



Forest Certification – How?

In the last two articles I wrote about WHAT forest certification is and WHY it is important. Today I'm writing the last of this series on HOW to get your forest certified if you decide it is the route you wish to go.

The two options for North America are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). As with many things, the higher the standards, the more meaningful the results. In my opinion the FSC standards are higher, but I support and participate in both systems because they are both superior to no standard at all.

Say that forest certification sounds good to you, so you engage a professional forester to help you. Your forester tells you that the easiest way to get certified is to enroll your forest in the Tree Farm program. The Tree Farm organization has a memorandum of understanding with the SFI folks that enables any forest product from a Tree Farm to be labeled and sold with the SFI label.

Only non-industrial owners with 10-10,000 acres with a written forest management plan qualify. The plan includes five categories: Wood Fiber Production, Wildlife Habitat, Water Quality, Recreation, and Other. There is wide latitude in plan content and detail. It can be very simple or complicated. It's a one size fits all plan format whether your forest is in Wisconsin, Florida, or Missouri.

Your management activities are subject to a periodic inspection. Every Tree Farm was inspected every five years until 2006 when sampling went into effect. Now only a small fraction of the total is sampled each year. The sample method includes replacement, so your Tree Farm could potentially be sampled more frequently, but probably won't get sampled as often, perhaps never. Suffice it to say the quality of inspections is less than it was.

For a small forest owner to become FSC certified independently is completely cost prohibitive, but the owner can achieve certification through the Resource Manager

option. Under this option it is the Resource Manager, its qualifications, actions, and documentation that are examined. In fact, the Resource Manager is audited by an independent third party EVERY YEAR.

So long as your Resource Manager maintains its qualifications and follows the standards, products from your forest can be marketed with the FSC label. FSC labeling requires a Chain-of-Custody track for every step from the end user back to the forest it came from. The plan must comply with all 10 Principles and Criteria (though not all will apply) and a set of Regional Standards tailored to the local forest types.

Forest certification is a complicated subject and I have only scratched the surface in these three articles. You can learn more by calling a professional forester or surfing the web.

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