



Open Letter – Top Ten Reasons Why USGBC Should Recognize all Credible Forest Certification Standards

October 2013

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) released their new Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating tool, LEED v4 in the summer of 2013. Like previous versions of LEED, LEED v.4 states a preference for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in the language, “Wood products must be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council or USGBC-approved equivalent.” Unfortunately, USGBC does not have a defined process in place to evaluate equivalency or criteria to determine equivalency. Since 2005, SFI certified-products have been excluded from the forest certification/sourcing credit without ever once having been told the basis of that exclusion. In every other process we have been associated with, we are given a reason for SFI’s exclusion, and with that information we typically do three things: make changes to be included; correct a misperception; or move on due to a lack of alignment between institutional objectives.

In its leadership capacity, USGBC has a unique opportunity. It can choose to encourage well managed forests, or not. It can choose to recognize all credible forest certifications or it can continue to exclude some certification standards to the detriment of healthy forests, viable communities, thriving markets and future generations.

SFI encourages USGBC to recognize that the decisions it makes and the actions it takes today will impact the future of our forests, our livelihoods and our collective global well being. USGBC’s leaders and board members are encouraged to recognize the role of certified wood products and understand that excluding SFI, CSA and ATFS results in the discrimination against two-thirds of the certified forests in the U.S. and Canada. Healthy markets require healthy forests. SFI certification supports the responsible production of wood and paper products, communities, jobs and numerous conservation values that are derived from working forests.

In June 2013, SFI worked with McGraw Hill in publishing a Continuing Education Unit in Architectural Record magazine for architects and builders which highlights the benefits of using SFI certified wood in green building [“Sustainable Building with SFI Certified Wood.”](#) Readers can earn one GBCI CE hour for LEED Credential Maintenance and/or one AIA/CES HSW Learning Unit by taking the [online test](#). The Continuing Education Unit will provide the facts you need to encourage USGBC to make a decision that supports the future of our forests.

While some argue that it is only a few credits and not worthy of such attention, SFI Certified Program Participants have noted that their sources of supply have been overlooked as designers and specifiers chase points to secure higher LEED ratings, which in turn means real jobs are on the line, in real communities where domestic or local sources of supply are being overlooked. It is time for our organizations to work together, to promote responsible forestry and green building.

- 1. Say “Yes” to healthy working forests.** Ninety percent of the world’s forests are NOT certified. By recognizing all credible forest certification standards, USGBC will drive demand for more certified forests and responsible sources of supply. “Certification has fundamentally changed the way forests are managed here in North America – SFI alone has certified more than 240 million acres in North America. If well-managed forests are our goal, then we should all be celebrating the remarkable victory of having millions of acres of forests across North America certified – we should not waste precious resources while millions of acres of forests disappear. The SFI Standard is making a real and positive difference towards keeping our forests as healthy, working forests.” – [Larry Selzer](#), *President and CEO of The Conservation Fund*
- 2. Say “No” to discrimination against domestic forests.** Under the current standard, two-thirds of certified forests in North America are unfairly treated in LEED. In fact, 90 percent of FSC’s global supply is from countries outside of the U.S., where USGBC is headquartered. USGBC’s exclusive recognition of FSC might discourage builders, architects and designers from sourcing domestic wood products. “Nearly half of respondents have sought out an alternative supplier in another country when FSC certified timber or products were not available in their own country.” – *FSC’s own 2010 Business Value and Growth market survey (page 6)*
- 3. Follow the lead provided by USGBC sister organizations in Australia, Italy and Spain.** The Green Building Council of Australia, Building Council Italia, and the Spanish Green Building Council have all taken steps to give credit to all forest certification standards. “The U.S. Green Building Council is out of step with green building councils in other countries who understand the value of promoting all credible forest certification standards.” – [Michael T. Goergen Jr.](#), *Former Executive Vice-President and CEO, Society of American Foresters*

In fact, all green building standards that value wood have recognized all forest certification programs without preference including ANSI/ICC 700-2008: National Green Building Standard, ANSI-GBI 01-2010 Green Building Assessment Protocol for Commercial Buildings (built on Green Globes U.S.), International Green Construction Code (IgCC), Built Green Canada, Green Globes, CASBEE (Japan), Green Star Program (Australia), and BREEAM (United Kingdom). “If the USGBC’s goal is to reward excellence, products from forests certified to SFI should be equally entitled to LEED certified wood credits.” – [Mike Ferrucci](#), *Forestry Program Manager and Lead Auditor, and NSF-ISR*

4. **Support North America's forest communities and workers.** Union leaders have spoken out in support of recognizing all credible forest certification standards. "What is critical to our members is that forests be managed in such a way as to ensure their long-term survival and viability while at the same time promoting thriving rural communities, safe jobs, and decent work. From this perspective, SFI has several advantages for workers that FSC does not." – [William V. Street Jr.](#), *Director, Woodworkers Department, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers*
5. **Base LEED on science, and encourage continual improvement and research.** SFI requires in-kind support or direct funding for research as a requirement of its standard. FSC does not. Since 1995, SFI program participants have invested \$1.3 billion in forest research activities which in turn have driven innovation and conservation in forest management. "SFI, like science, never stops learning. It is more than words on paper. SFI and its partners deliver actual results on the ground and in communities across North America. They build knowledge and advance understanding." – [C. Tattersall \(Tat\) Smith Jr.](#), *Professor and Dean Emeritus, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto*
6. **Recognize forest communities and the contributions of indigenous forest communities.** SFI supports responsible forestry at a local level in North America. There are close to 1,000 members in 37 community-based SFI Implementation Committees that support and actively engage in a wide variety of community, conservation and outreach activities. "As long as USGBC limits its LEED-certified wood credit to the FSC, it is turning its back on my community as well as other communities in North America. . . ." – [Bob Luoto](#), *owner and operator of Cross & Crown Inc.*, a family logging business in Oregon.

In addition, five million acres of lands owned by or managed for indigenous communities are certified to the SFI Standard – more than any other certification standard in North America. "If the U.S. Green Building Program wants to support North America's forests and its indigenous peoples, it will expand the LEED certified wood to recognize all of North America's certification standards." – [Ryan Clark](#), *Manager, Forestry & Strategic Planning, Capacity Forest Management*, which manages forestry operations for First Nations clients.
7. **Reward sound harvesting practices.** Since 1995, more than 135,000 resource and logging professionals have been trained in responsible forestry through SFI or its recognition of other programs. "I've seen for myself how training can improve forest practices – and I know that when it comes to training for logging professionals, SFI is far ahead of the FSC." – [Dr. Richard W. \(Dick\) Brinker](#), *Dean Emeritus, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University*
8. **Consider the wider impact of your actions. This goes beyond solid wood products.** Even paper and tissue markets are affected by LEED rating tools that give credits if FSC products are supplied in the operation of LEED buildings. "Sappi, like most paper suppliers, sources wood and fiber from multiple sources, certified and uncertified. The exclusion of SFI is based on a lack of understanding of complex supply chains and, in some ways, is a discrimination against labeling practices." – [Dr. Laura M. Thompson](#), *Director, Technical Marketing and Sustainable Development, Sappi Fine Paper, North America*
9. **Heed the calls of over 100 elected officials.** USGBC has ignored the views of elected officials from across the U.S. and Canada. Governors from 14 states and 89 Members of Congress have sent letters to USGBC voicing their concerns over LEED's treatment of wood and forest certification. Numerous [government leaders](#) – including the Governors of [Maine](#), [Georgia](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Alabama](#), the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Education – have made it clear that they recognize all forest certification standards. In Canada, the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, Natural Resources Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada and the Competition Bureau reference all domestic forest certification standards without prejudice.
10. **Let competition and choice prevail.** "It is disturbing that the USGBC would continue to pick one certification program at the expense of others that were developed with U.S. forests and communities in mind." – [Randy Dye](#), *Former President, National Association of State Foresters, and State Forester of West Virginia*

SFI supports green building initiatives, tools, codes and standards that recognize all credible forest certification standards equally. Forest certification standards like SFI can serve as an important proof point for responsible forestry and wood sourcing. We will continue to urge the USGBC for equal recognition of SFI, ATFS, CSA, PEFC and FSC certification standards, and believe the USGBC should follow other leaders on this issue.

Kathy Abusow
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Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc.

Resources

- [Top 10 reasons why USGBC should recognize all credible forest certification programs.](#)
- [Opinion Leaders Page.](#) Find out why some of the world's leading experts in forestry support all credible forest certification standards like SFI.
- ["Sustainable Building with SFI Certified Wood":](#) SFI worked with McGraw Hill in publishing a Continuing Education Unit in Architectural Record magazine for architects and builders which highlights the benefits of using SFI certified wood in green building. Readers can earn one GBCI CE hour for LEED Credential Maintenance and/or one AIA/CES HSW Learning Unit by taking the [online test](#).
- [SFI's Green Building webpage](#) is a quick study on why green building is good for you and good for forests.
- SFI 2013 Progress Report, [Writing the Next Chapter](#).