



Forest Certification FAQ Sheet

Forest certification can be defined as the practice of implementing and evaluating forest management activities in accordance with agreed upon standards of sustainability. These standards are established by one of several independent forest certification organizations.

1. Is forest certification necessary to ensure that forest management is sustainable?

Forest Certification is not necessary to achieve sustainable forests. In fact, there are many forests managed using a long-term management plan that address a variety of environmental issues without participating in forest certification programs.

2. Why should a Landowner certify their forests?

Certification is one method that a landowner can use to develop a management plan that addresses a broad range of resource issues. It can also demonstrate that your management meets specific standards of the forest certification program that you have chosen. Certification may help with marketing timber as “preferred” and possibly lead to a premium price realization.

3. What are the better known certification organizations and what are their differences/similarities?

The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are the two main options for NIPF (non-industrial private forest) landowners. A third major organization is the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), which is geared toward corporate and some publicly owned land.

<http://www.treefarmssystem.org/>

<http://www.fsc.org/>

<http://www.sfiprogram.org/>

Similarities: Third party certified; independent governance and oversight committee; standards/performance measures reviewed by diverse stakeholders; credible complaints and appeals process; open participation/transparency; and established standards that address legal compliance, soils, water quality and wildlife habitat.

Differences: FSC is more restrictive on herbicide usage, clear cut size and more rigorous in documenting fair labor conditions and wages for forestry workers.

4. What are the costs of certification?

Costs will vary on a case by case basis for each individual landowner. In most situations, the cost per acre will be less for larger ownerships or for “group certifications”, where multiple landowners are pooled together. Costs can be both direct and indirect. Indirect costs include those costs associated with establishing or modifying management plans or management practices in order to meet specific certification standards. Many active forest landowners already meet many of the established standards while others may be required to alter management practices to meet them. Additional documentation of practices within the management plan is likely in many cases. Direct costs are costs paid directly to certification organizations or to auditors who verify that standards are met. Currently, there is not a direct cost to individual ATFS certification, though this may change.

SFI, which is focused on corporate ownerships, does have direct costs. FSC tends to have higher costs for individual certifications. However, some markets that ship products globally prefer FSC, because of their international recognition. Most FSC Family Forest landowners are certified under group certification so that the costs of certification and auditing are spread out.

5. How do I become certified?

- a. Contact the ATFS district chair representing your county or FSC southeastern region representative (see separate contact information) for a qualified forester.
- b. Work with your forester to develop objectives and a qualified management plan. This should be done even if you have no current plans to have your forestland “certified”.
- c. Property is inspected by a third party auditor and if standards are verified as met, then the forest is certified.

6. Will I get a premium price for my timber if it is certified?

There is no guarantee, but premium pricing for specific certified wood has been reported in some areas of the country. As the issue of sustainability becomes more important and forest certification is seen as a viable solution for addressing this issue, premium stumpage prices could become a reality.

7. How will certification help me or my forester market my timber?

While no Georgia forest product companies currently restrict their purchases to only wood from certified lands, some are beginning to show preference for purchasing certified timber. Having a robust amount of certified forestland in your region also attracts new forest product industries that require documented sustainable wood sourcing. Wood pellet mills that intend to sell to the European market are good examples of new industries that have a high potential to develop in Georgia, but frequently must purchase much of their timber supply from certified forestlands. These trends toward a higher demand for certified wood products could result in buyers competing for the timber and/or higher prices paid for the timber. Landowners should realize that this demand for certified wood products is in the early stages of developing in the South and premium prices may or may not be realized in the near future.

8. What does the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) suggest concerning forest certification?

The GFC strongly encourages wise forest stewardship for all landowners. Working with a qualified natural resource professional is a sound method for developing and using forest management plans. This is a good idea whether certification is pursued or not. While we neither recommend nor discourage forest certification, we do encourage landowners to learn more about this issue and make an informed decision that works best for their circumstances.

For more information, the following document was written and endorsed by the Southern Group of State Foresters:

<http://www.southernforests.org/publications/SGSF%20Forest%20Certification%20Report.pdf/view>