

Environmental News Network
NGO Press Release

New Study Demonstrates Benefits of Sustainable Forestry Certification

July 20, 2005 — By Rainforest Alliance

A new study demonstrates that independent, third-party certification for environmentally and socially sustainable management of timberlands has led to vital, measurable improvements in the protection of forests, wildlife and stakeholder rights worldwide as well as to the long-term economic viability of forestry operations.

The report, entitled “The Global Impact of SmartWood Certification” was compiled by SmartWood, a forestry certification program of the non-profit Rainforest Alliance and is available at www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/forestry/perspectives/documents/sw_impacts.pdf. SmartWood is accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), a non-profit organization that supports environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests through independent forest management certification.

There are many competing forestry certifications today, but many environmental groups, including the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace, regard FSC certification as the most rigorous and independent and the only reliable assurance that wood is sustainably sourced.

It is also the most rapidly growing with FSC certified acreage more than quadrupling around the world over the last five years to some 133 million acres of forest. About a third of that total, or 44 million acres, has been certified as meeting FSC standards by the Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood program with much more in the pipeline. The global market for FSC certified wood is currently worth over \$5 billion and certified wood and paper products are now carried by major retailers including Home Depot, IKEA, FedEx Kinko's and many others.

Rapid growth of FSC and Rainforest Alliance certification has brought demonstrably good results for the environment and for people, the new study finds. It analyzes the changes that SmartWood required of 129 forestry operations in 21 countries in order to comply with FSC and SmartWood standards and receive the Rainforest Alliance's certification seal. The report identified clear and quantifiable improvements over a wide range of forest management issues for all 129 forests studied.

Impacts included better protection of aquatic and riparian areas, sensitive and high conservation value areas, and threatened and endangered species as well as improvements in worker safety, training, communication and conflict resolution with stakeholders. The report also found that certification promoted economic sustainability, including improved understanding of profitability and efficiency, greater accountability, transparency and compliance with laws, and better management planning, monitoring and chain-of-custody practices.

"This report by the Rainforest Alliance represents a comprehensive approach to demonstrating the actual impact of FSC-certification on the ground," said Richard Donovan, chief of forestry and SmartWood director at the Rainforest Alliance. "There is a real demand for FSC-certified wood in the U.S. marketplace, and this report is clear evidence of the positive effects that demand is having on working forests in the US."

"These results illustrate why SmartWood and FSC certification have caught on and are growing so fast," said the report's co-author, Deanna Newsom of the Rainforest Alliance. "The rapid growth of forest certification reflects how the tangible positive environmental and social results of achieving compliance with these high standards also make good business sense, partly because consumers are increasingly demanding them and partly because they make forestry operations more efficient, sustainable and ultimately more competitive."

Sustainability and competitiveness of the U.S. forestry were at issue in the publication last month of another study by the North East State Foresters Association on the 26 million-acre Northern Forest of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York, 80 percent of which is privately owned. The NESF report reveals that the forest products industry in the northeastern US is struggling with global competition, as are the local communities that depend on it. Among the report's recommendations are to support landowners so that they can adopt sustainable forestry and good environmental stewardship and to find ways to improve the certified forest products market.

"FSC certified wood already accounts for around 10 percent of the market in Europe and counting, with considerable support from producers, retailers, governments and consumers who increasingly demand that the products they buy demonstrate these high sustainability standards," said Rainforest Alliance Executive Director Tensie Whelan. "Meeting these standards through certification is a great way for forestry companies to compete globally. As Rainforest Alliance certification continues to grow among U.S. forest operations, their global competitiveness will improve along with their environmental and social practices."

Over 15 million acres of U.S. forest are currently FSC certified. Among those U.S. forests most recently certified by the Rainforest Alliance are nearly a half-million acres of Arkansas forestlands managed by the Potlatch Corporation. Some of these forests, including 55,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods that Potlatch added to the White River and Cache River National Wildlife Refuges through a land exchange, are located in the very same region that an ivory billed woodpecker - long thought extinct - was recently sighted.

About the Rainforest Alliance

The mission of the Rainforest Alliance is to protect ecosystems and the people and wildlife that depend on them by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. Companies, cooperatives and landowners that participate in our programs meet rigorous standards that conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable livelihoods. In more than 50 countries around the world, we are helping businesses, governments and communities change their land-use practices and set standards for the long-term use of resources and the conservation of the planet's great wealth of biodiversity. The Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood program was founded in 1989 to certify responsible forestry practices and to date has certified more than 38 million acres worldwide. To learn more visit www.rainforest-alliance.org.

About the Forest Stewardship Council

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, non-profit organization founded to support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests through independent forest management certification and marketplace labeling of certified forest products. FSC has operations in over 62 countries worldwide and serves as formal accreditor of forest certification programs such as SmartWood to ensure consistent performance. More than 163 million acres (66 million hectares) of forestlands have been certified globally according to FSC standards. Information on the FSC can be found at www.fsc.org.

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