include:

- 1) Continue to demonstrate the sustainability value of SFI-certified forests through case studies and knowledge transfer of scientific findings, and
- 2) Catalogue tools for conservation measurement and assessment, and, when gaps are identified, develop solutions with focused collaborations.

RESULTS: CONSERVATION THEMES & TOPICS

This category prompted participants to highlight conservation topics important to SFI stakeholders and where they felt that the SFI Conservation team should focus programmatic attention. As the SFI standards cover a wide range of conservation topics, this feedback is essential to help the Conservation Pillar continually focus activities, investment, research, and collaborations. Responses emphasized climate change (e.g. carbon, fire resiliency, soil health), fire (resiliency and fire as a management tool), water (e.g. water quantity, flood avoidance), and biodiversity (e.g. threatened and endangered species prioritization, ecosystem services). Based on number of votes, the top suggestions within **Conservation Themes & Topics** were as follows:

FOCAL CATEGORY	TOP RECOMMENDED COMMENTS
CONSERVATION THEMES & TOPICS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide capacity-building/workshops to field-based practitioners to understand - at a practical and functional level - the presence of very small plant populations and related conservation actions (e.g., seed selection, eDNA, harvests, site-management actions) 2. Conserve species and ecological communities (e.g., emphasizing how to conserve species/important communities and manage timber for economic values) 3. Focus on forest fire and resiliency (e.g., impact of fire mitigation actions on habitat of various species) 4. Assess and advance the conservation impact of the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard, particularly in biodiversity topics

RESULTS: TOOLS, DATA, & METHODS

The second focus category was centred around tools, data, or methods that participants felt would be helpful in meeting their sustainability objectives or to address pressing conservation issues that fall within forests and forest management or fiber sourcing. Overall, participants expressed a need for developed tools and providing a repository for catalogued tools to improve access for certified organizations. Leading suggestions within **Tools, Data, & Methods** were as follows:

FOCAL CATEGORY	TOP RECOMMENDED COMMENTS
TOOLS, DATA, & METHODS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a catalog of tools and resources for data and analysis needs, searchable by topic 2. Clarify how to measure effectiveness of the implementation of various tools, including guidance on how to know if a tool is effective 3. Create landowner, logger communication tools and platforms 4. Develop short and consolidated list/menu of conservation actions to consider during management

Example of tools include geospatial data for meeting the SFI standards, planning and inventory, and standardization of data collection methods (see table below). In the case that tools do not exist, SFI is advised to explore creating solutions specific to the needs of certified organizations.

FOCAL SUB-CATEGORY	SUMMARIZED EXAMPLES IDENTIFIED IN PARTICIPANT COMMENTS
TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate GIS layers and geo AI on topics like conservation priority areas, fire risk, urban development intensity • Consolidate and identify resources of tools/ dashboards to support practitioners/certified organizations • Develop tools to demonstrate contributions of certification to sustainably managed forests (e.g., carbon calculators, bird diversity estimating tools for managed forests) • Create list of conservation actions during forest management activities
DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access/sharing of biodiversity data (e.g., G1-G2 species habitat models) • Provide guidance to support incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledges (TEK) and respects data sovereignty
METHODS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate standardization of data collection and information sharing • Evaluate various tools use and effectiveness for specific conservation challenges for Certified Organizations

RESULTS: PRODUCTS, PROCESSES, & PARTNERSHIPS

The third focal category reflected an interest in increased access to newly developed products, examples of practices, and the findings of previous work supported through the SFI Conservation Grants program and by conservation partnerships. In addition to publishing factsheets and working on peer-reviewed publications, SFI has capacity to participate in collaborative projects, and facilitating workshops with SICs and external partners. This will support SFI in developing a robust narrative of sustainable forest management and the role of certification. As demonstrated by both SFI-funded work and SFI collaborations, elevating conservation-related narratives and other knowledge transfer products will highlight principles of sustainable forest management and responsible sourcing to outside audiences.



The top suggestions within **Products, Processes, & Partnerships** were as follows:

FOCAL CATEGORY	TOP RECOMMENDED COMMENTS
PRODUCTS, PROCESSES, & PARTNERSHIPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop case studies of successful conservation engagement with Indigenous communities, including how key groups were identified. 2. Increase engagement/collaboration with government agencies (state/provincial/ federal), forestry extension, and SICs on conservation priorities 3. Develop SFI grant summaries and science-based explainers/whitepapers on Conservation Pillar grants, collaborations, and projects 4. Clarify linkages to the investor community, including how SFI certification links to business risk mitigation (e.g., TNFD)

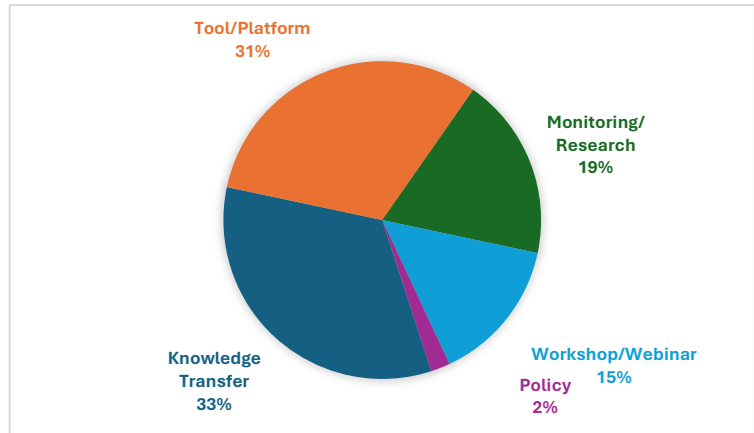
Examples of products and processes include increased and diverse media types for sharing science or technical information and further targeted and direct actions to advance on conservation topics (see table below). The SFI Conservation pillar continues to build relationships with multiple types of partners and will seek to further leverage existing connections (e.g. SIC, PLT) in building education and communication support.

FOCAL SUB-CATEGORY	SUMMERIZED EXAMPLES IDENTIFIED IN PARTICIPANT COMMENTS
PRODUCTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate art and infographics to bridge science translation to multiple audiences (i.e. practitioners, industry, researchers, government) • Issue more communication pieces on past and present projects, key sustainability topics (i.e. nature frameworks, species at risk) related to conservation in forestry • Increase storytelling/case studies to highlight conservation and value of working forests • Create videos on SFI standard objectives and implementation • Host workshops/webinars on technical topics and trainings and/or education on the value of certification
PROCESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide consistent messaging and processes to efficiently share information across different groups/audiences • Offer more direct consulting on conservation topics with certified organizations • Support incentive programs that credit conservation actions
PARTNERSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build partnerships and trust with government agencies, environmental organizations (i.e. like WCI), and Indigenous entities • Seek creative intersections with PLT/Education/School programming • Leverage SICs for education/capacity building (training, citizen science), outreach to form partnerships with different groups (i.e. forestry extension, NatureServe, plant-related organizations) and create greater standardization/sharing across these networks

RESULTS: ACROSS FOCAL CATEGORIES

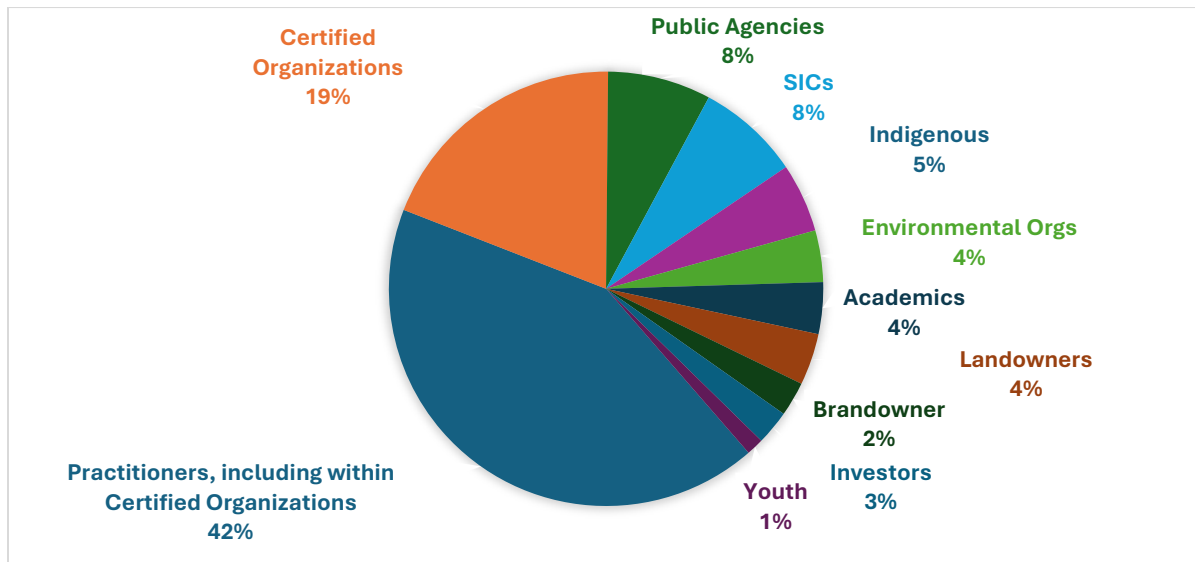
Across the three breakout categories all comments, regardless of where they originally were collected, related to 6 main types of actions that the conservation pillar could provide support with the most recommendations under “knowledge transfer” (33%) and “tool and platform development” (31%). Other categories included collaboration with other partners, monitoring and research, workshop and webinar development, and policy contributions (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Broad categories of action areas suggested by participants of the SFI Conservation Impact Workshop.



The recommendations also revealed various target audiences for Conservation Pillar activities. Overall, there was a consensus for greater general communications to the public about SFI-related topics. However, more specific audiences were identified within the comments with the top two audiences being Practitioners, including within Certified Organizations (42%) and SFI Certified Organizations (19%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Types of audiences identified within the submitted participant comments as potential targets for engagement by the Conservation pillar.



SFI works collaboratively across 4 main pillars: Standards, Conservation, Community and Education and have a robust Communications team to elevate SFI programmatic efforts. While the focus of the workshop was conservation-related, participants offered recommendations for which the conservation pillar would collaborate across multiple SFI pillars (Table 2). More than half (52%) of the suggestions had clear cross-pillar implications with SFI Communications, Community, Standards, and Education. SFI is a cross-pillar collaborative organization, so these recommendations may still be implemented alongside other pillar priorities.

Table 2: Examples of comments that related to other SFI Pillar work areas.

SFI Pillar - Related	Participant Suggestion
Standards	<p>“Investor community: How does SFI certification link to business risk mitigation e.g., TCFD”</p> <p>“Examples of processes that work and are achievable for smaller certified organizations”</p>
Conservation	<p>“Increasing focus on identifying/delineating FECVs and G1-G2/S1-S2 species habitat in all states/regions.”</p> <p>“Short and consolidated list/menu of conservation actions to consider during management”</p>
Community	<p>“Leverage SICs as a way to share info across program participants (i.e. Coordination on plant conservation alliance/similar to educate the SICs)”</p> <p>“Inviting state agency or other partners to SICs that are not voting members.”</p>
Education	<p>“Better use or collaboration with PLT/ Education.”</p> <p>“Online tool for public education on sustainable forestry”</p>
Communications	<p>“Interactive website”</p> <p>“Small video vignettes featuring how certified companies implement standard requirements on the ground; storytelling is KEY to share how standards are carried out”</p>

INTERPRETTING AND OPERATIONALIZING RESPONSES

The SFI conservation team is incorporating the ideas and feedback received from the workshop through four core strategies presented earlier in the synthesis: striving for continuous improvement of our standard, supporting core needs of our certified organizations, calculating conservation values based in analysis and research, and transferring conservation knowledge through science-based communication. This prioritization was reflected in the planning process for the new [2025-2030 5-year SFI Strategic Direction](#). Now approved, our 2025 focus will be to advance outcomes that quantifies, communicates, and expands the delivery of nature-based solutions related to forest management and fiber sourcing.

The SFI conservation team’s near-term goals include advancing solutions related to climate change, fire resiliency, and biodiversity. We are committed to further developing continuous

improvement and core actions that address our standard objectives of Climate Smart Forestry and Fire Resiliency and Awareness through increased engagement and newly funded projects across the North American landscape. This will include engagement with SICs, certified organizations, government, and non-profit organizations. Biodiversity remains a key focal area, and there were clear needs expressed in relation to tools and standardization for biodiversity metrics and reporting. The SFI conservation team is pursuing strategies to strengthen tools and support in using the best available biodiversity data.

2024 Conservation Impact Workshop participants in action. Thank you for your time and energy!



CONCLUSION

The valuable feedback received from the participants of the 2024 Conservation Impact workshop supported the SFI conservation team in development of our new [2025-2030 SFI Strategic Direction](#) and in turn shaped our 2025 workplan. The results from the engagement session provided insight to support current priority actions and topics that the conservation team already identified or will spark development of new ideas and avenues that work toward SFI's overall vision of a world that values and benefits from sustainably managed forests. The Conservation team is integrating this work across SFI pillars to deliver tools and products that advance sustainability through forest-focused collaboration and continued advancement through communication to various audiences, supporting implementation of the standards, and building partnerships on the value of SFI certification.

The Conservation team would like to thank all participants for their time and contributions, as well as the entire SFI staff that was engaged in facilitating the event.

For any questions or more information, please contact the SFI Conservation Pillar:
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