



## **Background and History of SFI Conservation Impact and the Sounding Board**

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### **About SFI**

Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) advances sustainability through forest-focused collaborations. SFI is an independent, non-profit organization that demonstrates our commitment to forests through our work in standards, conservation, education, and community. SFI works with the forest sector, conservation groups, academics, researchers, brand owners, resource professionals, landowners, educators, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, governments, and universities to achieve a vision of a world that values and benefits from sustainably managed forests.

### **Conservation Impact Background**

To aid in better decision-making, and to demonstrate the value of sustainably managed forests, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative sought to quantify the conservation benefits of SFI Forest Management certification and Fiber Sourcing, and the connection between sustainable supply chains and important conservation outcomes. By clarifying these conservation attributes, SFI seeks to help clarify the link between well-managed forests affected by the SFI program standards, and the public benefits that those forests provide.

Formally announced at the World Conservation Congress in September of 2016, The Conservation Impact Project focuses its work on three thematic areas – climate change/carbon, biodiversity, and water – across more than 360 million acres certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard and many millions of additional acres positively influenced by the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard. This research helps build understanding of the critical conservation value of forests managed to these standards and will facilitate continual improvement of SFI Certified Organizations and the management practices they employ. Conservation Impact enables Certified Organizations to convey and leverage conservation outcomes knowledgably, help conservationists have a deeper insight into the value of sustainable forest management, and help consumers make better choices for the planet.

The Conservation Impact project supports research that seeks to identify best practices in pursuit of sustainability outcomes, and generates new partnerships throughout the research, academic and conservation communities. In turn, the results help inform the SFI Standards, and help make the case for the value of sustainably managed forests toward conservation.

[Click here to learn more about SFI's Conservation Impact Project.](#)

## **The Conservation Impact Sounding Board**

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

The first Sounding Board meeting was convened in June of 2015 with 24 participants, resulting in a recommendation to focus the SFI Conservation and Community Partnership Grants Program on helping to address the research needs relative to Conservation Impact. Further, the group recommended that the Conservation Impact Program should focus its efforts on the three themes of climate, biodiversity, and water, reflecting themes which resonated across the sustainable forest products value chain. Building on that guidance, SFI developed new guidance for the grants program, and attracted a number of projects in 2016 to build understanding around these key themes. Additionally, SFI initiated "Direct Engagement" projects with several uniquely qualified partners, positioned to help us take some key projects to a large scale.

In July of 2016, eighteen members of the original Sounding Board convened by conference call to plan a second face-to-face meeting, which subsequently took place in Washington, DC in October of 2016. The thirty-seven participants, many considered to be the foremost experts in their field, included representatives from Virginia Tech, Nature Conservancy of Canada, American Forest Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, American Bird Conservancy, Saskatchewan Research Council, American Institute of Biological Sciences, NatureServe, U.S. Forest Service, the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI), and Canadian Forest Service, and many others. The meeting combined aspects of traditional scientific symposia with an interactive workshop format, to facilitate input into ongoing projects.

The next meeting, in June of 2017 convened forty participants and provided a focused opportunity for discussion around the three central themes, and additionally resulted in recommendations as to how to enumerate values relative to SFI's Fiber Sourcing programs. The group also introduced the idea of optimizing outcomes across the range of Conservation Impact topics, as well as attaining scale of measures and results. This meeting also saw the introduction and agreement around "communications" as a topic for Sounding Board discussion.

The fourth meeting of the Conservation Impact Sounding Board convened fifty participants in March 2018. Outcomes of that meeting included moves to link related projects, develop work across conservation themes, and review and summarize the results of work of SFI's Conservation Impact and Conservation Grants completed to date. Participants also recommended an emphasis on SFI's role as a convener, and on the importance of effectively communicating the conservation value of sustainably managed forests to decision makers and the public at large.

SFI hosted its fifth Conservation Impact Sounding Board meeting in October 2018 in conjunction with the SFI Annual Conference in Westminster, CO. The workshop convened nearly fifty

attendees, including representatives from academic institutions, research organizations, and conservation NGOs, as well as good representation of SFI Certified Organizations. The workshop focused on the development of cross-topic methodologies for measuring Conservation Impact. Participants also explored the role of communications in delivering results and stories to Program Participants, brand owners, and the general public. With Conservation Impact projects maturing, communications experts should play an increasingly important role in future convenings of the Sounding Board.

SFI hosted the sixth Conservation Impact Sounding Board in April 2019. The meeting welcomed over sixty attendees. In addition to a review of work underway, participants investigated the potential to link metrics projects across thematic areas and explored social values related to forests and conservation research. Participants suggested that although the development of conservation metrics is a long-term endeavor, the collaborative nature of research, and the personal stories of project leads, present compelling stories and the opportunity to increase understanding of the conservation benefits of forest management. Participants also recommended that SFI commence an investigation to understand the social values derived from forest certification. There was agreement that measures of “social impact” should be approached with the same rigor as conservation. Any associated analysis should employ social scientists to determine what to measure, how to measure it, and how it should be communicated.

Immediately following and co-located with the Workshop, SFI and American Forests (AF) co-hosted a Forest Climate Learning Lab, building from the successful series of workshops previously conducted by AF. The Forest-Climate Learning Lab investigated forest practices that can increase carbon sequestration and reduce emissions from wildfire. By convening the Sounding Board and Learning Lab back-to-back, both workshops benefited from diversified attendance. SFI will look for similar opportunities for collaboration at future events.

SFI hosted the seventh Sounding Board in conjunction with the SFI Annual Conference in October 2019. The meeting featured over seventy participants and focused on the connections being drawn through the supply chain to Conservation Impact work. In addition to the review of several Conservation Impact projects, the meeting featured a preview of SFI’s Dashboard project which seeks to increase the accessibility of SFI data, including conservation projects and early metrics. The group also discussed the intersection of Conservation Impact outcomes with SFI Standards. Participants recommended that 2020 Sounding Board meetings should ensure linkages between Conservation Impact science and the SFI Standards Revision process.

SFI hosted the first-ever virtual Sounding Board E-workshop in May 2020. The workshop was attended by 160 participants and was timed to provide linkage to an SFI Standards Revision webinar focused on climate change-related revisions. By timing these two workshops in close succession, participants could gain an understanding of the contribution of SFI’s Standards to climate change mitigation and gain an understanding of the context for the proposed revisions to SFI’s Forest Management Standard as they pertain to carbon sequestration and climate change resiliency. The workshop explored select results from Conservation Impact projects and introduced potential tools that may be helpful for SFI certified organizations and partners to measure and manage forest attributes relative to climate change.

SFI hosted a second virtual Sounding Board E-workshop in June 2020 which welcomed over 90 attendees. The workshop reviewed past water-related projects to gain critical insight from participants on water-related outcomes and the value of sustainable forest management on protection of water quality and quantity. The water-focused theme was linked to the development of the SFI Forest Management Standard's new provision to safeguard water *quantity* of rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands on SFI certified forests, in addition to the existing requirements to manage and conserve water quality. The workshop explored select results of additional Conservation Impact projects relative to water quality and quantity, discussed potential tools and applications to measure forest attributes relative to water metrics, and identified gaps in water-related outcomes to direct future work for the Conservation Impact Project.

SFI hosted the eleventh Conservation Impact Sounding Board Workshop in conjunction with the SFI Annual Conference in June 2022. The workshop convened nearly 70 attendees, including representatives from academic institutions, conservation NGOs, as well as good representation of SFI-certified organizations. The workshop featured a sneak peak of an SFI-funded, first-of-its-kind tool to map biodiversity metrics across SFI's footprint. Additionally, there was a focus on the release of [\*SFI's Conservation Impact: A Decade of Success\*](#), which succinctly presents research and results on climate, biodiversity, water, fire, and more. We explored key findings from our work over the past decade and the documents utility from the perspective of various stakeholders. We also explored select projects that strive for metrics to describe critical outcomes under the new objectives of the SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard: Climate Smart Forestry, and Fire Awareness and Resiliency. Attendees participated in robust discussion and were able to provide feedback on all sessions.