

## Certified Sustainable Forests

It has been well-known that forests are vital to help regulate the earth's climate and atmosphere and to provide important wildlife habitat, in addition to being an important source of many natural resources including wood products, biomass fuels, food and medicines. At the same time it has been well-documented that many important forests, particularly in tropical regions, have been disappearing at an alarming rate. After the unfortunate failure of an intergovernmental process, subsequent to the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development, to agree on a global forest compact for sustainable forests, the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) was created to promote practices of sustainable forestry worldwide. The FSC sets forth principles, standards and criteria that span economic, social and environmental concerns relating to forestry practices, including plans for forest harvesting and regeneration and the conservation of unique forests. These standards also protect habitats of endangered animal species and the rights of indigenous peoples and ensure that workers are properly paid.

A set of 10 principles has led to 57 criteria and indicators of sustainable forests, which must be followed in order for a forest or landholder to be certified. FSC trains independent certifiers (such as the well-known Rainforest Alliance) which perform audits and certification to the FSC standards. In addition, there is an additional "chain-of-custody" certification so that derived wood products can be assured to have come from a certified forest and landholder.

Wood products which are sold from certified mills, manufacturers and distributors receive the FSC logo. The FSC website provides two free guides to help consumers locate FSC-certified products (including lumber, furniture, paper, tissue and fabrics): the FSC Shopping/Consumer Guide and the FSC Builders Guide. The FSC has a global network with offices in 40 countries. There is an FSC-U.S. Chapter which was established to help differentiate the applications of the basic principles, criteria and standards to the nine different forest regions of the U.S.,