

Forest Certification Surveillance Audit Report

Prepared by:

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for:

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for the following certified forest area(s):

FL A18695, A75062, A18700, A18701, A81042, A81043, A18039 and Logan Lake Community Forest Licence CFAK2E. Also for A65006, all cutting permits managed by Aspen including all those under the authority of Aspen's FSP ID# 76 (as opposed to those managed independently by Stuwix). Aspen also manages numerous Forestry Licences to Cut and Non-Replaceable Forest Licences which are identified within one of two Forest Stewardship Plans – FSP ID#76 (Merritt TSA) and FSP ID#379 (Lillooet TSA). In the Kamloops TSA, Aspen-managed blocks under A84885, A89254, and A81371 are also included.

File Number: 1046463

Date of Evaluation: October 23 and 24, 2019

Date of Report: November 13, 2019

Certificate Registration Date: January 19, 2018

Certificate Expiry Date: January 18, 2023

SECTION 1 – ORGANIZATION

Certification type

Group certificate	
Single certificate	✓

Name and Description of the certified organization

Aspen Planers is a family owned integrated woodlands and sawmilling business. The woodlands operation participates in the Sustainable Forest Management Plan along with one other licensee. The woodlands operation feeds the mills producing over 200,000 mbf lumber annually as well as plywood and veneer, chips, post and rails, and hog fuel. The combined employment of manufacturing facilities is over 400 direct employees.

List of co-applicants

There are no co-applicant(s) on this certificate

SECTION 2 – DESCRIPTION OF THE DEFINED FOREST AREA

Legal Tenure / Licence Description

FL A18695, A75062, A18700, A18701, A81042, A81043, A18039 and Logan Lake Community Forest Licence CFAK2E. Also for A65006, all cutting permits managed by Aspen including all those under the authority of Aspen's FSP ID# 76 (as opposed to those managed independently by Stuwix). Aspen also manages numerous Forestry Licences to Cut and Non-Replaceable Forest Licences which are identified within one of two Forest Stewardship Plans – FSP ID#76 (Merritt TSA) and FSP ID#379 (Lillooet TSA). In the Kamloops TSA, Aspen-managed blocks under A84885, A89254, and A81371 are also included.

Geographic Locations

The Nicola Thompson Fraser SFM Plan area is situated in the southern interior, east of the Coast Mountains and encompassing the Thompson-Okanagan Plateau. The area extends south to the Canada-USA border and northward to Wells Gray Provincial Park. The overall Plan area follows the administrative boundaries of the Cascades Forest District (Merritt TSA and Lillooet TSA) and the Thompson Rivers Forest District (Kamloops TSA).

DFA description – Area and Forest types

The topography of Nicola Thompson Fraser is one of sharp contrasts, from dry, hot grasslands to large lakes and rugged mountains. The Nicola and Thompson Rivers join the Fraser River in the western section of the Plan area while the Similkameen River flows through the southern portion. The Plan area encompasses a wide range of Biogeoclimatic zones and subzones that reflect the complexity of the landscape and the different topographical conditions in each TSA.

In the north, the North Thompson River is bounded by the high peaks of the Monashee and Cariboo Mountains. Cool, wet conditions, with high snowfalls and dense spruce and cedar forests, are reflective of the Engelmann Spruce Subalpine Fir zone. In the central and southern portion, the mountains give way to high plateaus dissected by steep valleys and dotted with lakes and rivers. Moist and dry subzones of the Montane Spruce and Interior Douglas-fir zones, with mixed pine and pine-fir forests, reflect the differences in climate between east and west sides of the major valleys.

The landscape continues to become drier and gentler towards the south, with rolling uplands and numerous lakes. The driest Interior Douglas-fir subzones occur on the uplands, with the grasslands of the Bunchgrass subzones in the river valleys. The western boundary is influenced by the Coastal Mountains, where cool, wet coastal conditions predominate. Extensive areas of alpine and sub-alpine conditions limit forests to the middle and lower slopes of the deep valleys and wide river junctions. Engelmann Spruce-Subalpine fir, Montane Spruce and Interior Douglas-fir subzones closely follow the topography.

The diverse ecology of the area provides habitat for a wide range of fish and wildlife species including moose, mule deer, elk, mountain goat, and over 200 bird species. Predator species such as black bear, marten, cougar and coyote are also found. Many wildlife species range over large areas and some have specific habitat requirements at different times of the year. The area is also home to a number of wildlife species identified as Species at Risk, including spotted owl, American badger, bighorn sheep, grizzly bear and wolverine.

The numerous lakes and watercourses within the area are home to many fish species, including all five species of salmon, steelhead, rainbow trout, kokanee, brook trout, bull trout, and white sturgeon.

The forests of the Nicola Thompson Fraser provide numerous natural resource values, including forest products, minerals, fish, wildlife, and recreation and tourism opportunities. Extensive grassland and forested areas provide forage for both livestock and wildlife.

Major highways pass through areas of exceptional natural scenery, providing easy access to a number of communities ranging from the City of Kamloops with over 80,000 people to smaller towns such as Merritt with a population of 7,000, Lillooet, population 2,324, Cache Creek, population 1,037, and many smaller communities with populations of 200 or less. Other highways and hundreds of kilometres of unpaved roads provide access into the extensive grasslands, forested lands and backcountry areas.

A number of significant provincial parks, such as Wells Gray Provincial Park, Manning Provincial Park, Cathedral Provincial Park, Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park and Spruce Lake Protected Area are situated in the Plan area. Numerous smaller provincial parks, recreation sites and other Crown lands provide the setting for a host of activities including camping, hiking, wildlife and scenic viewing, fishing, hunting, hang-gliding, boating, river rafting, mountain-biking, four-wheel driving, ATV use, snowmobiling, and downhill, helicopter and cross country skiing.

SECTION 3 – AUDIT PROCESS

Process

All audit activities are planned with the Lead Auditor prior to the audit. An audit plan is provided detailing the scope and objectives of the audit, the audit team members, the processes to be audited and the timelines. While onsite the audit team works to verify that the management system meets the requirements of the standard and the certificate holder's system documentation by assessing objective evidence. The verification is done through interviews, documentation review, and observation. This verification occurs in the office as well as in the field. For the field portion a sample of active and closed operations are selected. Auditors use a detailed checklist to document evidence of compliance.

As the audit is based on a sampling of the available information there is always a level of uncertainty that exists, non-conformity can go undetected as well as good practices.

Audit objective

To verify the company's documentation and the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the organization management system in meeting the requirements of the CSA Z809-16 National Standard of Canada Standards for the declared scope of registration and

- To confirm that the organization complies with its own policies and procedures.
- To confirm that the management system is suitable for the organization.

Audit criteria

CAN/CSA-Z809-16 National Standard of Canada (Approved September 2016)
Sustainable forest management.

Scope of the audit

Facilities/organizational units/functional units audited include the woodlands office at 2399 Quilchena Avenue, Merritt, British Columbia and licences in the Merritt and Lillooet Timber Supply Areas (TSA) within the Nicola Thompson Fraser (NTF) Defined Forest Area as described in the NTF Sustainable Forest Management Plan. Field reviews were restricted to the Merritt Timber Supply Area during this audit.

Certificate scope

Forest management activities - planning, harvesting, transportation and silviculture on the Nicola Thompson Fraser DFA.

Combined, joined or integrated audit (see the definition in Annex 1)

This audit is not a combined, joined or integrated audit.

Description of SAI Global and the SAI Global Audit Team

SAI Global is a third party management system certification Registrar. Established in 1984, SAI Global has worked with thousands of organizations in North America and around the world, issuing registration certificates to those that meet international and national management system standards.

The SAI Global Sustainable Forest Management audit team members bring with them considerable experience in the area of sustainable forest management and environmental management systems auditing. Audit teams are comprised of certified auditors and registered professional foresters. All audit team members are subject to strict confidentiality and conflict of interest agreements.

Audit Team

Lead auditor:
Cindy Hutchison, RPF (British Columbia)
Auditor:
Dave Barker, RPF (British Columbia)
Technical expert:
N/A
Observer:
Robert Volkman, Standards Council of Canada

Audit time and dates

Evaluation dates:	October 23 and 24, 2019
Tasks	Hours (excluding travel)
Pre and Post-audit work (audit plan and report writing)	4.0
Audit time (Documents, Records, Fieldwork)	36.0
Stakeholders Consultation	2.0
TOTAL	42.0

See Annex 2 for a list of audited requirements.

Review of changes since last audit

Licensee participation in the Sustainable Forest Management Plan has been reduced to one other program participant.

Significant issues impacting on the audit programme

There were no active operations within scope in the Merritt TSA at the time of the audit.

Noted deviations from the audit plan and their reasons

None.

Description of operations (Day shift, Night shift)

The operations visited included a woodlands office working day shifts. Field operations normally work a shift from early morning to early afternoon, but none were available in the Merritt audit area during the audit. The audit focus was therefore assessment at post-harvest and silviculture activities. All interviews could be completed during normal business hours.

Operations visited during the field audit include

Site identification	Type of Operation Observed
A18695: 381-3, 381-4	Harvest 2018, on block roads, site preparation, planting
Mill Creek Road	Maintenance, near gas line
A55525: 516-2, 533-4, A18965: 464-3	Free growing, surveys
Mab Road km 7-10	Maintenance
A18695: 607-3, 612-1	Recent harvest, on block roads, site preparation
Swakum Road km 17	Maintenance
A18695: 607-5	CCR, post-harvest: roads, WTP, invasive plants, WHA, cultural heritage, retention, streams, natural regeneration, utilization
A18695: 607-6	Deferred harvest area
A18695: 607-9	CCR, post-harvest: road rehabilitation, piling, visuals, CWD, retention, utilization, green-up
A92671: 346-1	Selection harvest, post-harvest: UWR, range notification, retention, roads
A92671: 246-1	Disk trenching treatment, planting, retention, range management.

Interviews

Personnel (i.e. Staff/contractors)	
Position	Number
Planning Forester	1
Planning Consultant	1
GIS Technician	1
Silviculture Forester	1
Corporate Communications Officer	1

Members of the public participation process	
Position	Number
None available for interview.	0
Provincial Government	
Position	Number
None available for interview.	0

Aboriginal People	
Community and position	Number
Upper Nicola Band Councillors	2
Nooaitch Indian Band Lands and Resources Manager	1

Concerns relevant to the Standard and SAI Global's response

In this section - discussion of any significant concerns relevant to the Standard, made during the audit by public participation members, Aboriginal communities, government officials, DFA workers or other interested parties and the conclusions reached by the audit team in relation to them;
<u>Comments from stakeholder</u> Audit input was received from the Upper Nicola Band.
<u>SAI Global's response</u> The information was considered during the audit. The public audit report will be provided post-audit. If audit conclusions are not aligned with UNB interpretations of requirements, then the concerns can be escalated as a complaint.

Overview of elements audited off-site and on-site

See Annex 1

SECTION 4 – AUDIT FINDINGS

Status of non-conformances from the previous audit

NC#	2018-01	Grade:	Minor NC
Requirement:			
7.5.1 Monitoring and measurement The organization SHALL... b) record performance levels and monitor indicators for comparison against targets/forecasts...			
Non-conformance:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target 14: a non-conformance to plan commitments for CHRs (2017-01) for CP 711-8, CP720-3, and CP 720-4 have not been reported in the monitoring report. Target 19: no reporting on allocated AAC vs actual harvest for licences where there was no harvesting done in 2017. Target 24: Aspen Planers reported there were no hydrological assessments done for the 11 Merritt cutblocks in watersheds with ECA >35% in 2017 but the monitoring report indicates all cutblocks had further assessments completed 			
Justification for Major or Minor:			
Minor: Does not result in fundamental failure to meet the requirement			
Evidence provided to close the non-conformity:			
2018-11-28 PAG meeting minutes.			
Status:	Closed		

NC#	2018-02	Grade:	Minor NC
Requirement:			
7.5.3 Records			

The organization SHALL establish and maintain procedures for the identification, maintenance, and disposal of SFM requirement records. These records SHALL include training records and the results of audits and reviews.	
Non-conformance:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although there were two post-harvest reviews, records demonstrating that CHRs were managed as planned were not available for CP715-1. 	
Justification for Major or Minor:	
Minor: Does not result in fundamental failure to meet the requirement	
Evidence provided to close the non-conformity:	
CHR mapping.	
Status:	Closed

Non-conformances identified during this audit

NC#	2019-01	Grade:	Minor NC
Requirement:			
6.3.7 Criterion 7 — Aboriginal relations Core indicator: 7.1.2 — Evidence of ongoing open and respectful communications with Aboriginal communities to foster meaningful engagement, and consideration of the information gained about their Aboriginal title and rights through this process. Where there is communicated disagreement regarding the organization’s forest management activities, this evidence would include documentation of efforts towards conflict resolution.			
Non-conformance:			
There is an acknowledged disagreement with UNB and Aspen Planers regarding APs forest management activities, but there is no process/framework for AP to make efforts towards conflict resolution, allowing the conflict to simmer.			
Justification for Major or Minor:			
Minor: Unusual, non-systemic problem			
Evidence provided to close the non-conformity:			
Open			
Status:	Open		

NC#	2019-02	Grade:	Minor NC
Requirement:			
6.3.7 Criterion 7 — Aboriginal relations Core indicators 7.2.2 — Evidence of understanding and use of Aboriginal knowledge through the engagement of willing Aboriginal communities, using a process that identifies and manages culturally important resources and values. Target 14. ... 100% conformance to all plan commitments specifically designed to manage for culturally important, sacred and spiritual sites that have been identified and mapped. SFM policy: “comply with all... commitments”.			
7.5.2 Corrective action The organization shall establish and maintain procedures for a) defining responsibility and authority for identifying and investigating nonconformity; b) taking action to mitigate impacts; and c) initiating and completing corrective action. Any corrective action taken to eliminate the causes of actual and potential nonconformities shall be appropriate to the magnitude of problem and commensurate with the impact encountered			
Non-conformance:			

Activities in CP606-2 have been identified and being not in conformance with plan commitments designed to manage for culturally important sites and values and Target 14 100% conformance to all plan commitments reported. Corrective and preventive action (element 7.5.2) not completed for these inconsistent practices.	
Justification for Major or Minor:	
Minor: Unusual, non-systemic problem	
Evidence provided to close the non-conformity:	
Open	
Status:	Open

NC#	2019-03	Grade:	Minor NC
Requirement:			
7.4.6 Operational procedures and control The organization shall			
a) identify, establish, and maintain the operational procedures and controls needed to meet the SFM requirements; and			
b) communicate relevant procedures, controls, and requirements to employees, suppliers, and contractors working on behalf of the organization. EMS Manual – Standard Operating Procedures, OH3 – Harvesting – Log Loading “Ensure all slash is cleanly piled and placed as per the supervisor’s instructions away from standing timber and or regen.”			
Non-conformance:			
Pile in CP 612-1 (Swakum) is within 5 metres of regeneration.			
Justification for Major or Minor:			
Minor: Impact is limited in time or scale			
Evidence provided to close the non-conformity:			
Open			
Status:	Open		

NC#	2019-04	Grade:	Minor NC
Requirement:			
Target 39 was reported on contractors rather than the Aspen Planer Company safety program (or certification) as required.			
Non-conformance:			
7.5 Checking and corrective action 7.5.1 Monitoring and measurement The organization shall a) establish and maintain procedures to monitor on a regular basis progress towards conformance with the SFM requirements in the DFA.			
Justification for Major or Minor:			
Minor: Unusual, non-systemic problem			
Evidence provided to close the non-conformity:			
Open			
Status:	Open		

Opportunities for Improvement (OFI)

With respect to UNB relations, consider:

- A formal process and terms of reference for working together;
- An impartial single point of contact supported by all parties;

- A clear response (e.g. in-office review) or indication of why the request cannot be accommodated for all items identified on Dennis MacDonald's email of March 3, 2019 ("Information required as requested by UNB as per formal meetings.");
- Timely completion of the rehabilitation plan for block CP 606-2; and
- If a trial on CP 605 may be a valuable opportunity to promote capacity development and meaningful participation for FN communities (indicator 7.2.1).

Consider

- For the non-public SFM Plan Reporting Summary and the SFM Plan Appendix 3 consider reconciling the targets and indicators as there are missing and additional indicators on these two reports.
- The PAG may wish to consider a landscape level target for road density.
- A better definition of what "community meetings" are and how they are tracked for Target 28.

Positive Aspects of the Management System and Best Practices

- Partial cut CP 346-1 A92671 well implemented as a new trial (e.g. little residual damage, all age classes retained, minimal soil disturbance).
- High levels of retention in Jessie Creek cutblocks aesthetically pleasing.

Key focus areas/topics to be assessed during next audit

Indicator 7.1.2 and clause 7.4.2 Review correspondence, requested participation in science trial, and request interview with David Lawrence of Nooaitch.

Any unresolved issues, if any identified

See non-conformance reports.

SECTION 5 – GENERAL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review of the company's SFM program, and the audit results, the following recommendation is made:

Surveillance Audit

The company conducted an internal audit on August 2019 and identified no non-conformances. Non-conformance, when identified, are being managed and evaluated in a corrective action log.

A management review was conducted on August 2019 where the following agenda items were reviewed and discussed with the management team: internal and external findings and corrective actions, continual improvement, effectiveness of the SFMP and the management system.

The results of this surveillance audit indicate the capability of the management system to meet applicable requirements and expected outcomes, that the scope remains appropriate and that the audit objectives have been fulfilled with the exception of the non-conformances identified during this audit.

As discussed during the closing meeting, a root cause analysis with an action plan must be submitted within 30 days minor non-conformances for approval by the Lead Auditor.

Implementation of the corrective actions for minor non-conformance will be verified at the next surveillance audit.

A recommendation for the maintenance of registration to SAI Global to the CSA Z809:2016 standard and to the scope of registration identified in this report is on hold pending the receipt, review, and acceptance of the corrective action plans.

Next Scheduled Audit

Date(s): Week of August 17, 2020

Type of Audit: Surveillance (S3)

Cindy Hutchison
SAI Global
Team Leader

Date: November 13, 2019

ANNEX 1

A joint audit is when two or more auditing organizations cooperate to audit a single client.

A combined audit is when a client is being audited against the requirements of two or more management systems standards together.

An integrated audit is when a client has integrated the application of requirements of two or more management systems standards into a single management system and is being audited against more than one standard.

ANNEX 2

Standard requirement	Audited on-site	Audited off-site
4.1 General requirements	✓	
4.2 Required activities	✓	
5.1 General requirements		
5.2 Interested parties	✓	
5.3 Process: Basic operating rules for advisory groups		
5.4 Work of the advisory group	✓	
5.5 Public communication	✓	
6.1 DFA-specific performance requirements	✓	
6.2 SFM criteria — General	✓	
6.3.1.2 Discussion items for Criterion 1- Biological diversity		
6.3.1.3 Element 1.1 — Ecosystem diversity (VOITS)		
6.3.1.4 Element 1.2 — Species diversity (VOITS)		
6.3.1.5 Element 1.3 — Genetic diversity (VOITS)		
6.3.1.6 Element 1.4 — Protected areas and sites of special biological, geological, heritage, or cultural significance (VOITS)		
6.3.2.2 Discussion items for Criterion 2 - Ecosystem condition and productivity		
6.3.2.3 Element 2.1 — Forest ecosystem condition and productivity (VOITS)		
6.3.3.2 Discussion items for Criterion 3 - Soil and water		
6.3.3.3 Element 3.1 — Soil quality and quantity (VOITS)		
6.3.3.4 Element 3.2 — Water quality and quantity (VOITS)		
6.3.4.2 Discussion items for Criterion 4 - Role in global ecological cycles	✓	
6.3.4.3 Element 4.1 — Carbon uptake and storage (VOITS)	✓	
6.3.4.4 Element 4.2 — Forest land conversion (VOITS)	✓	
6.3.5.2 Discussion items for Criterion 5 - Economic and social benefits	✓	
6.3.5.3 Element 5.1 — Timber and non-timber benefits (VOITS)	✓	

6.3.5.4 Element 5.2 — Communities and sustainability (VOITS)	✓	
6.3.6 Criterion 6 — Society's responsibility	✓	
6.3.6.2 Element 6.1 — Fair and effective decision-making (VOITS)	✓	
6.3.6.3 Element 6.2 — Safety (VOITS)	✓	
6.3.7 Criterion 7 — Aboriginal relations	✓	
6.3.7.2 Element 7.1 — Aboriginal and treaty rights (VOITS)	✓	✓
6.3.7.3 Element 7.2 — Respect for Aboriginal forest values, knowledge, and uses (VOITS)	✓	✓
7.1 General	✓	
7.2 SFM policy	✓	
7.3.1 Defined forest area		
7.3.2 Defined responsibilities		
7.3.3 Rights and regulations	✓	
7.3.4 Incorporation of public participation requirements		
7.3.5 SFM plan		
7.4.1 Structure, responsibility, and resources	✓	
7.4.2 Competence, training, and knowledge	✓	
7.4.3 Communication	✓	
7.4.4 SFM documentation	✓	
7.4.5 Document control	✓	
7.4.6 Operational procedures and control	✓	
7.4.7 Emergency preparedness and response		
7.5.1 Monitoring and measurement		
7.5.2 Corrective action	✓	
7.5.3 Records	✓	
7.6 Management review	✓	