GUIDEBOOK

Forest Management Certification on Private Forestlands in the U.S.

A Resource for Landowners and Assistance Providers

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Preface

For years, forest managers and landowners have been frustrated with one very complex question: “How do we know when we are practicing forestry in a way that is sustainable?” Or, in other words, “What is right for the land?” There are likely many different answers to this, and it is difficult to know with certainty who is right. Forest management certification represents a new approach to addressing this question. Certification systems offer practitioners, landowners, and society some assurance that the right questions have been asked, and that results are evaluated in a way that illustrates whether or not forests have been managed “well.” Few systems dare to suggest that their approach is truly “sustainable,” although some will make this claim either implicitly or explicitly. Most important is that all of the varying, and often competing, approaches to certification advance the dialogue about forest sustainability and provide additional insights which enhance our ability to answer the key question of what is right for the land.

Staff at the Pinchot Institute for Conservation and the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies collaborated with certification system representatives and private forest landowners to develop this guidebook. The USDA Forest Service, through Cooperative Forestry, provided funding. This effort is an attempt on the part of all parties involved to be responsive to the needs of our nation’s many private forest landowners. Professionals often remark that landowners need more information on these issues. This is true for landowners and many other groups—sometimes even forestry professionals themselves. Certification is a fast-moving, evolving, and stimulating movement, as well as a business—as certification itself has spurred its own industry. New organizations are emerging to carry out and govern certification, and existing organizations such as auditing firms are adapting themselves to be part of the enterprise. There is much to learn and much to gain, but one fact remains paramount—the purpose of any of these systems is to improve the condition and sustainability of our forests. We must all keep that in mind as we learn, practice, evaluate results, and respond to changing conditions. Please enjoy this guidebook. If all goes well, it will help us achieve our common goal of sustaining forests.

Dr. Michael P. Washburn
Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies
Introduction

Private, non-industrial, forest landowners own nearly half of the nation’s forestlands and play a critical role in achieving sustainable forest management nationwide. These forestlands provide wood fiber, habitat for wildlife, clean air and water, recreational opportunities for millions of people, and countless other benefits to the public. Many private forest landowners strive to derive income from their forestland while maintaining its ecological health.

Private landowners face numerous challenges to maintaining their forestlands, including pressure to convert their forests to development. Forest management certification has emerged over the last decade both as a process to recognize well-managed forests and as a potential tool to foster forestland stewardship.

While there are a number of existing resources that examine various aspects of forest certification,1 private forest landowners continue to raise numerous questions regarding the various forest management certification efforts currently underway throughout the country. These questions express concerns over issues including: the costs and benefits of certifying, the process of undertaking certification, and the potential ramifications of not getting one’s land certified. This guidebook was developed to address these issues, targeting the questions and concerns of smaller-scale, non-industrial private forest landowners in particular. While some of the information may be valuable to other landowners (such as public agencies or private industry), the guidebook is primarily intended for private forest landowners and the practitioners who help them meet their forest management goals. Private forest landowners face a number of challenges that can be particularly daunting, such as those related to making small-scale operations profitable in a time of increasing land values and development pressures.

The purpose of this guidebook is to inform private forest landowners about certification, to help them decide if it is a path worth pursuing, and to highlight the steps and considerations involved in the process of becoming certified. The guidebook does not specifically recommend certification nor endorse any particular certification system, but hopefully provides useful and objective information. Furthermore, this guidebook is intended to build on the knowledge contained in prior publications and resources on certification, and to incorporate and highlight those efforts.
This guidebook addresses the *what, who, why, and how* of certification. **Section I** offers an overview of certification’s development over time. **Section II** highlights the various certifying organizations that currently operate in the United States. **Section III** explores the considerations for deciding whether or not to pursue certification, especially the costs and benefits. **Section IV** reviews the process of preparing for certification and the expected requirements. And finally, the **Appendix** lists a number of resources that can be consulted for further information.

Forest management certification is a rapidly evolving arena. All of the major certification programs frequently revise the details of their programs in response to the emerging needs of landowners, retailers, and various other stakeholders. While this guidebook seeks to address broad questions about certification, it also profiles the current status of existing programs and specific processes. As such, it is recommended that landowners interested in pursuing certification utilize the resources section to contact organizations for the most up-to-date information.
Section I

Understanding Forest Management Certification
Section I

Understanding Forest Management Certification

Forest management certification is a process that developed to recognize and promote environmentally-responsible forestry and the sustainability of forest resources. On the ground, certification relies on experts to conduct forest management assessments by evaluating management plans and observing actual conditions in the forest. There are a number of private certification programs in operation that seek to identify and reward well managed forestland by measuring forest management practices against various sets of standards. In this way, certification intends to provide credible assurance that certified forests, and the wood products derived from them, are the reflection of a process that supports the stewardship of an entire forest ecosystem. This responsibility calls for forest landowners and managers to pay attention to social and economic welfare as well as environmental protection.

Background and Driving Forces

Forest management certification arose as a non-regulatory alternative for fostering the improved stewardship of working forestlands. While there are many regulations governing forest management—particularly in the U.S.—certification provides a private incentive to encourage landowner commitment to sustainable forest management. It also offers a stamp of approval for forest management practices that meet standards considered to be “environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable.”

Forest management certification emerged as a means of promoting the sound management of tropical rainforests, where widespread deforestation and poor harvest practices were occurring throughout the 1980s. Since then, certification has broadened in scope to include the management of many types of forests (in fact, over 80% of the forests that are certified today are temperate or boreal). In addition, several certification programs have arisen specifically to meet the needs of smaller private for-
est landowners. These programs are aimed at making certification more cost-effective and manageable.

Forest management certification is driven by a variety of concerns, representing the diversity of interests that support it. These interests range from global to local and public to private, reflecting environmental, economic, and social concerns. While no single certification program is all things to all people, the overall certification movement is an attempt to find a positive balance between competing interests.

Certification is the vehicle through which a supply of wood from sustainably managed forests can be generated. In turn, it must respond to the needs of the forest managers and forest industry that provide this product.

Certification is a process with worldwide appeal, and a number of countries outside the U.S. have developed their own programs to certify their forestlands. One prominent example is the Pan-European Forest Certification (PEFC) system, which now has 18 members, including the countries of Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden. Additionally, Canada has a well-known comprehensive certification program in place, which revolves around its National Standard on Sustainable Forest Management.

Approaches to Certification

Certification programs were initially characterized as systems-based or performance-based. A systems-based approach utilizes a model similar to that developed by the International Standards Organization (see Box 1),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTERING MYTHS ABOUT CERTIFICATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certification is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mandatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSE. Certification is a voluntary process that is not required by law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• only applicable to large tracts of forestland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSE. Landowners with as few as ten acres of forestland can pursue certification (by some of the systems discussed in this guidebook).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• supported only by environmental groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSE. Various certification programs have been endorsed by private industry as well as other sectors.</td>
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which verifies that the individuals or organizations seeking the certification of their forestlands have developed and implemented a sound management system. With a performance-based approach, the certification of candidate forestlands rests with the tangible demonstration that these lands meet a pre-determined set of performance standards. Nowadays, most certification programs require that a combination of systems-based and performance-based standards be met.

Historically, certification programs also differed in their reliance on first-, second-, and/or third-party verification. According to the Dictionary of Forestry, published by the Society of American Foresters, verification is “a systematic and documented process to objectively obtain and evaluate evidence to determine whether conformity to a standard has been achieved.”

First-party verification is the least objective, allowing the party seeking the certification of its lands to conduct an internal assessment of its management system and practices. Second-party verification utilizes an outside, but not completely separate, entity such as a trade organization or customer to conduct the assessment. Finally, third-party verification, commonly referred to simply as certification, is the most objective in that an auditor, a body independent of the organization or individual seeking certification of its forestland, conducts the assessment. This guidebook discusses several certification programs in-depth in the context of the third-party assessment processes they employ.
Reviewing the Generic Certification Process

Although differences exist among various certification programs, there is a general process that most systems follow. Not every system will follow every step, but the points outlined below provide a simple guide to the basic elements of the certification process. The details of specific programs are discussed in Section II.

 devise Adoption of the System: Before auditors even step onto the property, some systems require a statement of commitment to the program for which the landowner is being audited. This is not necessarily the same as membership in the program.

 devise Membership: All of the systems discussed in this guidebook require either membership in the organization that sponsors the certification program or require the payment of a fee to participate in the program.

 devise Pre-Assessment: Most of the systems offer a pre-assessment process, wherein the landowner can pay to have his/her lands reviewed for a determination of whether they are likely to pass a full assessment. This option can be a more expensive route, but it can be very helpful to landowners who are unsure as to whether or not their forestland will be certified.

 devise Full Assessment/Audit: This step involves a thorough review of forest management practices carried out on the ground and in the office (e.g. review of the forest management plan and other documentation for the property in question). For all programs, a professional forester or a team of natural resource professionals evaluates management practices against the given system’s guidelines, criteria, and/or standards and renders a decision on final certification.

 devise Certification Report: All systems have some type of reporting format or process that describes the results of the assessment. When applicable, the report will recommend a set of changes that may or may not be obligatory for certification. Additionally, the reporting process may or may not include a public reporting component through which the results of the assessment are disclosed to the public.

 devise Attainment of Standards: Some systems have a protocol for addressing forest management practices that do not meet the certification standards. These noncompliant practices may be barriers to certification. In some cases, however, they are noted but are easily fixed through specific improvements made by the landowner. In this case,
the final decision on certification will be made after such improvements are undertaken.¹

**Certificate and Certification Contract:** Upon having their forestland certified by any of the systems outlined in this guidebook, landowners receive some proof of certification from the sponsoring organization. This proof is most often a formal certificate. In some instances, an agreement or “contract” is required. The contract requires the certified party to comply with the program standards with the understanding that failure to do so may result in the revocation of the certificate.

**Continuous Improvement:** In practice, if not explicitly stated in all program standards, landowners who have had their forestland certified are expected to continuously improve their management practices according to the program guidelines. This is, therefore, a somewhat subjective step but is rooted in the idea that certified forest landowners should always be striving for greater effectiveness and efficiency in their quest to maintain well managed forests.

**Monitoring/“Update” Assessments:** Forestland that has been certified may be subject to periodic reviews to ensure that management practices are continuing to uphold the requirements of certification. These reviews may be field-based and may also be used to check on progress in meeting obligatory improvements.

**Reassessment:** For most of the systems, the original full assessment is only good for a limited time, after which the landowner is required to undertake another full assessment. In some cases, the reassessment is the same scope and scale as the original, and in other cases it is abbreviated.

**What Gets Certified?**

While the landowner is intimately involved in the certification process, it is not the landowner who is certified in the end. It is the forestland and the accompanying management plans that guide the practices leading to certain environmental, economic, and social conditions that are certified. Often times, the certification of *land* will be referred to, leaving the review of management plans unstated but implicit.

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¹ Under the American Tree Farm System (discussed in more detail later in this guidebook), property is newly certified, re-certified, or de-certified upon inspection—decisions are not conditional. Similarly, Green Tag Forestry requires that any improvements cited as necessary during the assessment must be completed before certification is awarded.
Chain-of-custody

In the case of a landowner who wishes to sell certified timber harvested from his/her certified land, some certification programs employ a “chain-of-custody” review. The chain-of-custody process applies to companies, such as mills and wood products manufacturers, that purchase, process, and market certified wood. By tracking the development of wood products labeled as originating from certified forests, the chain-of-custody review verifies whether such products are made solely from certified wood or if co-mingling with uncertified wood has occurred at any point. In other words, chain-of-custody is the oversight of “the complete process by which wood is transformed from a tree in the forest to a final product provided in a wholesale or retail market, e.g. from the forest, to a sawmill, to a processing facility, to the marketplace.” Chain-of-custody is enforced to ensure that wood products labeled as certified contain only certified wood.
Section II

Outlining Four Certification Systems
Section II

Outlining Four Certification Systems

There are several forest management certification systems operating in the United States today. This guidebook outlines the following systems:

- **American Tree Farm System**
- **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**
- **Green Tag Forestry**
- **Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program**

As stated earlier, the key components of these four different programs are discussed within the context of the independent, third-party certification processes they employ. Much of the information used to create the program summaries on the following pages was taken directly from the programs’ websites and literature. While some may find it informative to compare the program features presented, it is important to note that the differences between programs on paper do not necessarily translate into differences on the ground.

**AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM**

**Background:** Initiated in 1941, the American Tree Farm System, a program of the American Forest Foundation, is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and operates only in the U.S. Its stated mission is “to promote the growing of renewable forest resources on private lands while protecting environmental benefits and increasing public understanding of all benefits of productive forestry.” To help landowners meet these goals, the American Tree Farm System provides outreach, education, and technical assistance. There are approximately 65,000 certified Tree Farms totaling almost 26 million acres of non-industrial private forestland across 48 states. Landowners with at least ten acres of managed forestland may seek certification of their land by the American Tree Farm System.
**Governance:** The American Tree Farm System consists of individual state programs, which are self-governing but operate under a policy framework developed by the American Tree Farm System’s National Operating Committee. Certified Tree Farmers and Tree Farm volunteers comprise the majority of this oversight committee. As Committee members, they work with representatives of industry and state forestry organizations to set overall American Tree Farm System policy in line with the needs of private forest landowners. The specific standards and guidelines that steer the System’s certification process are set by the American Forest Foundation (see Box 2). For each guideline, there are accompanying performance measures that are used to assess forest management practices on the land for which certification is being sought.

**Implementation:** The state committees that oversee the American Tree Farm System bring together certified Tree Farmers with foresters from industry, consulting businesses, and government to plan and administer the System in their state. In order for forestland to receive the American Tree Farm System certification needed to officially become a “Tree Farm,” it must pass an inspection conducted by one of the American Tree Farm System’s volunteer professional foresters. As with every other step in the Tree Farm certification process, an initial inspection of forestlands (before a management plan has been developed) by a professional forester is provided free of charge. There are approximately 7,000 volunteer inspectors who donate their time and expertise to the American Tree Farm System, and each one is trained to recognize the implementation of American Tree Farm System standards and guidelines in forest management. At a minimum, these inspectors must be professional practicing foresters and have either a B.S., or higher, in forestry from a Society of American Foresters (SAF) accredited program, or a two-year forestry technician’s degree from a SAF-recognized program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX 2: CATEGORIES OF STANDARDS/GUIDELINES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR THE AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring sustainable forests</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reforestation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Water quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Wildlife habitat</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Forest aesthetics</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Protect special sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Biodiversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Slash disposal and utilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prudent use of chemicals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Forest contractor use</td>
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Landowners pursuing certification for their forestlands under the American Tree Farm System must also have written management plans in place that protect the forest from soil erosion, water degradation, and insect and fire danger, and take wildlife and recreational opportunities into consideration. Forest health, silvicultural practices, and the quality of tree stands are also evaluated.

**Certification:** Certification under the American Tree Farm System, also referred to as “membership,” is completely free. Upon official certification of the land being inspected, landowners receive a certificate and a “Certified Tree Farm” sign that can be posted on their certified acreage. Every five years, certified properties are re-inspected to assess whether or not standards of sustainability are being maintained. Non-conformance with Tree Farm standards will lead to de-certification of the property.

**Label:** There is no label for Tree Farm certified wood. While the American Tree Farm System does not envision creating its own on-product label, Tree Farm wood is recognized by the SFI Program and may be counted toward content requirements for proposed SFI labeling systems. The American Tree Farm System is also exploring mutual recognition with other national certification systems, and is developing practices that will enable purchasers of Tree Farm wood to verify and track certification status of individual parcels.

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**FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC)**

**Background:** The Forest Stewardship Council is an international organization that was founded in 1993 by representatives of environmental groups and the timber industry, as well as foresters, indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders from 25 countries. Its headquarters are currently based in Oaxaca, Mexico. In April 2002, FSC announced plans to become more decentralized, which will include the establishment of regional headquarters around the world. The national headquarters for FSC-U.S. are in Washington, D.C. FSC-U.S. is responsible for overseeing the evolution of FSC standards in the U.S. and the ongoing development of regional standards for each region of the country. The International Secretariat in Oaxaca maintains responsibility for reviewing certifications, handling appeals, and accrediting auditors. The FSC-U.S. and the international parent orga-
nization in Oaxaca are governed by boards composed of a diverse set of interests. As of June 2002, the FSC had certified over nine million acres of forestland in the U.S.\textsuperscript{6}

**Governance:** The FSC guidelines for a well managed forest are most broadly defined in its set of global Principles (see Box 3) and Criteria, which encompass ecological, economic, and social aspects of forest management. Overseen by the international and national FSC bodies, regional working groups develop locally-applicable standards that are consistent with the global Principles and Criteria and an existing set of national indicators. Locally-adapted standards are near completion for all regions in the U.S.; the Lake States, Northeast, and Southeast standards have been approved by the FSC-U.S. Board. The Rocky Mountain standards are the furthest along, having been accepted and approved by the FSC International Board. FSC regional standards are approved by the FSC-U.S. Board prior to being submitted to the International Secretariat, where the FSC International Board is the final authority.

**Implementation:** Neither the FSC-U.S. nor the regional working groups carry out the actual field assessments and reviews of management plans. Rather, these are performed by FSC accredited auditors. Currently, there are twelve accredited FSC auditors in the world, two of which are active in the U.S.—SmartWood and Scientific Certification Systems. Both of these auditing firms have their own set of indicators based on the FSC Principles and Criteria, but which are more specifically written to provide guidance for measurement in the field. When available, auditors will use regional standards as the measuring stick for their assessment of forest management. In lieu of regional standards, national standards will

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**BOX 3:**

**FSC Principles**

- Compliance with laws and FSC principles
- Tenure and Use Rights and Responsibilities
- Indigenous Peoples’ Rights
- Community Relations and Workers’ Rights
- Benefits from the Forest
- Environmental Impact
- Management Plan
- Monitoring and Assessment
- Maintenance of High Conservation Value Forests
- Plantation Management
be used. As a precursor to the certification process, landowners may opt to pay for a pre-assessment to be conducted in order to gain a better sense of whether or not their forestlands are likely to be certified.

Assessment teams must be led by a professional forester and must include experts in socioeconomic, silvicultural, and ecological aspects of forest management. Through a formal process that follows every assessment, several independent peer reviewers examine the evaluations made by a FSC team.

**Certification:** There are three types of certification awarded by FSC: forest management certification, chain-of-custody certification, and group certification. Forest management certification involves an on-the-ground assessment of a landowner’s forestry practices and management plans by an interdisciplinary team of experts. Based on this assessment, the assessor will report the level of compliance with the FSC standards. For each aspect of the standards, the certifier may issue: *pre-conditions* (which must be addressed before a certificate can be issued); *conditions* (which can be addressed within a defined timeline after a certificate is awarded); and *suggestions* (which have no effect on the issuance of a certificate but could improve the quality of management). If there are no pre-conditions, or they have been resolved, the landowner is eligible to enter into a certification contract with FSC and receive a certificate. Compliance with FSC standards and the terms of the contract will be checked during subsequent annual audits, which are necessary to retain FSC certification. A full reassessment is required five years following the original certification.

FSC chain-of-custody certification follows wood from the forest to the shop floor (see discussion of label below). In addition, group certification, which shares assessment costs across a number of landowners, is an option offered by FSC for Certified Resource Managers, landowner cooperatives and associations, and forest management companies (see discussion of Certified Resource Managers on page 27).

**Label:** Wood produced on FSC certified land can bear a FSC label. However, there are very specific guidelines for how a label may be used, especially in regard to the fate of the wood once it leaves a certified forest. Every step in the chain-of-custody must be certified. This process differs from forest management certification in that it focuses on the tracking of the product, as opposed to the practices implemented in the forest. Only processors and retailers certified by FSC, those able to demonstrate the capacity to reliably sort wood from certified and uncertified lands and document how much certified wood is in each product they manufacture, can
produce and market FSC certified products.

GREEN TAG FORESTRY

**Background:** The Green Tag program was developed by the National Forestry Association in cooperation with members of the Association of Consulting Foresters and the National Woodland Owners Association. It aims to support forestry practices that assure a balance of natural diversity and sustainable forest productivity. Green Tag is expressly designed for use by private forest landowners and is available in all 50 states. As of July 2002, the Green Tag program had certified 51,795 acres in ten states.

**Governance:** There is no formal governance structure for Green Tag Forestry. Instead, the program employs ten criteria or guiding principles (see Box 4) that outline its expectations of forest management and how a landowner’s practices will be evaluated in the certification process. There are forty-six indicators, set by an executive board, that define successful conformance within each criterion.

**Implementation:**
Green Tag’s certification process begins with a landowner’s application to the National Forestry Association. There is a one-time $150 registration fee associated with this application. The next step is a field examination, which includes an on-the-ground assessment of the property for which certification is being sought, as well as a review of the practices employed to manage it. An independent forester conducts this examination. Site inspection fees range from $0.10 to $1.25 per acre depending on the size of the property and the

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**BOX 4:**

**GREEN TAG GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Forest Planning and Management
- Forest Health, Inventory, and Natural Diversity
- Logging, Post-Harvest Evaluation and Reforestation
- Road Construction, Stream Crossings, and Protection of Special Sites
- Product Utilization and Aesthetics
- Chemical Utilization
- Community and Social Relations
- Economic Viability
- Record Keeping and Tracking
- Commitment to Sustainability
completeness of the management plan and other records. Landowners can receive cost estimates prior to having a full assessment conducted.

**Certification:** Certified Green Tag program participants must maintain active membership in the National Woodland Owners Association as evidence of their commitment to continuing education in good forestry practices. An individual, one-year membership is $25, and a 2-year membership can be purchased for $45 up front. Certifications are valid for five years, and upon expiration landowners must apply for re-certification. Once forestland is deemed Green Tag certified, the landowner receives a certificate and may display a sign with the Green Tag Forest logo. The sign remains the property of the National Forestry Association and must be removed should the certification either lapse or be violated.

**Labels:** Once forestland is Green Tag certified, the lumber derived from it may display the “Green Tag Certified” label if it meets the program’s chain-of-custody requirements. Green Tag’s chain-of-custody process, which is similar to the one utilized by the FSC, follows wood from the forest to the mill to the lumberyard.

**SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE**

**Background:** The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program evolved from a program developed for members of the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), the national trade association of the forest, paper, and wood products industry. This initial program was designed to assure the public that AF&PA member companies practice good forestry. The SFI Program was adopted as a code of conduct for AF&PA members in 1994 and launched as a formal program in 1995. At this time, an advisory group was formed, composed of outside experts including university faculty, conservation groups, state foresters, and representatives from various professional forestry organizations. Their role was to review the implementation of the SFI program among member companies.

Between 1995 and 1998, AF&PA members adopted management systems to conform to the SFI program standard (see discussion under “governance”), adhering to the underlying philosophy of continuous improvement. In 1998, the SFI program initiated a licensing process to open the program to landowners who are not AF&PA members. Licensees, which include non-profit organizations such as The Conservation Fund, must meet the same requirements for certification as AF&PA member companies. Until 1999,
when the SFI program’s certification process came into being, conformance with the SFI program standard was monitored through a self-reporting or first-party verification process. It is only the SFI program's third-party verification process that is referred to as “certification.” While participation in the SFI program does not require that third-party audits be conducted, they are required for official certification. As of June 1, 2002, the SFI program had certified a total of 45 million acres in the U.S. 8

**Governance:** The SFI program is now governed by the *Sustainable Forestry Board* (SFB), which is an independent 501(c)(3) organization. The 15 member SFB is comprised of five representatives from industry, five from conservation non-governmental organizations, and five from other organizations including private landowner, logger, and professional associations. The SFB manages the SFI program standard and assessment procedures. It also evaluates compliance and oversees an appeals process that is invoked when a certification is challenged.

The 2002 SFI program standard includes a hierarchy of five broad principles, nine objectives (see Box 5), 38 performance measures, and 125 core indicators. This standard will remain in place until 2004, at which time it will be updated. As with other certification systems, the SFI program standard addresses a broad array of issues related to forest management—from aesthetics and sustainable yield, to wildlife and water quality.

**Implementation:** SFI program participants who wish to have their forestlands and management practices certified must choose an ISO accredited auditing firm (see discussion of ISO on page 3). All lead auditors for the SFI program must be formally trained as such; many are also professional foresters, but this is not a requirement of the program. However, the SFI program requires certain professional training and experience for other members of the audit team, including knowledge of

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**BOX 5:**

**SFI PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

- Broadening the practice of sustainable forestry
- Ensuring prompt reforestation
- Protecting water quality
- Enhancing wildlife habitat
- Minimizing the visual impact of harvesting
- Protecting special sites
- Contributing to biodiversity
- Continuing improvements in wood utilization
- Continuing the prudent use of forest chemicals to help ensure forest health
forestry operations, environmental regulations, forestry management systems, and the SFI program standard. Currently, there are 13 firms accredited to perform SFI program audits in the U.S. Participants in the SFI program may elect to have a pre-assessment (often termed a gap analysis) of their lands conducted, for a fee, to determine whether or not the property is likely to be certified.

Certification: Landowners seeking certification of their forestlands by the SFI program must prepare documents that demonstrate how they are complying with each component of the SFI standard. It is the job of a SFI program auditor to verify compliance. Substantial evidence that a landowner’s management system does not result in forest practices consistent with the Objectives and Performance Measures of the SFI program standard indicates major non-conformances. These are barriers to SFI program certification, and landowners will be asked to correct these before their lands can be certified. If a landowner’s forestland is indeed certified, he/she will be required to pay a licensing fee and agree to a set interval for certification audits beginning the third year. While the SFI program does not require annual audits, landowners must self-report annually on progress made in meeting the SFI program standard.

Label: A SFI on-product label is available to companies for wood products coming from their own SFI certified lands, or wood procured from landowners who adhere to certain requirements. The procurement guidelines in the standard require SFI program participants to know where their wood is coming from and to have a system to monitor and audit compliance with Best Management Practices (BMPs) and reforestation efforts on outside sources of supply.

Mutual Recognition

The concept of mutual recognition in certification has been gaining momentum both in the U.S. and abroad. In this context, mutual recognition refers to the two-way acceptance of the standards held by different certification programs. For example, the SFI program and the American Tree Farm System have a Mutual Recognition Agreement in place, which cross-validates the compatibility of these two programs’ missions and general objectives. Under this agreement, the SFI program acknowledges that the American Tree Farm System is “a credible standard for sustainable forestry on smaller ownerships, including non-industrial forest
### Table 1. Summary of Forest Management Certification Programs
(The information summarized in this table was taken from each program’s literature and/or website.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Tree Farm System</td>
<td>Local enterprise run by state and local community volunteers; initiated in 1941; under the oversight of the American Forest Foundation; recognizes the responsible management of private forestlands.</td>
<td>To provide conservation education to non-industrial private forestland owners in the U.S.; is intended to raise the visibility of practitioners and inspire others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)</td>
<td>Independent, nonprofit, non-governmental organization; founded in 1993 by a wide range of stakeholders; international headquarters in Oaxaca, Mexico; U.S. headquarters in Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>To support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Tag Forestry</td>
<td>Developed by the National Forestry Association in cooperation with members of the Association of Consulting Foresters and the National Woodland Owners Association; emphasis is on quality logging practices; developed especially for non-industrial private woodland owners.</td>
<td>To provide recognition to private landowners who practice responsible and sustainable woodland stewardship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program</td>
<td>Adopted by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&amp;PA) in 1994; participation in the program is a condition of AF&amp;PA membership; in 1998, the program was opened to landowners outside of AF&amp;PA membership.</td>
<td>To promote the integration of the perpetual growing and harvesting of trees with the protection of wildlife, plants, soil and water quality, and a wide range of other conservation goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Auditors</td>
<td>Logo/Label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows a set of ten standards and ten corresponding performance</td>
<td>Third-party certification conducted by American Tree Farm System approved</td>
<td>Tree Farmers receive a certificate and a sign (see logo below) that marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measures; standards are currently under revision by independent panel</td>
<td>foresters. A volunteer forester inspects the management plan and the</td>
<td>their land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and will be posted for public review on the Tree Farm website.</td>
<td>property.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows a set of ten principles and 56 criteria for forest management;</td>
<td>Third-party certification conducted by an interdisciplinary team headed</td>
<td>Products originating from forests certified by FSC-accredited certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>also follows regional standards.</td>
<td>by a trained forester; standards are approved by the boards of the FSC-U.S.</td>
<td>bodies are eligible to carry the FSC logo, if the chain-of-custody (tracking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and the International Secretariat.</td>
<td>of the timber from the forest to the shop) has been checked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows ten guiding principles.</td>
<td>Third-party certification conducted by an independent forester to assess</td>
<td>Timber that has been certified to Green Tag standards of forest practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the property and management activities; rules are set by an executive</td>
<td>can carry the Green Tag “Certified” label.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>board.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows a standard of five objectives, nine principles, 38 performance</td>
<td>Third-party certification conducted by an outside contractor.</td>
<td>Program logo; on-product label may be used for wood coming from SFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measures, and 125 core indicators (Objectives translate Principles into</td>
<td></td>
<td>certified lands, and wood procured from landowners adhering to certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action)</td>
<td></td>
<td>requirements. (See labeling guidelines.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
landowners.” Likewise, the American Tree Farm System recognizes the SFI program as “an independent standard for the forest products industry, larger ownerships and licensees.” This agreement indicates that certified Tree Farms will likely be a preferred source of supply for SFI program wood. Additionally, the American Tree Farm System has undergone a review by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (an independent auditing firm) that identified necessary changes in its administrative and assessment processes to more closely match the protocol of SFI third-party verification as well as emerging standards for mutual recognition. Green Tag Forestry has applied to both the SFI program and FSC for mutual recognition, but neither organization has granted it.

THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Providing Landowner Assistance for Sustainable Forestry

While it is NOT a certification program, the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) provides financial, technical, and planning assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners to encourage sustainable forest management practices on the ground. In consultation with the State Foresters, the USDA Forest Service developed the FSP under the umbrella of the 1990 Farm Bill.

This program harnesses the collective expertise of State Foresters, biologists, and private consultants to advise landowners on the creation and implementation of Forest Stewardship Plans that most effectively advance the goals of sustainability on their forestland. Such plans must address issues related to wildlife habitat, soil and water resources, wetlands, recreation, and timber. In addition, some State Foresters are exploring the idea of developing FSP principles and guidelines for a well managed forest.10