

**SFI's Statement on the USGBC's Third Draft Forest Certification Benchmarks
Updated - March 1, 2010**

***World's Largest Forest Certification Standard Urges the United States Green Building
Council to Support North America's Forests***

On February 22, 2010, the US Green Building Council released for public comment a 3rd round of draft benchmarks to evaluate forest certification programs. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) continues to urge the USGBC to end a forest certification policy that discriminates against North American forests and against most of the independent forest certification standards used in the United States and Canada.

As currently drafted, the USGBC's complex benchmark system may result in the continued exclusion of independent forest certification standards used in North America, including SFI, the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), the Canadian Standards Association's Sustainable Forest Management Standard (CSA), and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC).

During the September 2009 comment period, the USGBC put forward 80 individual benchmarks in its second draft; SFI submitted comments on a significant number of these benchmarks. In the current and third draft, only five of the benchmarks are up for review, which suggests only five of the benchmarks were changed. The other 75 are not available for comment, and the USGBC has not provided any rationale for why it has not addressed the proposed changes to these benchmarks, instead providing casual responses such as "the requirements were deemed appropriate."

"SFI has patiently and constructively participated in this USGBC processes for over five years, yet it appears that the USGBC, in its home stretch to finalize the forest certification credit, is set to continue with the status quo policy of excluding forest certification standards other than FSC. This position should not be taken lightly," says Kathy Abusow, President and CEO of SFI Inc. "With more than 186 million acres (75 million hectares) certified to the SFI Standard in North America, and another 197 million more acres (79 million hectares) certified to CSA and ATFS combined, excluding these programs means excluding well-managed, third-party certified forests and the communities and jobs that depend on them in the US and Canada."

"If the USGBC maintains the status quo and does not recognize the SFI Standard, many LEED builders who chase points will turn away reputable third-party certified SFI wood which is grown in their backyard, in the US and Canada, and instead turn to FSC certified wood – the vast majority of the FSC's global supply comes from overseas and often from countries without effective social laws," adds Abusow. "FSC has over 30 different standards around the world, yet almost half of the FSC certifications globally are to standards that are not yet fully endorsed by FSC International and do not measure up to the SFI standard for North American forests."

Several State Governors have written to the USGBC to register their dismay. For example, Governor Tim Pawlenty in Minnesota in a letter to USGBC leadership stated, "Recognizing only FSC-certified wood in the LEED benchmarks will result in discrimination against wood products derived from well-managed lands in green building projects. The USGBC should fairly assess and include all credible forest certification programs, including SFI and ATFS systems. ...I urge you to quickly make a board decision to recognize well-managed wood from Minnesota and all credible forest certification programs. In doing so, USGBC can join other government agencies and green building rating programs in recognizing wood as an environmentally friendly building material."

"We will continue to promote and support responsible forest management through our program and our ongoing collaboration with environmental groups, the academic community, public agencies, forest companies, small landowners, and thousands of others," says Abusow.

SFI is the largest single forest certification standard in the world, recognized equally alongside other forest certification standards by organizations such as the National Association of State Foresters, the Society of American Foresters, Environmental Choice, the Canadian Competition Bureau, the UK and numerous Canadian government agencies including the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, the Canadian Competition Bureau and Public Works and Government Services Canada. The American Consumer Council supports the work SFI does and Terrachoice Environmental Marketing speaks to the credibility of the SFI program in their "Seven Sins of Greenwashing" reports.

A 2008 resolution from the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) explains the rationale for inclusive policies succinctly: "requirements for certification should recognize ATFS, FSC, SFI, and all other credible options," and goes on to state that "there is no single "best" forest certification program. The value of certification is derived from credible processes and not from brand names. Competition among certification programs produces innovation and continuous improvement in certification processes and on-the-ground forestry practices." Resolutions from the NASF require 100 % membership approval to be passed.

The USGBC continues to miss the bigger picture. For example:

- **Approximately 80% of the certified forests in North America are certified to SFI, ATFS, or CSA.** Products from these vast forests continue to be ineligible for the LEED forest certification while USGBC completes its lengthy review of its discriminatory policy. This is not good news for forest products produced in North America and the communities that are home to forests certified to these standards.
- **Just 18% of North America's certified forests are certified to FSC, and 60% of FSC's supply is from offshore.** This means that USGBC is encouraging the architects, builders and owners of LEED-rated buildings to give preference to products from offshore, often shipped incredible distances, and to exclude wood from the USGBC's backyard and certified to SFI.
- **FSC's various standards and interim standards used around the world are not stronger than SFI in North America** – FSC has 31 fully accredited standards around the world, but almost half of the FSC certifications globally are not to fully endorsed FSC standards and many of those would likely not stand up to US and Canadian forest and environmental regulations and lack the rigour of a science-based standard like the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
- **A double standard** – The USGBC does not require other building products, such as steel and concrete, to have third-party environmental certification to achieve a credit. Yet products from forests third-party certified to internationally recognized standards like SFI have to clear 49 mandatory benchmarks just to be considered for a single LEED point, while a bicycle rack and shower can also qualify for a LEED point.
- **The trend is inclusivity** – There are numerous precedents that demonstrate that the global trend is to recognize all the major third-party forest certification standards. For example, Green Globes (US and Canada), BREEAM (United Kingdom), Built Green Canada, Built Green Colorado, CASBEE (Japan) and the ANSI National Green Building Standard (US) all recognize multiple forest certification standards including SFI. The Green Building Council of Australia recently ended their FSC-only preference.
- **The UN speaks out against exclusive recognition of a single forest certification brand** – The UNECE/FAO recently observed that green building may be a mixed blessing, because "green building initiatives standards giving exclusive recognition to particular forest-certification

brands may help drive demand for these brands at the expense of wider appreciation of the environmental merits of wood.” The UNECE/FAO is also concerned that the growth of certification worldwide appears to be slowing.

SFI Inc. encourages all certification programs and supporters of forest certification worldwide to comment on the draft benchmarks by March 14 and to urge the USGBC, its board, its steering committee and its material and resources technical advisory group to recognize all credible forest certification programs including SFI, FSC, ATFS, CSA and PEFC.

Additional information:

- Elected officials, government agencies, professional foresters and other stakeholders across North America have voiced concern over exclusive forest certification policies in green building rating tools. Review these quotes and statements on our website here: http://www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/statements_leed_us.pdf
- Read our September 2009 statement here: <http://www.sfiprogram.org/newsroom/?p=188>
- Download our Fact Sheet on SFI and Green Building here: <http://www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/Build%20green%204-09.pdf>

For information on how you can make a difference during the USGBC’s benchmark process, contact Jason Metnick at Jason.metnick@sfiprogram.org