

Certified Wood & the Future

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Wood certification has been discussed over the forestry 'coffee table' for many years now. Recently, the trend toward getting wood certified has gained steady momentum. One can make a visit to most any lumber/building supplier and find a logo for certified wood on various products. As visual product awareness and concern for environmental aspects continue to grow, the demand for certified wood will grow as well.

Simply put, the goal of certification is to satisfy an increasing public awareness for responsible, environmentally friendly, forest management. The truth is that green preservation is in public demand, therefore anything that promotes or denotes responsible forest management with the 'green' connotation is a plus for everyone – from the people growing trees, to those utilizing forest products, to people simply partaking of clean air and water. Sound conservation has nearly become a necessity throughout our culture. Even though there is a price that accompanies most green practices, there are also rewards.

Currently, there are three main wood product certifications utilized in North America. It should be noted that all three certifications are non-profit organizations.

The Canadian Standards Association or CSA was established in 1996. It is the leading forest certification in Canada. Of course, most of these products are utilized by Canada, but many products make their way into several states in the northern U.S. A portion of their motto reads: "all forest management involves public participation and conservation with biological diversity being the goal." Since 95 percent of Canada's forests are publicly owned, CSA certification requires strict third-party audits, with assurance of adherence to biological, environmental, and social criteria.

The next most prominent certification is the Forest Stewardship Council or FSC. Established in 1993, the FSC was initiated in response to global concerns about deforestation. It is a world-wide organization seeking to promote responsible management of forests around the world. Wood products with FSC designation have been sourced in an environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and economically viable manner. The FSC claims to "take care of forests along with the wildlife and people who call them their home." In addition to trees, the FSC makes sure that local communities are respected, and that the habitats of endangered plants and animals are protected. All FSC products are certified and labeled as eco-friendly.

With FSC, there are two types of certification. The first, forest management certification is awarded for responsible management of any forested area. The other, chain of custody, is certification that tracks material from the forest to the store. As with other certifications, members must undergo a third-party audit which is completed annually. Individual auditors determine their own fee or assessment. Since FSC is non-profit, these fees go toward core FSC functions, services provided to certificate holders, and further education regarding FSC's mission. FSC operates under ten principles of compliance. For practical purposes of this article, the condensed version of these principles is basically "to plan, educate, preserve, conserve, and mitigate toward the future of a sound plant and animal community."

Finally, the Sustained Forestry Initiative (SFI) is by far the most commonly used certification in the United States. Most wood industries across the continental U.S. are SFI certified. SFI only certifies lands in the United States and Canada. SFI believes that responsibly-sourced forest products are the answer to societal needs that are focused on clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife, recreational opportunities, green jobs, and quality forest products.

The Sustained Forestry Initiative is very businesslike in its approach to forest certification. All SFI members are required to have an annual third-party audit. Furthermore, SFI standards are constantly reviewed and then revised every five years to incorporate the latest scientific data to better respond to expanding environmental issues. Independent oversight is provided at each stage of the revision process. Currently, 300 million acres are enrolled, and this number is growing. The SFI Forest Partners Program, composed of National Geographic, Meredith, Macmillan Publishers, Pearson, Hearst Enterprises, and Boy Scouts of America, is making multi-year commitments and investments to increase certification throughout the forest supply chain. Consequently, if a non-industrial private landowner (NIPF) is Tree Farm certified, they are automatically SFI certified!

As our society grows in its environmental awareness, more emphasis will be placed on 'green' forest management to produce sustainable forest products. Having certified wood products not only substantiates forest management, it will also ensure certified wood has an expanding future. Next time you are out shopping, look for the logos of these certification systems to know you've purchased products that are environmentally sustainable. ♻️