

View on Forest Certification

Endowment View

The U.S. Endowment believes that forest certification can yield benefits to forest landowners and consumers (whether commercial or individuals) and ensure that forests are appropriately managed. We further believe that competition within the certification sector has served to strengthen the quality of individual programs while also ensuring attention to issues related to delivery and cost. When certification was in its nascent stages there were appropriate roles for significant non-profit financial support. Grants from some of the U.S. Endowment's peers were instrumental in helping to get programs grounded and in giving them a chance to gain traction in the marketplace.

While we strongly support forest certification, today – some 15 years after certification programs first emerged – we do not believe that there is an appropriate place for the Endowment in either endorsing individual systems or in providing financial support to programs that are either mature or approaching maturity in the marketplace. We do believe that existing certification systems might be augmented by market development, education and promotion efforts to further the “locally owned/grown; locally produced and locally consumed” movement and its inherent community benefits.

Background

Third-party certification of forests as either well- or sustainably-managed emerged as a global concept in the early 1990s. Such systems were developed as a means to advance and perhaps even reward sound stewardship of forests on one hand and provide guidance and assurance to consumers (mainly at the commercial level) that their purchases were not contributing to the demise of forests, on the other. Most concern focused on tropical and sub-tropical forests primarily in developing countries, yet, most certification has occurred in northern hemisphere forests in North America and Europe.

Given the diversity of forest types, tenure systems, use and condition of forests, it is not surprising that a number of forest certification systems have emerged. Two systems – Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC) – operate at the global level. In the U.S. (*the geographic reach of the Endowment*) there are two schemes for large-scale forests (on both public and private lands) – FSC and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI®) Program. Both programs are seeking to reach smaller, family forest ownerships through group certifications. The American Tree Farm System also serves as one means of certification for family forests.

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