



Forest Facts

FOREST CERTIFICATION

January 2008

Forest Certification

Forest certification is a voluntary process through which forest landowners allow their lands and management practices to be evaluated by a neutral auditor against the standards of a certification system. Ensuring market access for certified wood products and improving forest management are its two primary objectives.

Many of the nation's large lumber retailers have endorsed forest certification as a means of assuring customers that the wood they are buying comes from well-managed forests. For wood products companies that do business with the likes of Home Depot and Lowes, the stakes are huge. Although many forest landowners remain uncertain of the value of certification, many also fear loss of marketability if their forests aren't certified.

In the past, the unintended consequence of government regulation in the global marketplace has been to shift the supply of wood products to less regulated countries. Forest certification could potentially improve that situation by creating more uniform international standards for well-managed

forests, and by compelling consumers to confront their purchasing choices. Well-designed, market-based, voluntary forest certification programs involving willing wood products producers, retailers and consumers could complement the Oregon Forest Practices Act.

While standards for judging the credibility of programs are still emerging, certification has become a focal point for the wide range of social, cultural, environmental and economic agendas of industrial associations, environmental organizations, government agencies, and forest landowner groups alike. Today, the most common certification systems operating in Oregon are the American Tree Farm System, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI).

Certification could lead to a more efficient model to achieve and document high levels of forest stewardship by Oregon landowners. Increased acceptance and recognition of Oregon's forest products in international markets is another possible outcome.

State Forester Marvin Brown and staff at the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) are working with the Oregon Board of Forestry, forest landowners, and others to identify how forest certification systems can most effectively interface with established forest policies and with the Oregon Forest Practices Act. To date, the Oregon Board of Forestry has endorsed the following guiding principles:

- Certification should remain a voluntary, market-driven process. Landowners desiring certification must retain the freedom to choose which path toward certification best meets their objectives.
- For private forest landowners, certification is valuable only when it meets their management objectives and they can recover the investment required to participate in it.
- Forest certification is not a necessary prerequisite for sustainable forest management or for a well-managed forest.
- Landowners with well-managed forests who choose not to pursue voluntary forest management certification should not be considered by the State of Oregon to be less competent or protective of forest resources than those landowners who become certified.

The Board has also approved draft Oregon standards for the essential components for credible certification

systems. Several large industrial landowners have already obtained certification under SFI and other private landowners have obtained certification under the American Tree Farm System or FSC. However, public forests and a majority of Oregon family forestlands are not currently certified under these existing certification models.

Oregon forest landowners that are economically successful are better able to practice sustainable forestry. Therefore, the State of Oregon has an interest in having forest landowners achieve the best possible prices for their products. If forest certification is proven to enhance landowner income, the state will look for ways to enable landowners to make informed decisions about certification and take advantage of this marketing strategy.

With or without certification playing a role, Oregon's message to the rest of the world is that we are international leaders in practicing sustainable forestry, and consumers can be assured that products from Oregon's forests are not only high quality, but produced in a manner that promotes environmental, social, and economic sustainability.