

Joint NGO Statement

Alberta Forest Conservation Association, Canada – Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga, Canada – American Lands, USA – ARA, Germany – Boreal Footprint Project, USA – Both Ends, Netherlands – Bruno Manser Fund, Switzerland – Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society – Centre for International Studies, Canada – Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, Malaysia – Clearinghouse Group, Canada – Club Ornithologique du Madawaska, Canada – Defenders of Wildlife, USA – Ecological Institute International, Canada – Environment Neroth, Canada – Falls Brook Centre, Canada – Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, Canada – Fern, UK-Brussels – Finnish Nature League – Forest Ethics, USA – Forest Peoples Programme, UK – Friends of the Earth (FoE), England, Wales and Northern Ireland – FoE, France – FoE, Indonesia-WALHI – FoE, Netherlands – FoE, Norway – FoE, Slovakia – FoE, USA – Friends of the Siberian Forests, Russia – Global Witness, UK – Greenpeace, International – Greenpeace, Austria / France / Germany / Italy / Netherlands / Switzerland / New Zealand – ICUCEC, Canada – Institute for Development and Alternative Living, Malaysia – Just Forests, Ireland – National Wildlife Federation, USA – Netherlands Committee for Indigenous Peoples – Natural Resources Defence Council, USA – PERC, USA – People and Nature Network, Germany – Potlotek Fish & Wildlife Association, Canada – Rainforest Alliance, USA – Saskatchewan Forest Conservation Network, Canada – Sierra Club, Canada – Sierra Club, BC-Canada – Sierra Club USA – South East Yukon Proper Land Use Society, Canada – TIES, Canada – Urgewald, Germany – Woodwise Program, Co-op America – WWF, Canada – WWF, European Forest Team – WWF, USA – Yukon Chapter, Canada

Why the PEFC, SFI and CSA are not credible forest certification systems

Forest certification can be an important tool to improve forest management. It is neither a panacea to solve the world's forest crisis, nor can it replace regulations and legislation. However, it can and should complement these tools.

The role forest certification can play depends on the strength of the chosen certification system. Certification systems currently in operation are significantly different from each other in terms of procedural and performance requirements. The four largest are: the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Pan European Forest Certification Scheme (PEFC). The FSC is a global program, the CSA is only applicable in Canada, the SFI is mainly applicable in the US and Canada, and the PEFC provides a framework for national certification schemes in up to 14 European countries.

The CSA, PEFC and SFI are certification systems initiated and, in most cases, governed primarily by the forestry industry and forest owners. Although attempts by the forestry industry and forest owners to improve forest management are to be encouraged, we believe that the CSA, the SFI and the PEFC do not fulfil the basic requirements for credible forest certification systems and should not be preferred or promoted by consumers or corporate purchasers.

The basic requirements for a credible forest certification system

Certification is a process by which an independent third party gives written assurances that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements. To be effective, forest certification must:

- be based on objective, comprehensive, independent and measurable performance-based standards –both environmental and social;
- be based on equal and balanced participation of a broad range of stakeholders;
- be based on a labelling system that includes a credible chain of custody;
- be based on reliable and independent third party assessments and include annual field audits;
- be fully transparent to the parties involved and the public;

- take place at the forest management unit level (and not at country or regional level);
- be cost effective and voluntary;
- positively demonstrate commitment from the forest owner/manager towards improving forest management;
- be applicable globally and to all sorts of tenure systems, to avoid discrimination and distortion in the market place.

Applying these basic requirements to the four different certification systems shows clearly why the FSC is currently the only certification system that meets these requirements:

	FSC	PEFC ¹	CSA	SFI
Certification of performance standards ² with clear minimum environmental and social thresholds.	Yes	No	No	No
Allows for equitable and balanced participation and decision making.	Yes	No	No ³	No
Includes a credible chain of custody as a basis for product labelling.	Yes	No	No	No
Requires independent third party assessment and annual field audits.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is transparent to the public and the parties involved.	Yes	No	No	No
Requires forest management unit level certification.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes ⁴
Is cost effective and voluntary. ⁵	Yes	No ⁶	Yes	Yes ⁷
Requires a clear commitment from managers towards improving forest management.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Is a global system, applicable in all regions and all sorts of tenure systems	Yes	No	No	No

While the PEFC, CSA and SFI incorporate some of the above features, only FSC delivers on every important component of a credible forest management certification system. Consequently, we consider the FSC to be the only available framework that meets the basic requirements outlined above. The FSC is therefore the only credible forest certification system that we can recommend to consumers or promote among forest managers, policy makers and the public.

¹ Although the PEFC has different standards and procedures in different European countries, the table is based on the general PEFC requirements. Some national PEFC systems (e.g. Sweden) are performance based.

² Performance standards should specifically address a comprehensive range of key issues, including, at a minimum: old-growth or high conservation value forests; protection of biological diversity; use of chemicals and GMOs; recognition of indigenous peoples' rights; soil and water quality; and consistency with laws and international agreements

(e.g., ILO standards on labour rights, Convention on Biological Diversity).

³ Public input is required via public advisory groups, but the final decision about performance objectives is made by the applicant.

⁴ SFI is largely systems based. The forestry organisation determines the scope of the assessment and it is unclear to what extent individual forest management unit audits are required.

⁵ All schemes are seen as cost-effective, but not all are voluntary.

⁶ As in some cases regions are certified without

requiring the consent of all the forest owners in the region, it is doubtful whether the system is truly voluntary. Forest owners are given the option not to join, but this involves opting out and communicating this decision.

⁷ Compliance with the SFI standard is mandatory for the members of the American Forest and Paper Association, the national trade association for the US forest products and paper industry. Members may choose between first-party, second-party or third-party verification. Only third-party verification equals SFI certification.



Behind the logo

An environmental and social assessment of forest certification schemes

Summary



Report produced by Fern, May 2001, based on case studies by WWF France, Taiga Consulting, Taiga Rescue Network, Robin Wood, NRDC, Fern, Finnish Nature League, Greenpeace International



Evidence of widespread destructive logging of old-growth forests around the world has caused many consumers to be concerned about the trail of devastation left behind. The need to distinguish wood products from well-managed sources has been apparent for almost a decade, and the concept of forest certification was born. Certification is a mechanism that aims to assure consumers that the products they buy come from well-managed forests. Now, with new forest certification schemes appearing in the marketplace every year, each with its own environmental and social claims, consumers seeking to buy wood from sustainable sources face a different problem: which one to choose?

The full report, 'Behind the logo', is available from Fern: www.fern.org

Our in-depth comparison of the four biggest forest certification schemes – the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Pan-European Forest Certification (PEFC), the Canadian Standards Association’s Sustainable Forest Management Standard (CSA) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) – analyses the strengths and flaws of each scheme and aims to provide companies, governments and NGOs with the facts needed for informed decision-making.

Using a set of criteria reflecting the demands of governments, industry and NGOs, we establish the essential minimum requirements for a credible certification scheme. Unlike previous comparisons, our analysis focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the schemes, rather than how they look on paper*. Our criteria cover vitally important consumer issues such as transparency, stakeholder participation and assessment procedures. The criteria include and extend the “basic requirements for a credible forest certification system” endorsed by major environmental NGOs and listed on the statement that follows this summary.

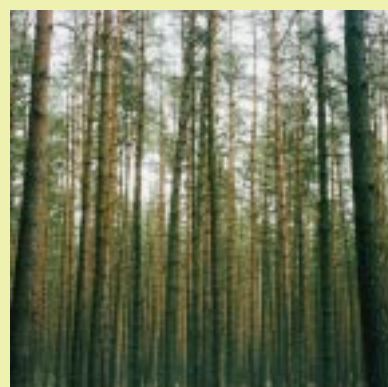
Findings

The conclusion of our analysis is clear: the Forest Stewardship Council is currently the only independent and credible certification scheme in the market. So far, this is the only scheme to bring labelled products to the marketplace and it offers a good option to consumers. This does not mean that the FSC scheme is perfect. Continued vigilance is required to ensure that its implementation lives up to its commitments. Of the remaining three schemes, the PEFC raises the most concerns, which is particularly alarming given the context of its aggressive push for market visibility and access. Both CSA and SFI score poorly against most of the criteria.

* With the exception of PEFC France that is not yet operational

Inspection-free zone

In Germany, no field visits are required to take place before the certificate is issued. Six entire states have been certified without any field assessments taking place prior to the certificate being issued.



Forest peoples’ rights ignored

Despite international agreements that customary and landrights of indigenous peoples should be respected, the PEFC, SFI and CSA all certify logging operations on disputed land, and do not recognise land or user rights of indigenous peoples.



Old-growth logging

In Finland, Finnish environmental NGOs are protesting against the logging of old-growth forests in Taivalkoski, in the north east of the country. One of the forests being logged is Susijärvi, a PEFC-certified old-growth forest supporting several threatened species. There is less than 5% of old-growth forest left in Finland, but even that continues to be logged. Timber from these old-growth forests is now being certified as coming from ‘sustainably managed’ sources. Finnish Nature League therefore believes that “PEFC seems to be nothing but a well-marketed greenwashing scheme”.

FSC

- ✓ The FSC has rigorous performance-based criteria covering all aspects of sustainability: ecological, social and economic.
- ✓ The FSC has proper standard setting, certification and accreditation procedures
- ✓ Economic, social and ecological interest groups hold equal decision-making power.
- ✓ The FSC is the only programme able to certify forests around the world, whatever the size and whatever the tenure system.

PEFC

- ✗ The PEFC has no overall performance-based standard: widely different national standards are adopted in different countries.
- ✗ The PEFC certifies logging operations in the last remaining old-growth forests in Europe.
- ✗ The PEFC has no clear rules on certification: in Germany forests have been certified without being visited, while in Finland forests have been certified without the owners’ knowledge. Once approved, forests in France will be certified through the PEFC scheme without having been seen by a certifier.
- ✗ The PEFC has unbalanced voting rights: one group of stakeholders (economic interests) has in-built dominance over all decisions.

SFI

- ✗ The SFI has a weak, flexible and non-comprehensive standard that fails to give a consistent and meaningful benchmark for responsible forest management. Operations applying for a certificate can modify the standard to better suit their own performance.
- ✗ The SFI scheme certifies large-scale clear-cutting in old growth forests and logging on indigenous peoples’ lands without their consent.
- ✗ There are inadequate monitoring and control mechanisms. No annual field visits are required.
- ✗ The SFI is controlled by industry. There is no balanced participation of social and ecological interests in standard setting or decision-making.

CSA

- ✗ The CSA scheme has no overall performance-based certification standard: the operation applying for a certificate determines the level of performance requirements for a successful certification.
- ✗ The CSA scheme certifies clear-cutting in high conservation value forests and logging on indigenous peoples’ lands without their consent.
- ✗ A public consultation process is required, but results are completely non-binding on the company’s forest practices and performance, severely limiting the utility of public participation.

Certification should be based on clear and high performance-based standards. None of these certification schemes, with the exception of the FSC, has a clear performance-based standard, let alone an environmentally and socially sound one. Therefore, claims that products labelled by these schemes come from ‘sustainably-managed’ forests are misleading. Certification is a process that should involve all stakeholders in an equal and balanced manner. None of these schemes, with the exception of the FSC, gives balanced rights to economic, social and environmental interests in its governing structure and standard setting process. To be credible, certification should be independent with no single party able to dominate the process. In PEFC, SFI and CSA vested economic interests are able to dominate the process.

Same-old forest industry

The single largest SFI certification – millions of hectares and 25% of SFI’s total certified forest area – was given to Interfor – which is known for its controversial clear-cutting of old-growth, coastal temperate rainforest in British Columbia. In December 2000 SFI endorsed Interfor’s operations as ‘sustainable’ (i.e. meeting its standards) even as major corporate buyers around the world were cancelling new business with the company due to its ecologically destructive practices. Rather than distinguish ‘sustainable forestry’ from the rest, as its name would imply, the SFI standard does the opposite, endorsing unsustainable forestry practices that have provoked local, regional and even international protests.

