

Almost half of the planet's original forests have disappeared and of what remains, only eight percent are protected. Each year the forest industry accounts for the harvest of 680 billion board feet of wood to meet the growing demand for paper and timber products. World demand for paper -- the single largest use of wood fiber -- has increased five fold since the 1950s, and is expected to double again over the next 50 years.

Forest Certification is a means of protecting forests by promoting responsible forestry practices. The process is carried out most effectively by an independent third party who assures that a forestry operation meets standards set by a certification program. Government has no direct role in the process. Forest Certification is a relatively new concept -- most certification systems were established in the 1990s, and all are evolving rapidly as they grow and compete. Certified wood is an aesthetic and functional equivalent to conventional wood and can replace it in any application, but they cannot be viewed as interchangeable in terms of specification and procurement.

Three Balanced and Effective Aspects of Forest Certification

- Environment - Forest Management standard should take into account issues such as biodiversity, water quality, soil erosion and wildlife habitat and will ensure ecologically sound forest management practices.

- Society - Standards that incorporate indigenous peoples' rights, public access and the social impacts of forestry on local communities will ensure that social benefits to human communities are maximized.

- Sustainable Economics - Standards that emphasize sustained yields and species diversity ensure long-term economic viability and thus a profitable and stable future for the forest industry.

For any standard to be well-balanced and effective in assessing the impact and benefits of forest management, it needs to address all three aspects.

The two primary organizations for setting certification standards are the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forest Initiative. Of the various certification schemes, the Forest Stewardship Council represents the gold standard in green building circles, and is the only reference standard recognized by the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certification program.



The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, not for profit, non-governmental organization which was established in 1993 to promote appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests. FSC has set the global standard for certification and those standards are used by all types of forest ownership around the world. FSC is governed by a Board of Directors and membership formed in three chambers: social, environmental and economic. The board is elected by the members. Company participation in FSC is voluntary. Members are required to be audited annually to ensure adherence to standards.

The FSC has three main categories for certification: Forest Management Certification, Chain-of Custody Certification and SmartWood Rediscovered Wood Certification.

FSC Forest Management Certification certifies forestry operations worldwide, including large and mid-sized forest managers and groups of small landowners. To qualify, companies must inventory their forests to show how they would be cut under a harvest cycle, usually 25 years, to allow regeneration. Only limited numbers of trees may be cut and soil erosion must be minimized to allow new growth. Companies must also invest in expensive machinery to ensure low-impact logging that protects the forest. Standards vary by country and region.

FSC Chain-of-Custody Certification certifies forest-product operations including manufacturers, distributors and retailers that purchase and sell FSC-certified products. Chain of Custody (CoC) certification assures consumers and intermediate processors that the wood they buy comes from certified forests. CoC certification verifies the flow of FSC-certified forest products through the supply chain, from the forest to the point of sale. CoC certification is available for sawmills, secondary manufacturers, broker/distributors, wholesalers, retailers and other points in the wood chain.



SmartWood Rediscovered Wood Certification evaluates forest products operations that are reclaiming or using reclaimed, recycled, and/or salvaged wood materials. Those that meet the SmartWood standards are awarded certification for Rediscovered Wood (RW). A program of the Rainforest Alliance, SmartWood was the world's first independent forestry certifier. Established in 1989, the organization went on to help establish the FSC. SmartWood is now accredited by the FSC and operates on a global level and has certified operations in 50 countries.



The Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI) was developed and adopted by the American Paper Association (AF&PA) in 1994 in response to the formation of the FSC. Although the creation of the SFI was a step in the right direction, the standards of the SFI are not as stringent and FSC's and third-party independent certification of its members is not required. Membership to the AF&PA is contingent on SFI certification. SFI's primary focus is on industrial forests in the United States and Canada. The Sustainable Forestry Board (SFB), an independent non-governmental organization, manages the SFI standard, certification process, dispute resolution and quality control.



Windfall Lumber

Certified Wood is available at a variety of home improvement and hardware stores nation-wide. Olympia is fortunate enough to be home to Windfall Lumber. Located just a few blocks from the Farmer's Market, they carry hardwoods, moldings, cedar and environmentally low VOC finish products. Visit their website at www.windfalllumber.com for more information.

The benefits of using Certified Wood are reflected in the health of the planet. Responsible use of the earth's natural resources will help to preserve the planet and in turn preserve all that it contains.

For more specific FSC standards visit www.fsc.org. For more information about SmartWood visit www.smartwood.org. For more information about SFI standards go to www.aboutsfi.org.

Wood Certification