



**U.S. Governors, Members of Congress and Other Leaders
Take a Stance on LEED Forest Certification Credit**

Governors, Members of Congress, and other leaders from across the United States are among those calling on the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) to ensure forest certification benchmarks for the certified wood credit in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating tool recognize all credible third-party forest certification programs.

Many of the letters to the USGBC note that the current exclusive recognition of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is biased against forest products from North America. More than three quarters of North America’s certified forests meet the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or American Tree Farm System (ATFS) forest standards –programs that certify forests exclusively in the United States and Canada. Conversely, more than 60 percent of FSC-certified lands are outside of North America.

Using domestic products is especially important for government agencies, which have a responsibility to deliver economic benefits to communities across the United States and meet environmental goals. Government-owned or occupied LEED buildings make up close to one third of all LEED projects. More than 1,200 federal, state and local projects are LEED certified, and another 8,500 were pursuing certification.

Many influential organizations have urged an inclusive approach to forest certification, including the National Association of State Foresters. Green building tools such as the ANSI National Green Building Standard similarly take an inclusive approach. The U.S. General Services Administration encourages the use of certified wood for all new installations of wood products, and references FSC-US and SFI for more information.

In 2009, the Green Building Council of Australia, which works closely with USGBC, announced its green building rating tool would give equal consideration to forest certification standards accepted by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) schemes in addition to FSC. The SFI Standard is endorsed by PEFC. The Council had faced intense pressure from Australian government agencies and unions to be more inclusive, and acted quickly.

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Governors Tell USGBC to Recognize all Credible Certification Programs

Ten governors – from Arkansas, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon, Virginia and Washington – have written to the USGBC. Following are excerpts from the letters, which are posted at www.sfiprogram.org/leed/leed_key_voices.php.



Virginia Governor Robert F. McDonnell (July 2, 2010 letter to USGBC)

“Besides FSC, there are other credible, independently audited certification programs used across far more acres in the Commonwealth, such as the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). . . . Failure to recognize Virginia’s well-managed forests in favor of concrete and steel is neither environmentally nor economically sound and will serve only to encourage the importation of wood products from our foreign competitors.”



Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe (June 3 letter to USGBC)

“In Arkansas, SFI’s certified acreage is five times the size of FSC acreage, while nearly 2,500 Arkansas families managed more than 1.1 million acres of forest under the ATFS. Additionally, Arkansas is home to two National Forests, covering almost three million acres, yet it is my understanding that wood products produced from National Forest timber are also ineligible for green credits under the LEED standards. We feel that USGBC is under-utilizing a product that is entirely renewable, energy-efficient, and provides numerous public benefits, including carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and water-quality protection.”



Idaho Governor C.L. (Butch) Otter (May 24, 2010 letter to USGBC)

“Under the proposed USGBC benchmarks, bamboo from China and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified wood from Russia and Brazil would be certified, whereas only some of Idaho’s wood would be certified. Much would not, including wood produced from Idaho’s State endowment trust lands that are managed on a sustainable basis to generate revenue for a variety of beneficiaries, most notably Idaho’s public school system. I am confident Idaho’s environmental protections exceed those of China and Russia.”



Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty (Feb. 16, 2010 letter to USGBC)

“Recognizing only FSC-certified wood in the LEED benchmarks will result in discrimination against wood products derived from well-managed lands in green building projects. The USGBC should fairly assess and include all credible forest certification programs, including SFI and ATFS systems.

“I urge you to quickly make a board decision to recognize well-managed wood from Minnesota and all credible forest certification programs. In doing so, USGBC can join other government agencies and green building rating programs in recognizing wood as an environmentally friendly building material.”



Oregon Governor Theodore R. Kulongoski (Nov. 30, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"The FSC program is certainly laudable, but the vast majority of Oregon's wood products industry has elected to utilize the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification program. Like FSC participants, their management under SFI third-party certification represents a commitment to responsible forestry that goes well beyond Oregon's comprehensive forest practice laws.

"In addition, our State has nearly 16 million acres of federal forests and 800 thousand acres of state-owned forests where environmental and social benefits are emphasized to an even greater degree. Yet wood from these lands would also appear to be ineligible for most, if not all, LEED credits, while FSC wood from foreign countries could get full credit. Importing wood rather than strongly encouraging local sources seems highly counter to the principles of sustainability."



Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour (Nov. 24, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"...the fact that FSC standards differ between U.S. and foreign countries means the LEED credit can be secured by wood from abroad but not from domestic, third-party certified forests. And since 90 percent of the wood produced in the world comes from forests not certified at all, it makes no sense environmentally or economically for USGBC to pick favorites from the ten percent of forests that are certified by recognized third-party certification programs.

"The USGBC should focus on encouraging the use of certified wood and responsible forestry practices – not providing disincentives by discounting credible forest certification programs. I urge the USGBC to improve the LEED standard by fully recognizing all wood products from well-managed forests that are certified under all credible forest certification programs."



Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm (Nov. 16, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"Michigan forest products have the potential to provide significant advances to the effort to make America's building infrastructure environmentally-friendly. I therefore encourage USGBC to ensure that its proposed Forest Certification Benchmark accommodates all of the major forest certification schemes and recognize them in its rating systems."



Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer (Oct. 27, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"Under the proposed benchmarks bamboo from China and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood from Russia and Brazil would be certified, whereas Montana wood would not. I am confident Montana's environmental protections exceed those of China and Russia."



Maine Governor John Baldacci (Oct. 16, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"I strongly urge the USGBC to ensure that its proposed Forest Certification Benchmark accommodates all of the major forest certification schemes recognized in the marketplace. At this time, we are not convinced that this is the case.

"In addition . . . we offer the observation that the LEED standard still does not give adequate recognition to the use of certified wood. We continue to encourage USGBC to fully and amply recognize in its rating systems the use of wood obtained from forests certified by independent third parties as well managed. Wood is the environmentally preferable choice of building materials for a number of reasons . . ."



Washington Governor Christine Gregoire (Oct. 2, 2008 letter to USGBC)

"By recognizing internationally endorsed certification systems, the proposed changes in USGBC policy have the potential to include forest products from more than 800 certified family forest owners in our state. Many more small forest parcels can be included as certification systems bring more lands under recognized sustainable management practices. Forest products from 4.8 million acres of third party audited state and industrial forestlands also have the opportunity to be included for LEED rating points under proposed changes in USGBC policy."

U.S. Representatives Call for Open LEED

The USGBC has received many letters from U.S. Representatives, including a July 15, 2010 letter signed by 79 Representatives from 35 states, which said USGBC should "accept all credible forest management certification systems for qualification under the LEED rating system."



Following are excerpts from the letters, which are posted at www.sfiprogram.org/leed/leed_key_voices.php.

79 Representatives from 35 states [July 15, 2010 letter to USGBC initiated by Representatives Kurt Schrader (Democrat-Oregon) and Bob Goodlatte (Republican-Virginia)]

"We urge you and your organization to expedite your review of forest management certification systems and to accept all credible forest management certification systems for qualification under the LEED rating system. Doing so will help ensure strong markets for domestic lumber producers and our forest landowners, which is vital to the future of our forests and our forest industry workers."

Representative Allen Boyd (Florida) (July 2, 2010 letter to USGBC)

"As a Congressman who represents many small woodlot owners, I am writing to express concern over the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. . . . I understand that the LEED rating system has proposed draft benchmarks to evaluate forest certification programs, but I am concerned that they do not offer a clear and simple way to give credit for all of the major third-party forest certification systems operating in the US."

Representative Collin C. Peterson (Minnesota), Chair, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture (May 27, 2010 letter to USGBC)

"LEED, in its current form, discriminates against wood products produced in our own backyard. Further, it prohibits the two (of the) largest sustainable forest certification programs in the U.S., the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), from gaining credit by recognizing only Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood."

Congressional Timber Caucus (Representatives Kevin Brady - Texas, Bart Stupak - Michigan, Bill Cassidy – Louisiana, and Mike Ross - Arkansas) (May 26 letter to USGBC)

"Over three-quarters of certified wood fiber in North America is certified under SFI, ATFS, and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). If the status quo remains unchanged, and SFI and ATFS wood products are not recognized, we believe many LEED builders will turn away reputable third-party SFI and ATFS certified wood which is grown locally and instead turn to FSC certified wood, the large majority of which is grown in other countries."

Representative Travis W. Childers (Mississippi) (May 19, 2010 letter to USGBC)

"More than 3.4 million acres of forest in Mississippi are certified to SFI or ATFS, ten times the amount of forests certified to FSC in the state. If the USGBC maintains the status quo and does not recognize SFI or ATFS, many LEED builders will turn away reputable third party SFI and ATFS certified wood which is locally grown and instead, will turn to FSC certified wood, the majority of which, comes from foreign countries whose standards do not meet those in the United States. Furthermore, since the USGBC does not require other building products, such as steel and concrete, to have third-party environmental certification to achieve a credit, USGBC is discriminating against a product that is energy efficient and provides additional benefits such as climate mitigation."

Representative Marion Berry (Arkansas) (April 22, 2010 letter to USGBC)

"I understand the USGBC has developed benchmarks to evaluate forest certification programs. Many in the domestic lumber industry and forestry sector have raised concerns about the process used to develop these standards, saying the process has largely ignored the need to address its exclusive recognition of FSC certified wood. Products from SFI and ATFS certified forests continue to be ineligible for the LEED forest certification credit."

Representative Mike Ross (Arkansas) (April 22, 2010 letter to USGBC)

"As a representative for the thousands of Arkansans employed in the forestry sector, I urge you to move towards acceptance of all forest management certification systems and to end discrimination against domestically produced wood building products. Doing so will help ensure strong markets for our domestic lumber producers and our forest landowners which are vital to the future of this essential American industry."

Senator Says Inclusive Certification Yields Benefits



Senator Blanche L. Lincoln (Arkansas), Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry (April 16, 2010 letter to USGBC):

"I understand that the USGBC has developed draft benchmarks to evaluate forest certification programs. Many in the domestic lumber industry and forestry sector have raised concerns about the process used to develop these standards, saying the process has largely ignored the need to address its exclusive recognition of FSC certified wood. Products from SFI and ATFS certified forests continue to be ineligible for the LEED forest certification credit.

"I urge you and your organization to re-evaluate your approach to forest management certification systems as quickly as possible, and to accept all credible forest management certification systems as qualifying under the LEED standards. Doing so will help ensure strong markets for domestic lumber producers and our forest landowners, which is vital to the future of our forests and our forestry industry workers."

Calls for Change from Other Leaders



California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (statement Oct. 14, 2007 when he vetoed a bill that would have required builders to reach the LEED gold rating for commercial buildings)

"I support the development of green building standards and share the goals of this bill. However, if implemented provisions in this bill would create a bias for certain building materials over others without a clear benefit. For instance, the use of California wood building construction materials is highly discouraged in favor of foreign grown bamboo and wheatgrass."

California State and Consumer Services Agency, Secretary Bill Leonard (April 19, 2010 letter to USGBC):

"In California, our forest practice laws and regulations are second to none. Over the past 37 years we have developed a comprehensive system of environmental review for all private timber harvesting activities which incorporates vigorous measures for resource protection. In addition, many of our timberland owners have their lands certified through one of the major certification programs. There are several widely recognized programs which encourage forest sustainability while promoting the conservation of natural resources. In my view, the LEED Standard should recognize wood products produced in California as well as those certified under all major forest certification programs in North America including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council, the American Tree Farm System, and Canadian Standards Association.

"By limiting recognition to FSC products, the LEED Standard is eliminating 90 percent of the private timber harvested in California. Yet, LEED accepts FSC-certified products from such places as China, Russia, Malaysia, and Brazil. This is unacceptable for a standard that is as widely recognized as LEED. In fact, only about 10 percent of the world's forests are certified under any certification program. It seems to me that the LEED Standard should encourage broader use of forest certification, not limit the acceptance to only one forest certification program."

Larry Selzer, President and CEO, The Conservation Fund (statement March 2010)

“Ensuring that our nation's private working forests remain intact, providing clean water, clean air, critical wildlife habitat as well as vital fiber resources and more than one million jobs that cannot be exported overseas, is and must be a national priority. These lands are part of the green infrastructure of our country, and we need to work hard to encourage landowners to maintain their lands as vibrant, productive forests. Independent certification of sustainable forest management, such as that provided by the SFI program, is a powerful tool for ensuring these forests are managed well, and it is long past due for certification programs such as the USGBC to recognize the value of the SFI and its peers. The Conservation Fund has been involved in the SFI Program since its inception because we see the incredibly positive results on the ground - and we believe consumers increasingly are recognizing the power of SFI to drive good conservation in our nation's private forests.”

William V. (Bill) Street Jr. Director, Woodworkers Department, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers; Chair, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes: (statement March 2010)

“The proposed benchmarks are destructive to American workers and our communities. LEED discriminates against wood by requiring it meet a higher standard than products with a far greater adverse environmental impact, such as concrete and metal. LEED also discriminates against local products by putting architects in a position where they may have to buy imported wood from places where both human and natural resources are abused. This puts local wood products from sustainably managed forests at a competitive disadvantage and endangers our forest-dependent rural communities.”

Wanda T. Barrs of Bleckley County, Georgia, 2009 National Tree Farmer of the Year and 2010 Governor's Agricultural Stewardship Award winners (statement March 2010)

“There is no doubt that SFI has established credible standards supporting best management practises in forestry along with verifiable data. It is time for science and verifiable data to drive the certification. Good forestry follows good markets as data will show. We will plant, grow, harvest, and replant as the market grows. This will enhance clean air, clean water, wildlife and all the supports of our quality of life. As 2009 National Tree Farmer of the Year and 2010 Governor's Agricultural Stewardship Award winners, Earl and I know first hand how important sustainability, stewardship and conservation are to our industry, state and nation.”



State Foresters Want Expanded Options for Certified Wood

The non-profit National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is made up of directors of forestry agencies across the United States, and supports forest management practices and policies unique to the regional characteristics and needs of diverse U.S. diverse forests. In 2008, NASF members passed two resolutions, supported by all state foresters, calling for inclusive recognition of certification programs and recognition of wood from certified lands in the United States for green building activities. NASF President Steven W. Koehn and state foresters from Florida, Georgia, Oregon and South Carolina have reinforced this position.

Oregon State Forester Marvin Brown and Chair, SFI Board of Directors (statement March 2010)

"The USGBC needs to decide what it is trying to achieve. Do they want FSC-certified products from Russia to be used instead of SFI-certified products from Oregon? They need to recognize the differences between certification systems are more perceptive than substantive. There have been innumerable comparisons of certification programs, and the most honest thing you can say is that they both promote responsible forestry."

Georgia State Forester Robert Farris (March 15, 2010 letter to USGBC)

"I urge you to make a board decision to adopt a set of benchmarks to recognize well managed wood from our state as well as all credible forest certification programs including SFI, ATFS, and FSC. In doing so, USGBC can join other government agencies and green building rating programs in their recognition of wood as an environmentally friendly building material and in their recognition of all credible forest certification standards."

Steven W. Koehn, President, National Association of State Foresters, and Maryland State Forester (March 12, 2010 letter to USGBC):

"NASF members support both forest certification and green building. LEED can and should grow the practice of green building by more fully recognizing the environmental benefits of wood as a material, and by expanding options for wood sourced from certified forests. While in different manners, the ATFS, FSC, and SFI systems include the fundamental elements of credibility and make positive contributions to forest sustainability. NASF members are forest experts who have first-hand knowledge of how these standards actually work on the ground throughout the nation. Based on our expertise and direct experience, we find all three standards credible and recognize the positive contributions they make to forest sustainability."

Florida State Forester James R. Karels (Dec. 2, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"We are very proud of the environmental record of the forest products industry in our state and our inclusive approach to forest certification. The State of Florida currently has 2,232,025 acres certified under the SFI and ATFS programs, and only 119 acres certified under FSC. If the final benchmarks issued by USGBC contain the same restrictive language as they do now, it will virtually eliminate Florida wood from receiving a point from the LEED system."

South Carolina State Forester Henry G. (Gene) Kodama (Nov. 3, 2009 letter to USGBC)

"The State of South Carolina currently has 2.1 million acres certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) programs. . . . If the final benchmarks issued by USGBC contain the same restrictive language that favors only FSC certification, only 6,000 acres of forestland in South Carolina will qualify."

From October 2008 NASF policy statement, passed by resolution¹

"While in different manners, the ATFS, FSC, and SFI systems include the fundamental elements of credibility and make positive contributions to forest sustainability. . . . No certification program can credibly claim to be 'best', and no certification program that promotes itself as the only certification option can maintain credibility.

"NASF advocates a voluntary and inclusive approach to certification as it relates to landowner objectives. Public and private sector requirements for certification should recognize ATFS, FSC, SFI, and all other credible options. There is no single 'best' forest certification program. The value of certification is derived from credible processes and not from brand names. Competition among certification programs produces innovation and continuous improvement in certification processes and on-the-ground forestry practices."

From Resolution No. 2008-6: Green Building and the Role of Wood Products²

3. Urge organizations that maintain green building standards to define their standards so as to fully recognize the value of wood in green building construction. Standards should:
 - (a) fully incorporate life-cycle analysis into the evaluation of the environmental performance of building materials,
 - (b) recognize the value of wood as an environmentally friendly building material produced from a renewable resource, with added benefits justified based on life-cycle analysis,
 - (c) recognize the value of domestically grown wood and wood products in comparison with wood from many parts of the world because (1) forestry practices in the U.S. compare favorably with those in many other parts of the world, (2) transportation-related emissions are far lower, and (3) use of domestic wood supports local economies, which, in turn, encourages retention of forestlands rather than conversion to other uses,
 - (d) 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, and
 - (e) recognize the value of U.S. wood from public lands that are managed in accordance with the principles of sustainable forest management regardless of whether the land is certified.

¹Forest Certification as it Contributes to Sustainable Forestry
<http://stateforesters.org/files/2008.Forest%20Certification.pdf>

NASF Resolution No. 2008-7: Forest Certification Policy Statement <http://stateforesters.org/node/1032>

² Resolution No. 2008-6: Green Building and the Role of Wood Products <http://stateforesters.org:80/node/886>

Green Building Rating Tools and Certification

Many tools are available to help builders and consumers make decisions about green building products. These include comprehensive rating systems in the United States that know certified wood is an excellent choice for green building, and encourage its use by recognizing credible forest certification programs.

For residential construction, the ANSI/ICC 700-2008:National Green Building Standard, the first green building rating system to be approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), offers resources and tools to help the building community and homeowners build green.

For commercial construction, the ANSI-GBI 01-2010 Green Building Assessment Protocol for Commercial Buildings (built on Green Globes U.S.) promotes building practices that result in energy-efficient, healthier and environmentally sustainable buildings.

Green Building Rating Systems that Accept All Credible Certification Programs

Rating System	Location	Recognizes all credible certification programs (Including SFI)
ANSI/ICC 700-2008: National Green Building Standard 		YES
ANSI/GBI 01-2010: Green Building Assessment Protocol for Commercial Buildings (formerly Green Globes U.S.) 		YES
Built Green Program 		YES
Green Globes 		YES
CASBEE 		YES
Green Star Program		YES
BREEAM		YES

For more information:

The SFI program has created a page on its website with resources related to the USGBC and the forest certification benchmarks. Visit <http://sfiprogram.org/LEED/> for the latest news, letters of support and useful links.