



The Natural Resources Defense Council works to protect wildlife and wild places and to ensure a healthy environment for all life on earth.

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Good Wood: How Forest Certification Helps the Environment
Forest certification is a seal of approval for wood and paper products, allowing consumers to use their buying power for good.

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1. Why is it important to protect forests?

Forests are more than a symbolic ideal of wilderness, more than quiet places to enjoy nature. Forest ecosystems -- trees, soil, undergrowth, all living things in a forest -- are critical to maintaining life on earth. Forests help us breathe by creating oxygen and filtering pollutants from the air, and help stabilize the global climate by absorbing carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. They soak up rainfall like giant sponges, preventing floods and purifying water that we drink. They provide habitat for 90 percent of the plant and animal species that live on land, as well as homelands for many of the earth's last remaining indigenous cultures. Forests are commercially important, too; they yield valuable resources like wood, rubber and medicinal plants, including plants used to create cancer drugs. Harvesting these resources provides employment for local communities.

Healthy forests are a critical part of the web of life. Yet more than half of the earth's original

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forest cover has been destroyed due to human activity such as agriculture, development and logging. Much of the loss has occurred within the past three decades. Protecting the earth's remaining forest cover is now an urgent task.

2. What is forest certification and how will it protect our forests?

Forest certification was launched over a decade ago to help protect forests from destructive logging practices. Like the "organically grown" sticker on produce, forest certification was intended as a seal of approval -- a means of notifying consumers that a wood or paper product comes from forests managed in accordance with strict environmental and social standards. For example, a person shopping for flooring or furniture would seek a certified forest product to be sure that the wood was harvested in a sustainable manner from a healthy forest, and not clearcut from a tropical rainforest or the ancestral homelands of forest-dependent indigenous people.

Increasing consumer demand for certification creates a powerful incentive for retailers and manufacturers to seek out good wood suppliers. This in turn prompts forest managers to adopt ecologically sound certified practices that maintain natural forest characteristics, and to move away from destructive techniques like large-scale clearcutting, logging in endangered and old-growth forests and destruction of natural forests for replacement by barren tree plantations.

3. Who sets the standards for well-managed forests?

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) runs the only credible forest certification program. The FSC is an independent, international nonprofit organization whose membership is comprised of more than 500 environmental groups, progressive companies, forestry professionals, social scientists and groups representing labor, church and indigenous people's interests. Formed in 1993, the FSC has established a set of international forest management standards; it also accredits and monitors certification organizations that evaluate on-the-ground compliance with these standards in forests around the world.

FSC's "Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship" set forth strict environmental and social standards for forest management. In order to address societal and ecological differences in countries around the world, these standards are refined through national or regional processes involving local forestry, environmental and social stakeholders.

Not all certification programs are credible. Spurred by the success of the FSC and consumer demand for certified products, at least eight other forest certification programs have formed internationally. However, these programs are backed by timber interests and set weak standards for forest management that allow destructive and business-as-usual forestry practices. **FSC certification remains the only credible seal of approval for good wood.** Don't be confused by forest industry substitutes. Always ask for FSC-certified wood -- look for the FSC logo, which depicts a checkmark and



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- [NRDC Annual Report: Wildlands](#)
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the outline of a tree.

4. How do forest products become FSC-certified?

During FSC forest-management assessments, teams of foresters, ecologists and social scientists visit forestry operations and inspect their practices for compliance with FSC's standards. For example, they assure that:

- Harvesting rates and clearing sizes do not exceed a forest's natural capacity to regenerate
- Natural forest conditions needed for wildlife and healthy ecosystem function are maintained
- Rare, threatened and endangered species and forest types are maintained and protected
- No natural forests are cleared and replaced by barren tree plantations; new plantations can be established on agricultural and pasture lands
- Adequate conservation zones exist
- Chemical use is minimized or eliminated
- Streams and rivers are protected from soil erosion that degrades water quality and fish habitat
- Workers, communities and indigenous people benefit from the forestry operation, and their rights and interests are protected.

Forestry operations that meet the standards are granted an FSC forest management certification and audited annually. Forestry operations are required to make improvements as a condition of getting certified and staying certified over time.

Certifiers also grant "chain-of-custody" certifications to companies that manufacture and sell products made out of certified wood. A chain-of-custody assessment tracks wood from the forest through milling and manufacturing to the point of sale. This annual assessment ensures that products sold as certified actually originate in certified forests.

5. Where are FSC-certified forests located?

As of December 2006, more than 200 million acres of forest in 76 countries have received FSC certification. About 47 percent of these certifications are located in Europe, 32 percent in North America, 11 percent in Latin and South America, and 7 percent in Asia and Oceania, and 3 percent in Africa. More than 5,400 chain-of-custody certificates, which allow manufacturers and distributors to label and sell FSC-certified products, have been granted in

74 countries.

6. Who uses FSC-certified wood?

There's a growing trend in business to grow and use FSC-certified wood. Some of the largest wood and paper products companies in the world, including Potlatch Corporation in the United States, Stora Enso in Sweden, and Domtar Forest Resources and Tembec, Inc. in Canada, are FSC-certified.

Gibson Musical Instruments, for example, uses certified sitka spruce and is now manufacturing a Les Paul guitar model from certified mahogany. The Gap, Inc. has installed certified wood floors in some Banana Republic stores. New Leaf Paper uses FSC-certified pulp. Williams-Sonoma Inc. and Victoria's Secret (Limited Brands) announced commitments in 2006 to increase their use of FSC-certified papers in their catalogs.

Many progressive companies have decided to preferentially buy wood and paper from FSC-certified suppliers whenever possible, although they still use products from other sources to meet their needs. Some of the major companies with FSC-certified wood procurement preferences include: The Home Depot; IKEA; Gap, Inc.; Domtar, Inc./Domtar Specialty Fine Papers; Nike, Inc.; Starbucks Coffee Company; The Body Shop; Lowe's Home Improvement Center; Patagonia; Seventh Generation; Johnson & Johnson; 3M Corporation; and B & Q PLC, the European home improvement giant.

7. How can I buy FSC-certified wood products?

The Home Depot carries some FSC-certified wood products in a number of its stores. Lumber dealers, wood products manufacturers, woodworkers and paper producers across the country sell certified forest products directly to consumers. (See [Further Resources](#) for help locating sources of FSC-certified wood and paper products.) Companies are encouraged to mark all their FSC-certified products with a label; however, many products still reach the market without actual on-product identification. Consumers seeking proof of FSC certification claims by suppliers may request copies of FSC certificates and/or their associated tracking numbers. Certified supplier names and certified supply tracking numbers can be verified on the FSC website.

FSC-certified products are not always readily available in stores, but consumers can help increase their supply in the future by expressing a clear preference for them when shopping for lumber, flooring, furniture, paper and other wood products.

Further Resources

- [The Forest Stewardship Council](#) -- homepage of the only credible forest certification program.

- [FSC Principles and Criteria](#) -- a complete list, in PDF format, of FSC's 10 principles and 52 criteria.
- [Certification Resource Center](#) -- a convenient way to find certified wood and paper suppliers by product and location. Be sure to select "FSC" in the field for "certification program."
- [FSC Certified Paper](#) -- this regularly updated online resource provides contact information for paper merchants and printers in the United States who use FSC chain-of-custody certification.
- [FSC Certificate Lists](#) -- a database where you can verify the origin of your certified wood product.
- [Footprints in the Forest](#) -- a report (and [summary](#)) by FERN, the European Union forest campaign, on weak certification programs.
- [Don't Buy SFI](#) -- an exposé of this weak, industry-sponsored certification program.

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[How to Shop for Household Paper Products](#)

* As a member of the Forest Stewardship Council, NRDC is authorized -- and proud! -- to display the FSC logo. Be sure to look for it when you shop for wood products. FSC-US-0008 © Forest Stewardship Council A.C.

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