



Woodland Certification

by Jeff Stringer, Christopher Reeves, Bobby Ammerman

Certification has emerged as one of the most hotly debated aspects of woodland ownership. While woodland certification¹ is a relatively new phenomenon, certification of products and services is something that has been around for a long time and as consumers we are familiar with. USDA has certification for meat and organic products, movies have a certified rating provided by the Motion Picture Association of America, and electrical appliances carry the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) certification and label. In all of these cases, certification means that the products carrying the certification label meet a set of standards and as consumers we know what to expect. We understand that if an electrical device has a UL label on it, it has been constructed to a set of standards that are designed to make it safe.

Woodland certification is similar, in that it ensures that if a woodland is certified, it means that it is being managed consistent with a set of standards. Further, if a forest industry buys timber from a certified forest and makes a finished product such as paper or flooring, the industry can place a certified wood label on the product. This label means that all or a portion of the wood that was used to make the product came from a certified woodland that was managed according to sound forestry principles that protect the environment.

Public concern with woodlands increased dramatically in the 1980s and '90s as activists shed light on the uncontrolled logging occurring in the rainforests of Central and South America and the harvesting of old growth trees in the Pacific Northwest. These concerns surfaced with the most urgency in Europe and spread into the United States as concern intensified over the logging of old growth timber in the Pacific Northwest. In response to these concerns, a number of organizations developed a certification system that was built around standards that they believed embodied

sound woodland management, protected the environment and addressed social concerns they perceived to be important to the public.

The interest in woodland and wood product certification is generated from the need to show the public that woodlands are being treated properly. Not every consumer thinks about these things while shopping for a new dining room table, buying printer paper, a box of tissues, or purchasing a house. However, surveys completed to determine the public's attitude toward woodlands indicate that people do care. They want to know that their purchase does not lead to the destruction or degrading of woodlands. The public wants to be assured that woodlands are being managed sustainably, although they could not define what sustainably is. In the United States, some consumers and some regions of the country are more attuned to this issue and place a higher premium on it than others. This is also true for other countries. Many export customers from countries in Western Europe require certification, while other countries show little interest. Regardless, there is a growing interest in protecting the environment, and woodland owners must have a means of showing that they can do their part. This is where certification comes in. It is a voluntary market response to the consumers' concern over the environment. Interestingly enough, there has also been recent international discussion about the idea of promoting woodland certification to aid in conservation and environmental protection.

Certainly certification is important to forest industries that have customers requiring certified wood products. These industries need a source of certified wood. Since they do not own appreciable amounts of woodlands themselves, there is growing interest to support certification of private woodland owners—one of forest industries' primary sources

¹The terms forests and woodlands are used interchangeably. Technically, woodland certification is termed forest certification and includes all ownership of woodlands from small, family-owned woodlands to large industry-owned forests.

es of timber. While certification is becoming important for woodland owners who are open to harvesting timber, recent developments have also shown the importance of certification for woodland owners interested in carbon programs, the potential sale of other ecosystem services, and even the development of conservation easements.

Defining Certification

Certification requires that woodlands are well managed using sound silvicultural, ecological, economic, and social principles. It indicates that the woodland has not been subjected to exploitive practices such as uncontrolled harvesting and abuse of the soil, water, wildlife, and critical habitats. Certification also indicates that laws and regulations have been followed by the owner and those who work in the woodlands. All certification systems require that each of these basic elements be addressed. The two most prevalent certification programs for woodland owners in the United States are the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). If you look at the primary objectives of these systems, ATFS having eight and FSC having 10, they will look very similar and they are designed to prove that sound principles were used in the ownership, management, and harvest of the woodlands. However, each certification system places a different emphasis on each of these issues. In essence, differences in the requirements



Photo courtesy: Billy Thomas

The signs above indicated that this property is being managed according to the specifications of the respective programs. The American Tree Farm System is a certification program while the Stewardship Forest program is not.

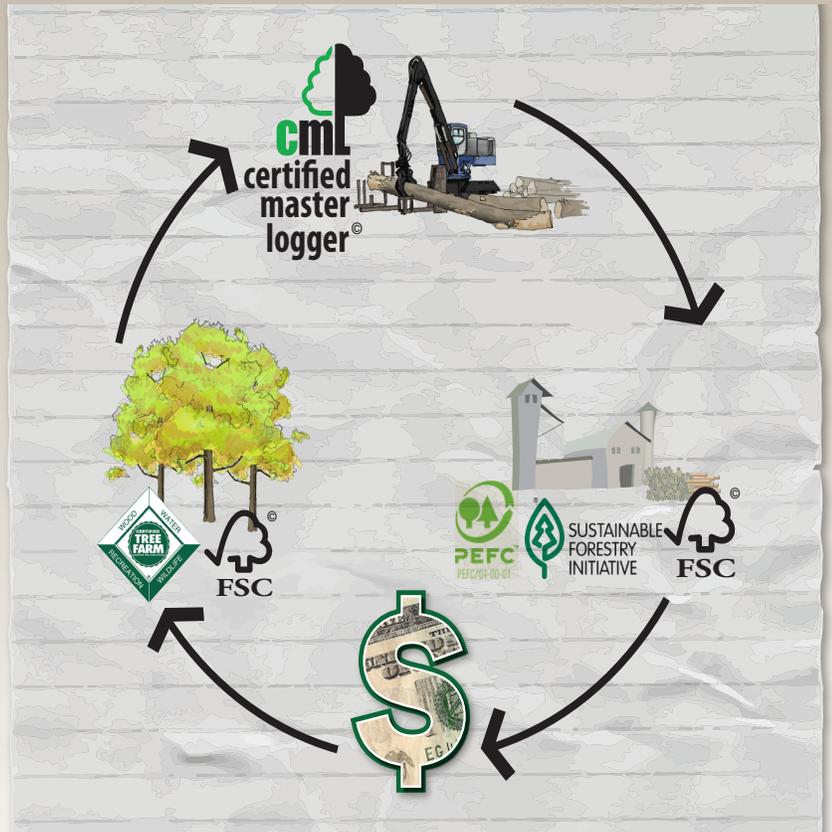
among the certification systems results from differences in how each system defines good management and what silvicultural, ecological, economic, and social issues are deemed important. You can see the difference in emphasis if you look at the details of each of the systems standards (see www.treefarm-system.org and www.fscus.org for details). Each of the organizations having a certification system (including systems other than ATFS and FSC) believes that its definition of good management and its standards are the best. Woodland owners, forest industries, and environmental organizations also take sides on this issue, which has led to lively debates on the legitimacy of the different systems. In the end, the certification system in which a woodland owner chooses to participate is based on the owner's interests and needs and the costs and benefits of the system. Each system has a different set of costs (financial and time) and different benefits. The woodland owner should understand these costs and benefits and make a knowledgeable decision about

whether to become certified and what certification system, or systems, will work best for the owner.

Three fundamental principles of all certification systems

1. The woodland owner must have a written management plan developed by or with the assistance of a professional forester.
2. The plan must address the provisions that are set forth in the standards of the certification system that includes sound silvicultural, ecological, economic, and social principles.
3. The woodlands must be inspected periodically to ensure compliance with the plan (and thus compliance with the principles of the standards).

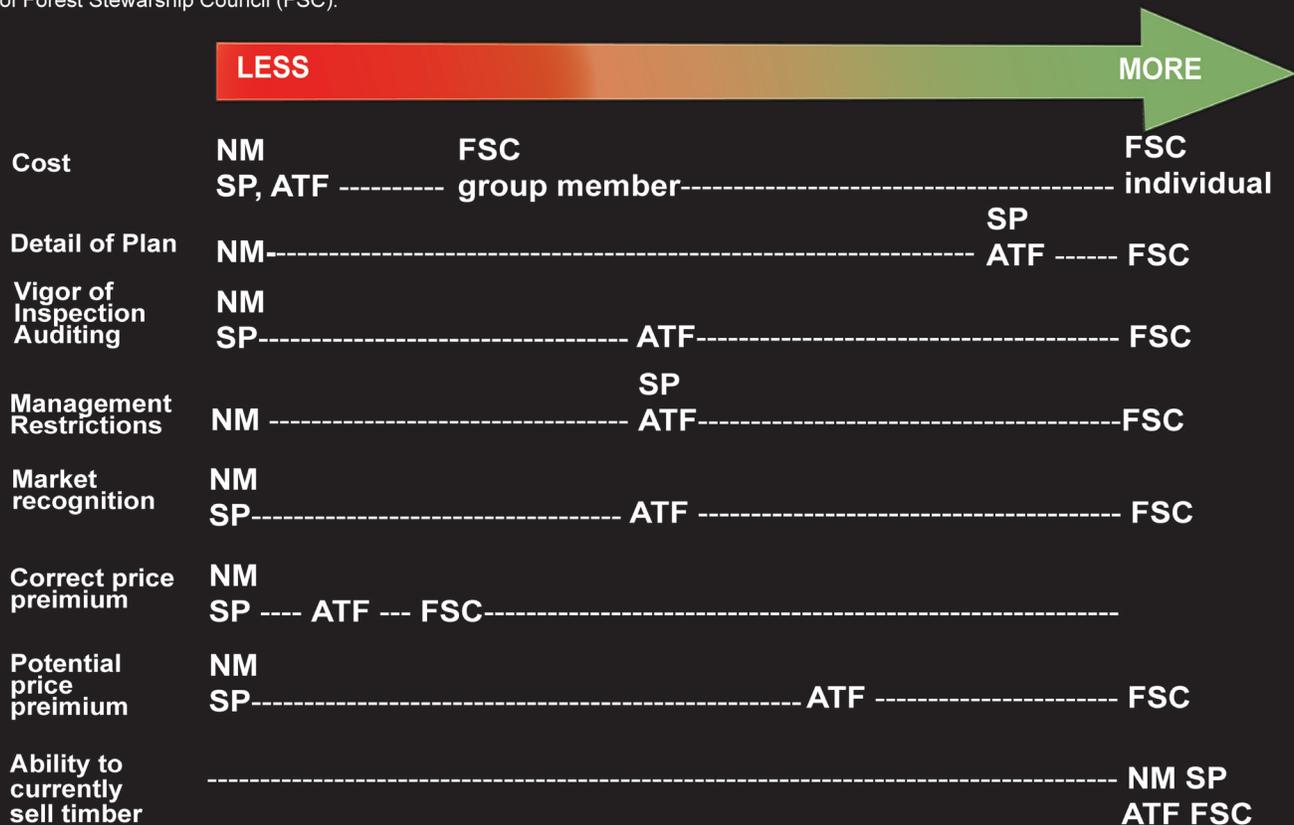
A woodland owner can certainly work and enjoy his or her woodlands without the aid of a forester and without a plan. However, it would be difficult for most woodland owners to do an efficient and effective job of actively managing their woodlands without some professional assistance. Professional assistance can often be obtained through the state forestry agency (such as the Kentucky Division of Forestry). A state forester can develop a written management or Stewardship Plan that provides information and recommendations employing sound forestry principles. So, what makes certification different, and what makes one



The diagram represents the flow of certified wood and ultimately money for woodland owners. FSC timber moves to FSC certified mills and American Tree Farm timber moves to SFI and PEFC mills. The use of certified loggers makes it easy for woodland owner and mills to meet certification standards. The mills produce either FSC, SFI or PEFC certified lumber or paper. Woodland owners benefit through preferential treatment from mills.

Comparison of Certified and Non-certified Woodlands

The following shows the relative difference among management and certification schemes as of **2011 for Kentucky Woodlands** with: no management (NM), a Stewardship Plan (SP), membership in the American Tree Farm System (ATF) and a individual or group member of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).



This comparison chart is provided to help readers visualize the relative differences among the management and certification schemes.

certification system different from another? The answer to those questions comes from principles 2 and 3. In some instances, a Stewardship Plan may very well encompass all of the standards required by a certification system. This is probably most true for the ATFS, which was developed specifically to address forest management as it relates to woodland owners in the United States. The difference between an uncertified woodlands and an ATFS-certified woodlands is that the ATFS woodlands is inspected (audited) to see that the management plan is being adhered to, whereas in uncertified woodlands, even one with a stewardship or management plan, there is no inspecting and thus no proof that good management has actually been practiced. There may also be some technical details of a certification system that might not be addressed in a typical Stewardship or non-certified woodlands management plan. This omission of technical details could be because some certification principles might not be very relevant to a woodland owner in the United States or the principles encompass some issues that have not been historically addressed by woodland owners in the United States. The latter is most typically encountered with certification systems that have been developed internationally or for owners of very large forests; the primary example is certification developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Next, we will contrast ATFS and FSC as it relates to family woodland owners.

Certification Systems

American Tree Farm System (ATFS)

The ATFS has been around since the 1940s. It started as a recognition system for good forest management for non-industrial, family-owned woodlands. Woodland owners involved a forester in the development of a written management plan, and their woodlands were inspected by those foresters periodically to ensure that the plan was up-to-date and being adhered to. Recently, ATFS has morphed into a certification system. The ATFS has contracted an outside organization to audit the entire ATFS program and its members (Tree Farmers) and increasing the breadth of its management standards to encompass a wider range of forest issues and concerns. The ATFS contains eight standards (principles) and 23 individual indicators (or provisions) that must be addressed in a plan. As indicated above, in many states a typical Stewardship Plan will contain what is necessary to meet standards for the ATFS. In a nutshell, the standards require that management activities, including harvesting, are done using sound principles of silviculture and management and that natural resources such as water and issues pertaining to wildlife are addressed. There is a heavy emphasis on ensuring that all local laws and regulations are followed. The ATFS was designed with small woodland owners in mind, provides a significant amount of flexibility, and uses the local forester's expertise in developing the

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From the Woods...

KWM: *What certified products do you currently have markets for?*

John: Our primary business is operating band sawmills in eastern and southeastern Kentucky. Our main product is Appalachian hardwoods, both green and kiln-dried. This varies from year to year, but the percentage of certified wood ranges from 5-20% of our total lumber production. The two main markets for this material are into the European Union and into LEED-specified government buildings.

KWM: *What certification do you currently have and why?*

John: We use the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) "chain of custody," with both "pure" and "mixed credit" accounts. While there are other certifying bodies, our customers are looking more for the FSC standard of product rather than with competing certification scenarios.

KWM: *Would it be helpful to have more certified forestland/timber in close proximity to your facilities?*

John: Certainly. It is difficult to develop markets for products that you do not always have available. Basically, you are considered either "in or out" of a market segment based on product availability; it's hard to sell from an empty wagon, so to speak. With energy and freight costs increasing regularly, the closer the resource is to your processing facility, the more competitive an organization can be. Also, the more of this certified timber that becomes available, the more stable markets we can develop for this material.

KWM: *Do you view certification as a passing fad or something that is here to stay?*

John: Speaking personally, I believe that the certification of America's forestland is an up and coming issue. Many consumers today want to be assured that the hardwood products they are buying are from responsibly managed forests. Further than that, they want to know that the timber was legally harvested. Forest and chain of custody third-party certification accomplishes all of that. The consumer is assured that the timber came from a well-managed forest and that all aspects of the processing were done in accordance with prevailing civil law. I think this market will continue to grow and be the norm for future business.

KWM: *As president of the Kentucky Forest Industries Association, do you see certification as something that could potentially help both the forest industry and woodland owners alike in this state? If so, in what way?*

John: It is difficult to imagine that mills such as ours and Kentucky woodland owners must think of our markets as global, but that is exactly what they are competing with. In a recent marketing meeting, we were told that 47% of all North American hardwoods are exported from this country. Third-party certification sets us apart from most areas of the world, where forests are abused, timber is stolen, and human rights are ignored. Our beautiful hardwoods are in demand in other countries. Certified timber is more desirable to buyers like us and to the buyers of our products. Any time we can gain an advantage, we need to do so if we are to compete with other countries for market share.



John C. Smith,
President, Kentucky Forest Industries
Association and Sales Manager of Forest
Products, Inc. of Corbin, KY

Kentucky Woodlands Magazine recently interviewed two prominent Kentuckians that are very knowledgeable about the wood industry and woodland management in the state. We wanted to get their perspective on what forest and wood certification means to the wood industry and woodland owners.



Joe Ball,

Woodland owner, Tree Farmer and past president of the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association.

KWM: *Are your woodlands in Kentucky certified and if so, which certification do you have and why did you become certified?*

Joe: My Tree Farm on the Wayne and McCreary county line was certified in 1987 with the American Tree Farm System and has been re-certified every 5 years since. The process of certification requires planning, goal setting, and setting priorities for implementing the plan which was what I wanted to do.

KWM: *Do you view certification as a passing fad or something that is here to stay?*

Joe: The growing public interest in stewardship is not a passing fad. I see certification as a sign of progressive times. The greater society is demanding that we demonstrate actions to implement stewardship of a valuable resource that affects more than the landowner.

KWM: *Would you advise other woodland owners to consider certification?*

Joe: Yes. Not only are the actions inherent in the certification process important for everyone concerned, it is the right thing to do. Some form of third-party certification is necessary and becomes a prerequisite for woodland owners that want to get involved with selling certified wood products, participating in government programs, selling carbon credits, and documenting that a timber tract has Tree Farm certified trees.

KWM: *As a past president of the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association, woodland owner and long-time Tree Farmer do you think certification is something that can help the forest industry and woodland owners in Kentucky?*

Joe: Moving in the direction of certification is a win-win proposition. It won't guarantee immediate profits to all concerned today, but it will ensure that more acreage is in a managed program thus improving the quality and growth rate of standing timber. Kentucky is presently number 2 or 3 in the production of hardwood timber. Certification could be an effective tool greatly enhancing Kentucky's forest industry. With a significant number of woodland owners involved in some sort of a certification program we would change the culture of the woodland resource from a resource to be exploited in the short run to one that will justify management and stewardship to benefit everyone. To initiate a successful trend toward certification landowners must receive short-term benefits (incentives) for their actions and investments, as well as long-term gain.

plan. The main difference between a woodland managed with a Stewardship Plan and one that is ATFS certified is that the ATFS woodland is inspected by an ATFS approved forester (Tree Farm inspector). Future inspections occur on a random basis to make sure that the woodland owner is adhering to the plan and that it is updated if needed. Harvesting can be conducted without the oversight or assistance of a forester, but during the inspection, the Tree Farm inspector will look to see that recommendations regarding the harvest were adhered to. The ATFS owner must also allow a third party-certifying body (Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLC, is the certifying body that ATFS uses) to visit his or her property to determine that the management plan is being adhered to. Currently, this auditing cost is being absorbed by the national ATFS office. The forester's time to help develop your management plan and conduct inspections are generally provided by the state agency or, in some cases, forest industry. Thus there is little or no cost for woodland owners that want to be ATFS certified. However there are indications that the cost of certification incurred by the ATFS and its partners may eventually, in full or in part, have to be passed on to its Tree Farm members. Currently ATFS is a system that has recognition within the United States. However, there are efforts to increase its recognition through association with the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and be globally recognized through endorsement by an organization called the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

FSC is a globally recognized standard for forest management for all types of forest ownerships. Initially conceived to work for larger land holdings, provisions have been developed to facilitate participation by family woodland owners. Currently the FSC is commanding the most attention from those interested in producing certified wood and paper products, primarily due to its global market recognition and acceptance. A woodland owner with FSC certification is required to have a management plan that ensures compliance with its standards. In total there are 10 guiding principles and 190 individual indicators that must be addressed. These indicators include social, economic, and environmental issues. As can be surmised by contrasting the difference in the number of indicators between ATFS and FSC, there is more rigor and detail required in planning and auditing for FSC-

certified woodlands. There are also more restrictions in the FSC standards. For example, there are specific rules requiring harvest planning and rules governing the use of pesticides, harvesting, protection of important or critical habitats, development of plantations, and the use of genetically modified species. Some of these restrictions point to differences between FSC and ATFS and both organizations can provide information and evidence to support their position on these issues. FSC also requires that your woodlands be initially approved and annually audited by an FSC third party-approved certification body (such as Scientific Certification Systems or Smartwood). All of these provisions and the rigor associated with certification were developed to meet what FSC perceived to be required of a legitimate internationally recognized standard for well-managed forests. If a woodland owner were to individually undertake FSC certification, it would cost \$4,000 to \$8,000 initially and \$1,000 to \$2,000 annually, a fee that is prohibitively expensive for most. Fortunately, for small woodland owners there are ways in which this cost can be substantially reduced and assistance can be obtained to help woodland owners with the unfamiliar aspects of FSC certification.

To fix this monetary problem and to deal with unfamiliar aspects required in the FSC plan woodland owners can join an FSC group. These groups are managed by an organization or a consulting forester termed the group manager. The group manager handles and assists woodland owners with the unfamiliar issues associated with FSC certification, and the costs are distributed amongst the members of the group reducing them significantly and allowing interested woodland owners that are serious about woodland management to become certified (see sidebar on group certification). The use of foresters who are trained in FSC planning and the use of certified loggers can further reduce the burden of FSC certification (see side bar on certified loggers).

Each of these systems has a set of standards of management that woodland owners must meet in order for their woodlands (and the products coming from them) to carry the certification system's label. Also, woodland owners must allow their lands to be inspected

by an independent third party to ensure adherence to the plan and the standards. These independent third parties are business or non-profit organizations that provide auditing services and are called certifying bodies



Photos courtesy: Jeff Stringer

These 2 X 4's were for sale at Lowes. They have an FSC mixed source label. This means that the mill that produced them (Domtar) had procured at least 70 percent of the timber in the 2 X 4s from FSC certified woodlands.

(example: Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLC for ATFS and Smartwood for FSC). This inspection provides legitimacy to the certification systems. This legitimacy is important for consumers that buy certified wood products and industries that make these wood products. As could be expected, this auditing, and in some cases development and implementation of a woodland management plan that meets certification standards, costs money. In theory, this cost will be offset by increased markets or prices paid for certified wood products. While the public says it wants woodlands to be well managed and wants proof of that, it is currently unwilling to pay more for certified products. This disconnect is very slowly starting to change, but it is problematic to those interested or needing to sell certified wood products.

Regardless of these problems, there are an increasing number of retailers, including big box chains that are interested in selling certified wood products. This interest has trickled down to the secondary wood industry, which makes finished products, and to the saw and paper mills that produce the raw lumber and paper. These industries are certifying their operations so that they have the ability to produce certified wood or paper (see side bar on forest industry certification). However, these industries need certified woodlands to obtain timber and pulpwood, and none of the industries have enough of their own woodlands to meet the need. They rely upon woodland owners for the majority of their wood. In some instances, these industries have developed policies of preferential treatment for woodland owners that have certified woodlands. Also, debates over renewable fuels and the use of biomass to reduce fossil fuel emissions have included discussions regarding the use of certification to ensure proper management and environmental protection.

Certification has also been used by some carbon programs to ensure that woods in these programs are being

Group Certification

Group certification is bringing many woodland owners under one certificate that is managed by one entity. Group certification is designed to make certification practical and affordable by centralizing and streamlining many of the administrative processes related to certification. Traditional certification requires a woodland owner or forester to contact and pay (on their own) for an audit team to visit the owner's woodlands to ensure that the owner follows the standards. In group certification, the audit team will only inspect and visit a select number of random properties within the group. This audit is the greatest financial hurdle to achieving certification, and by visiting only a sample of properties the costs are reduced by inspecting only a few properties rather than having to visit every single property individually. The group can also save time and money for group members by completing several certification requirements for them (for example, annual reporting, international treaty investigations, and database management of rare and endangered species). The group manager will be visiting with and walking woodland owners through the process of certification rather than woodland owners contacting an audit team on their own. The group can also support their members by advertising their certified timber sales and putting them in contact with reputable foresters, loggers, and others to help them.

Forest Industry Certification

Forest industries achieve certification through something that is called Chain of Custody (CoC) certification. It is a process that ensures the wood (for example, lumber and veneer) and wood products (for example, doors, flooring, trim, furniture, paper) that carry a label of certification come from well-managed, responsibly harvested certified forests or woodlands. The objective of CoC is to be able to verify the woodland origin of the wood used in consumer products. Each entity that handles certified wood becomes a link in the "certification supply chain," from the woodlands all the way to the consumer. A new link is created in the chain each time the ownership of certified wood changes. If any entity in the supply chain is not certified, the chain is broken, and the final product cannot carry a certified label. In a typical situation this means that the woodlands must be certified and a certificate must be in place to cover the logging, processing at a saw or veneer mill, and the production of wood products at a secondary wood industry such as a cabinet or furniture maker or printer. Forest industries must develop written control procedures for how they are going to source, sell, and separate certified wood from other materials during manufacturing. If their plans are found in compliance with CoC standards through auditing, they have the ability to procure, produce, and sell certified wood products. The most prominent wood certification systems in the United States are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) that recognizes the American Tree Farm System.

Certified Loggers

There are certification programs for loggers. The Certified Master Logger Program (CMLP) is an example of a performance-based certification program for logging firms. These firms must adhere to a set of logging standards and are audited once or twice a year to make sure they are adhering to those standards. These standards require that the firms are insured; follow all laws and regulations; develop harvest plans; and protect water, wildlife, and special habitats and places. The use of certified loggers can help woodland owners meet management objectives and can help them especially with FSC certification. You can get more information at www.certifiedmasterlogger.com



managed correctly and in a way that actually increases carbon sequestration. There is also growing interest in using woodland certification to provide a working forest for landowners who wish to participate in conservation easements. These issues indicate that certification may become an important aspect of woodland ownership regardless of whether the primary objective is timber production, carbon sequestration, or anything in between.

For many woodland owners who care about their woodlands, getting and adhering to a Stewardship Plan or becoming a member of ATFS is not a problem. While more requirements and verification exist for FSC, membership in a group can easily overcome these issues—most woodland owners who care about their woods can easily meet the requirements for FSC through membership in a group. So, certification is in reach of every woodland owner.

How to Get Certified

If you are not familiar with woodland management, the best place to start is by contacting the state forestry agency or consulting forester approved by the state agency and have a Forest Stewardship or management plan developed. Once you have a plan or if you already have one, professional foresters can direct you to the ATFS. The requirements of ATFS are not difficult. Involvement with FSC normally comes through involvement with a forester who is directly

involved or familiar with FSC certification. Most foresters will be able to direct you to these individuals and FSC groups in your area (if they are available).

Summary

Certification is voluntary and is used to prove that woodlands are being well managed. *Well managed* in modern terms means that woodlands, the natural resources they support, and the overall environment and ecosystem are taken into account during planning. Certified timber and pulpwood is becoming increasingly important to forest industries, and certification is a part of the discussions for ecosystem markets, conservation easements, and energy production. There are several certification systems available to woodland owners. Foresters are becoming more knowledgeable about certification and can help inform you about certification. There are also efforts under way by forest industries, environmental groups, state agencies, universities, and non-profit organizations to increase the understanding and opportunities for woodland certification. See the side bar on the Center for Forest and Wood Certification as an example of an effort under way to assist woodland owners with certification.

Certification will continue to evolve as market demand and recognition increases. It is widely agreed that certification of one form or another is here to stay. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that woodland owners who are interested in keeping their options open for a wide range of opportunities should become informed about certification and stay abreast of and participate in certification as it best suits their needs and interests. Staying up-to-date may be especially important as preferential treatment for woodland owners that have certified timber emerges, price premiums develop, or ecosystem markets and sources of conservation payments increase their involvement in certification. Keeping up with certification issues or becoming certified puts you in a position to take advantage of a wide range of opportunities that may profit you and your woodlands.



Center for Forest and Wood Certification

The Center for Forest and Wood Certification (CFWC) is being developed to provide woodland owners, forest industry, loggers, and foresters with assistance in certification. The CFWC is a partnership umbrella that provides certification groups that can be joined by woodland owners, coordination of efforts to train foresters and woodland owners in certification, and members who maintain certified logger programs. It also provides forest industries with assistance in certification and in building supplies of certified timber. See www.forestcertificationcenter.org for more information.

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