

#070527

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**Sent:** Saturday, October 06, 2007 5:13 PM  
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## Forest Certification Programs

Forest certification is a voluntary process of evaluating and validating forest management practices using a set of standards. The standards vary by certifying agency or organization but address issues such as management plans, protection of resource values, harvesting and management practices, social/economic issues and monitoring. The evaluation is often performed by a third party and, if successful, result in a "certificate" of compliance to the particular standards. The certificate, and accompanying labels or signs, demonstrates to the public, neighbors, consumers and markets that the landowner practices sustainable forest management.

### Certification Programs in the South

- The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) was created in 1941 with the designation of the first tree farm in Montesano, Washington. At that time, there was concern by industry that private nonindustrial forestlands (NIPFs) were being harvested at unsustainable levels and little effort was being made regarding reforestation.

To prevent deforestation and wood shortages for the mills, Tree Farm was created by the forest products industry to help ensure a continuous flow of wood from nonindustrial forestlands. Their system required a professional forester to visit the site and verify that the landowner had a written plan addressing the management of the wood and regeneration protocols for after the harvest, while addressing water, soil, wildlife and recreation concerns. The intent of the program was to certify tree farms that could serve a demonstration to other landowners of the benefits of scientific forestry.

The not-for-profit American Forest Foundation administers the ATFS. It relies on a network of volunteer foresters to certify all current and potential members.

### Forest Stewardship Program

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) was created in 1990 under the 1990 Farm Bill. The Stewardship Program was developed as an attempt to reach out to the largest constituent of forestland owners, the nonindustrial private forestland owner, specifically those who did not have a management plan. This group owns almost half of all the forestland in the United States.

The program aims to assist these landowners in maintaining their forestland in a productive and healthy condition for both present and future users by following a multiple use philosophy. This is accomplished by providing technical and financial support from the government to assist in management planning. The program brings public and/or private natural resource professionals together with landowners to develop and implement forest stewardship plans. By helping professional foresters to reach NIPFs, the US Forest Service strives to increase the use of sound forest practices, thereby improving the forestry image as a whole.

State forestry agencies are responsible for implementing and certifying stewardship forests.

## Forest Stewardship Council

The creation of the Forest Stewardship Council was prompted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of 1992, known as the "Rio Earth Summit". This conference was convened to address global issues such as climate change, land use change, and present and potential effects of development on the environment. The world's most influential government leaders, policy makers, non-government organizations, and industrial representatives attended. This was the first time that international forestry issues were discussed internationally at such a large scale.

After the Earth Summit, there was widespread discourse over the failure of the governments to develop an international forest convention that they believed would help curb the destruction of the rainforests. The NGOs were desperate for a change and they turned towards the markets to help develop a solution to their problem. In 1993, the Rainforest Alliance, an NGO based out of New York, teamed up with the World Wildlife Fund, several small logging companies, foresters and sociologists, and created the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

The FSC develops the principles and standards for its certification program and then accredits certifying agencies worldwide to certify forests. In the United States FSC certification is administered by one of two certifying agencies; the Smartwood Program and Scientific Certification Systems. These two agencies develop or utilize regional performance measures based on the principles and criteria of FSC International. These measures are approved by the FSC-US, the United States initiative of FSC International, which is headquartered in Bonn, Germany.

## Sustainable Forestry Initiative

The American Forest and Paper Association initiated the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) in 1991. It was originally designed to be a sort of "code of conduct" for the American forest products industry. However, the AF&PA had been closely monitoring the development of forest certification and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The AF&PA felt the FSC standard was unrealistic for American industry given its performance-based approach to management and its chain-of-custody requirements.

In addition to the concern over being forced to accept a certification standard that they believe was not well adapted for American forestry, the forest industry was just recovering from very visual policy disputes in the Pacific Northwest that had tainted the forest products image. The AF&PA was seeking a way to regain their environmental credibility with the American public. Since the problems of the past had tainted the entire forest products industry, the AF&PA felt that the only successful solution to repairing their image would be one that the entire industry could participate in.

**Rather than risk another blow to the industry's credibility by balking at certification, the AF&PA decided that perhaps forest certification could be the solution they were looking for.** The AF&PA convened a task force of foresters, environmentalists, and policy makers to develop a certification scheme that was better suited for American forestry. Thus marked the creation of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). In 1995, the AF&PA declared that all members must become SFI participants if they were to remain in the AF&PA.

Currently the independent not-for-profit Sustainable Forestry Board administers the SFI program.

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