

Fair Competition Among Canada's Certified Forests in Green Building

Issue

Many governments across the country have adopted the US Green Building Council and Canada Green Building Council's *Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design* (LEED) rating system to evaluate the environmental impact of a building project. The certified wood credit in LEED's rating system, however, only offers certified wood credits for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood and excludes all other certifications, including Canada's two other forest certification programs: the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Because this gives FSC a monopoly on sustainable wood in any building that seeks the LEED credit for certified wood, action by the federal government can level the playing field for responsibly-managed certified forests in Canada.

Background

Forest certification provides independent assurance that forest products are legally sourced from sustainably managed forests. Canada leads the world in forest certification. Seventy-five percent (75%) of Canada's managed forest lands are third-party certified to one or more schemes, compared to only 10% of the world's forests.

Canadian forest managers certify their lands to one of three internationally recognized forest certification programs – Canadian Standards Association (CSA), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). All three certifications set high thresholds that forest companies must clear – above and beyond Canada's tough regulatory requirements. The three programs have subtle differences, but all promote principles, criteria and objectives that are viewed as the basis of sustainable forest management around the world.¹

Many forestry experts, including the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) and the Competition Bureau of Canada recognize these certification standards and their role in promoting responsible forestry. The Canadian Council of Forest Ministers issued a statement on forest certification standards in Canada, noting that "Governments in Canada accept that these standards [CSA, FSC and SFI] demonstrate and promote the sustainability of forest management practices in Canada."²

Canada's forests and green building practices

Due to rising concern about the environment, there is a growing interest in green building practices. Green building rating systems help determine a structure's level of environmental performance. The LEED rating system, developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC), was adopted by the Canada Green Building Council in 2004. LEED has made positive contributions by promoting green building design and energy efficiency. This system, however, does not recognize all credible forest certification standards equally.

As such, approximately two-thirds of forests in Canada that are third-party certified to credible, internationally recognized standards for sustainable forest management are not eligible for the certified wood credit under the LEED standard. As a result, Canadian builders, architects and designers cannot source our own responsibly-managed CSA- or SFI-certified wood for use in building projects for which they seek to earn the LEED certified wood credit. Further, in some areas of the country, qualifying FSC- certified wood is either not available, or is available in limited supply. This may necessitate transportation of FSC-certified wood from other jurisdictions in order to earn the LEED certified wood credit.

Green building and our economy

Natural resources play a key role in Canada's economy. Within our national economy, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Canadian forest products industry is approximately \$19 billion.³ The forest and paper sector provides Canadians and the world with superior forest and paper products made of wood fibre sourced from responsibly-

¹ Forest Products Association of Canada, http://certificationcanada.org/english/what_is_certification/

² Canadian Council of Forest Ministers Statement, http://www.ccfm.org/pdf/CCFM_Statement_FRandEN.pdf#page=2

³ Forest Products Association of Canada, <http://www.fpac.ca/index.php/en/page/industry-by-the-numbers>

managed forests. These sustainable practices by the industry protect the environment, conserve forests, protect jobs and strengthen local communities.

Green building programs used in new construction or renovations can improve energy efficiency, reduce waste and deliver long-term cost benefits in buildings. Within North America, there are a number of green building programs that are inclusive of credible, third-party forest certifications (including CSA, SFI and FSC).

Using taxpayer dollars in green buildings promotes sustainable development and reduces the economic and environmental costs of the building. However using green building programs that exclude more than two-thirds of responsibly managed forest in Canada limits economic growth: it creates an unfair competitive landscape for Canada's forests, and it unintentionally sends a message to building professionals across the country and the globe that Canadian forests are not sustainably managed.

By equally promoting and supporting all of Canada's certified forests, the Government of Canada will:

- Promote competition and continual improvement among green building standards
- Promote fair competition among wood products grown or manufactured in Canada's responsibly managed forests
- Advance Canada's forest industry in the global marketplace
- Protect jobs and enhance the viability of Canada's resource-based communities

It is imperative that the federal government advocate for equal credit for all three of Canada's forest certifications in all green building programs in Canada. This resolution, however, also recommends a more immediate solution – specifying the use of third-party certified wood products for all wood materials in green buildings in Canada. This solution is very attainable and will have an immediate positive impact on the forest industry by equally promoting all of Canada's certified forests.

Recommendations

That the federal government:

1. Continue to support the use of green building principles and criteria in the construction of new federal buildings, renovations, additions or such projects funded by the federal government (in whole or in part).
2. Promote fair competition in Canada's forest industry by advocating that all green building programs in Canada give equal credit to all credible, third-party forest certifications, including CSA, SFI and FSC.
3. Encourage and educate designers and material specifiers to specify "third-party certified wood products" for all wood materials, acknowledging that the credit available within the LEED rating system may not be achieved.
4. Require all construction of new federal buildings, renovations, additions or such projects using wood and funded by the federal government in whole or in part, if pursuing LEED certification, not pursue MR Credit Certified Wood, but otherwise continue to require funded projects using wood products certified by SFI, FSC or CSA, until such time as LEED recognizes these other third-party certification standards.
5. Advocate having USGBC (CanGBC) define baseline standards for "USGB equivalency" and establish those standards consistently worldwide to enable all qualified third party-certified programs to compete fairly