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# FOREST CERTIFICATION AND FSC

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## INTRODUCTION

Forest certification has been actively growing around the world for the last decade. This effort was originally started to show communities in developing countries that there was a concern amongst industrialized countries for how well forests were being protected and managed. As opposed to all out boycotts, which often result in actually devaluing forest land, forest certification requires that landowners and manufacturers voluntarily invite third-party auditors to certify that their practices meet internationally recognized standards for responsible forest management.

Since the early 1990s, forest certification systems have grown both in the number of participants and in acres. Currently, there are more than 90 certification systems worldwide administered by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade associations, and other entities. Each of these certification systems was created to demonstrate that a given forestry operation is meeting a particular set of standards. However, not all of these certification systems were created equal and not all of them require a transparent, multi-stakeholder process. In a world that is increasingly asking for more accountability, and witnessing environmental degradation at the hands of natural resource-based industries, a transparent, multi-stakeholder certification process can provide assurances for protection.

If we were to go to a store to purchase a piece of 2x4 lumber that carried the FSC label for forest certification, it would likely not look any different than any other 2x4 we've ever purchased. The difference, however, can be seen on the ground in the forest where the log for that 2x4 was harvested from. FSC certification guarantees that harvesting is done in a well-managed manner that covers a variety of environmental, social and economic impacts. For example, a recent study conducted by the Rainforest Alliance of 80 FSC forest management certificate

holders in the United States looked at what forest managers were required to do in order to achieve or maintain FSC certification. Over 90% were required to make significant changes in management planning, nearly 80% were required to improve their monitoring, and 70% were required to change their practices to conserve high conservation value forests. Over half of those surveyed needed to make changes related to harvest plans, erosion controls, and wildlife management practices. In short, FSC certification drives change and improvement on the ground in forests.

## WHAT IS FSC?

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes the responsible management of the world's working forests through the development of standards, a certification system, and trademark recognition. A critical component of this system is the recognition of FSC's role as a facilitator of a collaborative process that brings extremely diverse members together to form the FSC standard of forest management. The other key is the recognition that this process is dynamic, in that the principles and criteria that define "good forestry" are subject to continual evaluation and improvement. Part of FSC's uniqueness has resulted from this collaborative process, allowing the organization to interweave the best ideas of its diverse membership into solutions.

In 1994, FSC's members approved an international set of Principles and Criteria. The Principles and Criteria are the threshold of what constitutes responsible forest management worldwide under the FSC system. Based on these, specific regional standards have been developed in several countries, which are applied above and beyond the original Principles and Criteria to manage for specific, local forest compositions. The regional standards were developed through a unique consensus process that allows for,

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### Principles of Forest Management

1. Compliance with laws
2. Tenure use rights and responsibilities
3. Indigenous peoples' rights
4. Community relations and workers' rights
5. Benefits from the forest
6. Environmental impact
7. Management plan
8. Monitoring and assessment
9. Maintenance of high conservation value forests
10. Plantations

See [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org) for a more detailed explanation of these principles.

and actively seeks, participation and input from all interested parties. The full set of Principles and Criteria, and U.S. regional standards, can be downloaded from [http://www.fscus.org/standards\\_criteria/](http://www.fscus.org/standards_criteria/).

Since its inception in 1994, FSC's third-party accredited certifiers have certified over 4,000 companies in more than 72 countries to sell FSC-certified products, and more than 160 million acres of forestland in 65 countries—an area larger than Ukraine—has been certified.

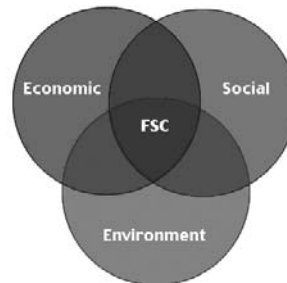
### HOW IS THE FSC MEMBERSHIP COMPRISED?

FSC International is an association of voting members. Members have the highest authority in formal decisions taken by FSC, including voting on policy motions, and electing the Board of Directors. Members, as distinct from “certificate holders” which are those companies that hold forest management or chain-of-custody certification to make and sell FSC-certified products, are divided into three chambers:

- **Economic Chamber:** Includes organizations and individuals with an interest in commercial forest products entities. A number of major retailers and forest products manufacturers are members of this chamber including The Home Depot, Columbia Forest Products, and Tembec.

- **Social Chamber:** Intended for indigenous organizations and social movements that have an active interest in environmentally viable forest stewardship. Members of the social chamber include unions representing wood workers, and indigenous groups, as well as organizations such as Forest Trust and National Network of Forest Practitioners.
- **Environmental Chamber:** Limited to non-profit organizations and NGOs with a demonstrated commitment to environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable forest stewardship. Some examples of current members include World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Greenpeace, National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The purpose of the three-chamber system is to maintain a balance of voting power between the different interests within the FSC. Each chamber has 33.3% of the voting power in the general assembly. Motions require an affirmative vote of 66.6% of the total vote to be adopted.



### HOW DOES CERTIFICATION WORK?

Under the FSC system there are two types of certification:

- **Forest Management (FM) certification** applies to the actual forestland. This certification applies the FSC Principles and Criteria (and any FSC regional standards that may be present in the area) to the land base. In order for a parcel to receive FSC endorsement, its forest management practices must meet the FSC's Principles and Criteria, as certified by an FSC-accredited, third-party auditor.

The certification process basically involves an initial assessment of the land, followed by annual audits. The certifier's on-site visits verify compli-

ance with FSC standards. A five-year contract is signed between the landowner and the certifier, committing the landowner to maintain the forest to FSC standards for the length of the contract. After five years, the process will start all over again with another full assessment, followed by annual audits.



The FSC logo identifies products which contain wood from well-managed forests certified in accordance with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council.

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- **Chain-of-Custody (COC) certification** applies to the “supply chain” that the harvested, certified wood will travel through until it becomes a final product for sale and purchased by the end consumer. COC certification applies to manufacturers and distributors of forest products. COC certification ensures that forest products that carry the FSC’s “checkmark-and-tree” label can be tracked back to the certified forestland from which it grew. This tracking system is beneficial and necessary since the FSC label is a registered “certification trademark,” similar to that of Underwriters Laboratories or Energy Star, rather than a “product trademark,” such as in the Nike swoosh logo. Certification trademarks provide consumers assurance as to the integrity of the claims made regarding the product. Any use of the FSC label by a COC certificate holder must be pre-approved by the company’s certifier.

The chain-of-custody certification process is basically a verification of the manufacturer’s ability to separately track all FSC materials throughout its business, from purchasing and inventory control to manufacture and sale. For most organizations in the U.S. this is a very simple, non-invasive process that verifies existing good business practices. With today’s computerized tracking control systems, bar coding, and wand capabilities, keeping track of FSC materials is a rela-

tively simple process. Like FM certifications, COC certificate holders will have an initial assessment followed by annual audits, and enter into a five-year contract with the certifier.

FSC certification can be applied to any product made of wood, including lumber, veneer, flooring, furniture, paper, and even guitars. All FSC claims are based solely on the origin of the wood, and in no way reference any other aspect or quality of the product.

## WHAT FSC MEANS TO GREEN BUILDING

During the development of many green building programs, the founders were concerned about the origins of wood products. They did not want to reward the use of wood from forest products companies who were not managing their forests to the highest recognized standards. The FSC certification system is the only system, through the COC, that allows for green building projects to directly reward those forest products companies for managing their forests to the highest standards.

Under the LEED system of the U.S. Green Building Council, points can be earned in five categories: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, and innovation and design process. Credit 7 in the materials and resources category addresses the issue of certified wood, with the intent of encouraging environmentally responsible forest management. The requirements for the credit are:

Use a minimum of 50% (based on cost) of wood-based materials and products, certified in accordance with the Forest Stewardship Council’s Principles and Criteria, for wood building components including, but not limited to, structural framing and general dimensional framing, flooring, finishes, furnishings, and non-rented temporary construction applications such as bracing, concrete form work, and pedestrian barriers.

In the short time since the LEED program gave preference to FSC-certified wood, 25% of the LEED-certified projects have obtained the “certified wood credit” (Materials and Resources Credit 7). Each one of these projects has an interesting story to tell about new specifications, bringing new suppliers into FSC certification, and learning lessons about available supply. However, all of these projects have



one thing in common: the project teams, owners, and buildings themselves are contributing to a growing green building movement that is asking, “where does my wood come from?”

Although specific questions about the LEED-certified wood credit must be directed to the U.S. Green Building Council, FSC-US has developed some tools to help specify and use FSC-certified wood products in green building projects. The centerpiece guide of this educational outreach effort is *Designing and Building with FSC*. This new guide offers strategies that will provide project teams with specific steps that should be taken to ensure FSC-certified products are a part of their project. The guide can be downloaded from [http://www.fscus.org/green\\_building/designing\\_building.php](http://www.fscus.org/green_building/designing_building.php).

### **SPECIFYING, BUILDING, AND ACCOUNTING FOR FSC USE IN GREEN BUILDING PROJECTS**

Many professionals who have designed, purchased, or built with FSC-certified building materials have opinions and experiences ranging from, “its unavailable and too expensive” to “we had three different bidders and the price was the same as non-certified.” The former statement characterizes the market a few years ago and still rings true in certain sectors where products are still difficult to obtain. However, the later statement is where the market is moving. Today, in many of the building material product sectors, increased availability has made things easier and in some cases at no extra cost.

Many factors go into, “it’s unavailable and too expensive.” Incorrect bids, reluctant suppliers, short-

ened timelines, project location, unknown availability of specified products, a business-as-usual mentality and more have been responsible for making the above statement come true. Several of these factors can be addressed and diffused during the typical phases of a building project so that they do not resurface or cause delays.

During the schematic design and design development stages of a project, many of the final product decisions have not been made, and research is being conducted regarding a product’s availability, feasibility, and deliverability. As the project team finalizes its overall goals, specific areas where wood can be used become part of the focus. Once these areas have been determined, researching the availability of those wood products from FSC-certified sources can begin.

Working with FSC-US, as a resource of information early in the design process, will allow project teams to specify FSC-certified forest products that are available and appropriate to the project. Providing a resource list as part of the instructions to bidders, and referencing assistance from FSC-US, will help assure that specifications are fulfilled.

A number of resources are available to assist project teams with this research; they can:

- **Look** at the FSC-US website ([www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org)) for a list of FSC-certified manufacturers and suppliers by clicking on “Certificates in the U.S.” to search for companies with COC certification by state, or by “product search” to search for a specific product. They can also visit the Green Building section for other resources.
- **E-mail** a product request to [info@fscus.org](mailto:info@fscus.org). Include as many specifics about the product as possible, such as species, quantity, lengths of boards, and when and where the product will need to be delivered. FSC-US can distribute this request to its network of suppliers, who will then be able to contact team members directly.
- **Call** FSC-US in Washington, DC (202.342.0413) for any questions that cannot be answered via the information on the website.

Contacting companies with FSC certificates directly and requesting product samples, pricing, delivery time, etc., will assist project teams with further product decisions. Contacting suppliers and asking

them questions will ensure that the information provided in the specification is accurate regarding grades, delivery time, etc.

After the design development stage is complete, making use of contract documents provides a framework of responsibility for all project team members. Although none of these documents is an absolute requirement, FSC has developed them all to help project teams increase the likelihood of success and education of general contractors, subcontractors, and material suppliers. These documents include:

**FSC Specification Language:** Specification Language is key to communicating the specific product desires of the project team to all that will bid, buy, and build with FSC-certified products. A higher success rate has been observed for those projects that employ an FSC-certified *line-item strategy* as opposed to a blanket specification for all wood products. Sample specification language can be viewed online at [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org).

**FSC Qualified Vendor List:** This should always be provided with the Request for Bid (RFB) to

inform general contractors and subcontractors about qualified suppliers, and to ensure accurate bidding and sourcing of FSC-certified products as specified (see Figure 1).

**FSC Certified Bid Assurance Form:** This should be located in each specific sub-section where FSC-certified wood products are specified, to help assure due diligence on the part of bidding contractors and subcontractors and ensure that they fully understand their obligations to provide a responsive bid. This form will provide insurance against potentially time-consuming and costly pitfalls, as well as fraudulent claims (see Figure 2).

The following steps are recommended for distribution and retrieval of this form:

1. Specifications are finalized and the FSC Certified Bid Assurance Forms are inserted in all sections that specify FSC-certified wood.
2. Bidding general contractors distribute subsections of specification with FSC Certified Bid Assurance Forms to subcontractors or potential suppliers.

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### FSC GREEN BUILDING RESOURCES

#### FSC Qualified Vendor List

The following list should have been provided through research into manufacturers, distributors, and suppliers of FSC certified products to assist bidding general and sub-contractors. Use of the below suppliers is not required, nor is there any guarantee implied as to their capability or performance.

Company _____ Address _____ _____ Salesperson _____ Phone _____ Email _____ CSI Section _____ Chain of Custody # ____ -COC- ____ <hr/> Company _____ Address _____ _____ Salesperson _____ Phone _____ Email _____ CSI Section _____ Chain of Custody # ____ -COC- ____ <hr/> Company _____ Address _____ _____ Salesperson _____ Phone _____ Email _____ CSI Section _____ Chain of Custody # ____ -COC- ____	Project Name _____ _____ Project Manager/Contact _____ _____ Company _____ Address _____ _____ Salesperson _____ Phone _____ Email _____ CSI Section _____ Chain of Custody # ____ -COC- ____ <hr/> Company _____ Address _____ _____ Salesperson _____ Phone _____ Email _____ CSI Section _____ Chain of Custody # ____ -COC- ____ <hr/> Company _____ Address _____ _____ Salesperson _____ Phone _____ Email _____ CSI Section _____ Chain of Custody # ____ -COC- ____
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**FIGURE 1**

**FIGURE 2**

**FSC GREEN BUILDING RESOURCES**

**FSC Certified Bid Assurance Form**

Project Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Project Manager/Contact \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**This section to be completed by Bidder:**

Specification Section(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

General Contractor \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Subcontractor \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This section to be completed by FSC certified forest products vendor:

**STATEMENT OF CERTIFICATION**

As the representative of \_\_\_\_\_

I give my assurance that we are able to supply FSC certified wood products as:

- 1) We are FSC certified for chain-of-custody and our number is \_\_\_\_\_ All invoices and shipping documents relating to FSC certified products will be labeled with our company's chain-of-custody (COC) number. In addition, each FSC certified product will be identified on a line-item basis in accordance with FSC rules.
- 2) Our company's statement of product availability, delivery times, and pricing reflect due diligence based on market conditions at the time of inquiry.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please send this completed form back with your bid to supply the FSC certified forest products specified.

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**FIGURE 3**

**FSC GREEN BUILDING RESOURCES**

**FSC Product Accounting Form**

To be completed by the project manager during construction.

Project Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Project Manager/Contact \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Product CSI Section	Submittal Required?   Attached?	Supplier's Name	Chain-of-Custody#	Product Description	Copy of Invoice attached?
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO
			____-COC-____		YES   NO

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- Suppliers return form with their bids to the general contractor who forwards these on to the architect or project manager. If necessary to accommodate the last-minute nature of some bid processes, the due date for the FSC Certified Bid Assurance Forms can be scheduled for 24 hours after the bid deadline.

Once the bids are awarded and the general contractor or subcontractors begin to purchase materials, it will be essential to record the types of FSC-certified products that have been purchased by using the **FSC Certified Wood Accounting Form** (see figure 3). Product invoices that contain the company's FSC COC number on a line-item basis referring to the FSC-certified products are the best submittal documents to demonstrate use of FSC-certified wood. This form offers the general contractor a blank document to fill out various details pertaining to a product's attributes, e.g., what is the product and CSI Spec. number? Were submittals issued for this product? Who was the supplier and what was the supplier's FSC Chain-of-Custody (COC) number? Is a copy of an invoice available for verification of the products supplier and FSC status?

Many green building programs conduct random audits to ensure that the credit requirements have been fulfilled. These questions help the general contractor or project manager get organized prior to a green building program audit or owner walk-through. Once the project is complete, the FSC Certified Wood Accounting Form and its accompanying receipts would be all the proof needed to show that FSC-certified wood was used on this project.

Each of these documents can be downloaded from [http://www.fscus.org/green\\_building/designing\\_building.php](http://www.fscus.org/green_building/designing_building.php).

## **THE FUTURE OF FSC AND GREEN BUILDING: A PERFECT MATCH**

No one could have imagined that the growth of the market for FSC-certified products would be accelerated by a green building program whose initial focus was commercial, institutional, and mixed-use projects. Typically, these projects do not require a significant amount of wood, and it would have been a hard sell five years ago to suggest that this would become a main driver of FSC certification. However, many forest products companies have earned FSC certification in anticipation that the green building sector's leading tool, the LEED program, will not only continue to grow, but that it will also spread into the residential market. Residential construction represents the largest consumption of wood products in North America; and with LEED for Homes currently working through its pilot process in eleven U.S. markets, there is an opportunity for further growth in the market and positive impact on acres in the forest.

LEED for Homes provides a sole preference for FSC-certified wood products under *Material & Resource credit 5—Environmentally Preferable Products*. The forecast is that this preference will provide a market incentive for FSC-certified products in the residential building industry, and that will increase the number of landowners, mills, distributors, and lumberyards that are buying and selling FSC-certified products as part of the chain-of-custody. As LEED for Homes and other residential green building programs mature, education will need to be a key component to ensure the longevity of these programs. Without education, these programs may not earn the traction in the market that would allow for significant positive impacts to our environment, society, and business.