



SFI and FSC Certification in North America — A Summary Comparison

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc.® (SFI®) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) programs both certify lands in the United States and Canada. This document looks at both programs — their scope and governance, forest management certification, chain-of-custody-certification, and requirements for sourcing fiber from uncertified lands.

Studies have shown buyers and consumers appreciate the value of forest certification to help them choose forest products from responsible sources. Currently, about 10 percent of the world’s forests are certified, and 40 percent of these certified lands are in North America.

“We must remember that the fundamental purpose of forest certification systems was to decrease deforestation rates, particularly in tropical regions by using the marketplace to create incentives for good forest practices. Quibbling over the relative merits of good systems distracts from that overall goal.”

— DR. JEFF HOWE, DOVETAIL PARTNERS INC. 2008¹

GOVERNANCE AND SCOPE

Comparison Point	Sustainable Forestry Initiative	Forest Stewardship Council
Area certified in U.S and Canada	181 million acres (73 million hectares). ² 383 million acres (155 million hectares) certified to SFI, Canadian Standards Association & American Tree Farm System — all recognized by SFI.	109 million acres (44 million hectares) ³
Independence	Independent, non-profit charitable organization.	Independent, non-profit charitable organization.
Board of Directors	Equal representation from environmental, social and economic chambers (government representation in social chamber).	Equal representation from environmental, social and economic chambers (government representation excluded).
Third-party audits	Yes. By certification bodies accredited by American National Standards Institute (ANSI), ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB), and/or Standards Council of Canada (SCC).	Yes. By certification bodies accredited by FSC International’s Accreditation Services International (ASI).
Number of standards	One for North America.	More than 30 worldwide (13 North America). ⁴
Certify to interim standards	No.	Yes. ⁵
Open standard development process	Yes. Includes public consultation. Developed by multi-stakeholder resources committee, approved by SFI Inc. Board of Directors. Peer review by independent SFI External Review Panel.	Yes. Includes public consultation. Developed by multi-stakeholder working group, approved by FSC International Board of Directors.
Criteria and Indicators	Process and performance-based indicators address environmental, forestry, social and economic issues.	Process and performance-based indicators address environmental, forestry, social and economic issues.
Basis for criteria & indicators	Inter-governmental Montréal Process criteria & indicator foundation; members represent about 90% of world’s temperate & boreal forests. Public & stakeholder input.	Developed by founding members, based on public input as to what good forest management means. Government excluded from decision making.

¹ Green Building Blues: Is Wood Getting a Raw Deal? www.dovetailinc.org/content/green-building-blues-wood-getting-raw-deal

² December 2009 www.sfiprogram.org

³ December 2009 www.fscscandna.org and www.fscus.org

⁴ FSC US is currently involved in a process to unify the regional standards into one national U.S. standard with regional variation for key indicators.

⁵ In 2009, close to half of FSC-certified lands globally were certified to an interim standard that had not yet been fully endorsed by FSC International. The other half certified to one of the more than 30 FSC standards.

FOREST MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION

These tables are based on requirements from the SFI 2010-2014 Standard and general information and details from the FSC International Principles and Criteria, which is the basis for the numerous FSC national and regional standards. While FSC regional standards go into more specifics, it is difficult to draw comparisons because the 13 FSC standards in North America have a wide range of variation.

The SFI program was created to certify forests in North America, and has one forest certification standard that applies across the United States and Canada. Its fiber sourcing and chain-of-custody standards apply to North America and offshore sources, given the global trade of forest products.

Comparison Point	Sustainable Forestry Initiative	Forest Stewardship Council
Sustainable harvest levels	Yes, requires formal calculation of long-term harvest.	Yes, requires formal calculation of long-term harvest.
Conserves biodiversity and old growth	Yes.	Yes.
Protects endangered species	Yes.	Yes.
Protects water quality	Yes. Meets or exceeds best management practices.	Yes. Meets or exceeds best management practices.
Recognizes rights of indigenous peoples	Comply with social laws, including indigenous peoples' rights; support efforts by indigenous peoples to apply principles of sustainable forest management. For forest management responsibilities on public lands, confer with affected indigenous peoples to understand & respect traditional forest-related knowledge; identify & protect special sites; address non-timber products of value.	Recognize & respect legal & customary rights of Aboriginal peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources. Aboriginal peoples control forest management on their lands & territories unless they delegate control with free & informed consent.
Prompt reforestation	Yes. Prompt reforestation of harvested sites, with time limits.	Yes. Forest regeneration must occur- timeframes often unspecified.
Addresses forest conversion	Yes. Fiber from forests converted to other uses cannot be certified and cannot count towards certified content in labels and claims.	Yes. Conversion to plantations or non-forest use not allowed except under specific circumstances.
Allows plantations	Yes. SFI requirements apply on plantations & natural forests alike. ⁶	Yes, in some circumstances. ⁷ Generally not allowed if forest conversion from natural forest occurs after 1994.
Allows clearcutting	Yes, where appropriate. Average clearcut size does not exceed 120 acres (50 ha) except where necessary to meet regulatory requirements or respond to forest health emergencies or other natural catastrophes.	Yes, where appropriate. No maximum clearcut size in many FSC standards, including those standards with the largest application in North America.
Chemical use	Minimize chemical use, use least-toxic & narrowest-spectrum pesticides. Use of integrated pest management where feasible. Require proper equipment, training & disposal. Follow all laws & regulations and label directions.	Promote non-chemical approaches, strive to avoid use of chemical pesticides. Prohibit pesticides that are persistent, toxic or whose derivatives remain biologically active and accumulate in the food chain beyond their intended use. Require proper equipment, training & disposal.
Genetically modified (GM) trees*	Research on genetically modified trees shall adhere to all applicable federal, state, and provincial regulations & international protocols. ⁸	Prohibit wood harvested from forests in which genetically modified trees are planted.

* Genetically modified forest products are not commercially produced in North America. SFI forest certification only applies to North America.

⁶ The U.S. Forest Service reports that the decline in natural forest is about 0.1% a year, due to several causes such as urban development. FSC typically allows a conversion rate from natural forest to plantations of 0.5%.

⁷ About 8% of FSC certifications outside of North America are to extensive plantations and, while native species are preferred, many involve non-native (exotic) species. Plantation certification under FSC is limited when conversion is from natural forests, however, plantation certification is acceptable if semi-natural forests are converted to plantations.

⁸ The SFI program does not ban government-approved and controlled research on genetically modified tree seedlings as research may find ways to resist pests, insects and disease or restore lost native species such as the American chestnut.

CHAIN-OF-CUSTODY CERTIFICATION

In addition to third-party forest certification, the SFI and FSC programs both offer chain-of-custody certification and on-product labels. Chain-of-custody certification is a tool used to track wood fiber from a certified forest. It also tracks uncertified content and helps buyers avoid unwanted sources.

The SFI program has two chain-of-custody labels, which show that some or all of the product's fiber content comes from forests certified to the SFI, Canadian Standards Association or American Tree Farm System standards. Both SFI labels can state the percentage of recycled content in the product, when available.

The FSC program has three chain-of-custody labels — pure (100 percent certified), recycled (at least 85 percent post-consumer) and mixed (blend of pure, recycled and controlled sources).

Both SFI and FSC have requirements to avoid fiber from unwanted sources — the SFI program through its controversial sources avoidance requirements and the FSC program through its controlled wood requirements.

Comparison Point	SFI Chain of Custody	FSC Chain of Custody
Track certified, uncertified & recycled content	Yes.	Yes.
Allows average percent ⁹ and volume credit methods ¹⁰ to calculate certified fiber. Companies can make a 100 per cent certified forest claim if they physically separate the certified forest content — this method is not often used.	Yes.	Yes.
Third-party certification audit	Yes.	Yes.
On-product labeling	Yes.	Yes.
Allows uncertified content to be mixed with certified content and carry the on-product label	Yes.	Yes.
North American certified fiber eligible for label	Approximately 80%. ¹¹	Approximately 20%.
Chain-of-custody certificates in North America	807 certificates at 1,831 locations. ¹²	4,258 certificates. ¹³

GLOBAL SOURCING FROM UNCERTIFIED LANDS

Given that more than 90 percent of the world's forests are not certified, the SFI and FSC programs both have requirements to account for and deal with fiber from higher-risk uncertified lands. Through FSC controlled wood requirements, SFI fiber sourcing and SFI chain-of-

custody global requirements, companies are told what to avoid when procuring fiber from lands that are not certified. This reduces the risk of fiber from unwanted sources, but does not improve forest management on uncertified lands.

AVOIDING UNWANTED SOURCES FROM UNCERTIFIED LANDS OUTSIDE NORTH AMERICA

Comparison Point	SFI Fiber Sourcing & Chain of Custody	FSC Controlled Wood*
Avoid illegal sources	Yes.	Yes.
Avoid sources where social laws may be violated	Yes. Encourage socially sound practices with processes to address workers' health and safety; fair labor practices, indigenous peoples' rights; anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures; prevailing wages; and workers' right to organize.	Yes. Avoid material harvested in violation of traditional and civil rights.
Maintain biodiversity	Yes. Protect forests with exceptional conservation value; biodiversity hotspots & high-biodiversity wilderness areas. ¹⁴	Yes. Avoid material harvested from forests in which high conservation values are threatened by management activities.

* There are five FSC controlled wood requirements — forest conversion and genetically modified trees are addressed in the Forest Management Certification table on page 2.

⁹ Company discloses (based on average content) what percentage of fiber in the product comes from certified lands, from recycled content (if applicable), and from non-certified lands. If 60% of the fiber is from certified land, then 100% of the output can be sold as having 60% certified content. In the SFI program, the average percent method must be used to qualify for the "percent-content" label.

¹⁰ Company may use label on percentage of output that corresponds to the average percentage of fiber in the product that comes from certified lands. If 60% of the fiber is from certified land, then 60% of output can be sold as certified.

¹¹ The SFI on-product label can also be used to identify fiber certified to two other North American certification programs — the Canadian Sustainable Forest Management Standard and the American Tree Farm System.

¹² December 2009 www.sfi-program.org

¹³ November/December 2009 <http://fsc.canada.org/factsandfigures4.htm> & http://fscus.org/certified_companies/?num=20

¹⁴ When sourcing fiber from outside North America, SFI program participants must maintain biodiversity by using information from organizations such as the Alliance for Zero Extinction, World Wildlife Fund, World Resources Institute and International Union for Conservation of Nature.

SOURCING FROM UNCERTIFIED LANDS IN NORTH AMERICA

The SFI program is unique in that it also has fiber sourcing requirements that promote responsible forest management on uncertified lands in North America, as well as avoiding unwanted sources for offshore procurement. This includes fiber and forest products that come from millions of family-owned forests in the United States and Canada. The SFI program offers participants an on-product certified fiber sourcing

label that tells consumers the company has been third-party certified to meet SFI fiber sourcing requirements, many of them summarized below. These labels do not make claims about certified forests but do show that a third-party independent audit has occurred to ensure the fiber sourcing requirements, landowner outreach and logger training requirements, among others, have been met.

PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE FORESTRY ON UNCERTIFIED LANDS IN THE U.S. AND CANADA

Comparison Point	SFI Fiber Sourcing	FSC Controlled Wood
Logger training	Establish & support training programs for loggers (responsible forest management, best management practices), reforestation & conservation, endangered species & safety.	No requirements.
Education & outreach	Develop & distribute regionally appropriate information to landowners on biodiversity, wildlife habitat, endangered species, etc.	No requirements.
Research	Support research to improve the health, productivity & management of forest resources, individually or through partnerships.	No requirements.
Best management practices	Provide guidance to landowners on use of best management practices to protect water quality; track & improve performance over time.	No requirements.
Reforestation	Provide information & guidance to landowners on benefits of reforestation after harvest.	No requirements.
Continual improvement	Continually monitor & report implementation of SFI Standard; make necessary improvements.	No requirements.
Third-party certification audit	Yes.	Yes.

RECOGNITION IN NORTH AMERICA AND BEYOND

Comprehensive studies by many respected organizations and agencies have concluded that certification to either the SFI or FSC program is a good choice, proving a forest is being managed sustainably and legally. There is a growing trend, especially with chain-of-custody certification, to be certified to both programs.

- In 2008, the United Kingdom's Central Point of Expertise on Timber confirmed SFI, FSC, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC) programs were among those that meet its government's requirements for 'legality' and 'sustainability'.¹⁵
- The U.S. General Services Administration encourages the use of certified wood for all new installations of wood products, and references FSC United States and SFI for more information.¹⁶
- Many green building tools, including the National Home Building Standard™ (ICC 700-2008) in the United States and Green Globes, recognize wood products certified to credible programs including SFI, FSC, CSA, and American Tree Farm System as a sound environmental choice.
- Public Works and Government Services Canada requires all wood products

used in its building projects to be certified to SFI, FSC, or CSA, and believes all three of these systems effectively promote more sustainable management of Canada's forest resources.¹⁷

- In 2008, the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers said the SFI, FSC and the CSA programs "demonstrate, and promote the sustainability of forest management practices in Canada."¹⁸

"Discrimination against wood can actually be built into (green building initiatives) standards, as wood is often the only material required to demonstrate responsible sourcing. . . . standards giving exclusive recognition to particular forest-certification brands may help drive demand for these brands at the expense of wider appreciation of the environmental merits of wood."

— 2008/2009 UNECE/FAO FOREST PRODUCTS ANNUAL MARKET REVIEW¹⁹

MORE INFORMATION: Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) www.sfiprogram.org • Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) International www.fsc.org

¹⁵ CPET Assessment of Forest Certification Schemes www.proforest.net/cpet/documents

¹⁶ Solicitation for Offers requirement SFO Section 7.4 Wood Products (revised August, 2008) [http://contacts.gsa.gov/webforms.nsf/0/16A3F7C2E0044E4485256F4D00628BE3/\\$file/SFO_8-29-08.pdf](http://contacts.gsa.gov/webforms.nsf/0/16A3F7C2E0044E4485256F4D00628BE3/$file/SFO_8-29-08.pdf)

¹⁷ Public Works and Government Services Canada Questions and Answers <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/biens-property/questions-eng.html>

¹⁸ Canadian Council of Forest Ministers Statement on Forest Certification Standards in Canada www.ccfm.org/pdf/CCFM_Statement_FRandEN.pdf#page=2

¹⁹ UN Economic Commission for Europe and UN Food and Agriculture Organization 2008-2009 UNECE/FAO Forest Products Annual Market Review <http://timber.unece.org/index.php?id=208>

