

**Forest Certification Programs:  
A Comparison of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry  
Initiative (SFI) of the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA)  
April 2002**

Forest certification is a "seal of approval" awarded to forestry operations that adopt environmentally and socially responsible forestry practices and to companies that process and sell products made of certified wood.

Two forest products certification programs operating in the United States include the non-profit Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the forest industry-backed Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). FSC is the only environmentally credible forest products certification and labeling program in existence today.

FSC has support from: environmental groups internationally including Natural Resources Defense Council, World Wildlife Fund, and The Nature Conservancy; major retailers including Home Depot, Ikea, Andersen Windows and Lowe's that have FSC wood procurement preferences; and, small and large forest owners and timber companies in 54 countries, including two of the largest pulp and paper companies in the world—Assidomain and Stora in Sweden.

In response to market demand for FSC products, a number of weaker competing industry- and government-backed "certification" programs have been formed internationally. The SFI program was commenced in 1995 by the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA), a timber industry trade association whose members manage 56 million acres representing 90% of industrial timberland in the United States.

SFI's approach is much weaker and more flexible than FSC's because of its goal of working with all AF&PA member companies to improve practices, regardless of current performance and interest. As a result, SFI lacks many components necessary for credible certification. For example, unlike FSC, SFI fails to:

- prevent the clearing and conversion of diverse natural forests to ecologically barren plantation monocultures—a process that has destroyed much forest habitat in the Pacific Northwestern United States and is now destroying forests and forested wetlands across the Southeast at an alarming rate;
- protect intact old growth forests in the US and high conservation value forests globally;
- protect sensitive, rare, and state-listed threatened and endangered species;
- adequately control clearcutting and specify retention of tree cover in clearings to help maintain ecosystem function. (SFI's average allowable clearcut size is 116 football fields!)

Because of its weaker approach, in the two years since SFI launched the "certification" component of its program, it has "certified" 50 million acres of near *status quo* industrial practices—i.e., almost the entire US industrial timber base, plus millions of acres of old growth logging in Canada. This is about as much acreage (70 million) as FSC has certified to high standards in 54 countries in 9 years.

Many studies demonstrate real differences in the FSC and SFI programs. They include analyses by NRDC, American Lands, National Wildlife Federation, Maine Audubon and FERN in Europe, as well as two independent studies.

The most recent independent study was released in January 2002. It is a field comparison of the two programs prepared by the Pinchot Institute. Six state agencies and universities participated in the program, as well as thirty Indian tribes. The results show that:

- 5 of 6 agencies agree that FSC provides more measures for protection of biological and ecological resources. FSC provides better protection in 12 of 15 areas including endangered species, wildlife habitat, protected areas, chemical use, etc...
- 5 of 6 agencies agree that FSC is a more comprehensive system. FSC ranks higher in measuring sustainable forestry and a range of social and environmental concerns.

- 6 of 6 agencies agree that FSC has better standards for public participation and social issues such as impacts of logging on communities and indigenous people.
- 6 of 6 agencies agree that FSC auditors did a more thorough job, ranking higher in 15 of 20 categories.
- Among Indian tribes, FSC ranked higher than SFI in 70% of survey questions.

In October 2001, a report sponsored by Home Depot, FSC and AF&PA was released by Meridian Institute, a non-profit that takes an objective approach to assessing conflicts. As a consensus report of SFI and FSC participants, it draws no conclusion about which program is better, but shows many differences—from governance, to public reporting, to environmental standards. There are differences in 24 areas and similarities in 7. The objectives of each program capture the overall difference: SFI establishes a baseline of performance to encourage improvement while FSC establishes a high standard for exemplary management.

In response to public criticism, SFI has made some improvements since these reports were issued. Improvements appearing in SFI's new standards (2002-'04) include requirements:

- for compliance with laws
- to minimize chemical use
- to control use of exotic species, and
- to procure only legally sourced timber to stem illegal logging in developing countries

While these and other changes are to be commended, many deficiencies still remain, including those described above and in a more extensive list appearing in the attached table. Thus, SFI should continue to improve its program and member company practices.

Several environmental groups including The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International have joined the SFI Board of Directors which is dominated by forestry interests. They joined not as an endorsement of SFI's current program, but to help improve it and integrate formal protection for endangered forests, which has yet to occur.

While SFI may have a role to play as a continuous improvement program for the forest products industry, environmental groups do not believe that SFI merits a "green" certification label for wood products at this time. Environmentalists have firmly opposed proposed launches of a deficient and misleading SFI certification label on wood products and will continue to do.

The FSC's unique strengths provide clear justification for continued FSC purchasing preferences by wood products manufacturers, retailers and consumers concerned about improving global forest management. An FSC preference remains the fastest and most effective way to drive improvements in both forest management and weaker certification programs globally.

Timber producers engaged in SFI and other certification programs are encouraged to take the next step toward FSC certification as a means to positively differentiate their practices. FSC certification is achievable for industrial and private forestland owners alike, as well as for forest products manufacturers and distributors.

## **COMPARISON OF FOREST CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS**

### **AMERICAN FOREST & PAPER ASSOCIATION'S SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE (SFI) (2002-2004 VERSION PUBLISHED DEC 2001) AND THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC) U.S. PROGRAM**

April 2001

<b><u>Components of Acceptable Certification Standards:</u></b>	<b><u>FSC-US</u></b>	<b><u>SFI '02-'04</u></b>
§ Adequately controls large-scale clear cutting of forests.	Yes	No
§ Prevents clearing and conversion of diverse natural forests to ecologically simplified plantations.	Yes	No
§ Includes protections for intact old-growth forests in the US and high conservation value forests internationally.	Yes	No
§ Prescribes protection for sensitive, rare, and state-listed threatened and endangered species.	Yes	No
§ Prevents the release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) into the environment.	Yes	No
§ Adequately protects maintenance of ecological functions.	Yes	No
§ Specifically assesses social factors such as impacts of harvesting on communities and indigenous people.	Yes	No
§ Standards emphasize rigorous field-based performance thresholds, rather than assessment of documentation and procedures that can be assessed in an office.	Yes	No
§ Requires consistent and replicable application of standards to all operations in a region, rather than allowing companies to individually tailor the standard that is used to assess them.	Yes	No
§ Includes a product label. It is based on a "chain of custody" tracking system to ensure that wood products labeled as certified actually originate in forests certified to the standard represented on the label.	Yes	No
§ Requires annual field audits of certified operations by independent, third-party certifiers, who in turn are accredited and monitored annually for quality control.	Yes	No
§ Gives certifiers full control over assessment process (scope, content, and corrective actions).	Yes	No
§ Is adequately independent of vested industry interests.	Yes	No
§ Includes program governance by an equal balance of ecological, social, and economic interests, at all levels of decision-making, rather than being dominated by forestry-related interests.	Yes	No
§ Requires public consultation during certification process.	Yes	No
§ Requires public summary of each certified operation.	Yes, detailed	Yes, not detailed
§ Is an internationally recognized and applicable program.	Yes	No