



## **Forest Guild Certification Policy**

Approved 7/7/14

The Forest Guild practices and promotes responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them. The Forest Guild supports forest certification as a tool that, when standards and auditing protocols are rigorously established, can verify whether forests are well managed.

Forest certification entails the evaluation of forest management operations against ecological, community/social, and economic indicators. Certification has an international influence on the process of defining acceptable forest management practices and verifying implementation through publicly available standards and auditing protocols. Forestland owners and managers may be motivated to participate in forest certification programs for a variety of reasons including improved access to markets for forest products, a desire to demonstrate to others that their practices meet standards of sustainability, or to gain knowledge from an independent technical review of their practices. Consumers may be motivated to seek out certified forest products as a way to ensure that through their purchasing decisions, they are rewarding responsible forest stewardship. The Forest Guild believes that forest ecosystems, forest management practices, public acceptance of forestry, and markets for certified forest products can benefit from rigorous yet practicable forest certification standards that lead to the long-term yield of a full range of forest products and services. However, certification must deliver benefits to forests and landowners, or it will not survive as a forest conservation tool in the long run.

Certification standards are based on current scientific knowledge, societal and landowner values and goals, and stakeholder inputs. Because our understanding of forests, the standards of forestry, and societal expectations of forests change over time, today's certification standards should not be considered to be a guarantee of long-term sustainability. Rather, they are a definition of well-managed forests that must evolve over time.

This policy statement identifies broad elements that should be included in certification systems worthy of public support and describes characteristics of systems that will encourage their application and acceptance by forest landowners, managers, and the public.

### **I. Attributes of Forest Certification Systems**

Certification systems must be based on credible, sound research; reflect societal values; and be informed by practitioner experience. Certification systems must:

- Reflect the limitations of knowledge about forest ecosystems, incorporate the precautionary principle where knowledge is limited, and be flexible enough to allow for credible new information and management approaches.
- Place the highest priority on maintenance and enhancement of the entire forest ecosystem by addressing characteristics such as forest structure, complexity, diversity, and function at multiple scales including the forest site, stand, and landscape. Certification standards must identify actions that promote healthy-functioning native ecosystems and minimize adverse impacts when harvesting trees and other products.

- Reflect societal values and benefits and protect people and communities affected by forest management.
- Include clear and auditable standards that require sound silviculture, including the maintenance and improvement of timber quality, stocking, and long-term productivity.
- Be developed and implemented in an open process that incorporates the interests, goals, and objectives of interested parties including landowners and managers, businesses, local communities, and conservation groups.
- Provide timely, publicly available summaries of the key findings of certification and annual audit reports.
- Include a process for independent or peer review of the certification decisions made by certification bodies.

## **II. Assurance of Forest Stewardship and Sustainable Yield of Forest Products and Services**

The credibility of forest certification systems is based on assurances that products, services and other societal benefits, as well as the ecological integrity of certified forests, can be sustained indefinitely into the future. Accordingly, effective and credible forest certification systems must address key ecological, social, and economic elements of sustainability, including:

- Maintaining, enhancing, or restoring native forest ecosystems and associated biotic communities, structures, and processes.
- Managing forest soils to protect their structure, function, and productivity.
- Harvesting at rates that are supported by sustained yield calculations commensurate with ownership size and intensity of operations. To demonstrate long-term sustainability of the full array of forest products and non-timber values and resources, harvest rates and associated management regimes must maintain and/or restore native forest types and associated age and size class diversity.
- Limiting the conversion of stands with natural forest characteristics, as defined by composition, structure, diversity, and ecological processes, to high-yield production stands<sup>1</sup>.
- Incorporating potential social and economic impacts of forest management activities, broadly defined, into forest management planning and on-the-ground actions. These include positive and negative impacts to forest workers, neighbors, local communities, and regional economies, as well potential impacts to entities with legal rights to some or all of the forest or its resources.
- Maintaining the forest over the long term, including establishing limits on conversion to non-forest uses.

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<sup>1</sup> See Forest Guild *Position Statement on High-Yield Production Forestry*, 2000.

### **III. Rigorous Yet Practicable Standards and Certification Processes**

Participation in forest certification by forestland owners and managers is voluntary. So, too, is consumer participation, as demonstrated by consumers' forest products purchasing decisions. Therefore, certification systems must balance cost and practicality with rigor and system integrity. To encourage participation and earn broad support for forest certification standards and systems, certification systems must:

- Include independent third-party verification of conformance to the certification standard(s). Standards must be clear and auditable and must expressly focus on social, economic, and ecological outcomes. The requirements of forest certification standards and systems should vary with ownership size and harvest rates as well as other risk factors. While flexibility is important, the resulting standard must still ensure that any size ownership can be verified as well-managed.
- Be practicable, efficient, and cost-effective to implement and audit and not impose unnecessary administrative burdens on land managers. However, efficiency and cost-effectiveness must be balanced with maintaining a rigorous and credible certification scheme as well as public accountability and confidence in the outcome of certification processes.
- Be periodically revised in an open process that incorporates new information and stakeholder concerns and addresses deficiencies in the current standard.
- Include a rigorous accreditation system for oversight of the certification bodies and their contract auditors.

### **IV. Certification of Public Forests**

Certification of public forests can provide an objective review of public forest management that is independent of the sometimes-controversial forest policy issues surrounding public land management. In addition, public forests with management found to be in compliance with rigorous certification standards can provide additional sources of certified forest products. When applied to public forests, certification should verify that management planning and outcomes clearly address the public interest through an open and comprehensive planning process. The decision to participate in a certification program should be based on the same public planning and decision-making process that governs other agency management decisions. While certification can provide benefits in the public sector, it is not a substitute for sound public forest policies, regulations, and procedures.