

Rocky Roads in the Rocky Top? Landowner Forest Certification

Last summer saw the mark of an important event in the South, in particular, the state of Tennessee. At that time, then Governor Don Sundquist announced to a gathering of media, forestry, and representatives from environmental groups that the state had decided to certify its forests. On the podium with the Governor were representatives from the Tennessee Conservation League, the Forest Stewardship Council, and the Pinchot Institute for Conservation.

Principally under the guidance of then State Forester Ken Arney and his staff, this event was the culmination of two years of work with the Tennessee Division of Forestry (TDF). As the first Southern state to be *recommended* for certification (the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources was the first to become *certified* under SFI and FSC), this designation is seen as quite an accomplishment for a state in which, ironically, forestry issues mostly dominate the legislative agenda. In the last year, more bills on forestry were introduced in the Tennessee state legislature than in any other state's legislative body. Nonetheless, in the midst of vociferous debates on forestry and budgetary issues that have plagued all states in recent years, TDF became certified.

SmartWood, a certifier for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), conducted a preliminary assessment (or "scoping") in the summer of 2001, as part of the Pinchot Institute's "Dual Assessment" projects. Other project participants included the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources, North Carolina State University, Duke University, the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, and the Marsh-Billing-Rockefeller National

Historical Park. Based upon SmartWood's positive findings, the state underwent a full FSC assessment later in the year and became eligible for certification, providing that they meet 30 conditions over the next few years. In addition to the FSC assessment, TDF also underwent a Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) "gap-analysis," also funded through the Pinchot Institute. The auditor, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, recommended several changes in the Division's management system necessary to further develop their SFI program prior to becoming certified through this system.



From left to right: former Tennessee Governor Don Sundquist, Pinchot Institute President Al Sample, and Marty Marina, former Director of the Tennessee Conservation League.

Before the press conference, with project partners gathered in his office, Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture Dan Wheeler joked to Ken Arney (now with the Forest Service's Southern Research Station), that he had just read through the FSC conditions and figured Ken would be getting some calls during the year. It is no secret that the conditions Tennessee is required to meet will be difficult. As Governor Sundquist stated at the press conference, those conditions are important measures that the Division should strive to accomplish.

After a more than two-year col-

laboration with the Tennessee Division of Forestry, the Pinchot Institute's involvement in the state is just beginning. Similar to the efforts of the Southern Center for Sustainable Forests following North Carolina's dual assessments, we are focused on providing outreach to other landowners. In this sense, our dual assessment projects are both a test of certification and a tangible demonstration to the rest of the state's wood producers. The 156,000 acres managed by Tennessee's forestry division are but a drop in the bucket for a state in which the vast majority of timberlands are privately-owned—mostly by small non-industrial private landowners. Given this, the Institute's challenge in Tennessee will be to navigate the technical and political differences among the certification programs and effectively draw on their strengths to convince these landowners that certification can be a powerful mechanism to reinforce and reward sustainable forestry management.

Some of the trends regarding the long-term health of these privately managed ecosystems are disturbing. By 2040, Tennessee is projected to lead all southeastern states the amount of hardwood harvests that exceed growth. In fact, for the entire South, the extent of hardwood forests is projected to shrink by 26% during this time period (Alig 2003). This trend is principally occurring on smaller private forestlands, many of which send their wood to chip mills. Some of these forestlands will become planted pine, others will be converted entirely to something else. During this same period, the acreage of pine *planted* on abandoned farmland, and sites where natural pine and hardwood forests were harvested will increase by 62%. This projection is a continuation of the trend seen over



Certified pencils produced by Musgrave Pencil Company for the Tennessee Forest Certification Awareness Team (TFCAT).

the last 45 years, during which the extent of pine plantations increased from 2 to 30 million acres (Siry 2002). So far it is doubtful that increased management intensity in some places has resulted in compensatory habitat-creation in other areas (Conner and Hartzell 2002). The implication of declines in biological richness and abundance are easier to understand. For example, the national Breeding Bird Survey reported declining populations for 32.8% of woodland, and 53.5% of shrubland bird species between 1966 and 1996 (Trani 2002).

It is for these reasons that the Institute has partnered with the Tennessee Conservation League (TCL) and, with generous support from the Chattanooga-based Lyndhurst Foundation, to conduct an outreach campaign on certification throughout Tennessee. Last summer, Senior Fellow Catherine Mater spanned points between Memphis and Knoxville on Interstate 40 encouraging representatives of the state's forest products industry to join the Tennessee Forest Certification Awareness Team (TFCAT). Members of this team will help to promote certification as a valuable tool for Tennessee wood growers and processors that also helps to both slow these trends and sustain the landowners' forests.

Last August, the TCL and Pinchot Institute held six meetings across the state for land- and mill-owners, foresters, and others in the forest

products industry. Also present were members of environmental groups, academic institutions, and the forestry extension. The Tennessee Division of Forestry told of their experience with SFI and FSC certification. They also detailed the changes they need to make as an organization to maintain their FSC-certified status, and the steps needed to complete the SFI assessment process. SmartWood's Southeastern regional director described the FSC assessment process, including the nuts-and-bolts of group certification. Finally, representatives from PriceWaterhouseCoopers and MeadWestvaco discussed the requirements and processes of becoming certified under SFI and the advances made towards developing monitoring systems for private landowners that supply SFI-certified companies. They also described the potential role of American Tree Farm System, another certification program, in becoming a valued supply source. During the course of these sessions, the feasibility of getting certified became clear to the attendees. What's more, many left with the assessor's phone numbers in their pockets. Similar to what the attendees learned, a full discussion of the systems, values and benefits to certification will be discussed in the next issue of this newsletter.

Based on our experiences over the past few years of facilitating the adoption of certification on large tracts of public lands, it is clear that certification improves management. The ability of third-party auditing to distill

and integrate a range of forest management values is ushering in a new era in forestry. However, the landowner statistics in southern woodbasket states—whose timber output and ecosystem fragmentation are simultaneously increasing—tell of a daunting outreach challenge. Despite valiant efforts, public forestry extension agents have managed to reach only a fraction of the landowners in many states. The stewardship of forests in states, like Tennessee, may depend on the success of certification programs to enroll these landowners. In light of this, the Pinchot Institute will continue its certification outreach in Tennessee, as well as evaluate the rigor and scope of the different certification programs.

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