



SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

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The Facts on Responsible Forestry – Conversion

There is a perception in the marketplace that FSC does not allow conversion of forests to plantations or other uses yet FSC exceptions for conversion are often greater than national averages and their requirements vary on this topic. In reality, SFI and FSC do not certify forest lands converted to non forest uses. Both FSC and SFI have controls around forest species conversion. Neither standard bans plantations from being certified in the U.S. South.

FSC Standards Allow Conversion

FSC has multiple, varied standards and allows certification of forests to draft standards or interim standards created by certification bodies. Some FSC standards (FSC Canada's National Standard, FSC Regional Certification Standards for British Columbia, FSC Russian Standard) clearly allow for conversion of up to five percent of a certified area to plantations in Canada.¹ Rates of up to two percent every five years are allowed in the U.S.² for conversion to plantations or non-forest uses. Other FSC Standards (Brazil, Sweden) do not specify a maximum noting only "a very limited portion" of the forest management unit can be converted.

FSC auditors have concluded that the most intensively managed forests in North America – planted loblolly pines in the Southern U.S. and planted conifers in Eastern Canada – still retain components of natural stands and are not "plantations." Therefore harvesting natural stands of mixed species and planting softwoods, a common practice under all certification standards, is not conversion prohibited by FSC.³

FSC treats conversion of forestland to other uses in North America just like SFI: participants must exclude lands slated for development from certified areas

Despite these facts, FSC continues to contribute to and allow confusion in the marketplace:

The following two quotes are on websites offering advice to consumers on green products:

- FSC presents conflicting information to the marketplace when it comes to its position on conversion. For example, FSC Canada's website states: "FSC PROHIBITS the conversion of natural forests for plantations, mining, oil exploration or agriculture."⁴ (*Emphasis in original*) And FSC states in presentations that under FSC there is "no conversion of natural forests to plantations";⁵ while another one states "No forest conversion."⁶
- FERN Footprints in the Forest: "The FSC remains the only scheme that demands a truly performance-based minimum threshold for forest management practices before a national standard can be endorsed. . . . The standard does not allow for forest conversion, use of GMO trees, and includes protection measure for high conservation value forests."⁷

Bottom Line

According to Forest Resources of the United States 2007, a U.S. Department of Agriculture publication: "Forest land across the Nation has increased by 4 percent since 1987 and decreased 3 percent between 1953 and 1987."⁸ According to the Canadian Forest Service, deforestation affected less than 0.02% of Canada's forests in 2005, and accounted for 0.4% of global deforestation.⁹

US Forest Service study of Southern forests, "The sprawl of urban areas tops the list as the most significant and permanent force affecting forest ecosystems."¹⁰ Forestry was not identified as a contributor to loss of forest lands.

According to a study commissioned by the American Hardwoods Export Council¹¹ and other studies referenced in Forest Stewardship Council chain-of-custody certifications,¹² all of the significant wood-producing regions of the U.S. and Canada are at low risk for producing wood from forests converted to another land use.

Under SFI, forestland that is being converted to non-forest uses would not meet any of the SFI Standard requirements (prompt reforestation, biodiversity, etc.) and could not be certified. In addition, wood from forests being converted to non-forest uses cannot be counted as certified content in any of the SFI program labels.

Performance Measure 2.1 requires prompt reforestation, and indicator 2.1.6 addresses conversion, requiring "Planting programs that consider potential ecological impacts of a different species or species mix from that which was harvested"

In 2010, SFI issued an interpretation regarding conversion of forest types¹³ clarifying that: "Conversions are not allowed except in justified circumstances where the program participant can document that ecological impacts are not significant if managing for a different species mix after a final harvest."¹⁴ SFI issued this interpretation to avoid confusion in the marketplace and by landowners who utilize our standards. SFI is transparent about requirements regarding conversions.

- ¹ FSC National Boreal Standard (Canada) 2004: www.fscscanada.org/docs/boreal%20standard.pdf?LanguageID=EN-US (page 91); FSC Regional Certification Standards for British Columbia (Main Standards) 2005: www.fscscanada.org/docs/bc%20standard.pdf?LanguageID=EN-US (page 42)
- ² FSC-US Forest Management Standard (v1.0) 2010: fsc.us/images/documents/standards/FSC-US%20Forest%20Management%20Standard%20v1.0.pdf (page 48)
- ³ Neenah Paper Controlled Wood Compliance Summary (2008) <http://info.fsc.org/servlet/servlet.FileDownload?retURL=%2Fapex%2FPublicCertificateDetails%3Fid%3Da0240000005sVGDAA2&file=00P40000003y41aEAA> (pages 18-25); FSC Forest Holdings Forest Certification System Transfer Audit Public Report (2010) <http://info.fsc.org/servlet/servlet.FileDownload?retURL=%2Fapex%2FPublicCertificateDetails%3Fid%3Da0240000006tLreAAE&file=00P400000077R0oEAE> (page 17)
- ⁴ FSC Canada website http://www.fscscanada.org/docs/factsheet_intro%20to%20fsc.pdf
- ⁵ <http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=fsc%20no%20conversion&source=web&cd=46&ved=0CDsQFjAFOCg&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.bookcouncil.org%2Fdocuments%2FCBrinkema.ppt&ei=yCrVTsrUJeuO4gTSr9XYAQ&usq=AFQjCNEP1ZViUPHmDGe9eKa-D0HTbOOeNQ>
- ⁶ Changing world forestry – FSC in Asia and Engagement in Climate Change <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/for/wscbredd-apac-01/other/wscbredd-apac-01-fsc-en.pdf> (Slide 7)
- ⁷ FERN Footprints in the Forest 2005 http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/media/documents/document_1890_1900.pdf (page 21)
- ⁸ Forest Resources of the United States, 2007. A technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment http://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/gtr/gtr_wo78.pdf (page 14)
- ⁹ Deforestation in Canada – What are the Facts? <http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pubwarehouse/pdfs/28159.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Southern Forest Resources Assessment (SFRA). 2001. US Forest Service Southern Research Station. <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/sustain/report/summry/summary.htm>
- ¹¹ American Hardwood Council study <http://www.americanhardwood.org/sustainability/sustainable-forestry/seneca-creek-study/>
- ¹² FSC Controlled Wood: An Analysis of Risk for Georgia-Pacific LLC Camas Mill <http://info.fsc.org/servlet/servlet.FileDownload?retURL=%2Fapex%2FPublicCertificateDetails%3Fid%3Da0240000005sU6KAAU&file=00P40000003y02yEAA>
- ¹³ SFI Interpretations http://www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/Interpretations_2010-2014_Requirements.pdf
- ¹⁴ SFI Interpretations 2.2 http://www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/Interpretations_2010-2014_Requirements.pdf page 5