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Release No. 0722

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Independent Audit Shows National Forests Perform Well in Meeting Sustainability Standards

Portland, Ore., October 25, 2007—The results of a two-year, third party audit released today by the U.S. Forest Service found that five national forests studied as part of the independent audit perform very well in meeting many of the widely accepted standards for sustainable forestry.

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation study evaluated the five national forests against rigorous standards developed by the two major forest certification systems currently in use in the U.S. — the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). The assessments tested the study forests and found they met or exceeded many of the standards for sustainable forestry although several face important conservation challenges. Independent, third-party certification is one of the most significant world-wide developments in the field of forest management in the last two decades. Its use has expanded dramatically as the public and consumers have increased their interest in practical ways to ensure good management practices. Certification was first applied internationally, and the United States and Canada followed. The system was designed not only to encourage good forest management, but also as a way for consumers to know the wood they purchase comes from sustainable sources. Due to the benefits of the process, public lands are now becoming involved as well.

“The National Forests and Grasslands provide valuable services to the public, like clean water, moderating the effects of climate change, wood and recreation,” said Sally Collins, the Associate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service. “This National Forest Service Certification Study has provided us with a valuable opportunity to learn about FSC and SFI certification and the third-party auditing processes associated with them, to evaluate how NFS approaches align with these systems.”

The Institute conducted the study in cooperation with the Forest Service to evaluate the potential consistency of certification with the Forest Service’s

existing mission to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

The study found that national forests are integrating complex direction and management considerations extremely well. The auditors reported that the broad range of objectives established for national forests are supported by a remarkable degree of scientific and consultative review and the outcomes of these processes are designed into plans and projects and are well addressed throughout implementation.

Auditors found a number of instances where additional work would be needed to meet FSC and SFI certification standards. These included addressing forest health and insect and disease problems, road maintenance backlogs, old-growth protection and management issues in the Pacific Northwest, adequate monitoring of non-wood forest products and wildlife, and monitoring compliance with contractor worker safety requirements and training. The agency had already identified many of these management issues.

The agency is in the process of reviewing the results of the certification evaluations and the Pinchot Institute study. The Forest Service will evaluate its options in consultation with key stakeholders and then determine how to proceed.

The report is available at <http://www.fs.fed.us>

http://www.pinchot.org/what_we_do/forest_cert/certification

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