

Open Letter – Top Ten Reasons Why USGBC Should Recognize all Credible Forest Certification Standards

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The U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) third draft of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) 2012 green building rating tool was released March 1st, and public comments closed on March 27, 2012. While USGBC made some forward movement in LEED 2012 by instituting credits for Life Cycle Assessment and Environmental Product Declarations, it continues to let down forest owners and managers, state foresters, conservation groups, researchers, auditors, producers, Governors, Congressmen and over 6,000 petitioners because it refuses to explicitly recognize the value of all forest certification programs.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) certification supports the responsible production of wood and paper products, communities, jobs and numerous conservation values that are derived from working forests. Yet products from well-managed North American forests continue to be excluded from the USGBC's "responsible extraction of raw materials" credit, which recognizes only certified wood that is "Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or better." That slogan has moved from the lapel pins of FSC proponents onto the pages of what is intended to be a technical and leading green building rating tool by a responsible organization. USGBC's LEED extraction credit continues to ramp up the competing materials debate: non-renewable steel and concrete get a credit without achieving third-party certification, while products third-party certified to SFI do not get access to this same credit.

As USGBC deliberates on the language that will go out for a final ballot in early June, here is why you should encourage USGBC to make a decision that supports the future of our forests.

- 1. Say "Yes" to healthy working forests.** Ninety percent of the world's forests are NOT certified. By recognizing all credible forest certification standards, USGBC will drive demand for more certified forests and responsible sources of supply. "Certification has fundamentally changed the way forests are managed here in North America – SFI alone has certified more than 195 million acres in North America. If well-managed forests are our goal, then we should all be celebrating the remarkable victory of having millions of acres of forests across North America certified – we should not waste precious resources while millions of acres of forests disappear. The SFI Standard is making a real and positive difference towards keeping our forests as healthy, working forests." – [Larry Selzer](#), *President and CEO of The Conservation Fund*
- 2. Say "No" to discrimination against domestic forests.** Under the current standard, three-quarters of certified forests in North America are denied access to LEED. In fact, 90 percent of FSC's global supply is from countries outside of the U.S., where USGBC is headquartered. USGBC's "FSC or better" language might discourage builders, architects and designers from sourcing domestic wood products. "Nearly half of respondents have sought out an alternative supplier in another country when FSC certified timber or products were not available in their own country." – *FSC's own 2010 Business Value and Growth market survey (page 6)*
- 3. Follow the lead provided by USGBC sister organizations in Australia, Italy and Spain.** The Green Building Council of Australia, Building Council Italia, and the Spanish Green Building Council have all taken steps to give credit to all forest certification standards. "The U.S. Green Building Council is out of step with green building councils in other countries who understand the value of promoting all credible forest certification standards." – [Michael T. Goergen Jr.](#), *Executive Vice-President and CEO, Society of American Foresters.*

In fact, all green building standards that value wood have recognized all forest certification programs without preference including ANSI/ICC 700-2008:National Green Building Standard, ANSI-GBI 01-2010 Green Building Assessment Protocol for Commercial Buildings (built on Green Globes U.S.), the recently released International Green Construction Code (IgCC), Built Green Canada, Green Globes, CASBEE (Japan), Green Star Program (Australia), and BREEAM (United Kingdom). "If the USGBC's goal is to reward excellence, products from forests certified to SFI should be equally entitled to LEED certified wood credits." – [Mike Ferrucci](#), *Forestry Program Manager and Lead Auditor, and NSF-ISR.*

4. **Support North America's forest communities and workers.** Union leaders have spoken out in support of recognizing all credible forest certification standards. "What is critical to our members is that forests be managed in such a way as to ensure their long-term survival and viability while at the same time promoting thriving rural communities, safe jobs, and decent work. From this perspective, SFI has several advantages for workers that FSC does not." – [William V. Street Jr.](#), Director, Woodworkers Department, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

5. **Base LEED on science, not slogans, and encourage continual improvement and research.** SFI requires in-kind support or direct funding for research as a requirement of its standard. FSC does not. Since 1995, SFI program participants have invested \$1.2 billion in forest research activities which in turn have driven innovation and conservation in forest management. "SFI, like science, never stops learning. It is more than words on paper. SFI and its partners deliver actual results on the ground and in communities across North America. They build knowledge and advance understanding." – [C. Tattersall \(Tat\) Smith Jr.](#), Professor and Dean Emeritus, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto

6. **Recognize forest communities and the contributions of indigenous forest communities.** SFI supports responsible forestry at a local level in North America. There are close to 1,000 members in 37 community-based SFI Implementation Committees that support and actively engage in a wide variety of community, conservation and outreach activities. "As long as USGBC limits its LEED-certified wood credit to the FSC, it is turning its back on my community as well as other communities in North America. . . ." – [Bob Luoto](#), owner and operator of Cross & Crown Inc., a family logging business in Oregon.

In addition, five million acres of lands owned by or managed for indigenous communities are certified to the SFI Standard – more than any other certification standard in North America. "If the U.S. Green Building Program wants to support North America's forests and its indigenous peoples, it will expand the LEED certified wood to recognize all of North America's certification standards." - [Ryan Clark](#), Manager, Forestry & Strategic Planning, Capacity Forest Management, which manages forestry operations for First Nations clients.

7. **Reward sound harvesting practices.** Since 1995, more than 130,000 resource and logging professionals have been trained in responsible forestry through SFI or its recognition of other programs. "I've seen for myself

how training can improve forest practices – and I know that when it comes to training for logging professionals, SFI is far ahead of the FSC." – [Dr. Richard W. \(Dick\) Brinker](#), Dean Emeritus, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University

8. **Consider the wider impact of your actions. This goes beyond solid wood products.** Even paper and tissue markets are affected by LEED rating tools that give credits if FSC products are supplied in the operation of LEED buildings. "Sappi, like most paper suppliers, sources wood and fiber from multiple sources, certified and uncertified. The exclusion of SFI is based on a lack of understanding of complex supply chains and, in some ways, is a discrimination against labeling practices." – [Dr. Laura M. Thompson](#), Director, Technical Marketing and Sustainable Development, Sappi Fine Paper, North America

9. **Heed the calls of 100 elected officials.** In a public blog, USGBC's President singled out and thanked ForestEthics for their "passionate views", despite the fact these unaccountable market campaigners are funded to promote FSC and undermine SFI. Yet, USGBC has not given the same public consideration to the views of a bipartisan group of elected officials: Governors from 14 states and 87 Members of Congress have sent letters to USGBC voicing their concerns over LEED's treatment of wood and forest certification. Nor has the USGBC responded in any public fashion to the 6,000+ stakeholders who have signed a petition and urged USGBC to recognize all credible forest certification standards. Numerous American public agencies and government representatives – including the National Association of State Foresters, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Education – have made it clear that they recognize all forest certification standards. In Canada, the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, Natural Resources Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada and the Competition Bureau reference all domestic forest certification standards without prejudice.

10. **Let competition and choice prevail.** "It is disturbing that the USGBC would continue to pick one certification program at the expense of others that were developed with U.S. forests and communities in mind. And it is further troubling that now they are requiring SFI and American Tree Farm System (ATFS) to prove that they are "better" than FSC in order to be recognized within LEED." – [Randy Dye](#), President National Association of State Foresters, and State Forester of West Virginia

SFI supports green building and the recognition of multiple forest certification standards. USGBC is a market influencer and as such the LEED rating tool has the ability to continue to undermine responsible forestry and the jobs and communities that depend on them. USGBC, however, is able to make a decision that will positively impact the future of our forests by recognizing and rewarding credits to products from certified forests and other responsible sources of supply. The future of our forests depends on decisions made today. For other opinions on this important issue, visit a summary of Good for Forests [blogs here](#).

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