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Building A Strong Framework for Responsible Forest Management Together

By Kathy Abusow, President & CEO, Sustainable Forestry Initiative®.

As I approach the one year anniversary of joining the Sustainable Forestry Initiative ® (SFI) as CEO, I reflect on the milestones surpassed, the collaboration I've had the privilege to witness, the momentum growing every day, and the evolution anticipated for the future.

Never before have we seen such interest and concern among consumers, governments and companies about the environmental integrity of forest products, whether it be 2x4's, reams of paper or packaging for their favourite products. As a result, the market demand for certified products is on the rise.

For SFI Inc. and our 228 program participants, this has translated into an increase in certified area to over 61 million hectares across North America. We've also seen forest product customers – from forest companies to lumber manufacturers to printers - increasingly express their corporate social responsibility commitment through certification. Today, SFI has more than 300 chain-of-custody and fibre sourcing certifications at over 600 locations across North America. This growth signals to us at SFI that forest managers and customers see SFI as a valuable piece of their environmental strategy.

In early June, SFI launched its third public review of the SFI forest management certification standard. Standard reviews are conducted every five years, supporting our principle of continual improvement. Previous public reviews have led to additions to the Standard such as provisions to conserve old-growth forests and indicators related to the certification of public forestlands, including requirements to confer with affected indigenous peoples. Frequent review allows us to address changing values and new emerging issues such as forestry's role in climate change and carbon management. This is an open process that gathers input from a variety of stakeholders and experts, including Canadian stakeholders and CIF members, and will lead to the 2010-2014 SFI Standard.

A Canadian perspective is of particular importance to the SFI Standard given that there are over 39 million ha certified in Canada, which accounts for 63.8 percent of total SFI certified area. And while the standard was originally focussed on private lands, strong uptake in Canada has extended requirements to address public lands and participation in land and resource management planning processes that involve local communities and stakeholder groups.

The 2010-2014 Standard will be drafted by an SFI Standards Review task group, and like the SFI board itself, the task group has balanced representation from environmental, economic, and social sectors. A balanced approach is vital to creating the best forest management processes, meeting marketplace expectations, and ultimately improving forest management on a global scale. And with only 10 percent of the world's forest certified, leadership in forest management is what is required. Our combined efforts are directed to progress rather than debate.

At SFI, we know that the best solutions grow from sound science and collaboration. The success of our program and our sector's sustainability goals rely on commitment from forest managers, academics, conservation groups, and forest product customers along the supply chain. We harness the value from our stakeholders through our reviews, but also from our 37 SFI implementation committees across North America, our conservation partnerships, and research.

Partnerships at a global level are important as well, and SFI has had the privilege of working with the international non-profit Forest Trends on their forum on illegal logging. It is also important to recognize exceptional leadership, and in spring 2008 SFI awarded the first annual SFI Leadership in Conservation Research award. The award was presented to UPM-Kymmene, Time Inc., the University of Moncton, the New Brunswick government, the Nature Conservancy, and Bird Studies Canada for their collaborative work on a unique study of bird populations in Canada's Acadian forests.

SFI put forward the existing 2005-2009 forest certification standard for a 60 day public comment period on June 2, 2008 and will invite comment again for a 30 day period in early 2009. We also look forward to feedback we'll receive during regional stakeholder meetings and workshops held across Canada and the US. For more information or to provide written comments, please visit www.sfiprogram.org. We invite all those with an interest in forest management to join as we build a strong SFI Standard together that is good for our forests, our communities and meets the needs of an increasingly green market.

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Kathy Abusow is President and CEO of SFI Inc., a non-profit, charitable organization solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the Sustainable Forestry Initiative program. SFI Inc. directs all elements of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative program including the SFI Standard, chain-of-custody certification, fibre sourcing requirements, labelling and marketing. SFI

Inc. is overseen by a three-chamber Board of Directors equally representing social, environmental and economic sectors.