

A Paper Buyer’s Guide to Forest Certification Schemes

The following quick reference guide represents the highlights from the recent comparison by ÉEM inc. of forest management certification schemes in North America. This study is designed to help paper purchasers determine which certification system best suits their environmental paper procurement criteria and is based on an analysis of the written standards.

The schemes compared are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Canadian Standards Association (CSA), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certifications (PEFC).

Highlights of Conclusions & Findings from ÉEM inc.

A sustainable forest is most likely to exist under an FSC certification. FSC strengths include the protection of ecologically important forests and the banning of the conversion of natural forests into plantations. A CSA certification can be acceptable but further knowledge of the forest and management practices is required. The CSA standard does not address forest conversion into plantations, or protection of high conservation value areas and wildlife habitat, other than those protected by government. The SFI program is weaker with respect to forest management practices and the lack of independence in the certification process in the past means that it is still struggling with credibility issues.

Using fibre from certified forests is but one environmental aspect of paper procurement. The use of recycled fibre is paramount.

Comparison at-a-glance

	FSC	CSA	SFI	PEFC
Prohibits the use of genetically modified trees	Yes	No	No	No
Prevents the conversion of natural forest to plantation	Yes (with a few exceptions)	No	No	No
Requires precautionary approach to the management of High Conservation Value areas	Yes	No	No	No
Prohibits	Fibre from illegally harvested or high conservation value forests	Fibre from illegally harvested and controversial sources	Fibre from sources that are illegally harvested and some specified non-acceptable sources	Raw material from controversial sources

The complete comparison with objectives, methodology and detailed comments on the four certification schemes is available in a PDF document and can be found at www.eem.ca and www.marketsinitiative.org/resources.

Highlights of the Forest Certification Scheme Comparison

	FSC	CSA	SFI	PEFC
	Forest Stewardship Council FSC-STD-01-001 version 4	Canadian Standards Association CZ CAN/CSA-Z809	Sustainable Forestry Initiative 2005 Version	Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes

Uptake of the certification schemes

Total land area worldwide covered by certifications	75 million hectares	74 million hectares	52 million third-party certified hectares (Canada and USA)	187 million hectares (sum of all the endorsed certification schemes)
Key supporters	Many large international social and environmental NGOs, at the exclusion of other certification schemes. Growing industry and retailer support.	Sectors of the Canadian forest industry.	Major American forest industry players, as per mandatory certification for AF&PA members.	Supported by forestry industry and some government organizations setting procurement standards (UK).
Key rejecters	None	Numerous NGOs claim the standard must be improved to guarantee sustainable forest management. The Alberta government favours FSC certification over CSA.	Written without significant input from ENGOs. Rejected as lately as October 2005 by key conservation NGOs.	NGOs that reject CSA and SFI obviously reject the PEFC, which endorses these schemes.

Quality of certification process

<i>Opinion on the certification process and its transparency</i>	<i>Has a transparent certification process, where findings and corrective action requests (CARs) are made public. There is an appropriate degree of separation between the FSC organization and the organization being certified. Strict legal compliance is required.</i>	<i>This process is less transparent as findings and CARs are not made public. There is an appropriate degree of separation between the CSA and the organization being certified, and there is an additional degree of separation in the use of accredited registrars. Strict legal compliance is required.</i>	<i>This process is less transparent, as findings and CARs are not made public. There is little separation between the AF&PA, the Sustainable Forest Board and the organization being certified. The additional degree of separation in the use of registrars is critical in this set up and the accreditation of the registrar becomes important. Many certificates were issued before this became mandatory. Strict legal compliance is not required.</i>	N/A
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Chain of Custody and Product Labelling

Prohibits	Fibre from illegally harvested or high conservation value forests	Fibre from illegally harvested and controversial sources.	Fibre from sources that are illegally harvested and some specified non-acceptable sources.	Raw material from controversial sources.
Labels	FSC 100% label FSC Mixed Sources labels: A mixture of FSC Pure, Recycled and Controlled* FSC Recycled label: Made from 100% recycled paper, where at least 85% is post-consumer. *FSC Controlled Wood: Meant to allow non-FSC fibre in paper that does not come from areas of social conflict, illegal logging, genetically modified trees, high conservation value forests or large scale conversions. At the current time there is not third-party audit of these claims.	CSA 100% From a Certified Forest label Minimum 70% Content From a Certified Forest label	100% of the fibre used in this product comes from forests independently certified to the SFI Standard. At least xx% of the fibre used in this product line comes from forests independently certified to the SFI Standard. 100% Recovered fibre label <i>Opinion: Does not speak to the content from an SFI certified forest and cannot be relied on. The new COC standards and the new percent content labels are judged reliable but few companies are yet certified to use them.</i>	From sustainably managed forest. Promoting sustainable forest management. Promoting sustainable forest management and recycling.

	FSC	CSA	SFI	PEFC
Range of Application	Worldwide	Canada	United States and some areas in Canada	Worldwide
Quality of forest management				
Cut rate	The rate of harvest of forest products shall not exceed levels that can be permanently sustained.	Designed to conserve forest ecosystem productivity and productive capacity by maintaining ecosystem conditions that are capable of supporting naturally occurring species.	Attempted to ensure long-term harvest levels based on the use of the best scientific information available.	N/A
Maximum clearcut area	Standards for cutting are set in regional forest management standards.	No specific limits are set but specific criteria must be met.	Objectives and indicators exist to manage the visual impact of harvesting.	N/A
<i>Opinion on clearcutting and large scale cuts</i>	<i>The standard goes further than limiting clear-cut areas by describing how the area should be cut.</i>	<i>The standard requires no more than the provincial regulatory requirements and the inclusion of the concerns of local interested parties.</i>	<i>The standard relies on the provincial regulatory requirements. The maximums set here are similar to the typical regulatory limit.</i>	N/A
Reforestation	Ecological functions and values shall be maintained intact, enhanced, or restored.	Includes regeneration treatments.	Ensures long-term forest productivity and conservation of forest resources through prompt reforestation, soil conservation, afforestation, and other measures.	N/A
<i>Note on reforestation</i>	<i>By law, all forests harvested on Canada's public lands must be replaced.</i>			
Pesticides	Management systems shall promote the development and adoption of environmentally friendly non-chemical methods of pest management and strive to avoid the use of chemical pesticides. Includes parameters on prohibited pesticides.	Has a public participation process where pesticide use may be addressed.	Program participants shall minimize chemical use required to achieve management objectives while protecting employees, neighbors, the public, and the forest environment. Includes specific indicators.	N/A
<i>Opinion on pesticides</i>	<i>Although there is no ban on the use of chemical pesticides, FSC principle is more strongly worded than the other schemes. In other regional FSC standards internationally, chemical pesticide use is prohibited.</i>	<i>This element is essentially not addressed, thereby relying on local regulations.</i>	<i>It largely encourages the company to follow the local laws with regards to chemical pesticides management.</i>	N/A
Genetically modified trees	Prohibited.	Has a public participation process where genetic engineering may be addressed.	Not addressed.	N/A
Forest conversion from natural forest to plantation	Shall not occur, with a few minor exceptions.	Not addressed.	Not addressed.	N/A
High Conservation Value Areas	Decisions regarding high conservation value forests shall always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach. Further requirements exist in regional forest standards.	Respects protected areas identified through government processes.	Manage lands of ecologic, geologic, cultural or historic significance in a manner that recognizes their special qualities. <i>Note: Does not specify that the plans or programs should maintain old-growth forests in their natural state.</i>	N/A
Wildlife habitat	Ecological functions and values shall be maintained intact, enhanced, or restored, including... genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity. Safeguards shall exist which protect rare, threatened and endangered species and their habitats.	Conserve ecosystem diversity at the landscape level by maintaining the variety of communities and ecosystems that naturally occur in the defined forest area. Conserve species diversity by ensuring that habitats for the native species found in the defined forest areas are maintained through time.	Manage the quality and distribution of wildlife habitats and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity... Apply knowledge, gained through research, science, technology, and field experience to manage wildlife habitat and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity.	N/A
<i>Opinion on general forest management</i>	<i>The FSC standard has rigorous forest management criteria, adapted to regional forest types. Strengths include the protection of ecologically important forests and the banning of the conversion of natural forests into plantations.</i>	<i>Forest management practices can vary greatly between certified forests because it depends on the development of a forest management plan for each certified forest. This standard does not address forest conversion into plantations, or protection of high conservation value areas and wildlife habitat, other than those protected by government.</i>	<i>Lacks rigour with regards to some forest management issues. The wording of the standard allows for largesse in the interpretation. The conversion of forests and high value areas into plantations is not forcefully addressed.</i>	<i>The PEFC has endorsed the CSA and SFI certification schemes, so weaknesses described in those systems also apply to PEFC.</i>