



Forest Certification

Forest WHAT? OK, most people don't have a clue what forest certification is and most of the time they probably don't care. After all, it's not something you deal with every day. In this article I'll introduce you to what forest certification is, then later on I'll write articles on the WHY forest certification may be important and HOW you can get your forest certified.

Forest certification is a system for examining a forest and the way it is managed to certify the products that come from it are being produced in a sustainable manner. That sounds reasonable and probably sounds fairly simple. As with most things the devil is in the details and forest certification is a lot more complicated than you would think. For instance, anyone can tell you that 2x4 comes from a sustainably managed forest. Do you believe that? Without some form of proof you shouldn't. So there needs to be some type of verification to convince you to say "I'll take it." Of course if you really don't care if the last tree in the rainforest was cut to make your 2x4, then you can stop reading here and go do something else. If you're even mildly interested, read on.

In North America there are two certifying organizations. Each one has its own set of rules and standards and each one has its unique logo. The first organization to come along was the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). It began in 1993 and originated with environmental conservation groups. The second organization is the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), which came began in 1994 with the American Forest & Paper Association, an industry group. Note which came first.

You can probably see that an industry group may be a little biased in its perspective, a bit like the fox guarding the henhouse. In fact, SFI has been proactive in trying to distance itself from its industry image and on January 1, 2007 became "...a new, fully independent organization..." Each organization develops its own cultural mentality though, and with staff coming over from the industry side of the table we can expect some of the perspective to remain. To be fair FSC may be viewed as being too anti-industry for lack of a better term. Maybe. To make that judgment requires more details.

What does "sustainable" mean anyway? This is where the two systems begin to differ. On the

surface there is a lot of similarity. A continuous flow of wood, wildlife habitat, clean water, yes both address these factors but to different depths and in different ways. But how about economic and cultural sustainability? This means managing with consideration of the dependency of local communities on the forest for income and food. It may sound a little far fetched, but if we look at the impact drastically reduced timber harvesting on US Forest Service land has had in some western states it may take on real meaning. Whether or not those forests were being overcut is beside the point, it shows a lack of planning, and that is what sustainability and forest certification are really all about.

Let me end this article by saying as a professional forester with more years experience behind me than I have in front of me I tend to favor the FSC system. I work with both systems on a regular basis because any management is better than none, and we've done without forest management longer than we should have.

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