



Emerging Issues and Forests Part III

In the two previous articles, emerging issues and opportunities for forestland owners have been discussed and have included the potential impact of a bioenergy facility that procures woody biomass and the eligibility of managed forestland for carbon credit in the carbon trading market. In the third and final segment of this series, forest “green” certification programs will be explored. Green certification programs are becoming increasingly popular in the international forest products market. Forest certification programs are used to “certify” that a forest is being managed professionally and sustainably. This definition of sustainable means that environmental, social and economic criteria are being met during all forest management activities. There are two globally recognized and accepted programs for forest certification and they are the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) programs. Another certification program gaining credibility in the United States is the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) group certification program. All of these programs require the landowner to have a forest management plan and forestry practices implemented on their land evaluated by an approved third party auditor to determine if these activities meet the criteria of sustainable management established by the green certification (SFI, FSC, ATFS) program they are pursuing.

So, why should a landowner consider enrolling their forestland into a green certification program? At this time, there are really no visible benefits. What about the future? My crystal ball tells me that forest certification programs could provide significant benefits to Missouri landowners in the future. Here is what I see unfolding. Missouri’s forest products industry is receiving increasing pressure to provide green certified wood products in a global market. Mill owners indicate that currently they aren’t necessarily receiving more revenue for “green” products, but they are

sometimes losing their market share to companies that can provide green products. This squeezing of market share will eventually result in demand for green certified wood that is likely to drive the price up. Will this result in more profit to a landowner whose forest is FSC, SFI, or ATFS certified? Only time will tell, but I think it is likely.

If the above mentioned issues create these anticipated opportunities, they could work together nicely to have a positive impact on the profitability of forest management on private land and the health of Missouri’s forestland. It all begins with forest certification, because it is highly likely that any credible carbon market which accepts managed forestland will require that lands offered for carbon credit trading be “green” certified by a globally recognized program. In addition, there are currently forces at work to encourage and provide incentives to a woody biomass using bioenergy facility that procures standing trees, if the incoming trees are certified as sustainably harvested. So if the stars align just right, consider a scenario in which a Missouri forestland owner enrolls in a forest certification program which provides access to the carbon market, the woody biomass market and a higher price for highly sought after green certified forest products. Imagine all of this and the icing on the cake is validation/certification that the forest is being conserved and managed sustainably for clean air and water, diverse wildlife habitat, quality wood products, soil protection, outdoor recreation, scenic beauty and solitude. Yes, there is hope for Missouri’s forests!

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