

 UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Forest Certification Goes Mainstream

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I think it is safe to say we have all heard mention of “green wood” and “certified forests”. These phrases identify forests and/or forest products that are managed and harvested in a manner consistent with how certain groups define sustainability. Though this is not a new activity in the field of forestry (Tree Farm has been certifying forests for 60 years), it is one that has recently gained quite a bit of publicity and increased momentum.

Sustainable forest management. This is slippery terminology and means different things to different people. Sustainability can be defined as: *to keep in existence; to supply with necessities or nourishment; to support the spirits or vitality of some thing or place.* When applied to the forest, these personal ideals, which commonly elude forms of measurement such as monetary value, include clean air and water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, spiritual values, and aesthetics. Sustainability can also be defined as: *the continuing yield of a biological resource, such as timber and other forest products,* which is more measurable and concrete. To many private forest landowners, sustainable forest management means all of these things, with the measurable and the unmeasurable being equally important.

Forest Certification. Forest certification assures that forests are managed sustainably, according to standards established by a certifying organization. Many new forest certification programs began following the 1992 United Nations “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Several countries, including the U.S., identified sustainable timber harvesting as a priority. Various sets of criteria and indicators were developed, along with international agreements on their use. The U.S. participates in the Montreal Process, a working

group with a set of criteria and indicators for temperate and boreal forests. Criteria and indicators provide a method for describing, monitoring, and evaluating progress towards sustainable forest management.

Certification programs. To date, all programs are voluntary. Each organization focuses on one of two objectives: forest land certification or forest product certification. *Forest land certification* assures the public that forests are being managed sustainably and timber harvesting and silvicultural activities do not irreparably harm the environment. *Forest product certification* is a feature of some forest land certification programs and is dependent on a “chain of custody” process. “Chain of custody” tracks forest products from the time they leave the forest, through processing and marketing to the final consumer. This ensures that eco-labeled certified products can actually be traced back to a certified forest.

Certified Private Forests. Certified forest owners, such as a Tree Farm member, make a statement to the world that they, the forest owner, agree with and practice sustainable forest management. To date, private un-certified forest landowners will still be able to sell their timber to certified company mills that participate in a program that does not include the chain of custody process and eco-labeling. This could very well change. Check with your local mill before planning your next timber sale. Ask what requirements you must meet to sell your logs to them. Certification of your private forestland today is a positive step towards ensuring the future marketability of your forest products.

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Certified Loggers. Certification not only applies to forests and how they are managed, but also to those that harvest forest products. Currently, many mills in Idaho are now requiring that loggers that harvest and deliver logs to their mills not only meet Idaho's Forest Practices Act (FPA), but also complete an educational program called Logger Education to Advance Professionalism (LEAP). A new credential for Idaho loggers, called the Idaho's Pro-logger Program, is being administered through the Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho (ALC). This program was developed partially in response to forest certification and requires completion of the LEAP program, first aid training, safety, and Best Management Practices courses every other year, and 32 credits of continuing education activities over a two-year period. Forest certification programs such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI - see below) require this type of logger training. Currently, Idaho landowners who do their own logging must meet FPA, but do not have to be certified to sell their logs to a mill that does not participate in the chain-of-custody process. Be forewarned, this too is a topic that is now under discussion.

Several certification organizations and programs operate in the U.S. Included are brief descriptions and a web site address for more in-depth information.

The American Tree Farm System

www.treefarmssystem.org This program was established in 1941 and includes 70,000 Tree Farms and 90 million acres across the U.S., with approximately two-thirds of the acreage on industry lands and the remaining acres on non-industrial private forest land. The American Tree Farm System's certification standards focus on wood, water, wildlife, and recreation, and are currently being revised to more vigorous standards. Tree Farm certification does not include the chain of custody process, and hence does not offer eco-labeling.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)

www.afandpa.org/forestry/sfi/menu.html This program, operated by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), is a performance-based program with first-, second-, or third-party verification that forest management practices are sustainable. All AF&PA

member companies, which encompass 56.5 million acres or 80% of industrial timberlands in the U.S., must participate in the SFI program. SFI does not include a chain of custody process and hence does not offer eco-labeling.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

www.fscoax.org/ The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), not to be confused with the national Forest Stewardship Program, is a "certifier of certifiers", with two organizations in the U.S. - SmartWood (www.smartwood.org) and Scientific Certification Systems (www.scs1.com). These two organizations are accredited by the FSC to perform third-party certifications and use FSC's performance-based standards. FSC certification follows the chain of custody process and offers eco-labeling.

Green Tag Forestry www.nationalforestry.net/grntag/grntag.asp

Green Tag Forestry is a "third party" certification developed by the National Forestry Association in cooperation with the Association of Consulting Foresters and the National Woodland Owners Association. The Green Tag can be used as an eco-label.

As forestland owners and managers, keeping up to date about the latest trends in forest management, policy, law, and public opinion allows us to be better land managers. Forest and forest product certification is rapidly moving towards being what the public, and many natural resource professionals, perceive as the right thing to do.

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