

For Release: IMMEDIATE
Monday, March 10, 2008

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NEW YORK JOINS ELITE COMPANY WITH CERTIFIED “GREEN” FORESTS
State-owned Forests Meet Highest Requirements for Protection, Sustainability

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis announced today that state-owned forests have regained their status as “green certified” by internationally recognized standards, meaning they are managed with the highest sustainability requirements, a distinction awarded to only 10 percent of the world’s forests and only a few American states.

The designation applies to all state-owned forestlands outside the Adirondack and Catskill parks. Importantly, this mark of distinction means that the millions of dollars worth of forest products harvested annually from state lands now are eligible to carry the “certified” imprint that has been in increasing demand in the marketplace.

“At first blush, saying you manage a ‘green’ forest might sound redundant. But it’s a designation few have earned,” said Commissioner Grannis. “We’re very proud of this recognition. It not only validates the state’s efforts to practice forestry in an economically-, environmentally- and socially-responsible way, but also adds value to our forest products.”

“A majority of our state forests were acquired over 75 years ago, not as healthy forests but as abandoned farmland with depleted soils and serious erosion problems,” said State Forester Robert Davies. “The recognition we are receiving is due to the support of Commissioner Grannis and the dedication of the Department’s past and present professional forestry staff.”

New York State now has 762,898 acres of certified forestlands – second-most in the Northeast. State-owned forests previously had been certified but certification lapsed several years ago following a period of Department cutbacks. Commissioner Grannis had made a goal of regaining the designation.

To make the grade, a state must meet strict measures in nine categories, including sustainable practices (cutting/planting capacity), forest health (pest, diseases and other factors), biological diversity and soil and water protection. The auditors found that New York excelled in numerous areas, including protecting mature forests, limiting the impact of invasive plants and insects, identifying and protecting imperiled species and using easements to conserve working forests.

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Vetting was completed by third-party independent certification auditors NSF-International and Scientific Certification Systems, who assessed the State's forest practices and forest management plan against the standards set by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). SFI Inc. and FSC are independent, non-profit organizations that establish forest-certification standards to guide forest management activities on lands across the nation. Auditing of New York began in summer 2007.

Green certification is not only a validation of management practices, but also a distinction valued in the marketplace -- somewhat akin to the "organic" label on grocery products. Certified forest products typically carry a stamp or imprint displaying the designation. New York state-owned forests annually generate about \$5 million in revenue from the sale of forest products. This helps stimulate the rural upstate economy and adds value to the raw material converted to lumber, furniture, flooring, pulpwood, particle board and paper products including envelopes, greeting cards, catalogs and other products.

Interest in certified products has been growing and there are now roughly 80 green certified paper- or wood-based businesses in New York, ranging from paper mills to printers to flooring suppliers.

"The State of New York is joining rare company — only 10 percent of the world's forests are certified. The State has taken a true leadership role in managing our forests for future generations while meeting the needs of the marketplace," said SFI Inc. President and CEO Kathy Abusow. "Today's announcement demonstrates the State of New York's commitment to the environment by taking this important step to support and promote responsible forest management."

"We congratulate Governor Spitzer and the Department of Environmental Conservation for achieving FSC-endorsed certification," said Robert Hrubes, SCS Senior Vice-President. "Conformity with the rigorous FSC standard assures the public that New York State is practicing exemplary forest management. The DEC has a demonstrated track record of responsible management of its natural resources and certification of its forests underscores and strengthens New York State's stewardship efforts."

"Forests are key to keeping our air and water clean, conserving biodiversity, and helping ameliorate the impacts of climate change," said Albert E. Caccese, Executive Director of Audubon New York, the state program of the National Audubon Society. "Sustainable forest management can provide habitat to many species of birds and other wildlife, and also support the economies of rural communities. We applaud Commissioner Grannis and the DEC for regaining this important certification."

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“Environmental Advocates of New York applauds Commissioner Grannis and the DEC for re-earning the green forest certification of thousands of acres of state forest lands,” said Robert Moore, executive director of Environmental Advocates of New York. “The green certification ensures that New York's state-owned forest lands are managed to the highest environmental standards.”

(NOTE: Map is available)

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