



LEED Approach to Certification: Slogans or Science?

By Kathy Abusow

President & CEO of SFI

March 6, 2012

Who knows what U.S. Green Building Council hopes to achieve with its latest draft language on forest certification in LEED. The new draft LEED requirement “FSC or better” feels more like a slogan than thoughtful language intended for a green building rating tool – probably because that’s exactly what it is. Those were the words on buttons worn by Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) supporters at the 2011 USGBC GreenBuild show.

USGBC is moving away from science when it comes to forest certification. While the latest draft language has some new opportunities for life cycle assessment and environmental data which is of relevance to wood, there remains a disconnect in terms of promoting and recognizing wood from responsibly managed forests. There is a real disconnect when USGBC claims to be a standard that supports market transformation and yet chooses language that can undermine and disadvantage markets for three quarters of the certified forest products from North America. Healthy markets for products from responsible forests means more forests will be managed responsibly. Undermining those markets, however, can have numerous consequences, be they intentional or unintentional.

USGBC’s unwavering support for FSC shows it understands the value of third-party forest certification. But it is painting itself into a corner through a credit structure that could enable builders to turn their backs on 75 percent of North America’s certified forests if they want to chase LEED credits for certified wood. The potential for this to happen is evidenced by FSC’s own 2010 Business value and Growth market survey (page 6) which found: *“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.”* USGBC is reinforcing the myth that only one forest certification standard is worth supporting – ignoring the fact [respected organizations](#) say otherwise and ignoring the fact that 90 percent of the world’s forests aren’t even certified.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) remains committed to ensuring all forest products from responsible sources and certified forests gain equal access to credits in LEED rating tools. While we agree that the 90% of FSC’s certified forests that are certified outside the US, i.e. outside USGBC’s home turf, should get access to LEED, not for a minute do we believe that these FSC products should get preferential access to LEED certified wood credits over products certified to standards in use in North America, such as SFI, ATFS and CSA – all of which SFI recognizes.

If through the language “FSC or better” USGBC’s aim is to allow credits for certification standards that are better for forests, for other forest values and for forest communities, SFI can certainly show we match – and often exceed – FSC requirements. SFI will post a number of blogs between now and March 20 when the [LEED public comment period](#) ends to show how many unique attributes the SFI standard has that supports responsible forestry in communities across North America. We will show how SFI goes beyond and above the uneven nature of FSC’s varied standards and how SFI focuses on things that matter here at home, such as research, logger training and landowner outreach. But let’s be clear, SFI is a standard that is grounded and founded in North America, that reflects social, economic and environmental priorities that are of relevance here at home – this is our strength and this should not be overlooked.

The decisions USGBC makes today about green building and certification will affect our forests and our communities well into the future. By refusing to be inclusive like other green building rating tools, it diminishes the value of certification and that diminishes the value of our forests.

More to come...



Why SFI is Better: Logger Training

By Richard W. (Dick) Brinker

Dean Emeritus at Auburn University

March 8, 2012

*The U.S. Green Building Council is inviting [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, **Dr. Richard W. (Dick) Brinker**, Dean Emeritus, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University, and a member of the social chamber of the SFI Board of Directors, looks at how SFI supports logger training.*

One way to make sure forests are managed well is to make sure the people on the ground – loggers and landowners – are trained well. Training [has been my passion](#) for more than 25 years, and it has been a firm principle of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) since the start.

I’ve conducted and coordinated extension education activities for professional loggers, foresters, and landowners since 1988. And as far as I’m concerned, the creation of SFI was a dream come true – it meant logging professionals, and forests, across the United States and Canada were able to benefit from our work. The Forest Resources Association estimates that since 1995 about 130,000 resource and logging professionals have been trained in responsible forestry through the SFI program or its recognition of other programs.

Training and Education is one of the 14 principles for responsible forestry in the SFI 2010-2014 Standard. Program participants must make sure their staff and contractors are properly trained, and they must be part of a local SFI Implementation Committee to improve training. If they source fiber from uncertified lands, they must encourage the landowner to use qualified professionals.

SFI is the only certification program in North America with these requirements. And it’s making a huge difference. States such as [Texas](#), [South Carolina](#) and [Tennessee](#) point to it as one reason for consistent improvement in their best management practices to protect water quality.

And while training is important to me, I’ve been privileged to be involved with SFI in many ways. I’m a member of the independent SFI Board of Directors, and from 2002 to 2008 I was part of the SFI [External Review Panel](#). Both of these roles are like having tenure at a university – we are chosen for our knowledge and expertise, and granted the independence and freedom we need to contribute and say what we think. That’s just one of the many strengths of the SFI program.

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 Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Therefore, it meets the “FSC or better” requirements set out in the draft language for the LEED rating system. If the U.S. Green Building Council wants LEED to achieve as much as possible for our forests, and utilize a truly sustainable resource, its credit structure will include SFI certification.

Dr. Brinker was Dean and Professor in of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University, from 1998 until his retirement in 2011. During this time, it became one of the most highly regarded and productive natural resource programs in the southern region of the United States.



The Adaptive Advantage: SFI's Research Requirement

By C. Tattersall Smith

Professor and Dean Emeritus, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto

March 9, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council is inviting [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be "FSC or better" according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, Charles Tattersall (Tat) Smith Jr., Professor and Dean Emeritus in the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto and a member of the SFI Board of Directors, looks at the role of research in the SFI program.

Achieving the goals of sustainable forest management requires society to commit to the long-term pursuit of knowledge about the ways in which our forests contribute to sustaining economic, social and environmental values. Research conducted within the overall framework of adaptive forest management is a fundamental cornerstone of the pursuit of the knowledge required.

Our academic institutions play an essential role in partnership with all actors in the forest sector as we educate the next generation of professionals and develop new knowledge and seek to reduce uncertainty about the ways in which forest management decisions sustain forests to meet the needs of society today and for future generations. As an educator, I encourage students to be inquisitive and to challenge existing theoretical bases which guide government policy and management decisions, and to be passionate in the pursuit of new levels of understanding.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) recognizes the important role of research in improving the way our forests are managed. Research is a core principle of the [SFI 2010-2014 Standard](#), and central to SFI's many collaborations. SFI is the only third-party forest certification program in North America with specific research requirements – Objective 15 of its standard says program participants must provide *financial or in-kind support of research to address questions of relevance in the region of operations. The research shall include some of the following issues:*

- a. forest health, productivity, and ecosystem functions;
- b. chemical efficiency, use rate and integrated pest management;
- c. water quality and/or effectiveness of best management practices including effectiveness of water quality and best management practices for protecting the quality, diversity and distributions of fish and wildlife habitats;
- d. wildlife management at stand and landscape levels;
- e. conservation of biological diversity;
- f. ecological impacts of bioenergy feedstock removals on productivity, wildlife habitat, water quality and other ecosystem functions;
- g. climate change research for both adaptation and mitigation;
- h. social issues;
- i. forest operations efficiencies and economics;
- j. energy efficiency;
- k. life cycle assessment;
- l. avoidance of illegal logging; and
- m. avoidance of controversial sources.

As a result of this unique requirement, SFI-certified companies have invested more than \$1.2 billion in research activities since 1995. Further, SFI Inc. has invested more than a million dollars in [conservation and community partnership grants](#), in the last two years.

While the numbers are impressive, what matters most to me are the results.

Here's an example: I currently provide leadership to an international collaboration under the auspices of the International Energy Agency Bioenergy implementing agreement, and will be making recommendations on how certification can contribute to meeting society's sustainability goals for emerging international bioenergy markets. I know I can count on SFI as a resource in this endeavor, because back in 2008 I led an SFI-hosted workshop that brought together experts on sustainable biomass production. It's worth noting that our recommendations at that time led to changes in the SFI 2010-2014 Standard. For example, in addition to SFI adding research on bioenergy feedstocks to Objective 15 as listed above in letter f, the SFI Standard now includes a definition for bioenergy feedstocks; and requirements for landowners to have a *program or monitoring system to ensure efficient utilization, which may include provisions to ensure... management of harvest residue (e.g. slash, limbs, tops) considers economic, social and environmental factors (e.g. organic and nutrient value to future forests) and other utilization needs; and also requirements for procurement companies to supply regionally appropriate information or services (e.g. information packets, websites, newsletters, workshops, tours, etc.) to forest landowners, describing the importance and providing implementation guidance on...management of harvest residue.*

This is the kind of proactive effort I welcome. I am proud to be a member of the SFI board, and look forward to seeing further advances in sustainable bioenergy feedstock production so SFI can use them to inform its next standard review cycle, which begins in 2013.

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.

The same cannot be said for the approach to forest certification in the LEED draft. Using a phrase like, "FSC or better" has no validity or basis in science. The U.S. Green Building Council is well advised to recognize SFI certification which happens to exceed FSC in the area of research as FSC has no such requirement. By including SFI, the USGBC would also tell researchers like me that it values the work and knowledge we have achieved through the SFI program.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Supporting North American Forests and Communities through Green Building

By Robert A. (Bob) Luoto

Owner and Operator of Cross & Crown, Inc.

March 12, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council is inviting [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, Bob Luoto, Owner and Operator of Cross & Crown, Inc. and Chair of the SFI Board of Directors, talks about how the SFI program supports rural timber-dependent communities.

My name is Bob Luoto, and I am the third generation within my family to go into logging. I have been a professional logger for 38 years. My wife, Betsy, and I own Cross & Crown, Inc., our family logging business out of Carlton, Oregon. Our son, Kirk, is 30 years old, and is the fourth generation of Luoto men to enter into our business. His 4-year-old son, Landon, could choose to become the fifth generation to take over our family business – if our business can survive that long.

In rural, timber-dependent America, the economic decline began years before the rest of the country ever felt a thing. In my experience, we are usually among the last to recover. It is having a terrible impact on so many of our family, friends and neighbors, and on our own business.

As long as U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) limits its LEED-certified wood credit to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), it is turning its back on my community as well as other communities in North America. Our company and our employees, as well as other timber-based companies, have suffered and will continue to suffer if we send jobs out of the country by denying LEED certified wood credits for fiber from certifications to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) Standard. By giving preferential treatment to FSC, which has 90 percent of its certified land outside the United States, USGBC discourages the use of timber and other forest by products

harvested on three million acres of lands certified to the SFI Standard in Oregon alone. This obviously is harmful to rural communities and the families who live and work in them. It is telling my son, who has become a partner in our family business, that the industry has no future for him or his children.

What is most distressing to me is that there is no good reason for this decision not to equally and explicitly include all forest certifications including SFI. I work on lands certified to SFI, and I am proud of what I see our people accomplishing on SFI-certified land every day. All of my employees are trained in Best Management Practices thanks to SFI requirements. SFI certification makes our work much safer and keeps North American harvested timber ready for use in rural towns and large cities all across North America. It is for this reason that we must not forget that SFI recognizes approximately three quarters of the certified forests in North America and yet only 10% of the world's forests are certified.

I have been actively involved with the American Loggers Council for 16 years. We were among many invited to be at the table to shape the SFI program back in the 1990s, and have been partners ever since. I currently chair the SFI Board of Directors, and can attest to the knowledge, the expertise, the care that this independently run board uses in all of its decision-making.

USGBC should show that it cares about rural communities like Carlton and small businesses like Cross & Crown, Inc. by recognizing SFI. It should show that it is a leader by dropping any barrier that discourages builders from using certified wood products from North America. By doing this, it can help us keep our own business alive and well for our son and our grandchildren, and promote the responsible management of hundreds of millions of acres of forestland throughout North America.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Helping to Keep Working Forests as Forests

By Larry Selzer

President and CEO, The Conservation Fund

March 13, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council is inviting [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, [Larry Selzer](#), President and CEO of The Conservation Fund, and a member of the conservation chamber and Vice Chair of the SFI Board of Directors, looks at how SFI certification helps conserve working forests and explains why SFI should be recognized by USGBC’s LEED rating tools.

At [The Conservation Fund](#), we know that one of our greatest conservation challenges in North America today is the loss of working forests. We also know forests that are managed to provide economic return and for social attributes are more likely to continue to remain as forests and therefore likely to support environmental values as well.

That’s why we work with our many partners to help landowners and communities develop sustainable solutions that integrate economic return with environmental quality. And that’s why we support third-party certification programs like the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®). The Conservation Fund owns almost 100,000 acres of working forests in the United States – all are actively managed and the SFI Standard plays a prominent role.

Last fall, in my [remarks](#) at the SFI Annual Conference, I spoke about how it is time to think of forests as infrastructure – a self-sustaining economy in green that provides us with clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, carbon sinks to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and a source of renewable energy – not to mention the millions of jobs that depend on them.

We know how important it is to maintain our critical infrastructure. But before we can ask citizens to invest more in forests, we need to convince them those forests are, and will be, well managed – and that’s where forest certification comes in. Certification provides the public a window into the forest, and it provides them with independent assurance that certified forests are responsibly managed.

If the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) wants to help us keep working forests as forests, it will acknowledge SFI’s

leadership in the area of responsible forestry. It will recognize that forests certified to SFI are part of the solution to keep forests as forests. If working forests don’t have access to green building markets, those forests may likely be converted to non-productive uses such as houses and commercial development. The purposeful exclusion of SFI can actually accelerate the loss of our forests lands nation-wide. 90 percent of the world’s forests are not certified, including a significant amount of land in North America. That’s why it’s so important for USGBC to recognize that the SFI Standard is making a real and positive difference towards keeping our forests as healthy, working forests, supporting a variety of economic, environmental and social values for communities today and in the future.

SFI certification was created to balance forest interests, and it does this extremely well. I am honored to serve in the conservation chamber, one of three equal chambers making up the SFI [Board of Directors](#). I have dedicated my life to conservation and the protection of our working forests, and, working with the SFI Board to continue to set the highest standards for responsible forestry for the industry.

Consider this quote from John Burroughs: “To treat your facts with imagination is one thing, to imagine your facts is another.” America is losing millions of acres of working forest every year to development pressure, and yet the USGBC continues to give credentials when none are warranted to the inaccurate claims of a small faction who have proven they are bereft of any ideas about how to expand conservation in the future. Instead of supporting those who imagine their facts and repeating claims that have no grounding in the truth, USGBC needs to show true leadership and join us in protecting these treasured lands by recognizing the remarkable contribution SFI is making on millions of acres of forests across North America.

Larry Selzer has been a supporter of SFI certification since it began, and is currently Vice Chair of the SFI board. The Conservation Fund is a top-ranked non-profit, in 2010 it was #1 on Charity Navigator’s list of 10 of the Best Charities Everyone’s Heard Of for its efficient and fiscally responsible performance.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – “No Certification Program Can Credibly Claim to be ‘Best’ ”

By C. Randall (Randy) Dye

President, National Association of State Foresters

March 14, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council is inviting [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, Randy Dye, West Virginia State Forester and President of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), talks about NASF’s position on third-party forest certification and green building.

State Foresters have long been advocates of policies encouraging the use of domestic wood products for green building – from both economic and environmental perspectives. State foresters have a unique public trust responsibility for America’s forests, and we have been active leaders in the growth and evolution of third-party forest certification as an important tool that is making a positive contribution in our public and private forests.

We [welcomed](#) a report last year from the U.S. Department of Agriculture showing that wood is superior to other construction materials in terms of environmental benefits, and applauded USDA’s statement that “Sustainability of forest products can be verified using any credible third-party rating system, such as Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council or American Tree Farm System.” We still see a need for change in the U.S. Green Building Council’s (USGBC) treatment of both wood and forest certification in the draft language for LEED.

In 2008, the [National Association of State Foresters](#) (NASF) passed a [green building resolution](#), pointing to the importance of giving wood products, especially from the United States, a substantial role in the U.S. green building movement. The resolution urged organizations that maintain green building standards to “recognize the value of U.S. wood that is certified by a credible forestland certification standard as having been grown in a sustainable manner, keeping in mind that there are multiple certification standards and systems that are credible and nationally recognized, and that the diversity of U.S. forestlands requires the use of multiple forestland certification standards and systems...”

NASF members also approved a [forest certification policy](#) statement in 2008 setting out the fundamental elements of forest certification: independent governance, multi-stakeholder standard, independent certification, complaints/appeals process,

open participation and transparency. This policy statement found that all of the major certification programs used in the United States – the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®), the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – include these elements and make positive contributions to forest sustainability.

Further, it stated: “No certification program can credibly claim to be ‘best’, and no certification program that promotes itself as the only certification option can maintain credibility. Forest ecosystems are complex and a simplistic ‘one size fits all’ approach to certification cannot address all sustainability needs.”

The policy statement specifically recognized the value of forest certification programs that originated in the U.S., such as SFI and ATFS, noting that “each developed workable requirements for addressing sustainable forestry across all ownerships. Training requirements for on-the-ground personnel (loggers, landowners, and foresters), wood procurement standards, and group landowner certification have broadened participation and made forest certification more meaningful in the U.S.”

So 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. And it is further troubling that now they are requiring SFI and ATFS to prove that they are “better” than FSC in order to be recognized within LEED.

In 2010, we sent a [letter](#) to the USGBC urging it to incorporate changes in the LEED language to promote wood and expand the practice of forest certification. Our concerns were ignored, and yet the need for this is even greater today. We [have identified](#) the loss of markets for U.S. wood products as a major concern for our forest industry and economy, and we would like to see an increase in our country’s share of global wood value production through the utilization of sustainable forest practices.

USGBC should encourage the use of wood and advance certification by recognizing that SFI, FSC and ATFS all require rigorous documentation to prove that forestry practices are sustainable – and by awarding credits for products certified to all of these standards. This will lead to benefits not only for the environment and our forests, but for communities and workers across the U.S.



Why SFI is Better for Woodworkers

By William V. Street Jr.

Director, Woodworkers Department,
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
March 15, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is asking for [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, William V. Street Jr., Director of the Woodworkers Department, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, a member of the SFI Board of Directors, and chair of the PEFC Board of Directors, looks at the benefits of SFI certification for workers.

The IAMAW (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers) represents more forestry and wood workers than any other union in the United States. We have members who work in SFI-certified forests and FSC-certified forests. We have some that work in forests certified by both systems on any given day. We support all certification systems that can deliver sustainable forestry in a way that protects forest ecosystems as well as forest dependent communities and our members.

The forest landscape in North America has been altered by humans for more than 3,000 years. Sometimes in a way that is sustainable and sometimes in ways that are not. During this period, there were times when both natural and human resources were exploited. 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.

SFI has had union members on their Board of Directors for years. Unions are also involved in their standard setting processes. As a result, SFI has labor guidelines and requirements that exceed U.S. law. SFI’s third-party based audit system means that problems as they arise are resolved quickly because for our members, justice delayed is justice denied. SFI has a standing Workers Rights sub-committee ready at the call to meet to begin social dialogue when problems are identified. SFI’s work standards are based on the Conventions of the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) core labor standards. The application and enforcement of these standards are derived directly from ILO rulings and recommendations. FSC, on the other hand, relies on a political process to enforce ILO labor standards in the U.S. Since forest workers have not been provided the same leadership opportunities in FSC, the likelihood of prevailing in a political-based process is remote.

The FSC enforcement process is not at “arms” length from the standard setting body. This means that considerations other than fact-based evidence frequently prevail with many involving conflicts of interests between the standard maker and the

auditor. This “judge and jury” role confusion tends to make FSC vulnerable to the whims of large special interest groups who are able to dictate outcomes that in the past have been harmful to workers, their communities, and forest health.

Finally, the ideological driven “exclusivity” of FSC means that systems such as LEED contribute to rural poverty and unemployment while simultaneously adding economic pressure to convert forest land to non-forest land uses, especially in areas with high concentrations of SFI certified forests which is approximately 75% of US certified forest land. This “exclusive” nature of both FSC and programs such as LEED creates economic barriers for wood sourced from local forests produced by our members. SFI on the other hand is inclusive and respectful of all certified wood and forests, thereby not harming our members who produce FSC wood products.

The IAM realizes that both FSC and SFI have a ways to go before either of them can claim to be perfect from a worker’s perspective. However, both systems have made significant contributions to move forest managers and forest products towards the concept of sustainability. Our members have learned throughout our own 125-year history that when we fight among ourselves, when we fail to practice solidarity, we all suffer. We hope a time comes when those who care about forests, forest workers, and their communities learn that promoting one system at the expense of another, while major areas of U.S. forestland are not certified, is a waste of time and energy.

Neither system is going to go disappear. We will continue to work with all systems to improve their social standards, promote rural livelihoods, and decent work. For the time being, in terms of woodworkers it is “SFI or better” because in the U.S., SFI and the American Tree Farm System of small family forest land owners are the best.

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) is open until March 20, 2012. At the end of the review period, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Rigorous Independent Audits and Continuous Improvement

By Mike Ferrucci

Forestry Program Manager and Lead Auditor, NSF-ISR

March 16, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is asking for [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, [Mike Ferrucci](#), Forestry Program Manager and Lead Auditor for NSF-International Strategic Registrations, offers an auditor’s view of independent SFI certification.

My job is to verify that SFI program participants seeking certification meet all the relevant requirements of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) [2010-2014 Standard](#).

I make sure operations are in compliance with all applicable laws in the United States and Canada, as well as unique SFI requirements such as logger training, landowner outreach and research. I confirm that wildlife habitat needs and water quality are protected, that workers are properly trained, that harvesting is sustainable, and that there have been opportunities for community involvement as required by the SFI 2010-2014 Standard.

I also identify opportunities to improve performance – continual improvement is a principle and auditable requirement of the SFI forest standard, and many [audit summaries](#) recommend areas for improvement. One of the primary goals of voluntary SFI certification is to continually improve forest practices.

Each audit team includes professionals with appropriate skills and knowledge in disciplines such as forestry, wildlife ecology, occupational health and safety and hydrology, as well as expertise in certification protocols – we are [accredited](#), impartial and qualified. A typical SFI certification audit takes several days and involves two to four auditors with knowledge and skills appropriate to the scope, scale and geography of the operation being audited.

All certification bodies that conduct SFI forest management certification audits must meet the accreditation requirements developed by a national member of the International Accreditation Forum – in our case it is [ANAB](#), and it makes sure we meet its requirements by auditing our performance every year.

SFI Inc. is not involved at all in forest certification audits – that’s the whole point of independent third-party certification. If anyone has a concern about our findings, they can raise this with the certified company or with us, and if they are unsatisfied with the response, they can raise it with the body that accredited us, in our case it is ANAB.

What SFI does do is develop the standards, and make sure they are understood. The SFI 2010-2014 Standard is a single standard for forests across the US and Canada, with indicators that may also be supported by more specific interpretations – and that’s important to promote consistency among different certifiers.

SFI audits follow established international norms – we can award certificates with isolated minor non-conformances but not if there are major non-conformances or many minor non-conformances. My advice for companies that want to be certified to SFI is that they should make sure everything is in order before I arrive. If the SFI standard requirements are not being met, I have no choice – I won’t be issuing an SFI certificate.

I certify forests to SFI and I work on audit teams for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards, and my message to the U.S. Green Building Council is this: I know how hard it is to earn SFI certification. Forests certified to SFI or FSC are well managed and meet the high expectations of consumers. If the USGBC’s goal is to reward excellence, products from forests certified to SFI should be equally entitled to LEED certified wood credits.

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) is open until March 20, 2012. At the end of the review period, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Support Forest Professionals and Responsible Forest Practices

By **Michael T. Goergen Jr.**

Executive Vice-President and CEO, Society of American Foresters

March 19, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is asking for [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, [Michael Goergen](#), Executive Vice-President and CEO, Society of American Foresters, and Chair, SFI External Review Panel, looks at the benefits of forest certification for foresters and forest practices. The [Society of American Foresters](#) has 17,000 members and represents all segments of the forestry profession in the United States.

‘FSC or better’ is neither logical nor scientific. Especially when it continues to reinforce misconceptions about third-party forest certification and responsible forest practices.

Certification programs like Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and American Tree Farm System do so much to advance our work and our profession. Certification empowers foresters, giving us the authority and tools to work with landowners on actions that are necessary to support sustainable forest management.

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is out of step with green building councils in other countries who understand the value of promoting all credible forest certification standards. As a result, LEED risks discouraging the use of forest products from well-managed forests, one of North America’s greatest natural resources and an excellent choice for green building. Forest products should receive recognition in green building systems regardless of certification, and should receive extra credit if they are certified to one of the widely accepted North American standards.

USGBC accepts questionable facts from the small but determined group of market campaigners who promote FSC and appear to want an FSC monopoly. Competition between these certification systems is valuable and allows forest professionals the opportunity to improve the systems through science and experience.

Campaigners attack SFI on clearcutting and chemical use but ignore FSC’s own standards that, as they should, allow these practices around the world. Clearcutting and chemical use when appropriately applied are important tools for forest management.

At the Society of American Foresters, we support the use of proven silvicultural methods to meet diverse forest management objectives – [and this includes clearcutting](#). FSC and SFI both certify forests with clearcuts. Some FSC forest standards in North America have smaller clearcut limits than those specified in the SFI Standard. And some FSC standards don’t have maximum clearcut limits at all – including four that account for more than one half FSC-certified lands globally* – FSC Canada’s National Boreal Standard (25% of FSC-certified land), the Russian National FSC

Standard (20%), the Swedish FSC Standard (8%) and the Brazil Amazon Terra Firme Standard (3%). There are also no limits in two interim standards in New Zealand and Australia, and in the Regional Certification Standards for British Columbia. This may be totally appropriate based on forest type and composition, but clearcutting in North America is also appropriate and necessary to create certain habitat types and promote regeneration of our forests.

Another topical issue with the USGBC has been chemical use in forestry. The U.S. Forest Service says pesticides are [one part of an integrated approach](#) to managing insects, disease and invasive plant problems. Both FSC and SFI recognize this, and both allow minimal use of chemical where appropriate. It’s true FSC prohibits ‘highly hazardous pesticides’ but under official FSC policy, forest managers can apply for a pesticide derogation/exemption– and 74 derogations/exemptions have been approved by FSC International worldwide; 43 of them on FSC-certified plantation management.

I am also Chair of the independent [SFI External Review Panel](#), and our role is to take a detailed, unbiased, thorough look at the SFI Standard – and offer advice to the SFI Board of Directors. I like what I see. We monitored the standard review process that led to the SFI 2010-2014 Standard, and found it was a model of open, transparent consideration of public input, scientific and economic factors, and conflicting demands. We follow its implementation and challenge the program to continuously improve. USGBC could learn a lesson from SFI.

In order to forward responsible forestry and the work of professionals that are engaged in this complex task, USGBC should recognize all credible certification programs used in North America, including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, and the Forest Stewardship Council. All of these systems are empowering forest management and making a difference on the ground.

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) is open until March 20, 2012. At the end of the review period, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.

**Numbers accurate as of March 2012*



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI: Beyond Green Construction – Why Papermakers Should Pay Attention

By Dr. Laura M. Thompson

Director, Technical Marketing and Sustainable Development, Sappi Fine Paper, North America

March 20, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is asking for [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, Laura Thompson, Director of Technical Marketing and Sustainable Development for Sappi Fine Paper, North America, talks about the benefits of inclusive policies. Follow her through her blog [The Environmental Quotient](#) or on Twitter at [@eQLauraThompson](#).

The [U.S. Green Building Council](#) (USGBC) has developed one of the leading rating tools for design, construction, operations and maintenance of buildings. Their LEED rating tool is built upon a point system based on a breadth of criteria for energy and environmental design. One criteria addresses sourcing wood from certified forests. Within LEED for [Existing Buildings: Operations and Maintenance](#), points are awarded for procurement of consumables (e.g. envelopes, tissue products, and copy paper) that are FSC certified. In a recent update to their rating tool, USGBC has indicated that points for certified wood would be awarded for products that are “FSC or better.” This designation has caused quite a stir amongst many stakeholders.

Sappi has long expressed support for inclusive [policies](#) that recognize the world’s leading forest management standards including the Canadian Standards Association, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). With 90% of the world’s forests not certified to reputable standards, we need to spend our collective energy to expand certification and protect against deforestation rather than getting in the weeds over some of the details of which standard is best (or in this case “better”). It is clear that the principles of both SFI and FSC are quite similar and both promote responsible forestry across a range of social, economic and environmental issues. To quote from a review by [Dovetail Partners](#): “Significant changes have occurred within the major certification programs in recent years, and, ... it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between certification systems in North America.”

Sappi, like most paper suppliers, sources wood and fiber from multiple sources, certified and uncertified. In fact, it is possible

to have a product that is labeled as FSC certified, but actually contains more fiber from SFI sources and yet USGBC is saying they will only recognize it when it is called FSC certified. 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. The paper has both types of fiber in it and yet only one label can be granted points according to USGBC’s latest language.

But beyond our official position on inclusive policies, and beyond the apparent hypocrisy surrounding points for paper labeling, I am shocked that such a leading organization would write what amounts to me as a sloppy reference in a standard. “FSC or better”? What does this mean? Even if we are to grant that FSC is “better” on *some criteria* I think it can also be argued that SFI is better in other areas. I am certainly not the only one pondering this issue of subjectivity, and supporters of SFI have been writing some insightful guest blog posts in reaction to this recent announcement. Be sure to check out other postings and comments about SFI’s [research](#) requirements and [logger training](#).

Sappi Fine Paper North America is a producer of coated fine paper, release paper and market pulp. Its coated fine papers are used in premium magazines, catalogs, books and high-end print advertising. Sappi’s release papers provide the surface aesthetics for synthetic fabrics used in footwear, clothing, upholstery and accessories, as well as the textures for decorative laminates found in kitchens, baths, flooring and other decorative surfaces. An integrated pulp and paper producer, with state-of-the-art pulp mills, Sappi is the third-largest seller of hardwood pulp in North America. For more information visit [www.sappi.com/eq](#)

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) closes today (March 20, 2012). At the end of the review period, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.



Why SFI is Better: Community Outreach

By Patrick Sirois

Coordinator, Maine SFI Implementation Committee

March 22, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is asking for [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be "FSC or better" according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, Pat Sirois, Coordinator of the [Maine SFI Implementation Committee](#) talks about SFI community outreach in Maine.

In Maine, there are more than seven million acres certified to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) Standard, and another 780,000 certified to the American Tree Farm Standard. None has LEED recognition. This is unfortunate because these lands represent about half of Maine's forests, and they are managed sustainably by some of the best forest landowners and managers anywhere.

It also suggests the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) does not value the many contributions made by volunteer members of the Maine SFI Implementation Committee who work hard to broaden the practice of sustainable forestry on certified and uncertified lands in our state. We are one of 37 community-based [SFI implementation committees](#) across North America engaged in important initiatives such as logger training, landowner outreach and conservation and community projects.

Here's just a sample of what we have achieved in Maine alone: We have been involved in training for more than 6,500 loggers and forest professionals since 1999. We worked with the Maine Snowmobile Association to expand the use of best management practices in recreational trail construction. We supported government efforts to enhance brook trout habitat. We partnered on a project with a local Habitat for Humanity affiliate. We're also involved in a [pilot project](#) led by corporate sponsors to make SFI certification more accessible to medium-sized landowners.

We must be doing something right. Our state has 400 nesting pairs of bald eagles and 90 percent of the remaining native brook trout habitat in the lower 48 states. The U.S. Forest Service says our water has the best quality for drinkability of the 20 most eastern states. We have one of the most developed logger and forester training infrastructures anywhere.

Yet much of the wood harvested and manufactured in Maine is not eligible for LEED certified wood credits. Thankfully, Maine Governor Paul LePage and our customers worldwide know we do a great job, and acknowledge that SFI, Tree Farm and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) all have a lot to do with our favorable environmental profile.

Last year, Governor LePage signed an [executive order](#) saying that any new or expanded state buildings must be built to a green building rating standard that accepts all forest certification programs equally. The USGBC should follow suit and recognize we have an advantage over regions of the world where forests are not certified and are not managed sustainably.

What's lost in all this is something we in Maine are very proud of, the sustainability of the forest resource and how all certification programs have contributed to that end.

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) closes March 27, 2012. At the end of the review period, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Addressing Aboriginal Interests

By Ryan Clark

Manager, Forestry & Strategic Planning, Capacity Forest Management Ltd.

March 23, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is asking for [comments](#) on the draft language for its LEED rating system. SFI Inc. has invited views on the treatment of [third-party forest certification](#), which must be “FSC or better” according to the latest USGBC credit language. In this post, Ryan Clark, Manager, Forestry & Strategic Planning, [Capacity Forest Management](#) talks about how SFI certification addresses indigenous interests.

Capacity Forest Management manages forestry operations for 17 First Nations clients in British Columbia. In partnership with our clients, we balance cultural priorities with the need to provide an economically viable forestry operation.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) certification is one tool we use to achieve this balance. The SFI Standard addresses cultural values as well as addressing environmental and economic concerns important to our clients. And it offers an important proof point to customers around the world that they are buying products from a responsible source.

There are three respected third-party certification programs used in Canada – SFI, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). On the ground, their similarities outweigh their differences. Our clients chose SFI certification because a lot of its principles match the objectives and goals they have for the long-term sustainable management

of their land base, such as measures to protect water quality, special sites, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk, and forests with exceptional conservation value.

The SFI program has strong emphasis on training – participants must make sure personnel and contractors have the knowledge and skills to support sustainable forestry practices. This is important to our First Nations clients who are often new to forestry and looking for ways to increase capacity in all aspects of forestry, from the boardroom to planning, harvesting and operational silviculture crews.

Our clients care about their forests, and SFI certification is a great way to demonstrate this. 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.

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Forest Stewardship Council, Canadian Standards Association and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) closes March 27, 2012. At the end of the review period, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.



The Future Is Now – USGBC’s Decisions Can Sustain Our Forests

By **Kathy Abusow**

President & CEO of SFI

March 26, 2012

It’s been close to a month since Draft 3 of the new LEED 2012 language was released, and my initial reaction has not changed. I’m pleased to see there are credits specific for whole building Life Cycle Assessment and Environmental Product Declarations, and I look forward to seeing how these credits get accessed moving forward. However, I remain disappointed with requirements related to local sourcing and forest certification.

In the latest draft, local sourcing is overly restrictive and confusing – in some instances the local sourcing radius has been reduced from 500 miles to 50 miles – which is obviously not helpful for rural-based economies such as the forest products sector. And the “FSC or Better” language in the latest LEED Draft does a disservice to those organizations attempting to constructively engage and support responsible forestry and wood products from well-managed forests. Laura Thompson of Sappi said it well in her [Environmental Quotient](#) blog when she said she is “shocked that such a leading organization would write what amounts to me as a sloppy reference in a standard. ‘FSC or better’?”

That’s so true. What are the criteria to determine “better”? How will they be assessed, and by whom? With so many different Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards around the world, which one will the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) pick as its baseline? Will USGBC rise to the occasion and give credits for responsible forestry beyond FSC? Or will USGBC take us all down this long path of trying to decipher the baselines and the winners?

For years SFI has been promoting choice and inclusion of forest certification standards, and we don’t believe it is constructive to be forced to explain why we are better than FSC. This type of conversation is occurring because of USGBC’s new language.

Ninety percent of the world’s forests are not certified at all, and USGBC can drive demand for more certified lands by recognizing all credible certification standards – including SFI, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), American Tree Farm System (ATFS), FSC and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). These programs are pillars of responsible forestry, and they all serve a variety of land ownerships and markets. Together we are building the future of our forests upon which forest products, multiple values and communities can be sustained.

Our advice to the USGBC is to drop “FSC or better” and instead use the criteria for forest certification set out by the National Association of State Foresters [forest certification policy](#) or better yet – recognize the 10 percent of the world’s forests that are certified, be it to FSC or standards recognized by PEFC, including SFI, ATFS and CSA.

LEED is a precedent setting standard – many retailers rely on it to define responsible forest management. The decisions USGBC

makes today will determine the future health of our forests and our communities.

Here’s my message to USGBC: The future is decided now, and I hope you will play a pivotal role in keeping well-managed forests and communities alive and thriving.

What Experts are Saying

No doubt USGBC will receive lots of feedback about its draft language. We opened up our [Good for Forests](#) blog, and many others voiced their opinions on the topic of FSC or Better:

- **Dick Brinker, Dean Emeritus, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University**, says SFI training requirements are making a huge difference, and some states point to it as one reason for consistent improvement in their best management practices to protect water quality.
- **University of Toronto former Dean and Professor Tat Smith** says that SFI certification exceeds FSC in the area of research, and that by including SFI, the USGBC would be telling researchers “it values the work and knowledge we have achieved through the SFI program.”
- **SFI Board Chair Bob Luoto**, who owns a logging business in rural Oregon, says as long as USGBC limits its LEED-certified wood credit to FSC, “it is turning its back on my community as well as other communities in North America.”
- **Larry Selzer, President of The Conservation Fund** and Vice-Chair of the SFI Board of Directors, says if USGBC “wants to help us keep working forests as forests, it will acknowledge SFI’s leadership in the area of responsible forestry.”
- **The National Association of State Foresters’ Randy Dye** says 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.”
- **Union leader Bill Street of the International Association of Machinists** says the “ideological driven ‘exclusivity’ of FSC means that systems such as LEED contribute to rural poverty and unemployment while simultaneously adding economic pressure to convert forest land to non-forest land uses . . .”
- **Auditor Mike Ferrucci** says: “If the USGBC’s goal is to reward excellence, products from forests certified to SFI should be equally entitled to LEED certified wood credits.”



SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

SFI-00001

- **Michael Goergen, Executive Vice-President and CEO of the Society of American Foresters** says “ ‘FSC or better’ is neither logical nor scientific. Especially when it continues to reinforce misconceptions about third-party forest certification and responsible forest practices.”
- **Sappi’s Laura Thompson** says exclusion of SFI-certified products is based on a lack of understanding of complex supply chains because a paper product labeled as FSC certified may actually have more SFI fiber than FSC fiber “and yet USGBC is saying they will only recognize it when it is FSC certified.”
- **Pat Sirois, Coordinator of the Maine SFI Implementation Committee**, says the USGBC position suggests it “does not value the many contributions made by volunteer members of the Maine SFI Implementation Committee who work hard to broaden the practice of sustainable forestry on certified and uncertified lands in our state.”
- **Ryan Clark of Capacity Forest Management**, which manages forestry operations for First Nations clients in British Columbia,

says: “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.”

SFI has always been committed to green building, and we are pleased that numerous green building rating tools around the world and across North America treat all forest certification standards the same. We are looking forward to the day when we can support USGBC for making a decision that supports responsible forestry, jobs and communities across North America.

Respected organizations are calling on the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America for its LEED rating system – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association, Forest Stewardship Council and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. After the [LEED Rating System Third Public Comment Period](#) closes March 27, USGBC members will vote on the final draft.



Now is the Time for USGBC to Say Yes to Healthy Working Forests

By Kathy Abusow

President & CEO of SFI

April 24, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council has announced a [fourth public comment period](#) for its draft LEED 2012 language – starting Tuesday May 1 and ending May 15. Based on comments submitted during the third public comment period, there is clear and strong support for USGBC to open up the “Responsible Extraction of Raw Materials” credit and allow SFI certified products to gain equal recognition in the LEED rating tools.

SFI opened up our blog for comments about why USGBC should recognize SFI, including areas where our program is without question stronger than the Forest Stewardship Council – and we were both impressed and gratified by the response. (If you missed the posts, we have pulled them together in one [on-line document](#).)

I summarized many of these feelings when I sent an [open letter](#) to USGBC leadership last week setting out 10 reasons why LEED should recognize all credible forest certification standards.

We aim to keep the discussion going through the fourth comment period, and beyond. This issue is just too important, and at SFI we care too much for our forests and communities. LEED is a precedent setting standard that can promote or undermine responsible forestry through its actions – let’s make sure USGBC knows this and acts accordingly.

Remember you have May 1 to May 15 to [comment](#) on the next draft, and if you are a member of USGBC, you have to [opt in](#) by May 1 so you are eligible to vote.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Benefits for State Lands in Minnesota

Robert S. Tomlinson

Manager of Strategic Land Asset Management

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

April 25, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is about to begin the fourth public [comment](#) period on draft credit language for LEED 2012. Respected organizations are calling on USGBC to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America through LEED – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association, Forest Stewardship Council and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. SFI Inc. has invited views on how USGBC should treat [third-party forest certification](#): In this post, Robert S. (Bob) Tomlinson, Manager of Strategic Land Asset Management and former Assistant Director of the Division of Forestry, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and a member of the independent SFI External Review Panel, talks about the value of SFI certification when managing public forests.

In Minnesota, [4.9 million acres](#) of state-administered forestlands are certified to Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards. Minnesota was the first state with public forest lands to be certified in the United States, establishing us as a nation-wide leader in forest certification. Our experience with SFI and FSC has taught us that both make a positive contribution to our forest management, and both should be recognized by USGBC in its LEED rating tool.

Minnesota's state forests are managed for multiple purposes – to produce timber, provide outdoor recreation, protect watersheds and provide habitat for fish and wildlife. The SFI certification process is a useful framework that brings together inter-disciplinary representatives from the different natural resource divisions involved in managing these important public resources – professionals responsible for watersheds, wildlife habitat, timber, and recreation.

SFI's focus on results allows for the flexibility to consider site-specific needs without losing any of the rigor required to support exceptional practices. And SFI's requirement for continual

improvement has led us to closely examine and re-examine our forest management practices, and demonstrate our progress to a third-party auditor. Indeed, continuous improvement within our agency and with our partners in forest management is one of the outstanding benefits of SFI forest certification.

SFI's unique grassroots structure of establishing and empowering SFI Implementation Committees goes even further by helping to address local concerns (such as invasive species management), and raise community understanding about sustainable forestry. This has led to a greater recognition of the fact we are managing forest lands to promote the conservation, enjoyment and use of Minnesota's forests for multiple purposes. The Minnesota SFI Implementation Committee also supports our outreach and education programs for family forest land owners, and loggers who are key partners in managing the state's forest resources.

While Minnesota has experienced its own share of mill closures during the recent economic downturn, we are blessed to have retained a viable forest products industry still operating in the state. I am convinced this is due in part to a stable supply of certified fiber coming from our state forest lands, and stronger market access made possible by forest certification. Minnesota in total has seven million acres certified to the SFI 2010-2014 Standard. I am convinced that this large amount of well-managed and certified forest land will help to sustain both healthy forests and healthy forest product industries for future generations.

Wood from responsibly managed forests is an excellent environmental choice for green building, and markets for wood products are a key avenue to sustain our rural communities. Hopefully, the USGBC will recognize the value that SFI has brought to forest management in Minnesota, and realize that SFI should be recognized equally alongside FSC.



Why USGBC Should Recognize SFI – Our Story: A Georgia Tree Farm and Green Building

By Earl and Wanda Barrs

Owners of Gully Branch Tree Farm

April 26, 2012

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is about to begin the fourth public [comment](#) period on draft credit language for LEED 2012. Respected organizations are calling on USGBC to recognize all credible certification programs used in North America through LEED – including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm System, Canadian Standards Association, Forest Stewardship Council and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. SFI Inc. has invited views on how USGBC should treat [third-party forest certification](#): In this post, award-winning Georgia tree farmers Earl and Wanda Barrs talk about the value of SFI and ATFS certification to family forest owners.

For the past 25 years, my wife Wanda and I have managed 1,500 acres of forestland in Bleckly County, Georgia. My family first settled this land in the late 1800s. Now, I am proud to say that our tree farm, Gully Branch, has been recognized nationally as a state-of-the-art forest.

Gully Branch is certified to the American Tree Farm System® standards, and our ATFS management plan outlines in great detail how we will protect and enhance our tree farm for timber, wildlife, water and recreation. I am a trained forester and Wanda has dedicated her professional life to education. Gully Branch has been used as one of Georgia's premier outdoor classrooms and since 1994, more than 7,000 students and adults have visited our tree farm.

Offering opportunities for children to learn about how a working forest provides wood products for our homes, schools and businesses; cleans our air and water, and provides critical habitat for wildlife brings us great satisfaction. Students of all ages need to learn about the value of well-managed forests and the multiple benefits that come from healthy forests.

Across the country, families and individuals own more of America's forestland than any other group, including the federal government or industry. In Georgia, families own more than half of the forestland in the state, and 70 percent of the wood used by industry comes from family forest owners like us. These families play a key role in providing jobs and economic vitality for rural communities.

But we will only continue to see the benefits that our forests provide – clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, recreation, wood products,

jobs and economic vitality – if we continue to work to ensure healthy markets for our wood products.

Green building markets are an important emerging opportunity for products from Georgia's sustainably managed forests. USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system has helped increase awareness about green building, and several government agencies have adopted the LEED system for their building policies. Unfortunately, LEED standards have continued to shortchange wood as a renewable and environmentally preferable building material. LEED offers few credits for the use of wood in green building, and the credits that are related to wood products are restrictive.

In the new LEED 2012 draft, we remain **strongly** opposed to the USGBC's treatment of forest certification, only recognizing wood certified to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) forest certification standard. Builders would not have the same incentives to build with wood from forest certification standards, like our ATFS Certified Family Forest, or the SFI Standard which also supports our communities and our forests.

However, we were encouraged to see some improvements in LEED 2012 that would allow for greater consideration and recognition of the environmental benefits of wood. Tools like Life Cycle Assessment and Environmental Product Declarations scientifically measure and describe the environmental impacts of materials. Overall, wood tends to do well compared to other products, and by including these tools, LEED would hopefully create a greater demand for wood products in green building – strengthening markets for family forest owners like us.

When markets were healthiest, so were America's forests because landowners had the resources to reinvest in their forests. It is important that the USGBC do more to recognize wood grown and certified to the ATFS and SFI standard so that family forest and working forests can be sustained and help grow in the green building market.

Earl and Wanda Barrs of Cochran, GA, were recognized as 2009 National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year, by the American Tree Farm System, a program of the American Forest Foundation (AFF). Wanda serves as Vice-Chair of the AFF Woodlands Operating Committee and on the AFF Board of Trustees. Earl serves as Chair of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Board.

All of the blog posts can be viewed online at goodforforests.com, where you can review related links and additional content.