



## **Certification: Definition and Background**

### **What is forest certification?**

Certification is a market-based, non-regulatory forest conservation tool designed to recognize and promote environmentally-responsible forestry and sustainability of forest resources. The certification process involves an evaluation of management planning and forestry practices by a third-party according to an agreed-upon set of standards. Certification standards address social and economic welfare as well as environmental protection.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) are two of the main standards operating in North America for larger ownerships. The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) is the largest certification system for small private landowners. Green Tag, a program of the National Woodland Owners Association, also offers certification for small private landowners.

### **How are forests certified?**

Becoming certified differs somewhat among the certification programs. However, third party certification is based on onsite comprehensive assessments performed by an accredited auditing firm. The auditing firms for certification systems conduct up-front coordination and preliminary review with the landowner seeking certification. If merited, the auditing firms return and conduct a more comprehensive assessment, which includes an evaluation of all types of activities in the forests and whether they conform with the many requirements in the certification standards. The evaluation also includes interviews with contractors, and others who are affected by--or just interested in--how the lands are managed. Through these stages, auditors pay close attention to the overall management system, including the management plan and monitoring programs, to make sure that landowners are capable of tracking and maintaining healthy forests over the long-term.

At completion of the assessment, the auditing firms submit a certification report, which includes a recommendation on whether the landowner is ready to become certified. A affirmative recommendation for certification is often accompanied by requests for changes in management to better conform to the certification standard. A summary of findings is made publicly available.

### **How do I know wood is certified?**

In most cases, wood coming from certified forestlands is tracked through the production chain and into the marketplace, thereby allowing businesses and consumers to choose wood products that are managed to recognized standards. Wood grown and harvested in a manner that satisfies certification standards may be labeled as such based on program guidelines.