

Independent, Science-Based Report Finds Washington State Forests Could Be Certified as Sustainably Managed

Improvements in ecological reserves and habitat protection must be made before certification awarded

Recently, during the midst of public debates on the issue, the Pinchot Institute for Conservation publicly released the findings of an independent, science-based assessment of 1.2 million acres of forest managed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), which completed the review of DNR's practices on its Western Washington forests, outlined measures that the state agency would need to satisfy before FSC certification could be achieved and several other conditions that would have to be met over the first five years of certification.

The scientific review team commended DNR for its performance related to ecological issues, including efforts to protect wetlands and streams, and assure fish passage. However, the assessors raised a number of issues concerning the negative ecological impacts of DNR's management approach. One concern related to High Conservation Value Forests, if unresolved, would be a barrier to green certification.

The scientific team also investigated DNR's performance related to social and economic guidelines, noting a need to minimize the negative effects its management strategy has on timber-dependent communities.

The SCS report addresses the six sustainable harvest alternatives currently being considered by the Washington Board of Natural Resources. The certifiers cautioned that "four or five" of these alternatives may lead to forest management practices that

do not conform with the FSC-certification standards – principally as a result of increased harvesting without greater accommodation for wildlife habitat.

Pinchot Institute President Al Sample said that the certification is achievable for DNR and that other states have faced similar conditions on their way to becoming certified.

"The types of concerns in this report mirror those we have seen in other states," Sample said. "While Washington state faces unique issues related to its trust lands, we saw a unique opportunity to learn more about the applicability of certification on public forest lands."

The Pinchot Institute also is overseeing a review of DNR lands by a second certification organization, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). BVQI, the auditing firm for SFI, submitted the results of a preliminary assessment for SFI certification, which did not show any nonconformance with the SFI guidelines. Whether the DNR conforms with SFI standards in practice would be determined during a field portion of the audit.

Public land agencies in other states have taken part in similar independent reviews facilitated by the Pinchot Institute. In most cases they went on to become FSC certified. These states include Maine, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and North Carolina. The Institute has also facilitated certification assessments with 30 Indian Nations, and is currently engaged in a similar effort with the Potlatch Corporation in Idaho. Pot-

latch's Oregon lands are already FSC certified.

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation has secured private funding, which includes support from Lanoga Corporation and several private foundations, for the assessment of state forests. No state funds were used for the project.

The Institute has conducted certification pilot projects for five years, testing the applicability of forest certification in new settings. In all of its projects, the Institute works with its partners to test certification for their lands, and compare the two major competing certification programs: (1) The Forest Stewardship Council, an international brand established by a broad coalition of interests including environmental, social and economic interests and, (2) the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, a national brand developed by the American Forests & Paper Association, the major trade association of the U.S. forest products industry.

Just as with its other projects (profiled throughout last year's issues of *The Pinchot Letter*), the Pinchot Institute will study how certification works on state trust lands, compare the two major certification programs in the United States, and then provide its findings to forestland managers and others around the country.

The full SCS report can be found at www.pinchot.org. For more information, please contact Program Associate Will Price at (570) 296-9626 or willprice@pinchot.org.