FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SFI® and U.S. Endowment to Support Heritage of African American Landowners through Sustainable Forestry

Laguna Niguel, CA – The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Inc. (SFI) announced today at Fortune Brainstorm Green that the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) is a recipient of a 2014 SFI Conservation and Community Partnership Grant to support African American forestland owners.

Loss of ownership and asset value by African American forestland owners in the U.S. South has reached a critical level and traditional approaches to engaging them on forestland preservation have fallen short. According to Dr. Shorna R. Broussard, PhD, of Cornell University, unlike their counterparts across the country, land loss rates by African-American landowners is as much as 30% greater. She also notes that “Nationally, approximately 144,000 African-Americans own 1.9 million acres of forestland and that ownership is concentrated in the southern United States.” In order to mitigate this loss, the Endowment, USDA Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service have established pilot projects in Alabama, North Carolina and South Carolina to assist landowners in working with trusted partners within their own communities. The SFI grant will help extend that work through emphasizing the potential of certification to open additional market opportunities.

Through the SFI grant, the Endowment will deepen its work with partners including the Center for Heirs Property Preservation, Limited Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network (LRLEAN), Roanoke Center of Roanoke Electrical Coop and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund to provide the right tools and information at the local level to connect landowners with community resources. The Endowment also hopes to capitalize on the opportunity to raise awareness and develop conservation options that benefit these landowners now, and for future generations.

“We want to see the rich heritage of African American land ownership in the South thrive,” said Kathy Abusow, President and CEO of SFI Inc. at Fortune Brainstorm Green. “By collaborating with the Endowment, SFI can leverage the influence of our partners and supporters to provide the necessary guidance and information for landowners to maintain the legacy and benefits of their ownership for years to come.”

The Endowment and SFI aim to emphasize the importance of sustainable forestry and certification in maintaining all of the values that forests can offer such as clean air, water and biodiversity.

“By enhancing collaboration at the local level, we have an opportunity to work together in support of African American landowners,” said Carlton Owen, President and CEO of the Endowment. “We welcome SFI’s support and participation and look forward to building relationships with existing networks to promote sustainable forestry and ensure ongoing legacies in this region.”

The SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program fosters partnerships between organizations interested in improving forest management in the United States and Canada, and
responsible procurement globally. Projects address topics of current importance such as improving wildlife habitat management and conservation of biodiversity, protection of watersheds and critical flyways for migrating birds, and assisting local communities through forest education programs and green building projects for low-income families.

Since 2010, SFI has awarded more than 50 SFI Conservation and Community Partnership grants totaling more than $1.9 million to foster research and pilot efforts to better inform future decisions about our forests. When leveraged with project partner contributions, that total investment exceeds $7.1 million.

For more information, please visit http://www.sfiprogram.org/community-conservation/conservation-community-partnerships-grant-program/.

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About Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. (SFI)
SFI Inc. is an independent, nonprofit organization that is solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the internationally recognized Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) program. Across the United States and Canada, about 250 million acres certified to the SFI forest management standard. In addition, the SFI program's unique fiber sourcing requirements promote responsible forest management on all suppliers' lands. SFI chain-of-custody (COC) certification tracks the percentage of fiber from certified forests, certified sourcing and post-consumer recycled content. SFI on-product labels identify both certified sourcing and COC claims to help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions. SFI Inc. is governed by a three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally. Learn more at www.sfiprogram.org and www.sfiprogram.org/Buy-SFI.

About the U.S Endowment for Forestry and Communities
The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Inc. (Endowment) is a not-for-profit corporation established September 21, 2006, at the request of the governments of the United States and Canada in accordance with the terms of the Softwood Lumber Agreement (SLA) between the two countries. The Endowment is one of three entities designated to share in a one-time infusion of funds to support "meritorious initiatives" in the U.S. It has been endowed with $200 million under the terms of the SLA.

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i “Minority Landowners and Forestry”, Dr. Shorna R. Broussard, PhD., Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University