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Virginia Committee Wins SFI Achievement Award Raises Awareness of Benefits of Wood for Green Building

MILWAUKEE, WI --The Virginia Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) Implementation Committee (SIC) earned the 14th Annual SIC Achievement Award today for harnessing the enthusiasm and knowledge of its many partners to show the environmental benefits of building with certified wood.

“Thanks to our diverse membership, we’ve been able to raise awareness in the state’s green building community about the great value of forest certification,” said Committee Chair James Fretz of International Paper Company. “We want architects, builders and engineers to see for themselves how certification improves forest management, and to understand they are supporting local communities and workers by choosing SFI-certified forest products.”

Virginia SFI Implementation Committee members conducted a sustainable forestry tour to show architects and builders in the green-building community what SFI certification looks like on the ground. Following the VA governor’s 2010 letter to U.S. Green Building Council, calling for recognition of all certification programs in the LEED rating tool, the Committee continued outreach to government officials - raising awareness and promoting the use of wood products from Virginia. In partnership with the Virginia Forestry Association, the committee actively engaged in state legislature outreach about the importance of multiple green building rating systems, which in turn gives more options for increased use and recognition of SFI-certified wood products.

The committee has also participated in community outreach activities. It worked with partners to develop and deliver educational programs for the state’s 400,000 family forest owners, including field tours, publications and presentations on sustainable forestry, threatened/endangered species and wildlife management practices. It was the lead sponsor of Virginia’s Link to Education about Forests (LEAF) network, an association of private and public educators, landowners and practitioners who provide learning experiences about forests and their management. The achievement award also acknowledges contributions the Virginia committee made to logger training. It supported the Virginia Sustainable Harvesting and Resource Professional (SHARP) Logger Program, which provides free training to more than 1,000 loggers, foresters and others each year.

“Virginia SFI Implementation Committee members clearly understand their decisions and actions today conserve forests and maintain strong local communities,” SFI President and CEO Kathy Abusow told the SFI Annual Conference today. “These 37 unique, grassroots committees play a vital role in promoting logger training and landowner outreach, maintaining the SFI program’s integrity, and supporting and promoting responsible forestry locally.”

The Virginia SIC members and partners include the Virginia state departments of Forestry, Conservation and Recreation - Natural Heritage Program, and Game and Inland Fisheries; several Virginia Tech departments; the Virginia Forestry Association; Virginia Loggers Association; Virginia Cooperative Extension; Virginia Tree Farm Committee; Virginia Forest Stewardship Committee; Virginia’s Link to Education about Forests (LEAF); and the 19 SFI program participants operating in Virginia.

About SFI Inc.

SFI Inc. is an independent 501c(3) non-profit charitable organization, and is solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the internationally recognized Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program (www.sfiprogram.org). Across North America, more than 190 million acres/77 million hectares are certified to the SFI forest management standard, making it the largest single standard in the world. SFI chain-of-custody certification tells buyers how much certified, responsibly sourced and/or recycled content is in a product. The SFI program's unique fiber sourcing requirements promote responsible forest management on all suppliers' lands.