

INTERNATIONAL PAPER IN THE SOUTHERN U.S. A Case Study of an SFI Member Company's Destructive Practices in North Carolina

The temperate forests of the Southern U.S. are some of the most biologically rich forests in North America. These forests are under assault by companies that subscribe to the AF&PA's "Sustainable Forestry Initiative" (SFI). Over the last 10 years, SFI member companies such as International Paper have expanded paper production in the Southern U.S. causing an acceleration of clearcutting and the conversion of diverse, native forests to single-species tree plantations.

International Paper (I.P..)—the largest pulp and paper company in the world—claims to support "sustainable forestry" as a member of SFI, but a closer look at the company's practices suggests that the emergence of the SFI has done little to change the destructive practices employed by large timber companies. A case in point is International Paper's industrial forestry practices in the Green Swamp of eastern North Carolina.



Figure 1. The Green Swamp managed by a private landowner

SFI states that the goal of member companies is, "To practice sustainable forestry to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by practicing a land stewardship ethic which integrates the reforestation, managing, growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees for useful products with the conservation of soil, air and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, and aesthetics."(quotes above and below are from the SFI standards document)

International Paper and the Green Swamp of North Carolina

The Green Swamp is part of the Middle Atlantic Coastal Forest Ecoregion, an area that the World Wildlife Fund has identified as one of the top ten ecoregions in the U.S. and Canada in the number of species of reptiles, birds, and tree species. The ecoregion is also listed by WWF as endangered due to the conversion of wetland areas to other uses. Industrial forestry is directly responsible for 53% of the wetlands loss in the coastal plain of North Carolina.

SFI Standard --"4.1.4 Objective: Manage the quality and distribution of wildlife habitats and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity, by developing and implementing stand-and landscape-level measures that promote habitat diversity and the conservation of forest plants and animals."

SFI Reality – IP currently manages thousands of acres of industrial tree plantations in the Green Swamp on land that was converted from diverse, natural forested wetlands. The intensive management of these industrial tree plantations (ditching, draining, clearcutting and herbicide spraying) has significantly degraded the habitat of many species of plants and animals indigenous to this area such as the venus flytrap, pitcher plant, red cockaded woodpecker, and wacamaw killfish.



Figure 2. The Green Swamp after being ditched, drained, and clearcut by International Paper

SFI Standard – “4.1.3 Objective 3. Protect the water quality in streams, lakes, and other waterbodies by implementing riparian protection measures based on soil type, terrain, vegetation, and other applicable factors.”

SFI Reality – A five year study of the Green Swamp and the Waccamaw Basin has just been released and reports that the paper industry’s ditching and draining of the Green Swamp has so altered the area’s hydrology that the swamp no longer is able to hold the 200,000 acres of water it once did. The East Carolina University study ordered by the General Assembly found that the destruction of the swamp is now causing the Waccamaw River to flood during wet periods and run shallow during dry weather. Silt deposition from ditches draining what used to be the wetlands now limits boating and is threatening the diverse wildlife of the Waccamaw River.



Figure 3. Surface water in area susceptible to drift of chemical sprays



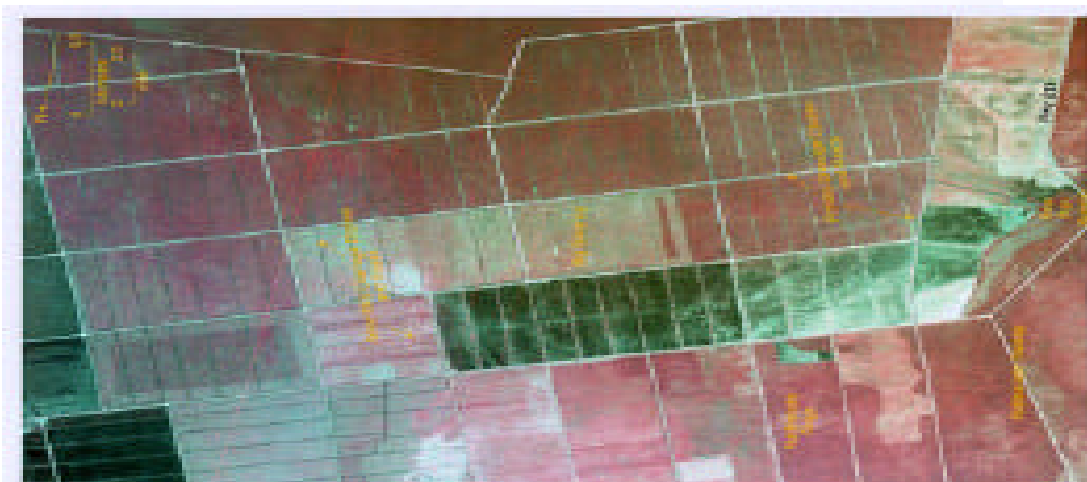
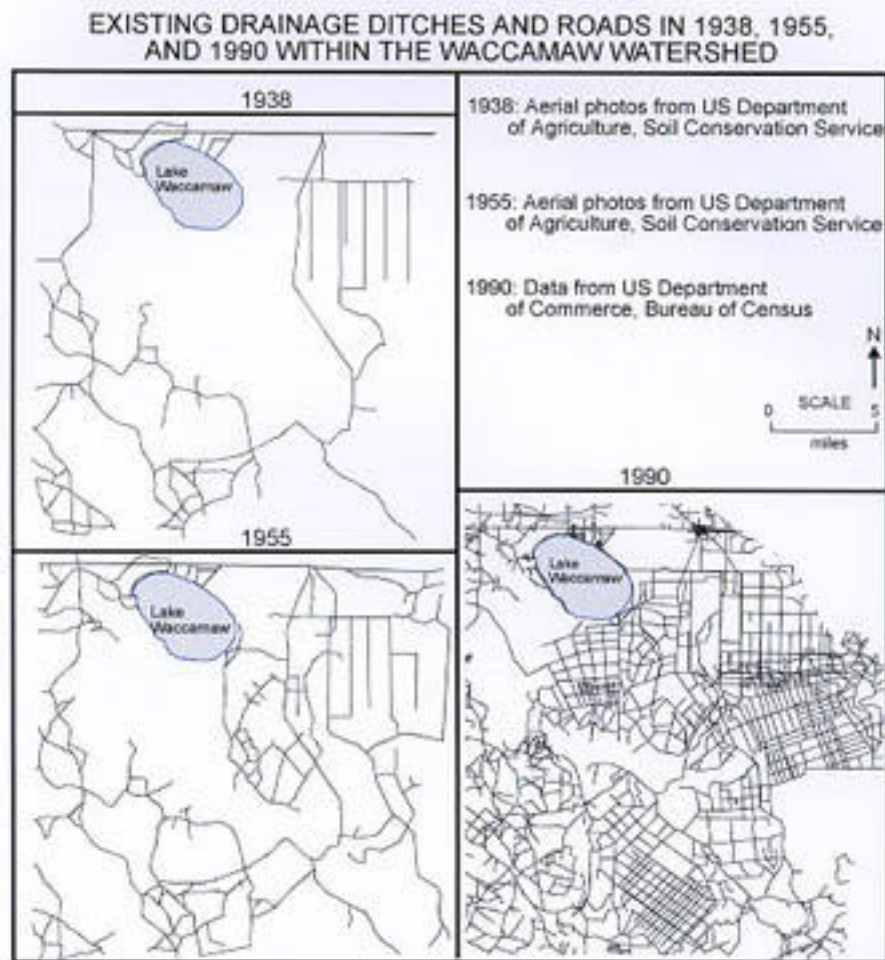
Figure 4. A ditch carrying water from a sprayed area of the Green Swamp

SFI Standard – “4.1.2.1.3 Program Participants shall use forest chemicals prudently (follow all applicable label requirements, Best Management Practices, and meet or exceed laws and regulations concerning the use of fertilizers, herbicides, and other forest chemicals) to improve forest health and productivity, while protecting employees, neighbors, the public, and the forest environment.”

SFI Reality – In the past three years alone, it is estimated that approximately half a million pounds of herbicides--a variety of some 22 different brands and mixes--have been spread over the Coastal Plains of North Carolina including the Green Swamp. When inspectors with North Carolina’s Division of Water Quality investigated I.P.’s use of chemicals in the Green swamp they found that, "Based on this field work it appears that these herbicides are being widely used across this area without regard to the presence of ditches or permanently flooded wetlands. Based on these field observations, the DWQ believes that the spirit and the letter of EPA labels are not being followed and that these herbicides are being applied to surface water." (July 13, 2000)

I.P.’s poor track record in the Green Swamp sends up a red flag on SFI companies’ ability to guarantee purchasers of paper and other wood products that these products are manufactured from forests that have been logged with environmental responsibility. In short, while the goals of the SFI are commendable, SFI member company practices have not changed, leading to only one conclusion: SFI really stands for “Same Old Forest Industry”.

Appendix A: Figures from “THE WACCAMAW DRAINAGE SYSTEM: GEOLOGY AND DYNAMICS OF A COASTAL WETLAND, SOUTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA”, Stanley R. Riggs et. al., Department of Geology, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C., Sept. 2000.



Infrared aerial photograph of a segment of green swamp that has been extensively drained by a large network of ditches and associated road dams. Notice that this area of natural wetland has been totally converted to a monoculture of pine plantation. Black and gray areas are harvested areas and red and pink areas are pines of various maturity.