

A Guide to Forest Stewardship Council Certification for Land Trusts

Leslie J. Hudson



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This guide was created with generous support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Merck Family Fund, Virginia Wellington Cabot Foundation, Roy A. Hunt Foundation, WestWind Foundation, Claneil Foundation, Overhills Foundation, and Boston Foundation/Samuel Winship Fund.

Many individuals shared information, insights, and experience during the research and writing of this guide. Sincere thanks are due to Jane Arbuckle (Maine Coast Heritage Trust), Si Balch (New England Forestry Foundation), Sylvia Bates (SKBates Conservation Consulting), Andy Beers (The Nature Conservancy), Connie Best (The Pacific Forest Trust), Barrie Brusila (Mid-Maine Forestry), Dave Bubser (SmartWood), Tom Craven (Triangle Land Conservancy), Scott Dickerson (Coastal Mountains Land Trust), Paul Doscher (Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests), Jay Erickson (Montana Land Reliance), Mandy Farrar (Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine), John Gunn (Round River Ecology), Alan Hutchinson (Forest Society of Maine), Geoff Jones (Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests), Steve Keith (Downeast Lakes Land Trust), Rodger Krussman (Trust for Public Land), Bonnie Lounsbury (Androscoggin Land Trust), Kevin McGorty (Tall Timbers Research Station), Pete McKinley (Hancock Land Company), Janet McMahon (Medomak Valley Land Trust), John McNulty (Seven Islands Land Company), Rusty Painter (Conservation Trust for North Carolina), Tom Rumpf (The Nature Conservancy), Nancy Sferra (The Nature Conservancy), Ian Stewart (Coastal Mountains Land Trust), Kyle Stockwell (The Nature Conservancy), and Sue Telfeian (Loon Echo Land Trust). Thank you all for your time and your patience, and apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted from this list.

Special thanks go to those who gave generously of their time and expertise to review and comment on various drafts of the entire document: Liz Burroughs of the Forest Society of Maine, Charlie Niebling of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Megan Shore of Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Walter Smith of SmartWood, Peter Stein of the Lyme Timber Company, Tammara Van Ryn of the Land Trust Alliance, Henry Whittemore of the Maine Forest Service, and especially Rob Bryan of the Maine Audubon Society, who shared his time and wisdom far beyond any reasonable expectation. Finally, warm thanks go to Deanna Newsom for her guidance on behalf of the Rainforest Alliance TREES Program.

December 2005

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Design and layout: Cheryl Daigle

Project coordination: Deanna Newsom

Cover photo: Wildlife Forever/Grann, courtesy of Downeast Lakes Land Trust

Photos: Rainforest Alliance, unless otherwise indicated

Additional copies of this publication can be downloaded at www.rainforest-alliance.org/landtrustguide.

Recommended citation: Hudson, Leslie J. *A Guide to Forest Stewardship Council Certification for Land Trusts*. New York, NY: Rainforest Alliance, 2005.

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INTRODUCTION

Why This Guide Is Needed

As landowners and easement holders, land trusts often find themselves managing forestlands. These lands may be conserved for many different purposes, and may be managed for wildlife habitat or other ecological values, for education or demonstration, for recreation, for production of wood products, or for income generation. On properties where a land trust or easement holder has decided to conduct active forest management (and timber harvesting in particular), third-party certification can provide a useful tool to ensure sustainable management. In addition, because most land trusts lack forestry expertise, the involvement of professional foresters in the certification process can provide the peace of mind that comes with sound management.

Conservation easements appear to hold special potential for compatibility with certification. The term “conservation easement” was not coined until the late 1950s, although Frederick Law Olmsted first applied a similar concept in the late 1800s and the National Park Service experimented with the idea in the 1930s. By the 1970s, conservation easements had become relatively common. Many of these early easements were “working forest conservation easements” because forest management was often an integral component of the management of conserved land. (A working forest is usually defined as one that is actively managed for the production of timber or other commercial values.) Working forest conservation easements differ somewhat from conventional conservation easements: they not only prohibit certain activities, such as development, but also guide management activities that benefit and protect certain forest values. In the past two decades, working forest conservation easements have become increasingly sophisticated and complex.

Over the past few years, there have been a number of efforts to combine working forest conservation easements with forest certification. It has become clear that there are some linkages and even some synergies between the two, although they are distinctly different tools. Taken together, they can foster a higher standard of forest management than when used alone.

The intention of this guide is to provide land trusts with answers to the following questions:

- What is third-party certification of forest management and why is it of interest to land trusts?
- What certification options are available to land trusts?
- More specifically, what is Forest Stewardship Council certification and how is it achieved?
- How would a land trust decide to pursue certification of the properties it owns or to encourage certification of the land on which it holds easements?
- How would a land trust achieve and maintain certification of its own lands?
- How would a land trust use certification as a tool to aid monitoring or foster good management of the easements it holds?

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international nongovernmental organization that has developed a set of forest management standards and accredits third-party certifiers to evaluate conformance with these standards. Founded in 1993 to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests, FSC offers the only certification system applicable worldwide. Conservationists generally view FSC standards favorably; as a result this system is often chosen by land trusts. The Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood certification program,



Bill Stilliker, Jr.

created in 1989, was a precursor to FSC. Today, SmartWood is an FSC-accredited certifier that operates globally. Observing that the number of land trusts using forest certification as a tool was very small, but believing that certification can provide many benefits to land trusts, the Rainforest Alliance funded the research and publication of this guide.

Certification is quality assurance that you have met rigorous standards and are a good land manager; it's like the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.

- Connie Best, The Pacific Forest Trust



Vermont Family Forests



An Overview of Third-Party Certification of Forest Management

Certification is a process whereby forest management practices are reviewed through field observation and office-based documentation to evaluate the management system's conformance with established standards defining a well-managed forest. Wood products from certified forests can be labeled so that consumers know they have come from well-managed sources. "First-party" certification means that the review is conducted internally by the entity seeking certification. "Second-party" means that the reviewers are external but not completely separate from the entity being certified. "Third-party" means that the reviewers are fully independent of the entity seeking certification.

There are two main reasons to pursue forest certification: to verify that forest management is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable, and to achieve market competitiveness and viability. The market advantage can take two forms: certification can secure access to markets that require certified products, or it can assure consumers (who may then be willing to pay a premium price) that certain standards were met in managing the forest. A lengthier discussion of reasons for land trusts to pursue certification follows in Chapter 3, starting on page 11.

The number of independent certification programs is growing, but generally the differences between them are decreasing. This guide focuses on the Forest Stewardship Council and describes two alternatives, the American Tree Farm System and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). While often mentioned in the context of certification, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is not a forest certification body per se but rather an organization that sets standards in many areas. Since SFI certifications are conducted by independent audit firms using ISO protocol, ISO has become associated with forest certification.

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FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CERTIFICATION

Founded in Toronto, headquartered in Germany, and with offices in the U.S. and worldwide, the Forest Stewardship Council is an international nongovernmental organization dedicated to encouraging the responsible management of forests of all sizes. Its 10 principles and 57 criteria establish standards for sustainable forest management that are universally applicable, and specific indicators within the principles and criteria are used to assess conformance with these standards. The indicators themselves are developed by regional committees to assure local relevancy. A strong emphasis on ecological health and social benefits in addition to the traditional aspects of forest management distinguishes FSC from other programs. FSC accredits independent entities (e.g., the Rainforest Alliance’s SmartWood program, Scientific Certification Systems, and SGS) to conduct certification assessments. Certification is valid for five years as long as annual audits confirm continued conformance to the standards and principles.

FSC has adapted its programs to a variety of needs. For example, while many large corporate holdings are FSC-certified, the organization has also established initiatives aimed at smaller ownerships. These include *group* certification, in which a property is assessed for certification as part of a group, and the *family forests* program, which streamlines the certification process for smaller ownerships or ownerships with low-intensity management.

FSC certification does not apply solely to forests that are being actively managed for harvesting. In Uganda, for example, FSC certification of forests designated for carbon sequestration¹ verifies that the carbon credits are associated with a well-managed forest. FSC certification can also ensure sound management of forests for watershed protection or ecotourism benefits.

¹ Forests are designated for carbon sequestration with the goal of creating a stable, long-term store of carbon in the form of naturally regenerating forests. The forest owner receives financial compensation for offsetting power plant emissions.

What FSC Certification Options Are Available for Land Trusts?

FSC has two basic programs: *forest management* and *chain of custody*, both of which earn the certificate holder the right to use the trademark FSC logo. *Forest management* certification, as might be expected, evaluates management of the forest against the regionally applicable FSC standards. *Chain-of-custody* certification tracks raw materials from certified forests all the way through processing, manufacturing, and distribution up to the point of consumer sale to ensure that wood sold with the FSC logo can be traced back to a certified source.

Forest Management Certification

Forest management certification includes a thorough assessment of legal issues, indigenous rights, labor rights, multiple benefits from the forest, and environmental

impacts associated with management. There are several steps, including a thorough assessment of a landowner's management practices by an FSC-accredited multidisciplinary team, consultations by this team with interested parties ("stakeholders"), and usually peer review of the written assessment report. It is difficult to estimate the price of a standard *forest management* assessment, because circumstances vary widely, but smaller properties tend to cost proportionally more per acre than larger ones.

Two special adaptations of *forest management* certification are available to make it more affordable to small landowners and those who, like many land trusts, manage a large number of smaller properties. In every case, the principles and criteria used to evaluate management practices are the same, but the process varies somewhat. These options are described below.

Group Certification

Under this program, several landowners can have their properties certified as part of a group. Under standard (individual) *forest management* certification, certified status is awarded directly to the landowner. *Group* certification differs in that the certified "group manager" holds no legal title to the forest resource being managed. The group manager must meet all FSC requirements by developing a consistent forest management model and philosophy, and is responsible for ensuring that FSC requirements are met on all lands that are part of the group. The group manager may or may not actually manage the individual properties, and can be an individual, a cooperative body, an owner association, a forest management or forest products company, or another legal entity. Examples include consulting foresters and associations of small woodland owners.

Assessment of the group is usually done through a sampling process. Not all properties are visited during the initial assessment. Once certification is achieved, annual third-party audits provide an opportunity for site visits to additional holdings in the group.

Group certification is likely to be the most cost-effective way for a land trust to pursue certification, and the process can be quite simple. For example, a land trust could hire a consulting forester who holds a group certificate, or it could join an association that is already a certified group. A land trust with one or more foresters on staff could become a certified group manager. Not only would its own lands be certified, but it could also provide a service to other land trusts by contracting with them to manage their forests. The income from this management would benefit the certified group manager. Alternatively, a land trust could invest in the group certificate itself and serve as group manager while hiring one or more non-certified consulting foresters to carry out management in keeping with the certification standards.

As with *forest management* certification, the cost of a group assessment is based on the number and size of the properties and the complexity of the process (e.g., the proximity of properties to one another and the homogeneity of management conditions). The cost can range from \$5,000 for a small group to \$50,000 or more for larger groups with larger properties. For each landowner, the cost of the initial assessment can vary widely, but generally amounts to a portion of the group fee. Typically, the larger the group membership, the lower the cost per member, but this cost also depends on the size of the member's holdings.

Besides being the most cost-effective approach, *group* certification can be particularly beneficial to a land trust without a trained forester on staff. The FSC-certified manager ensures that management is done professionally and to a high standard.

Family Forests (also known as SLIMF, or Small and Low-Intensity Managed Forests)

The *family forests* program may also be of interest to land trusts. It is a modified version of the original *forest management* program and can be applied to properties smaller than 2,470 acres in size, to groups where each individual holding is less than 2,470 acres, or to properties managed below a specified low threshold of harvest intensity. The streamlined process includes sampling levels that better reflect the scale of the operation, greater emphasis on local (rather than statewide or regional) consultations with stakeholders, and fewer peer reviewers. Certification costs for *family forests* can also be reduced through use of a smaller audit team and fewer on-site audits.

Generally, the *family forests* program is applied to members of a group, with each group member required to meet the size or harvest intensity requirements. It is also possible for a small property or one managed below a certain harvest intensity to seek *family forest* certification on its own, but this is unlikely to be cost-effective for a land trust. In this latter case, the minimum cost of certification would be \$5,000–\$6,000.

Chain-of-Custody Certification

Chain-of-custody certification provides a means to assure consumers that the forest products they purchase, much like organic food, are grown and processed in a sustainable manner. It verifies the flow of FSC-certified forest products through the supply chain, from the forest to the point of sale, and is available to forest managers, sawmills, secondary manufacturers, brokers and distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and any other points in the wood chain. *Chain-of-custody* certification can help meet the demand for certified products and increase public awareness of certification.

For most forest management operations, including land trusts, conformance with *chain-of-custody* requirements is examined during the initial assessment and included in the price. As the chain of custody always starts in a forest, each *forest management* certificate holder is required to show that it can control and accurately identify products when they leave the property. A joint certificate covering both *forest management* and *chain of custody* is then awarded. For land trusts and most other forest owners, responsibility for the chain of custody typically ends when the wood leaves the forest landing or is delivered to the mill.

The FSC Certification Process

When a land trust decides to seek certification, the first step is to contact one of FSC's three accredited certifiers in the U.S. Contact information for SmartWood, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), and SGS can be found on page 20. Completion of a questionnaire and discussions with the certifier can help to determine the steps involved (they vary among certifiers, although all three follow the same general approach) as well as the cost. The process is generally as follows:

1. Following consultation with the applicant, the certifier assembles an assessment team (usually consisting of a forester and an ecologist, and sometimes a socioeconomist).
2. Prior to the assessment, the land trust will need to prepare information on its property, ensure that all necessary systems are in place, and provide documentation to the certification team. In some cases (usually for larger properties), a preassessment or "scoping" can be scheduled to determine the landowner's readiness.
3. A mutually acceptable time frame and dates (usually 3–5 days) are established for the assessment itself, an intensive but rewarding time during which the assessment team, the landowner(s), and the forester(s) spend long hours in the field and in the office evaluating on-the-ground procedures as well as office documentation. The assessment team also interviews staff and stakeholders.
4. Following the assessment, the team prepares a written report for submission and revision first by the certifying body, then for review and comment by the landowner, and finally for review by one or two external experts not previously involved in the process.
5. The final report is submitted in full to the landowner, and, if certification is awarded, excerpts (excluding proprietary information) are released to the public domain. Usually, "corrective action requests" are attached to the certification; these are specific actions the landowner must fulfill within a certain period of time, usually prior to the first annual audit or, occasionally, before certification is granted.

The certification process for the *family forests* program is similar to that described above, but scaled to the smaller size of the forests involved.

The process is slightly different for *group* certification, which is often the most attractive option for land trusts. Here, the assessment team audits the conformance of the group manager's management approach, philosophy, and oversight system with FSC requirements, and conducts field visits to a sampling of the forests in the group. To become part of a certified group, the land trust should first contact SmartWood to learn whether or not there are existing groups in the area or if the potential exists for a new group to be formed.

Certification is awarded for a period of five years, subject to annual audits to ensure ongoing conformance with the principles and criteria. It is important to note that certification is voluntary, and one can cease to participate at any time. This is particularly significant when certification is used in relation to a conservation easement, which is usually in perpetuity (discussed further on pages 17–18).

Other Certification Programs of Interest to Land Trusts

American Tree Farm System (Tree Farm or ATFS)

Begun in 1941 to recognize good management of family forests, and therefore the oldest certification system, Tree Farm certification today is sponsored by the American Forest Foundation (AFF). Individual landowners are certified through a second-party audit, with recertification occurring every five years and no annual audits. Tree Farm also offers third-party certification to groups. Individual forest owners join an umbrella organization, which is certified as conforming to ATFS standards, and member landowners agree to manage their forests to AFF's nine "Standards of Sustainability" with their associated performance measures and indicators. A single certificate held by the group is valid for five years, and there are annual group reporting requirements. While Tree Farm's standards alone are not as rigorous as many land trusts might desire, it is a more affordable system and could provide a foundation to build on. Adaptations might include establishing clear goals for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and requiring that all standards be met (under the current program, some are left to the landowner's discretion).

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative was adopted in 1994 by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), the forest industry's main trade association. In SFI terminology, "participation" is required of all AF&PA members, and means that a landowner adheres to and implements SFI's six principles of sustainable forestry, as verified through first- or second-party review. SFI "certification" is achieved through adherence to the six principles as well as a full third-party review. While it is available to all landowners, SFI is designed primarily for properties of more than 10,000 acres and is generally not applicable to small land trusts.

Other Alternatives

Only those certification programs that are currently most relevant to land trusts are discussed here. In terms of public perception, certification may be more or less valued in some parts of the country. For example, a state may have its own voluntary standards for sound forest stewardship. Adherence to these standards may or may not be more valuable in terms of on-the-ground management rigor or potential access to certified markets, but may reap great benefits in terms of public perception.

North Carolina has a Stewardship Forest Program that upholds similar principles to FSC, is easy to navigate, and provides landowners with a sense that their management is valued. While it does not offer third-party review, the program is free and therefore more accessible to many landowners, including our land trust.

- Tom Craven, Triangle Land Conservancy

Choosing a Certification Program

Clearly, a land trust should select the certification program that best matches its mission, its forest management objectives, and the expectations of its members and supporters. It is also important to bear in mind that certification is not overly prescriptive:

there is flexibility in how a landowner chooses to achieve the specified standards. Interviewing prospective certifiers as well as other landowners and foresters who have been certified under a specific program will help with the selection process.

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FSC CERTIFICATION OF PROPERTY OWNED BY THE LAND TRUST

Certification can be a complementary tool for land trusts.

- Barrie Brusila, Mid-Maine Forestry

Why Should a Land Trust Consider Seeking Certification?

A land trust can decide to seek certification of the forestlands it owns, and can consider encouraging or even requiring certification of properties on which it holds easements. The following list of reasons a land trust might consider FSC certification applies to land trusts as landowners as well as to the owners of easement-protected lands. (For a discussion of certification as it relates to the land trust as easement holder, see Chapter 4, starting on page 15).

You can take a philosophical stance and show the public that you are taking steps to manage your forestland sustainably, enhanced by third-party monitoring. Besides, offering sustainably managed forest products helps to meet consumer demand, opens up new markets for the land trust's products, and demonstrates the land trust's commitment to sustainable management.

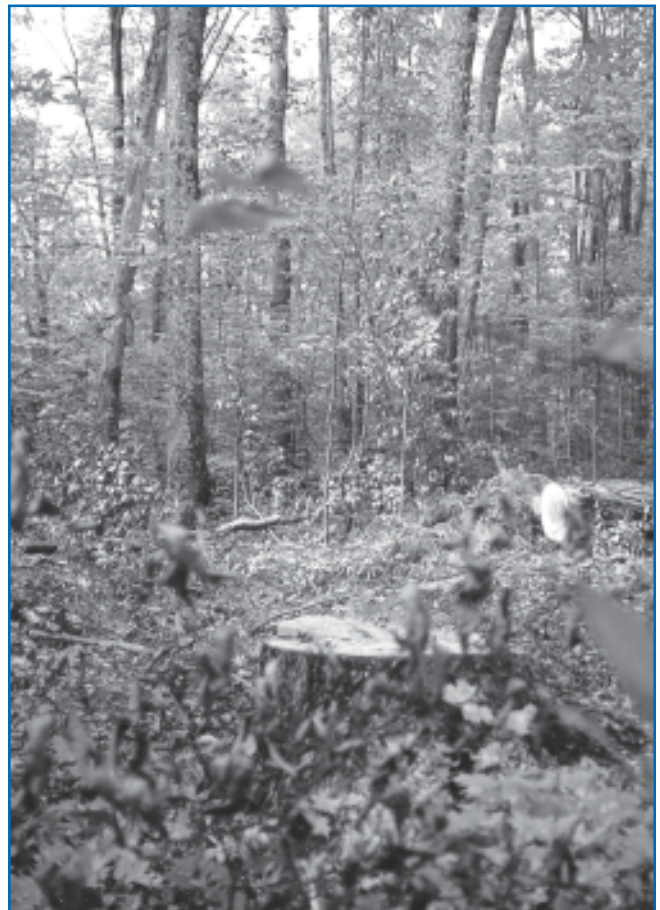
- Steve Keith, Downeast Lakes Land Trust

Land Management

- Certification can result in improved land management because it requires adherence to a broad and detailed list of high standards over the long term.
- Certification can be a particularly valuable tool when the land trust lacks skilled forestry staff. With an FSC-certified manager, the land trust gets its forestland managed by a professional forester and is assured that management is done to a high standard.
- Even an existing high standard of management can be validated and improved through certification's rigorous external review, as well as through incorporation into management practices of a "second opinion" from highly qualified professionals. Some landowners find the "corrective action requests" and "observations" that accompany certification to be its most valuable components, providing specific feedback to ensure ongoing improvement of a management system.
- Certification can provide greater breadth to land management by ensuring that non-timber forest products, biodiversity and other environmental values, and social benefits, are taken into consideration along with generating income from management of the timber resource.
- Through FSC's Principle 9, "Maintenance of High Conservation Value Forests," explicit requirements help to protect special conservation values within working forests. "High conservation value forests" can include environmental and sociocultural features that are of critical importance or outstanding significance, e.g., endangered species, a community water source, or an archaeological site. The certification assessment ensures careful evaluation of the property to identify any such sites and the appropriate expertise to help the land trust achieve its goals for protecting and enhancing these values within the larger forested area.

Certification makes you understand land management better; it forces you to think about what you are doing and look after all the systems you should be taking into account anyway.

- Si Balch,
New England
Forestry Foundation



Vermont Family Forests

*It's always valuable to have a fresh, external perspective applied to what you do—
to seek the opinion of someone with different "eyes."*

- Tom Rumpf, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Chapter

Public Perception and Education

• Certification can help a land trust achieve its mission. For fee ownerships, certification can provide third-party confirmation that the mission has been achieved. For easements, certification offers a way for the landowner, encouraged by the land trust as easement holder, to make an additional commitment to conservation beyond the easement—to sustainable management of the land.

• Good forest management and income generation often go hand-in-hand. Certification makes it clear that, while the land trust may indeed be generating income from its forestlands, sustainable forest management—with provisions for biodiversity and other environmental concerns—is the land trust’s foremost management focus.

• As nonprofit organizations in need of public and private financial support and goodwill, land trusts can benefit from outside verification of the quality of their management practices. Becoming third-party certified is one way that a land trust can demonstrate exemplary land management, with or without harvesting trees. Donors and supporters appreciate the assurance from third-party audits that forest management activities meet strict international guidelines for sustainability.

• At the same time, by becoming certified the land trust shows its support for the concept of certification. Certification of land under commercial production also supports the local certified market (if one exists). Where certified markets do not currently exist, land trust certification may help to build such a market.

• Some land trusts begin with the intention of retaining land as “forever wild.” For various reasons, timber management may become desirable but can cause apprehension among trust members or the public. Certification can help some land trust boards, members, and communities embrace forestry as positive because they are assured that it will be done in a sustainable, biodiversity-friendly manner with independent (third-party) review.



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• Conversely, certification can attract additional donors of land and easements who favor active forest management, and can broaden the organization’s potential membership base and sources of financial support.

Economics

• Certification can open up new markets for timber products, or preference may be given to certified wood. More and more large corporate buyers are requiring certified products.

• In some cases, landowners receive higher prices for forest products grown on certified land, especially for species that are in high demand.

• Some funders (e.g., individuals, foundations) are motivated to provide financial support to land trusts with certified forestlands or to pay for the costs of the certification process.

None of these financial benefits are guaranteed by certification. A land trust considering certification could contact a certified resource manager or landowner to ascertain whether or not new markets or premium prices can be expected.

How Might a Land Trust Decide Whether to Pursue Certification?

A land trust's board and staff should conduct a thorough internal discussion before making the decision to pursue certification.

Consideration of the potential benefits in terms of land management, public perception and education, and economics (listed on pages 12–13) makes a good starting point. Additional topics to consider include the following:

- A land trust that is not already harvesting timber may want to examine which of its properties might be suitable for forest management conducted under certification standards. (If certification is pursued, not all properties must be included.) For those that are, certification may provide guidance in incorporating ecological and social (cultural, recreational, etc.) values into management.

- If the land trust's properties are currently maintained as "forever wild," the perceived positive benefits of certification may be inadequate to assuage a potentially negative view of timber harvesting held by members, the board of directors, or the community. An educational or awareness-building campaign might change this perception.

- The land trust should consider whether or not certification will evaluate all aspects of management of concern to the organization. (Certification is a process of evaluation, not a management system that delivers results.) For example, if the land trust has specific objectives regarding management for biodiversity, such as conservation of a particular species, certification may not focus on that species unless it is included in the forest management plan or listed as threatened or endangered. In that case, the land trust will need to conduct additional verification to ensure that conservation goals for that species and its habitat are being met. Examples might include the establishment of no-harvest ecological reserves for late-successional species, or harvesting to create early-successional habitat in regions where those species are in decline.

- It is important to consider all of the costs of certification, including fees for the initial assessment (discussed earlier) and annual audits (usually 30–40 percent of the assessment fee). There can also be considerable staff time involved in drafting a forest management plan (if none exists), preparing for and participating in the assessment, implementing new field procedures and technologies, and completing additional paperwork. A potential price premium for forest products may help contribute toward these expenses, but this benefit is by no means guaranteed because certified markets have not developed everywhere. (A land trust should consider being flexible and amenable to selling to non-certified markets when necessary.) For specific information on costs, a land trust should contact the certification body directly. SmartWood, for example, will generate a firm price quote for the assessment upon submission of a short questionnaire. Discussions with personnel from SmartWood or other certification bodies can help flesh out potential other costs.

If a land trust seeks *forest management* certification but does not choose the *group* or *family forests* model, the cost of an initial assessment can be high. This is the reason most often cited when a land trust decides not to pursue certification. Prices can also vary a great deal among certifiers. FSC's *family forests* program offers a more affordable, but still not inexpensive, option for land trusts. *Group* certification can be considerably less expensive, with certification usually rolled into the cost of management, fulfilling two land trust needs at once: its forests are managed professionally and certification is achieved.

Information on whom to contact to discuss certification, including aspects such as the process, the cost, and potential new options applicable to land trusts, can be found on page 20.

4



CERTIFICATION AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

How Can Certification Benefit and Complement Conservation Easements?

Forest certification can be compatible with conservation easements, particularly working forest conservation easements, and there are useful synergies. As with properties under land trust ownership, there can be many benefits to certification of land on which a land trust holds an easement. All of the reasons a land trust would decide to seek certification for its own holdings (described on pages 12–13) are reasons why an owner of easement property might also pursue certification. Certification allows a landowner to make an additional commitment to conservation beyond the easement itself: to sustainable management of the land. In addition, landowners interested in certification might reduce their costs by participating in a land-trust-sponsored group certification process.

*Landowners can double the potential benefits
with both a conservation easement and certification
as complementary stewardship options.
Land trusts should tell landowners about this opportunity.*

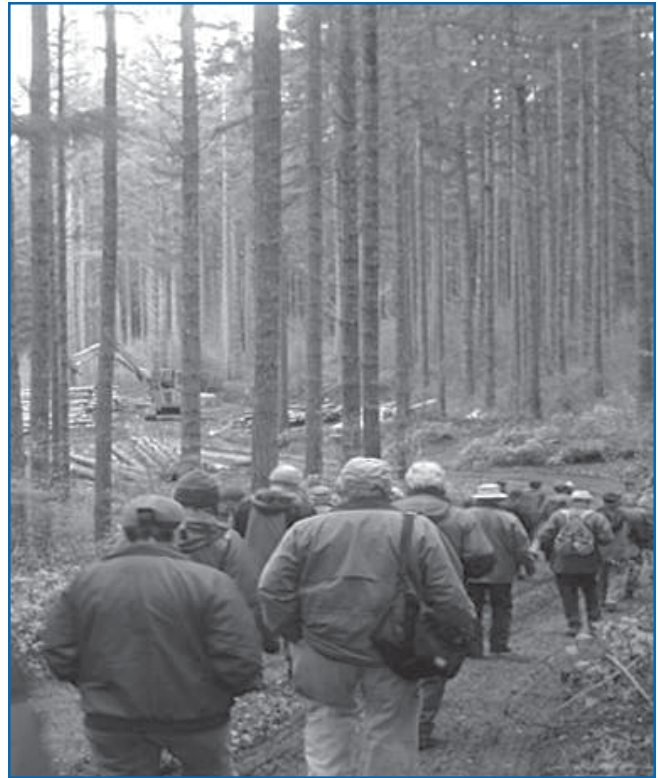
- Connie Best, The Pacific Forest Trust

Land trusts can benefit from certification of the lands on which they hold easements in the following ways:

- Pre-existing certification can make negotiating and drafting a working forest conservation easement much easier, because the landowner is already familiar with and implementing many of the principles to be included in an easement. (Conversely, a solid working forest conservation easement combined with good management and monitoring systems can facilitate the certification process.)
- If either the landowner or the land trust believes that forest management is desirable for a property protected by an easement, certification can help allay concerns about the quality of management.
- Given the challenges inherent in writing and interpreting forest management easements, certification can be used as an alternative for certain elements of easement monitoring.
- Reduced monitoring costs can result from arranging for the initial certification assessment or the annual audits to address certain aspects of monitoring.

However, if a comprehensive working forest conservation easement and a solid stewardship program are in place, certification of an easement property could represent an additional and nonessential expense for the landowner. Land trusts need to consider landowners' wishes and limitations in this regard.

Certification can not replace the process of baseline documentation, which gathers data far beyond that pertinent to forest management alone. For donated easements that retain certain rights, baseline documentation is required by the Internal Revenue Service and provides a foundation for legal follow-up should enforcement issues arise.



The Relationship of Certification to Easement Monitoring

Easement holders know that monitoring is an important responsibility, and in fact their credibility can depend on how well they accomplish this task. While the Internal Revenue Service does not have a specific requirement for the frequency of monitoring, the Land Trust Alliance's *Land Trust Standards and Practices* requires that it be done at least annually. Certification can not fully substitute for monitoring or enforcement of conservation easement terms, and both landowners and easement holders must be careful not to jeopardize their IRS status (when applicable) in this regard. However, certification can play a role in easement monitoring. For example, the existence of certification can mean that good management and documentation systems are already in place, which can reduce the amount of time and money spent on monitoring. Certification can also help to ensure that a land trust relies on professional forestry expertise when monitoring the technical aspects of working forest conservation easements. And some land trusts are experimenting with the use of certification as an optional monitoring tool for certain aspects of working forest conservation

easements, an approach that can result in cost savings and efficiency. This application works best when certification assessments and audits are conducted annually. *Group* certification assessments and audits, in which not every property is sampled annually, may pose more of a challenge to incorporate into monitoring because of their reduced frequency.

Conservation easements are precise legal documents requiring monitoring to address specific terms. The criteria and indicators for certification are also quite specific, and certification teams must review each of these individually as well. Therefore, despite a great deal of overlap between certification and monitoring, it is important to ensure that no details are overlooked when the two processes are combined. It is generally best to ensure that certification assessors address issues related to forest management on the property, and easement monitors cover the non-forestry-related easement terms regarding residential areas, subdivision, and so forth.

Finally, easements are usually established in perpetuity, whereas certification programs are relatively new, evolving, and voluntary (a landowner can discontinue participation at any time). When evaluating the compatibility of certification with easement monitoring, land trusts should recognize that certification standards undergo periodic revisions.



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Incorporating Certification into Conservation Easements

A working forest conservation easement usually requires the landowner to prepare a forest management plan, and includes a provision for the easement holder to review (and, sometimes, to approve) this plan. Certification appears to have the most potential for use in conservation easements when it is offered as an optional monitoring tool for review or approval of the forest management plan. To date, this has been the most popular approach. For example, some easements have been written to allow the presence of certification to stand in for an easement holder's need to review or approve the plan or to monitor aspects of forest management addressed by the plan. In other words, if a landowner is certified, certain terms of the easement, such as forest management plan review, are considered met and do not need to be carried out by the easement holder.

Several variations on the use of certification as an optional monitoring tool have recently been provided as alternatives (not as requirements) in certain working forest conservation easements, although there are no known applications to date. For example:

- The certification body is required to examine the easement document while conducting the certification.
- If the certification body has reviewed the forest management plan and found it to be in conformance with the pertinent provisions of the easement, then the easement holder accepts this approval in lieu of its own monitoring activities for those terms of the easement. The easement holder retains the right to review the relevant certification documents.
- Certification as a stand-in for monitoring is expanded to a greater role: the easement holder can elect to delegate not only management plan review to the certification entity, but also certain monitoring responsibilities related to forest management practices. In this case, however, the holder maintains the right to approve the forest management plan. There would of course be an increased cost to the certification, but it could still be more efficient

and more professional than if done by the land trust.

In each case, the easement holder retains the right to approve the certification body; the application of certification as a monitoring alternative is an option, not a requirement; and the easement holder never relinquishes its responsibility for enforcing the easement.



Guidelines for Incorporating Certification into Conservation Easements

The following suggestions should provide guidance for incorporating certification into a conservation easement:

- Due to the expense of certification, it is best provided as an option, rather than as a requirement, in an easement.
- If certification is incorporated as an optional alternative to some aspect(s) of monitoring, ensure that the holder will choose and approve the certifying body and not cede monitoring responsibility other than where it is specifically delegated, e.g., for assessment of sustainable harvest levels or of wildlife habitat.
- Draft easement language referencing certification carefully. Certification programs and standards are evolving somewhat and will undoubtedly continue to do so. Incorporating current specific certification terminology into easements bears some risk; it is better to draft terms related to sound forest management principles that will hold up regardless of terminology and thus maintain compatibility with certification standards. Easement standards should be flexible enough to allow revised interpretations based on emerging science.
- At the same time, making the easement language as compatible as possible with the principles of certification—as applicable to the particular property, the drafting style of the easement, and the recognition that the easement is granted in perpetuity—can greatly facilitate compatibility with certification, should it be used now or in the future as a monitoring or management tool.

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CONCLUSION

As observed in the introduction to this guide, the nascent relationship between land trusts and forest certification holds promise but is largely untested. It is clear, however, that both approaches to conservation share the common goal of healthy forests, and that land trusts can use third-party certification as a tool to achieve a higher standard of forest management as well as to generate various other benefits. In compiling what is known to date about these possible synergies, this guide strives to serve as an educational tool for land trusts considering certification of their forestland holdings or fostering certification of the lands on which they hold easements.

Over the next few years, the use of certification by land trusts will undoubtedly increase. The lessons learned from these experiences will help the land trust and certification communities determine where mutually beneficial scenarios exist, and will inform the next generation of cooperative projects between land trusts and certifiers.

RESOURCES

Publications

Land Trust Alliance. *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. Washington, DC: Land Trust Alliance, 2004.

Lind, Brenda. *Working Forest Conservation Easements*. Washington, DC: Land Trust Alliance, 2001.

The Maine Forest Certification Initiative. *The Final Report of the Maine Forest Certification Advisory Committee*. January 28, 2005.

Rickenbach, M., R. Fletcher, and E. Hansen. *An Introduction to Forest Certification*. Oregon State University Extension Service. July 2000.

Smith, Walter, Amy Cimarolli, and Marco Lowenstein. *FSC Forest Management Group Certification Guidebook*. Rainforest Alliance. February 21, 2005. (For a copy, contact SmartWood.)

Certification Systems

American Tree Farm System (ATFS)

1111 19th Street, NW, Suite 780
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202-463-2462
www.treefarmssystem.org

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

1155 30th Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20007
Tel: 202-342-0413
www.fsc.org
www.fscus.org

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)

American Forest and Paper Association
1111 19th Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202-463-2700
www.aboutsfi.org

Accredited FSC Certifiers in the U.S.

Scientific Certification Systems (SCS)

2000 Powell Street, Suite 1350
Emeryville, CA 94608
Tel: 510-452-8007
Fax: 510-452-8001
www.scs1.com

SGS North America

201 Route 17 North
Rutherford, NJ 07070
Tel: 201-508-3000
Fax: 201-508-3193
www.qualifor.sgs.com

SmartWood USA Regional Office

101 East Fifth Street, Suite 208
Northfield, MN 55057
Tel: 507-663-1115
Fax: 507-663-7771
www.smartwood.org

Other Resources

Forest Certification Resource Center

www.certifiedwood.org

Forest Stewards Guild

P.O. Box 519
Santa Fe, NM 87504
Tel: 505-983-8992
www.foreststewardsguild.org

Rainforest Alliance

665 Broadway, Suite 500
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212-677-1900
www.rainforest-alliance.org

This guide was commissioned by the Rainforest Alliance and every effort was made to ensure its accuracy and consistency with current FSC policy. However, in the event that an inconsistency exists between this guide and FSC policy, the latter should take precedence.

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 and 1,100 companies worldwide. To learn more, visit www.rainforest-alliance.org.



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