



Forest Certification

by Jeff Stringer

Editor's Note: The magazine will begin to feature information on woodland and wood certification. Certification is one of the most important and growing concepts in forestry throughout the United States and the world. Woodland owners undoubtedly will benefit by understanding certification and the advantages and costs associated with certifying woodlands.

Forest Certification: What? Why? How?

What is forest certification? Why should I care? How does it work? These are questions commonly asked by woodland owners. The following provides a quick and direct answer to these questions.

What Is Forest Certification?

A certified forest describes a forest (or woodlands) that is managed under a set of standards developed by an organization. Further, the woodlands are inspected periodically to ensure that they are being managed according to the standards. Certified wood refers to wood products (logs, lumber, flooring, furniture, etc.) that were derived from trees growing in a certified forest.

Why Certify a Forest?

Woodland owners certify their woodlands for several reasons. To sell carbon, your woodlands must be certified. Some markets for wood products require that the wood come from trees grown in certified forests. In some states, woodland owners pay less property tax if their woodlands are certified. Certification provides woodland owners with a higher level of technical assistance than typical woodlands are afforded.

How Is a Forest Certified?

Governmental bodies do not have a certification system. Instead, certification systems have been developed by various forestry organizations. Woodland owners can get their woodlands certified under several different systems developed by

estry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and others. Each of these organizations has its own standards for certification. Some elements of all standards are very similar, and some standards have specific and unique stipulations. Certification systems range from those that are relatively simple to understand and implement to those that involve a fairly sophisticated and detailed management plan. The systems reflect the values of the organization that developed them. Also, there is a difference in demand for certified wood that has been grown under the different standards.

Woodland owners apply to an organization (like American Tree Farm), and the woodlands is inspected or audited to determine that they are being managed under the standard. Some certification is basically free, and some certification can cost several hundreds or thousands of dollars.

There is no right or wrong certification organization or system. Most woodland owners become certified under the system that best meets their needs. For example, woodland owners who enter the carbon program must have their woodlands certified, and most choose the American Tree Farm program. Some woodland owners are close to industries that want wood certified by the FSC, and it might be advantageous for them to have their certification through FSC. So the type of certification selected is based on the needs and wishes of the woodland owner.

Future issues of the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine will contain the "Certification Corner" providing more detailed information on certification. Archived editions of "Certification Corner" will be available at www.ukforestry.org, and click on Kentucky Woodlands Magazine.



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organizations such as American Tree Farm (ATF), National Woodland Owners Association (Green Tag), Sustainable For-