

## RESPONSE TO FORESTETHICS "7 ISSUES" REGARDING THE FOREST PARTNERS PROGRAM

**February 2016:** The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Inc. works to ensure the health and future of our forests, because forests are a part of our everyday lives. SFI® is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting sustainable forest management. SFI works at the intersection of sustainable forests, thriving communities and responsible procurement.

SFI shares ForestEthics underlying objective to save forests, but we are disappointed with their decision to undermine SFI. SFI has a proven track record of helping to grow future forests through programs to sustain communities, fund conservation research, educate youth and work to continually improve and quantify conservation impacts. SFI, along with other certification standards, plays an important role in conserving forests. An inclusive approach to forest certification is needed if progress is to be made.

ForestEthics recently published several inaccurate characterizations about the SFI Forest Partners® Program. The SFI Forest Partners Program is an investment in the future of our forests and in responsible forest supply chains. The Forest Partners Program is made up of four market leaders – Time Inc., the National Geographic Society, Macmillan Publishers and Pearson – who made five-year commitments to increase the amount of lands certified to the SFI forest management standard. And the program is delivering on its promise, with 5 million new acres certified and another 2 million new acres under consideration.

This document illustrates the false nature of ForestEthics' claims and highlights the true contributions of the SFI Forest Partners Program.

### 1. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT THE SFI FOREST PARTNERS PROGRAM LACKS BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOREST MANAGEMENT.

The SFI Forest Partners Program is not a separate certification program, but instead a program to strengthen forest practices and procurement *through* SFI certification.

The SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard promotes responsible forestry practices. Its requirements include measures to protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk and forests with exceptional conservation value. It addresses critical issues such as:

- **Old Growth** - Recognizing and protecting the unique nature of old growth is a requirement in the SFI Standard.
- **Biodiversity** - SFI has clear measures in the Standard to address the conservation of biodiversity through Forest with Exceptional Conservation Value.
- **Clearcutting** - SFI allows clearcutting where appropriate and when all other requirements (e.g. wildlife habitat, site productivity, biodiversity, size restrictions, green-up, wetland and riparian protection measures) are met. The SFI Standard limits the average size of clearcuts to no more than 120 acres; in 2014 the average actual size among SFI certificate holders in North America was well below this at 73 acres.
- **Conversion** - SFI does not certify lands that will be converted to a non-forest use after harvest and such lands will never be included within an SFI certificate. And any conversion of one forest type to another always requires a justification.

The SFI 2015-2019 Fiber Sourcing Standard distinguishes SFI from all other forest certification programs in that it governs how SFI Program Participants procure fiber from non-certified forests. Given that approximately 90 percent of the world's forests are uncertified, there needs to be a strong mechanism to promote responsible procurement from these lands.



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This is accomplished in multiple ways, including addressing the conservation of biodiversity for Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value in harvests of purchased stumpage, and utilizing the services of qualified logging professionals, certified logging professionals and resource professionals. SFI Program Participants must also invest in forestry research, science and technology, and develop verifiable monitoring systems to evaluate the use of best management practices across the wood and fiber supply area.

## 2. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT THE SFI FOREST PARTNERS PROGRAM IS NOT DESIGNED TO INCREASE CERTIFIED ACREAGE AND FIBER.

A stated goal of the Forest Partners Program is to “Grow the certified forestland base by ten million acres/four million hectares by the end of 2017, beginning in the Southeast United States”. So far the program has succeeded in getting more than 5 million new acres certified, with another 2 million under consideration.

## 3. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT SFI AND ITS FOREST PARTNERS PROGRAM ARE ALLOWING THE CONVERSION OF VAST AREAS OF THE SOUTHEAST US AND OTHER REGIONS INTO INTENSIVELY-MANAGED PLANTATIONS OF EXOTIC OR CLONED PINE TREES.

### Conversion from One Forest Type to Another Forest Type

The SFI Forest Management Standard prohibits conversion of forest cover type to another forest cover type except in justified circumstances. Justified circumstances might include, for instance, diversification of species mix to avoid an emerging invasive pest or pathogen (i.e. Emerald Ash Borer) where the viability of a new stand would be jeopardized if not shifted to a new mix of tree species. The intent of this requirement is to outline the limitations on conversion and the due diligence process which must be followed when converting to a different forest cover type. Any justified conversion must:

- be in compliance with relevant national and regional policy and legislation related to land use and forest management; and

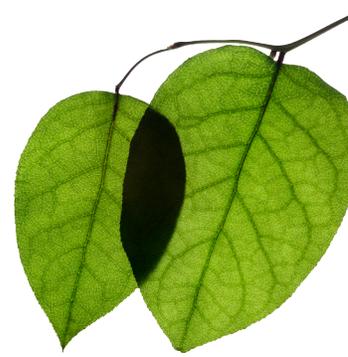
- not convert native forest types that are rare and ecologically significant at the landscape level or put any native forest types at risk of becoming rare; and
- not create significant long term adverse impacts on Forest with Exceptional Conservation Value, old growth forests, forests critical to threatened and endangered species, and special sites.

Furthermore, even if there is a justified circumstance, SFI requires that an assessment be conducted to consider productivity and stand quality conditions. Impacts to be evaluated in connection with the SFI-mandated assessment might include social and economic values; specific ecosystem issues related to the site such as invasive species, insect or disease issues, riparian protection needs and others as appropriate to site including regeneration challenges; and ecological impacts of the conversion including a review at the site and landscape scale as well as consideration for any appropriate mitigation measures. Additionally, and in any case, the SFI Standard requires that plantings of exotic tree species minimize risk to native ecosystems.

### Conversion of Forest to Non-Forest Use

SFI does not certify lands that will be converted to a non-forest use after harvest and such lands will never be included within an SFI certificate.

The SFI Forest Management Standard prohibits any lands that are designated for conversion to another land use from being included in the SFI certification. Furthermore, fiber derived from these excluded lands cannot be described as certified forest content in any product bearing an SFI program label. SFI also requires that program participants conduct a risk assessment to avoid controversial sources in a product supply chain.



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#### 4. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT THE SFI FOREST PARTNERS PROGRAM HAS NO REQUIRED FIELD VERIFICATION OR AUDITS TO CONFIRM COMPLIANCE WITH IMPORTANT CONSERVATION PRACTICES.

This claim demonstrates ForestEthics confusion and misleading statements about the SFI Forest Partners Program. SFI requires third-party verification of all entities getting certified to the SFI Standards. This process independently confirms the requirements set out in the standard and supporting documents have been met. Independent certification bodies evaluate planning, procedures and processes in the forest, in the mill or in the plant to ensure they conform to SFI requirements – whether it is for forest management, chain of custody or certified sourcing.

Auditors must complete an accreditation program before they are approved to perform certification audits to the SFI Standard and/or the SFI chain-of-custody standards. The accreditation program must be through one or more of the following independent, international accreditation bodies:

- American National Standards Institute (ANSI)
- ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB)
- Standards Council of Canada (SCC)

Organizations and forest managers wishing to make public claims regarding their SFI certification must submit a summary of audit findings performed by an accredited third-party certification body. The summaries are prepared by the certification body and include general descriptions of conformities, non-conformities, corrective action plans, opportunities for improvement, and exceptional practices.

A certificate is issued only after the independent certification body determines a specific operation conforms to the SFI requirements – for forests, chain of custody or certified sourcing. Annual surveillance audits are mandatory on all certified operations, and a full re-certification audit is required for forest operations every three years.

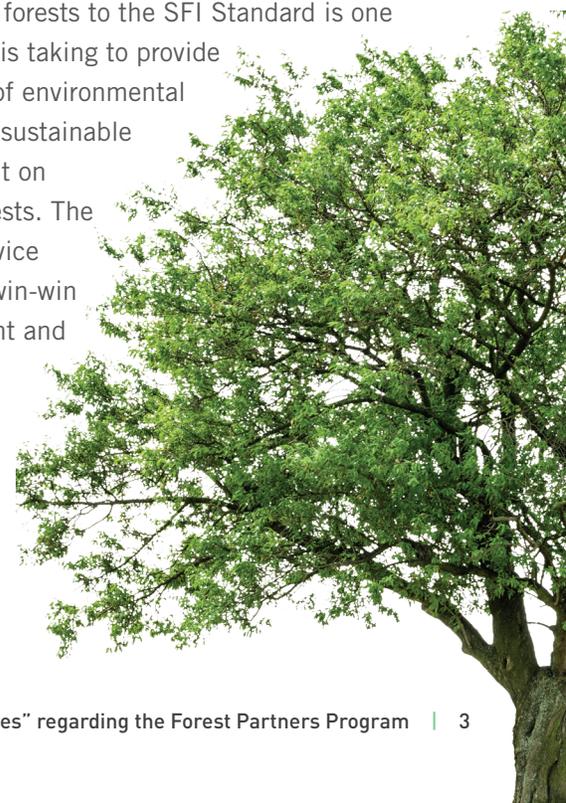
#### 5. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT THE SFI FOREST PARTNERS PROGRAM HAS NOT BEEN TRANSPARENT ABOUT THE PROGRAM'S REQUIREMENTS AND OUTCOMES.

As stated above, SFI has made progress by achieving certification of 5 million acres of new land that was not previously certified. The Forest Partners help fund programs that allow landowners to collaborate on shared objectives and link market leaders directly to stakeholder groups. SFI and our Forest Partners are working together to strengthen forest practices and procurement through coordinated projects and group certification opportunities.

The [SFI website home page](#) features a prominent link to the SFI Forest Partners Program page. This dedicated page includes a program overview containing the goals of the Program, 11 state-based project fact sheets, a video, numerous press releases announcing specific progress towards the Program's goals, and contact information for more information. Additionally, a number of published public announcements and events with high ranking state officials have highlighted progress and accomplishments against the Program's goals, including those with numerous state foresters, Commissioners and the Governors of South Carolina and Florida.

The State Forester of Florida had this to say about their participation in the Forest Partners program:

“The Florida Forest Service's commitment to certify two of its largest state forests to the SFI Standard is one action the service is taking to provide public assurance of environmental responsibility and sustainable forest management on Florida's state forests. The Florida Forest Service believes this is a win-win for the environment and our forest-based economy.”



## 6. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT SFI IS UNDERMINING THE MARKET FOR GREEN PRODUCTS.

This comment suggests that ForestEthics is only interested in a monopolist forest certification approach, and anything else is not reputable. The truth is SFI is the largest forest certification standard in North America with over 280 million acres certified. More and more science based conservation groups like The American Bird Conservancy and The Conservation Fund understand that because of the 280 million acres, SFI has the scale to directly influence the future health and viability of our forests.

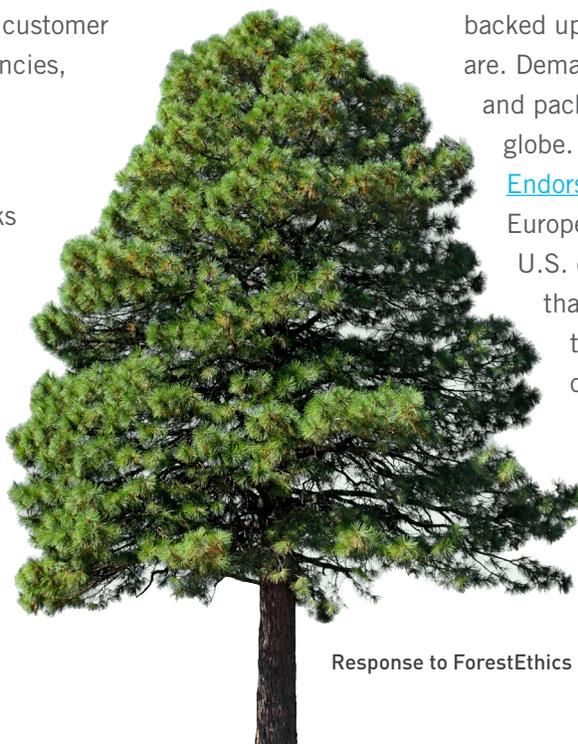
The marketplace clearly recognizes the value of the SFI program, as evidenced by more than 69,000 label-uses in 2015, the fact that [1 in 4 U.S. consumers](#) recognize and understand the SFI logo, and that 20% of Fortune 100 companies used the SFI label in 2015.

Through program requirements that guarantee research investments, and by making grants directly in support of conservation, SFI makes a real difference on the ground. SFI Program Participants engage in conservation projects every day that reflect the diversity of forests across North America, and which materially advance our collective interests in clean water, biological diversity, and sustainable forestry.

Since 1995, SFI Program Participants have directly invested nearly \$1.5 billion in forest research, with nearly 80% of these investments in 2014 dedicated to conservation-related objectives.

SFI is widely recognized by customer groups and government agencies, including:

- [The Sustainability Consortium](#), which works to improve consumer product sustainability, recognizes the value of SFI certification standards in its key performance indicators.



- [The World Business Council for Sustainable Development \(WBCSD\)](#) is the leading platform for strategic collaboration for the global forestry industry. In its material for corporate managers, it lists the positive attributes of SFI's procurement objectives; and its leadership statement supports forest certification standards like SFI.
- [GreenBlue](#), a non-profit organization that equips businesses with the science and resources to make products more sustainable, recognizes SFI for supporting environmental quality throughout the paper supply chain.
- [BREEAM](#)– the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method – is the world's foremost environmental assessment method and rating system for buildings. BREEAM recognizes that SFI follows current best practices in forest certification.
- [The National Association of State Foresters](#), a non-profit group made up of the directors of state forestry agencies, renewed a resolution recognizing SFI as a credible standard.

## 7. FORESTETHICS CLAIMS THAT THE MISREPRESENTATION OF CERTIFIED PRODUCTS AS “GREEN” CAN BE, WHEN EXPOSED, TREMENDOUSLY DAMAGING TO CONSUMER CONFIDENCE AND TO BRAND EQUITY.

SFI agrees that “green” claims on products should be backed up with third-party verification, as SFI claims are. Demand for certified products in the print, paper and packaging sectors is on the rise across the globe. In a [2014 study for the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification](#) (PEFC) by the European research firm GfK, almost 70% of 1,000 U.S. consumers said they would prefer companies that source wood-based products responsibly to use a forest certification label to inform consumers.





In SFI's 2014 market survey of SFI Program Participants, which had over 90% participation, respondents in all sectors reported an increase in demand for certified forest products.

Choosing an on-product label from SFI is a good way to stand out in consumers' minds as a responsible company that offers environmentally sound products. The Natural Marketing Institute (NMI) surveyed almost 20,400 U.S. consumers in 2015 and found that 24% recognized the SFI logo and what it stands for, compared to 15% for FSC.

In this same survey, 78% of consumers stated "It's important for companies to not just be profitable, but to be mindful of their impact on the environment and society." SFI on-product labels are recognized globally and provide a visual cue to help consumers source products from responsibly managed forests. SFI has several certified chain-of-custody labels and a certified sourcing label.

When consumers buy products with the SFI label, they are not only purchasing a product that meets rigorous certification standards, they are also helping grow future forests, sustain communities, fund conservation research, and educate youth. That's something we should all stand proudly behind.

