



Fact or Fiction in Forest Certification?

Many organizations appear unaware of the numerous improvements the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) has made over time to strengthen its certification program. As a result, SFI recently made market acceptance its new strategic objective, and is taking steps to raise understanding in the marketplace of what SFI can offer and how SFI-certified products demonstrate a company's corporate social responsibility.

Campaigning organizations that want to promote a preferred brand at any cost often base their claims on information that is out of date or inaccurate. Here are some of the facts to help your sales representatives present a realistic and accurate view of SFI:

1. Claim: SFI is not an independent organization.

- **Fact:** SFI is a fully independent, registered non-profit charitable organization with a 501c3 status. Its three-chamber Board of Directors governs all aspects of the SFI program, with equal representation from the environmental, economic and social sectors.
- **Fact:** The American Forest and Paper Association no longer has any control over the SFI program. As the U.S. industry's trade association, AF&PA still makes participation in SFI or other North American forest certification programs endorsed by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC) a condition of membership to improve forest practices, not to influence SFI. The situation is similar in Canada where the Forest Products Association of Canada has made certification to SFI, the Canadian Standards Association or the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) a condition of membership.

2. Claim: FSC has NGO endorsement, and SFI does not.

- **Fact:** SFI has the support of and works in partnership with numerous conservation groups, including The Conservation Fund, the American Bird Conservancy, Pacific Forest Trust, Ducks Unlimited (US), NatureServe and others. These are solution-oriented, constructive organizations that work to improve forest management and meet conservation objectives.
- Conservation groups demonstrate their support of SFI in a number of ways:
 - i. Current members of the SFI Inc. Board of Directors in the environmental chamber are:
 1. George H. Fenwick, President, American Bird Conservancy
 2. Jerry McCollum, President and CEO, Georgia Wildlife Foundation
 3. Laurie A. Wayburn, President, The Pacific Forest Trust
 4. Steven A. Williams President & CEO, Wildlife Management Institute

The terms of the board representatives from The Conservation

Fund and The Nature Conservancy have expired, resulting in two openings for conservation groups.

Conservation groups represented on SFI's independent External Review Panel include the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, the National Association of Conservation Districts, the American Fisheries Society and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The panel conducts an independent review of the SFI program while seeking steady improvements in sustainable forestry practices.

Conservation groups work with SFI through partnerships and pilot projects to improve the SFI standard and its implementation. For example:

- o The SFI Inc. Board of Directors recently released for public review and comment a new performance measure and associated indicator (to potentially be added to the 2005-2009 SFI standard) to promote the conservation of priority sites for endangered or critically endangered vascular plant and vertebrate species.
- o The Nature Conservancy is currently working with SFI Inc. and program participants on conservation and landscape planning exercises designed to better understand implementation of requirements in the 2005-2009 SFI standard, and how they could be improved in the 2010-2014 SFI standard.

ii. Conservation groups also work with SFI companies in numerous activities to improve research and understanding of forestry-specific issues. In 2008, SFI Inc. will recognize many of these achievements through awards that highlight conservation partnerships that are improving practices on the ground.

Note: SFI differentiates between conservation groups and campaigning groups. SFI and program participants welcome opportunities to work in partnership with conservation groups that conduct research and work on the ground to improve forestry and/or meet conservation objectives. SFI would welcome an opportunity to engage constructively with campaigning groups such as Greenpeace, ForestEthics, and Markets Initiative. Unfortunately, these organizations tend to use dated or inaccurate information about SFI in an attempt to pressure organizations in the supply chain into moving in one direction, i.e. to buy and or demand FSC in the marketplace. For this reason, campaigning groups tend to oversell FSC and undersell SFI and, to date, have shown no interest in working with SFI to improve forest practices.

3. Claim: There is no guarantee that products marked as SFI certified have any connection to SFI-certified forests.

- **Fact:** SFI tracks exactly which organizations have achieved forest certification to the SFI 2005-2009 standard and the location of those forests. SFI requires that public audit reports are posted on its website to ensure that a claim to SFI certification is accurate and traceable. SFI also tracks exactly which organizations have achieved SFI chain-of-custody certification, and requires that evidence of certification is posted on the SFI website.
- **Fact:** The complexity of the supply chain both in North America and globally means that all certification programs (SFI, FSC, CSA, PEFC) have chain-of-custody standards that allow for percentage-based methods to track certified wood flows, and do not require the products to be separated. As a result, there is never an absolute guarantee of a direct link between the certified product and the certified forest with any of the programs. However, organizations must track the percent-certified content coming into their facility over a period of time, and sell the same percentage amount as certified leaving the facility. As a result, SFI can guarantee that the same percentage amount of certified content coming into the mill is being sold as SFI-certified content leaving the mill.

Other background info on labels, if needed.

- **Fact:** Under SFI's chain-of-custody average percent method and volume credit methods, an organization is required to disclose what percentage of the product comes from certified lands, from recycled content (if applicable), and from uncertified lands.
- **Fact:** Under SFI's certified content labels, the organization is required to disclose the percent certified content found in the product, much like recycled content labels disclose the percent recycled content in the product. SFI is the only forest certification program that communicates to the buyer the percent content in the product.
- **Fact:** SFI has a fiber sourcing label, distinct from a certified content label, which speaks to the procured wood requirements found in objectives 8-13 of the SFI standard. This label can only be used if 100 percent of the fiber flows through a third-party certified SFI procurement system. A certified procurement system requires that organizations have an auditable system in place to track all the wood they use, whether it comes from a certified forest or not. If it does not come from a certified forest, it has to meet the procured wood objectives related to best management practices, reforestation, and critically imperiled and imperiled species. This encourages companies to use trained loggers in sustainable forestry practices and avoid illegally logged fiber and fiber from biodiversity hot spots.
- **Fact:** Under all of SFI's labels, the non-certified fiber cannot come from controversial sources (illegal logging, biodiversity hotspots, etc.)

4. Claim: FSC is more rigorous than SFI.

- **Fact:** Independent criteria-based assessments have demonstrated that SFI and FSC meet legality and sustainability expectations. SFI staff can provide examples of such assessments, upon request.
- **Fact:** SFI has one single standard with auditable objectives and performance measures that are the same no matter where that standard is applied across North America.

- **Fact:** FSC has 13 standards that vary significantly across North America, nine in the U.S. and four in Canada. To say FSC is more rigorous than SFI is highly misleading. Here is just one example:
 - o Campaigning organizations like ForestEthics and Greenpeace give the impression that FSC is the preferred choice because of its approach to clearcutting, which they claim is a poor forestry practice. They leave the impression that FSC does not allow clearcutting. In reality, FSC standards vary significantly. The FSC Canada Boreal Standard, which is responsible for 60 percent of the FSC-certified acres across North America and provides most of the FSC-certified products used in North America, has no maximum clearcut size limits. As a result, there are thousands of acres of land clearcut under FSC certifications in the boreal. The FSC Pacific Coast standard in the U.S. Pacific Northwest has a clearcut size limit of about 40 to 60 acres, however, few companies have pursued certification to this standard. There are almost 45 million acres certified to the FSC Boreal Standard and less than two million acres certified the FSC Pacific Coast Standard.

5. Claim: SFI allows clearcuts (Refer also to Q&A #4 above.)

- **Fact:** When used appropriately, clearcutting is an acceptable harvesting method that can mimic natural disturbances such as wildfire, and benefit many plant and animal species that require openings in the forest.
- **Fact:** Yes. SFI does allow clearcuts and SFI does have a limit on clearcut size of 120 acres average across a certified area.
- **Fact:** FSC standards also allow clearcuts and some have no limits — including the FSC Canada Boreal standard, which covers 60 percent of all FSC-certified lands in North America and provides much of FSC's certified fiber in the U.S. marketplace.

Performance Measure 5.2. Program Participants shall manage the size, shape, and placement of clearcut harvests.

Indicators:

1. Average size of clearcut harvest areas does not exceed 120 acres, except when necessary to respond to forest health emergencies or other natural catastrophes.
 2. Documentation through internal records of clearcut size and the process for calculating average size.
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6. Claim: Plantations are "bad forestry".

- **Fact:** All certification standards, including SFI and FSC, recognize plantations and allow for their certification.
 - o Approximately eight percent of all FSC certifications are to extensive plantations in areas outside of North America, and involve non-native (exotic) species primarily Sitka spruce in the United Kingdom, lodgepole pine in Sweden, eucalyptus and radiata pine in Brazil, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile and others. Virtually all of FSC-certified plantations use chemicals; virtually all use clearcutting for final harvest; virtually none rely on variable retention harvesting.

- o Many plantations in the U.S. are actually on reclaimed agricultural land. For example, under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), more than 1.1 million acres of agricultural land have been planted with trees as of 2006.
- o SFI understands that North America has natural forests and plantation forests and, as a North American standard, it is committed to improving the practice of forestry on all forest lands. SFI's water quality, wildlife habitat and other requirements apply on plantations and natural forests alike.
- o SFI Inc. would like to better understand why campaigning organizations in the global trade of forest products accept FSC-certified wood from plantations in Brazil, Chile or Indonesia but not SFI-certified wood from southern yellow-pine forests in Georgia.
- o Campaigners that promote tree-free forest products from annual crop plantations fail to recognize the annual environmental impacts of these crops, such as irrigation and chemical use, and the environmental benefits of growing trees that provide habitat for wildlife, sequester carbon, and provide a multitude of goods and services associated with a forest.

7. Claim: FSC does not allow forest conversion, SFI does.

- **Fact:** A forest that is being converted to other uses could not be SFI certified as it would not meet many of the standard requirements, including forest regeneration. Wood from these forests cannot count as SFI-certified content under SFI label use requirements.
 - o Globally, forest conversion is a significant issue, especially in developing countries where there is significant forest loss. The FSC standard is applied globally, and makes three clear exceptions for forest conversion. FSC Principle 6.10 states, "Forest conversion to plantations or non-forest land uses shall not occur, **except in** circumstances where conversion:
 1. entails a very limited portion of the forest management unit;
 2. does not occur on high conservation value forest areas; and
 3. will enable clear, substantial, additional, secure, long-term conservation benefits across the forest management unit.
 - o It is common knowledge that, on average, five-per-cent conversion is acceptable for FSC certification under these exception clauses, which is significantly higher than the U.S. national average for forest land conversion of one-tenth of one per cent. Every certification body conducting FSC audits allows a different amount of converted land into a FSC-certified forest.

8. Claim: SFI allows use of GMOs.

- **Fact:** Currently, GMO forest products are not commercially available in North America. SFI lands are certified only in North America.
- **Fact:** Limited government-approved trials involving GMOs in North America do not result in the commercial sale of products.
- **Fact:** Research is important to the future of the world's forests.

For example, it can help to find new ways to make trees resistant to insects and disease that can destroy significant tracts of forest land.

- **Fact:** SFI recognizes that the topic of GMOs cannot be ignored, and that research involving biotechnology has the potential to restore trees with important ties to North America's natural heritage, such as the American Chestnut. The SFI standard requires that program participants that utilize improved planting stock, including trees derived through biotechnology, shall use sound scientific methods and follow all applicable laws and international protocols.

9. Claim: SFI allows use of chemicals.

- **Fact:** All certification standards, including SFI and FSC, recognize the important role of chemicals and allow for their use in forest management. When used properly, chemicals can promote regeneration after harvest and limit invasive species, pests, and disease without compromising the natural environment.
- **Fact:** The SFI standard auditable Performance Measure 2.2 and supporting requirements makes it clear that *Program Participants shall minimize chemical use required to achieve management objectives while protecting employees, neighbors, the public and the forest environment.*
- **Fact:** The SFI standard requires *the use of least-toxic and narrowest-spectrum pesticides necessary to achieve management objectives and the use of integrated pest management where feasible.*
- **Fact:** The SFI standard requires *monitoring of water quality or safeguards to ensure proper equipment use and protection of streams, lakes, and other water bodies as well as use of methods to ensure protection of threatened and endangered species.*

10. Claim: SFI does not adequately protect old growth or endangered forests.

- **Fact:** SFI's Performance Measure 4.1, indicator 6 requires *support of and participation in plans or programs for the conservation of old-growth forests in the region of ownership.*
- **Note:** The terms old growth and endangered forests mean different things to different organizations. The U.S. Forest Service alone has recorded more than 200 definitions. The following is SFI's definition of old growth:
 - o *A forested ecosystem distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes, such as tree size, down woody debris, canopy levels, and special composition. Program Participants should utilize a definition specific to their region and particular forest types.*

11. Claim: SFI allows logging in the most biologically diverse and sensitive areas.

- **Fact:** Objective 4 of the SFI standard requires that program participants 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, including aquatic fauna.
- **Fact:** SFI and FSC require the conservation of biological diversity,

and protection of endangered species and communities. SFI-certified companies that source wood from non-certified land must identify sources from outside North America to minimize the risk of purchasing fiber from illegal sources or biodiversity hotspots.

- **Fact:** An independent scientific study by The Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences concluded “landowners that were certified sustainable under either SFI or FSC had significantly stronger biodiversity practices than landowners not certified. There was no difference between FSC and SFI in terms of overall biodiversity practice scores.” Report #MCCS-FCP-2005-1: *Changing Timberland Ownership in the Northern Forest and Implications for Biodiversity*, December 2005.
- **Fact:** SFI Objective 6 and Performance Measure 6.1 and supporting indicators make it clear that special sites must be identified and managed in a manner appropriate for their unique features.

Objective 6. To manage *Program Participant* lands that are ecologically, geologically, historically, or culturally important in a manner that recognizes their special qualities.

Performance Measure 6.1. *Program Participants* shall identify special sites and manage them in a manner appropriate for their unique features.

Indicators:

1. Use of existing natural heritage data and expert advice in identifying or selecting sites for protection because of their ecologically, geologically, historically, or culturally important qualities.
2. Appropriate mapping, cataloging, and management of identified special sites.

12. Claim: SFI allows practices that are harmful to habitat and water quality.

- **Fact:** Under objective 4 of the SFI standard, participants must meet performance measures and indicators related to managing the quality and distribution of wildlife habitats. They must develop and implement measures at both the forest stand and landscape level that promote habitat diversity and the conservation of forest plants and animals, including aquatic fauna.
- **Fact:** Under objective 3 of the SFI standard, participants must meet performance measures and indicators that protect water quality in streams, lakes, and other water bodies.
- **Fact:** Larry Selzer, President and CEO of The Conservation Fund and a former member of the SFI board, says: “In terms of wildlife habitat, biological diversity, water quality, air quality and recreational opportunities, the SFI standard is unmatched in the marketplace.”

A few more facts:

- Only 10 percent of the world’s forests are third-party certified — more than half are in North America. SFI participants must ensure that the wood they buy comes from legal, sustainable sources.

- SFI meets the strict requirements of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes, which is accepted by governments around the world.
- SFI has one standard covering 135 million acres across North America.
- The SFI standard requires that SFI-certified operations must track anything that is not from a certified forest in the supply chain to ensure it comes from legal and well-managed sources.
- For sources in Canada and the United States, this means encouraging landowners to use trained loggers and best management practices, to protect endangered species and habitats, and to promptly reforest harvest sites, to name a few.
- For sources outside of Canada and the United States, this means making efforts to thwart illegal logging and promote the conservation of biological diversity, among other things.
- Customers that accept SFI include Wal-Mart, Lowes, Time, Sears Lands End, Unisource, xpedx, Xerox, Pella, FAO Schwartz, United Airlines, Centex Homes, and Graphic Communications.
- Since 1995, SFI program participants have contributed more than \$885 million for forest management research.
- SFI program participants plant more than 650 million trees each year.



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