

**Hardwood Matters: Green Wave column**  
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The National Hardwood Lumber Association (NHLA) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) have a lot in common. We both know wood is an excellent environmental choice and we both do a lot to strengthen forest practices – from improving stewardship at home to tackling illegal logging issues in offshore markets.

A dramatic rise in environmental awareness in the last year has resulted in more requests from buyers for proof that forest products are from well-managed forests and legal sources. As a result, more governments and more companies are developing procurement policies that give preference to certified forest products.

This is good news for the SFI program. The amount of SFI-certified land in the United States and Canada rose to 143.7 million acres at the end of 2007, up from 135 million acres at the end of 2006. By the end of 2007, there were 102 chain-of-custody certifications at 408 certified locations compared with 21 certificates at 48 locations at the start of the year.

But this growth in certification represents a challenge for NHLA members who source much of their timber from private lands – often from small family-owned operations. These smaller operations are not as likely to be certified for a variety of reasons, including perceived or real concerns about the cost and complexity of certification.

What is promising is the fact that the SFI program is well positioned to help your members deal with this challenge.

SFI is an internationally endorsed forest certification program that has been improving forest practices across North America and promoting responsible procurement globally for more than a decade. We are recognized and accepted around the world.

At the same time, we are a North American standard. We know that 60 per cent of the fiber in products manufactured in the United States originates from forests that are not certified, and that much of this is from the 10 million small family-owned forests in the country. We know that only 10 per cent of the world's forests are certified to a credible standard such as SFI, so it is sometimes hard to find products from certified forests.

### **Fiber procurement**

The SFI program stands apart from other certification programs by addressing this issue head-on. Like other standards, we have a chain-of-custody certification that tracks the percentage of wood fiber from certified forests, uncertified forests, and recycled sources of supply. But what sets the SFI program apart is that we have procurement requirements so program participants can also source fiber from forests that are not certified and promote responsible forest management on those lands.

The SFI program in effect has two distinct sets of labels – one that represents a percentage of content from a forest that meets SFI certification requirements and one that shows the product meets our fiber sourcing requirements. Suppliers can buy fiber from

forests that are not certified and still assure customers that it has a solid pedigree – whether it is from North America or offshore sources.

This unique commitment to responsible forestry acknowledges the fact that all forest landowners, not just SFI-certified companies, play a critical role in ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of our forests, and in meeting our fiber needs. As a result, SFI program participants practice responsible forestry on the lands they manage and also influence millions of additional acres.

In the United States and Canada, SFI program participants that procure wood from uncertified lands must, among other things, encourage landowners to reforest harvested areas, to use best management practices for protecting water quality, and to identify and protect or create important habitat elements for wildlife, including critically imperiled and imperiled species and communities.

For sources outside of the United States and Canada, SFI program participants must complete a risk assessment to avoid illegal sources of supply, which is a growing global concern. In jurisdictions without effective laws, they must take measures to promote the conservation of biological diversity and to address issues such as workers' health and safety, fair labor practices, indigenous peoples' rights and workers' right to organize.

Our fiber sourcing label currently recognizes wood from family-owned forests that have been certified to the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). Once ATFS is endorsed by the International Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC), fiber from ATFS-certified tree farms will also meet SFI's certified content label requirements.

### **Broad recognition**

Environmental awareness is also fuelling a green building movement, and once again the SFI program is well positioned. Products from SFI-certified companies are recognized under North American green rating systems such as the Green Building Initiative's Green Globes and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Green Building Guidelines, as well as many international recognized green building programs such as BREEAM (BRE Environmental Assessment Method) in England.

The US Green Building Council recognizes that certification standards are continually improving, and is currently re-evaluating the Forest Stewardship Council-exclusive position in its LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standard. This would make it more in-line with other recognized green building standards. And the Chicago Carbon Exchange has endorsed the SFI Standard as evidence of sustainable forest management under its rules for forest carbon sequestration projects.

The SFI program has also met the endorsement requirements of the internationally recognized Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC). This endorsement gives SFI global reach and recognition. It means that SFI companies can sell their products in markets where both SFI and PEFC are recognized.

SFI represents local interests through 37 SFI Implementation Committees, a unique grassroots network at the state, provincial or regional level. Through these committees, SFI program participants work with local organizations and individuals to ensure the SFI

program is both consistent and meets the specific needs of each region. Just recently, the Minnesota SFI Implementation Committee and the North St. Louis County Habitat for Humanity teamed up to build a new home for a local woman and her daughter.

Like the NHLA, the SFI program is supporting international efforts to tackle illegal logging. Along with the World Bank, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), SFI sponsored Forest Trends' 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Potomac Forum on Illegal Logging and Associated Trade on Feb. 14, 2008. The meeting brought together more than 100 experts from around the world to examine the complex issues around illegal logging and associated trade.

### **Reward stewardship**

Just as the NHLA has a Forest Stewardship Award to promote responsible stewardship of hardwood forests and recognize excellence, SFI Inc. recently presented its first SFI Leadership in Conservation Research Award to UPM-Kymmene Inc., Time Inc., the Université de Moncton; the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources; The Nature Conservancy of Canada, and Bird Studies Canada. Through a strong collaborative partnership, these organizations are involved in a unique study of bird populations that is expected to have far-reaching impacts to improve forest management.

Before joining SFI Inc., I was a forest certification consultant and watched SFI evolve to become an internationally endorsed, fully independent, registered non-profit charitable organization, with a three-chamber Board of Directors that has equal representation from the environmental, economic and social sectors.

I also watched a shift in the role of third-party forest certification. It began in the 1990s as an independent voluntary process responding to concerns about illegal logging practices and forest conversion, especially in tropical regions. Increasingly, it is becoming the mechanism by which customers determine the environmental origin of the products they buy, regardless of the geographic origin.

North American forest operations are not immune to these demands even though the biggest issues – illegal logging and deforestation – are beyond our borders. Today's global markets are complex, and independent certification makes it easy for customers to buy responsible forest products without doing a lot of homework.

The SFI label makes sustainable forestry less anonymous. It is a visual clue for people who want to buy products from legal and responsible sources – similar to the recycling symbol. Customers know that when they see the SFI label on a product – whether it is hardwood flooring or furniture – that they are supporting forest operations that conserve biodiversity, protect wildlife habitat, and so much more.

The SFI program is based on the premise that responsible environmental behavior and sound business decisions can co-exist to the benefit of communities, landowners, manufacturers, shareholders, customers, the environment, and future generations. In this age of increased corporate social responsibility and consumer awareness, it offers a valuable tool to encourage and support responsible procurement.