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Discussion Paper on Forest Certification

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To facilitate discussion for The Forests Dialogue

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Introduction[1]

Increasing scientific information reveals that the world's forests are under stress. Key concerns include degradation of forest ecosystem structure and function, the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities, and the economic health of forest companies and landowners. Traditional governmental processes have been criticized for being slow to respond to these concerns. As a result, in 1993 an array of non-governmental organizations, with strong support from the World Wildlife Fund, created the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) forest certification program. The FSC was designed as non-state, multi-stakeholder, and market driven approach for encouraging sustainable forest management. Since the creation of this pioneering program, forest certification has gained considerable attention on the part of environmental groups, trade associations, forest companies, forestry professionals, policy makers, and academic institutions and think tanks (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom Forthcoming, 2002; Sasser In Press 2002; Meidinger 1997; Meidinger 2001; Upton and Bass 1996).

Within North American and European countries, alternative certification programs have been initiated by industry and landowner associations (Cashore, 2002; Atyi, 2002; Meridian Institute, 2001; Elliott, 2000). These certification programs were created by landowner and industry groups who had concerns about key elements of the FSC system, including its policy scope and stringency of some of its standards. Other certification programs that have been developed include the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) program, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), and the Pan European Forest Certification System (PEFC). [1]

The existing state of forest certification is characterized by a few key features:

- Despite its origins being traced back to international concerns over tropical timber destruction and degradation, most of the debate about and institutionalization of forest certification has been lead by people from developed countries, and most of the forest that has been certified is in Europe and North America.

- Different interest groups tend to support different programs – and different programs meet different needs on the part of landowners – with the result that no single certification program has emerged as the only credible or dominant program, either domestically or internationally.

- Certification systems have been developed in response to different forest types, land ownership patterns, and historical, cultural, and legal traditions.

[1] Our review has benefited from Cashore's related research with Graeme Auld and Deanna Newsom (See bibliography). We would like to thank Tim Mealy, Michael Washburn, Nigel Sizer, Scott Wallinger and Gary Dunning for helpful comments on previous versions of this paper. We also wish to thank participants in the Geneva meeting and in particular Tom Jorling and Ben Gunneberg for helpful comments. Any errors remain our complete responsibility

It is in this context that The Forests Dialogue (TFD) (http://research.yale.edu/gisf/tfd/index.html), a multi-stakeholder forum, convened a meeting on forest certification with the expressed interest of building understanding among the different programs, learning from the experiences of the various systems, and creating an atmosphere in which the goals behind forest certification (i.e., sustainable forest management) might be promoted and further developed. The Program on Forest Certification at Yale (http://research.yale.edu/gisf/ypfc/index.html), part of the Global Institute of Sustainable Forestry, seeks to support this opportunity for exploration and will use the outcomes of the gathering to shape on-going research, teaching, and outreach on certification.

The purpose of this paper is to spark discussion among participants and to encourage a frank and honest dialogue about the future of forest certification, given the existence of different interests but also common concerns. The paper seeks to spur discussion of lessons to be learned on how to set relevant standards that motivate good forestry practices, how to involve forest owners on a large scale, and how to make certification more effective as a market instrument. Such an exercise is designed to facilitate an exploration among various stakeholders as to whether there exists a desire to collectively advance forest certification as a policy instrument with which to address global forestry concerns.

The remainder of the paper proceeds in two parts. The first section briefly describes the key certification programs that are emerging globally and identifies what appear to be key differences and similarities among these approaches. Participants are encouraged to constructively critique this section so that an agreed understanding of commonalities and differences can emerge. The second raises a series of questions designed to explore whether common ground exists that might enhance the ability of forest certification to address key problems surrounding the promotion of global sustainable forest management.

Review of Key Certification Systems

In the paragraphs that follow, we introduce each of the certification systems noted above, outlining major structural and other characteristics. We also provide a brief status report for each, describing some of the most noteworthy developments within the three programs. A table offering a summary comparison of the programs follows the descriptions. This review is far from exhaustive, as it does not fully cover the proliferation of forest certification programs world-wide. For an excellent and comprehensive review of the array of certification programs, see Bass et. al, (2001: Chapter 1) and Atyi and Simula (2002).

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

In 1991, a loose alliance of representatives from environmental and conservation groups, indigenous people's organizations, the forestry profession, a few forest product companies, and others began to hold discussions on the emergence of forest certification. The outcome of these discussions was the 1993 creation of an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization known as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The goal of FSC was to integrate environmental and human rights concerns, what a segment of the industry terms "progressive"

business interests, and community goals through a global set of performance-based forest management standards.

The FSC program is organized around ten (originally nine) overarching principles. These principles were developed and adopted in 1994, when FSC still was comprised largely of environmentalists from North America and Europe. Regional or national working groups adapt these global principles and criteria to be applicable to the forests within their jurisdictions. The regional and national standards are approved through a vote by the FSC Board of Directors.

FSC is a membership organization open to individuals, groups, and companies that are recommended by at least two existing program members. Members comprise the FSC General Assembly and are elected by that body to sit on the Board of Directors. The General Assembly consists of environmental, social, and economic chambers and votes on all matters concerning changes to the FSC principles and criteria. A secretariat and small staff are in charge of day to day administration of the program.

FSC offers two types of forest certification. Individual landowners may obtain single FSC certificates, or several landowners may apply for group certification. Group certification allows smaller landowners to be certified together under one certificate (or certified forest manager) and thus cut down on costs. Mills and product manufacturers may obtain chain of custody certification, which allows the program logo to be used on wood products coming from FSC-certified forests. Through something known as the percentage-based claims policy, the logo also may be used on wood products not entirely composed of certified materials when at least 70% by volume of the wood used in manufacturing the product line, or the collection of products, is FSC certified. In the case of chips and fibre, the percentage based claim can be as low as 17.5% with respect to non-virgin fibre, and 30% of virgin chip and fibre.

As of September 2002, there are approximately 30 million hectares (about 74 million acres) of forest certified under the FSC standard. The global distribution of the FSC-certified land is as follows: Africa, approximately four percent; Asia, approximately three percent; Europe, approximately 64 percent; North America, approximately 16 percent; and South America, approximately 12 percent. There are around 2,500 chain of custody certificates in existence.

Canadian Standards Association (CSA)

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) is a not-for-profit, membership-based institution that provides product testing and environmental and other kinds of certification services for electrical, mechanical, and a variety of other products. CSA International released for review its forest certification standard, the National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (CAN/CSA-Z809), in 1996. The standard utilizes a continual improvement approach and requires public participation, practical demonstration of sustainable forest management practices, and management commitment. CSA-Z809 takes into account environmental, social, and economic factors. It contains system requirements based on the criteria and indicators of the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers. These criteria and indicators

are consistent with the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System Standard and include elements that correspond to the Montreal and Helsinki processes.

One-quarter of the technical committee charged with developing the CSA standard was comprised of forest producers, including woodlot owners, while the remainder were scientists, academics, representatives from the provincial and federal governments, as well as environmental, consumer, union, and aboriginal representatives. Consultations with environmental and other non-governmental organizations as well as a Canada-wide public review were conducted to allow input into the development of the standards. Public meetings were held in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver to seek further input. The standard was then revised and published in the fall of 1996.

In July 2001, CSA International introduced its Forest Products Marking Program. The program has adapted the CSA mark, which has appeared on millions of products and reportedly has a recognition rate of over 80 percent among Canadian consumers (CSA International, Undated). Three different kinds of labels are awarded: "100% from a Certified Forest" for cases where all of a product's wood content has been tracked and monitored from its point of origin, "70% of This Product Line is from a Certified Forest" for cases where at least 70 percent of the input used to make a product line has been tracked and monitored from its point of origin, and "70% of Content is from a Certified Forest" for cases where at least 70 percent of the content of a composite product has been tracked and monitored from its point of origin.[2]

As of June 2002, approximately 8.8 million hectares (approximately 21 million acres) have been certified to the standard (Teresa Borgiel, Personal Communication). Five different companies hold CSA-Z809 certificates. A revised version of the CSA standard is under review and is due for release in October 2002.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program grew out of efforts by members of the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) to develop forestry management standards. In 1994, the association adopted program participation, though not third-party certification, as a condition for membership. SFI is a system of principles, objectives, and corresponding performance measures focused on two overall goals: allowing for the continual growing and harvesting of trees and ensuring the long-term protection of wildlife, plants, soil, and water quality. The program is based on ISO protocols and procedures and operates under a philosophy of "a rising tide that raises all boats." One hundred and eighteen core verification indicators developed for each objective and performance measure must be satisfied for a participant to earn certification. In addition, over 100 other indicators exist as optional requirements for customized assessments. By the end of 2002, approximately 52.6 million hectares (about 130 million acres) of North American forestland will be enrolled in the SFI program, approximately 35.6 million hectares (about 88 million acres) of which will be third-party certified (Suzanne Mangino, Personal Communication).

[2] The required percentage by volume varies by product line – e.g., pulp versus solid wood.

The SFI standard was developed largely by AF&PA members. Today, the SFI is overseen by the Sustainable Forestry Board (SFB), an independent organization responsible for maintaining and enhancing the program's standards and verification procedures. The SFB has 15 members, two-thirds of which come from non-industry interests, including environmental/conservation organizations, government agencies, professionals and academic groups, and non-industrial landowners. The remaining five representatives on the SFB are AF&PA members. The SFB operates a public review process for the program through its Internet site. State Implementation Committees (SICs) involve local stakeholders, ranging from loggers to conservation groups, in adapting and implementing SFI at the state level (including making available public grievance mechanisms).

In June 2002, the AF&PA Board of Directors gave its approval for the usage of two types of SFI product labels, or certification marks, whose governance lies with AF&PA. One mark, that of "SFI Certified Participant," is available for use by primary producers who have successfully completed third-party certification and met all other applicable label use requirements, which include the implementation of a verifiable auditing system to account for the origins of their wood material. The other marks for secondary producers include that for "SFI Participating Manufacturer," "SFI Participating Publisher," and "SFI Participating Retailer." To use these on-product marks, secondary producers must have an auditing system in place to verify that at least two-thirds (by weight) of the wood or fiber they use must come from land certified under the SFI or American Tree Farm systems. At this point, four companies have completed the process for gaining approval to use the SFI certification marks, and one company has applied a mark to a product.

The SFI standard was originally written primarily to apply to the operations of industrial forest owners. In 1998, the SFI program added a licensing program with different requirements to encourage participation in SFI by smaller landowners, who may not be members of the AF&PA. SFI has enrolled – in the form of a landowner cooperative – over 800 non-industrial, private forest landowners in the licensing program (Meridian Institute, 2001). The recognition agreement that SFI has with the American Tree Farm certification system enables landowners to make use of that program's small, non-industrial private forest standards, which were revised to be consistent with the SFI standard.[3]

Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC)

[3] The American Tree Farm System is sponsored nationally by the American Forest Foundation and implemented locally by volunteer state committees that work under guidelines developed by Tree Farm's National Operating Committee. The purpose of the program is offer educational assistance to private, non-industrial landowners in order to promote the growing of renewable forest resources on private lands while protecting environmental benefits and also increasing public understanding of all benefits of productive forestry. Since 1941, the program has recognized landowners for their commitment to sustainable forest management through its certification program and awarding of Tree Farm signs to certified participants. To earn certification for their forest, landowners must implement a written management plan that addresses performance measures for reforestation, slash disposal and utilization, chemical usage, forest aesthetics, water quality, wildlife habitat, special sites protection, and soil conservation and then undergo an inspection by a volunteer member of their Tree Farm state committee. Currently, the American Tree Farm System has approximately 65,000 Tree Farms in the program totaling almost 26 million acres of non-industrial private forestland in 48 states.

The PEFC is a framework for the mutual recognition of forest certification schemes. It was initiated in 1998 through discussions among landowners and industry representatives from six European countries. Its governing body, the Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC) Council, was officially launched in 1999. The purpose of program is to provide assurance that wood products come from forests managed according to the Pan European Criteria, which are based on the resolutions of the Helsinki and Lisbon Ministerial Conferences of 1993 and 1998 on the Protection of Forests in Europe.

For a certification program to gain recognition under PEFC, first a national working group or forum must be established among interested parties (e.g., forest owners, trade unions, NGOs) to interpret the elements of that certification program in relation to the requirements of PEFC. Then the PEFC Board of Directors appoints independent or expert consultants to prepare a report that also assesses the applicant program against the PEFC criteria. Each member-governing body is allowed the chance to submit comments on the applicant program. In cases where the Board of Directors finds that a program conforms, a recommendation to approve it is made to the General Assembly and put forward to a vote by the delegates. In the event that a applicant program is found not to conform or is not successful in the voting, it can either make revisions and apply again or appeal against the decision at the next General Assembly meeting.

Currently, the PEFC Council's membership comprises 18 National Governing Bodies (16 of which are European), and who represent 19 independent forest certification schemes. The PEFC Council has already endorsed 12 of these schemes. CSA of Canada, and the SFI and Tree Farm from the U.S. also belong as members of the council, though their programs are not (yet) endorsed under the PEFC (membership in the council is a precondition to achieving endorsement). Applications for membership are pending in at least half a dozen other countries. As of September 2002, the PEFC-certified area consists of 43.8 million hectares (approximately 100 million acres) and more than 300 chain of custody certificates.

PEFC provides for both single and group forest certification. In addition, the program includes another kind of certification – that of regional certification. Under regional certification, a region represented by the authorised applicant must be certified by a third party as meeting the requirements of the national standard. Landowners within a defined geographical area that has been granted group certification status can apply to be recognized participants in the PEFC system only after committing to implement the national performance standards. The certification body, using a sampling methodology, regularly audits forest owners participating in group certification. Once the regional certification is complete and the landowner demonstrates his/her individual commitment to participating in the program (that is, they are committed to complying with national criteria), forest owners can apply to the PEFC Council or the relevant PEFC National Governing Body acting on behalf of the PEFC Council to obtain permission to use the PEFC logo .

Another component of the PEFC criteria is chain of custody verification, of which three types are allowed. Two of the methods – the minimum average percentage system and the input/output system – are based on inventory control and accounting of material flows, and the third is done via physical segregation of wood. A minimum percentage of seventy percent by volume or weight is required for wood to be certified under the average percentage system. The

kind of PEFC label that can be applied to certified products varies by the type of chain of custody applied.

Overview Comparison of Selected Forest Certification Programs				
	FSC	**PEFC**	**SFI**	**CSA**
Origin	Environmental NGOs, socially concerned retailers	Landowners (and some industry)	Industry	Industry
Type of Standards: Performance- or Systems-based	Performance	Combination	Combination	Combination
Policy Scope	Broader (includes labor and indigenous concerns)	PEFC mutual recognition provides for broad scope of SFM, including labor, wood promotional and social concerns. Specific treatment depends on National Initiative***	Narrower (focuses on continuous improvement in forestry management). Less focus on social and indigenous issues.	Narrower (focuses on continuous improvement in forestry management) Labor and indigenous issues part of stakeholder consultation process
Geographic Scope	International	Europe origin, emerging international	North America	Canada
Verification Requirements	Third party	Third party in many countriers Varies by national program	First, second, or third party	Third party
Existence of Chain of Custody Component	Yes	Yes, emerging.	No	Emerging

Participation in Rule-making	-International membership votes according to tripartite structure divided equally among environmental, social, and economic chamber -National voting loosely follows tripartite model	-Landowner associations majority of broad PEFC council. -Widespread multi-stakeholder consultation process are required of all national intitiatives	-Originally Business dominated (American Forest and Paper Association) with advice from advisory board -Currently a tripartite 9 member "sustainable forestry board" made up one third from industry, one third from professional/academic, one third from conservation interests that governs standard development. -Other policies (labeling, tracking, etc) remain with American Forest and Paper Association.	-Business dominates policy making -Widespread advisory multi-stakeholder processes used in standard development and in implementation at firm-level
Application of Substantive Requirements	Less-discretionary (less flexibility given to firms and landowners than other programs)	-Principle of subsidiary -National initiatives are given responsibility in developing SFM standards in accordance with national economic, social, and environmental conditions	Discretionary – allows for flexibility and firm level choices.	Discretionary – Firms granted discretion in application of principles
Existence of Label or Logo Component	Label and Logo	Label and Logo	Logo and Label	Logo

Sources: Adapted from Moffat (1998: 152), Cashore (2002), Rickenbach, Fletcher, and Hansen (Rickenbach, Fletcher, and Hansen 2000) and
Cashore, Auld and Newsom (2002).
Terms: Performance-based refers to programs that focus primarily on the creation of mandatory on the ground rules governing forest management, while systems-based refers to the development of more flexible and often non-mandatory procedures to address environmental concerns. Third Party means an outside organization verifies performance; Second Party means that a trade association or other industry group verifies performance; First Party means that the company verifies its own record of compliance. Chain of Custody refers to the tracking of wood from certified forests along the supply chain to the individual consumer. A logo is the symbol certification programs use to advertise their programs and can be used by companies when making claims about their forest practices. An eco-label is used along the supply chain to give institutional consumers the ability to discern whether a specific product comes from a certified source.
NOTE: Because the PEFC is itself a mutual recognition program, it is difficult to make universal characterizations about program content or procedures, since they vary by country.
**See PEFC see annex 1 of the PEFC Technical Document www.pefc.org. the PEFC's broad articulation of Sustainable Forest Management draws on criteria and indicators and guidelines from the "Ministerial Conference on Protection of Forest in Europe (MCPFE)" and includes economic, environmental and social aspects of Sustainable Forest Management. PEFC also requires conformance to key ILO conventions.

Discussion Section

The Forests Dialogue meeting is taking place at a time when supporters of all the certification programs are focused on highly strategic decision-making (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom 2002). The FSC, for example, is particularly concerned with maintaining and stimulating additional demand for its program along the market's supply chain. If the FSC loses this demand, forest landowners and companies would have fewer economic incentives to choose the FSC approach, which a number of industry and landowner associations have asserted to be inappropriate for small-scale forestry on the one hand, and large-scale industrial practices, on the other hand. FSC is still largely dependent on foundation financing and is seeking ways to diversify its funding and to increase its impact in developing countries.

Two important dynamics are affecting all certification programs. The first is that like the FSC, all of the programs are engaged in efforts to increase their support. Programs other than FSC are focused on convincing companies down the supply chain that their programs are credible, and they are also focused on efforts to convince conservation groups to join them in improving their programs. As part of their strategies, programs are often changing their procedures and policies to gain increasing support. As the "legitimacy achievement" strategies (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom 2002) play out, the various systems appear to be moving closer together in many important respects. For example, the FSC appears to be increasing its flexibility, sometimes "conforming" to landowner and forest products company concerns. At the same time, other programs are becoming less discretionary, increasing substantive performance measures and procedures and broadening the environmental and social scope of their standards (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom 2002). A key question relates to understanding how alike these programs will or should become as they engage in this competition for legitimacy.

The second key dynamic relates to the fact that all certification programs are, to various degrees, constrained by their "core audiences" in their ability to take strategic decisions (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom Forthcoming, 2002). For instance, the FSC "core audience," which includes many environmental and social organizations, supports the program because its overall approach to forest management fits with their own value structures and belief systems. The FSC and its strategists must maintain this "moral" support through attempts to reach out to "non-core" audience members, such as forest companies and forest landowners. Hence, this "moral" support from the FSC core audience may limit the changes the program can undergo to gain support from non-core audience members. Industry and landowner initiated programs also have a "core audience," which includes forest landowners and/or forest companies. Like FSC, each of these programs must maintain overall support from their forest landowner and forest company core audiences, who also possess an entrenched belief system and value structure. Further, this "moral" support from landowner and forest companies may limit what the SFI, CSA, and PEFC can do in their efforts to broaden their support.

Recognition of these dynamics is important because they provide the context in which discussions across programs must take place. If the TFD dialogue is to push forward certification as a policy tool, it will be important for all TFD participants to recognize the role of core audiences in limiting and directing strategic choices, especially with regard to the type and scope of proposed cooperative agreements.

It does appear that there is significant room for discussion. In fact, a good amount of informal discussion has already taken place among the various programs described above. Discussions have included efforts to recognize explicitly the different approaches and purposes behind various certification programs, as well as "stair step" efforts that would rank various efforts to promote sustainable forestry management. As a result, the climate appears ripe for further dialogue and interaction focused on understanding and promoting forest certification as a policy tool with which to address sustainable forest management. Questions to begin this discussion include:

1. What are potential lessons learned regarding the primary goals of forest certification and the major factors that appear to be keeping certification programs from achieving those goals?

2. Are there enough commonalities among the systems that some degree of consensus can be reached as to what certification is achieving in different regions and sectors in terms of sustainable forest management goals? For example, to what extent is certification having a material effect on the practice of forestry among individual forest owners, who are predominant in Europe and the United States? Certification has not yet penetrated into the parts of the world where many argue forest management is in greatest need of improvement. Is certification a useful tool in these places?

3. How should forestry standards be set to best motivate improved forestry? Is a single "gold standard" a motivating factor, or does it act as a deterrent to improvement efforts? Many customers are creating *de facto* progressive recognition approaches or "stair step" approaches, but most certification systems only recognize a single standard. What is the role of multiple tiers that measure a progressive advance on the part of forest owners?

4. Does certification risk becoming a barrier for whole classes of forest owners to enter the market? If so, how can this outcome be avoided?

5. If multiple systems are a practical reality, how do customers along the supply chain and end-consumers decide which systems are credible for the areas in which they operate? Do systems share enough in terms of goals to be able to collaborate on efforts to create a recognized framework? If so, what form would this framework take? A stair step approach? Recognition of distinct differences and common approaches?

6. Is certification a good arena in which to address pressing issues, such as illegal logging and the management of plantations? For example, how should third-party verification of specific aspects such as "legal origin" relate to the more ambitious programs such as FSC? Would these more specific programs undermine the more holistic programs?

7. What should the governance of a certification system include? Emerging agreement exists about the tripartite approach, but there are differences in perspective as to what groups should constitute the tripartite structure. Does the governance of certification adequately represent the broad aspirations and consensus of citizens within a country, or does it merely

reflect the narrower agendas of various interested parties? Are the right stakeholders involved?

8. How can partnerships among industry, environmental groups, and forest owners advance the cause of sustainable forestry management within the context of certification? Of special importance, how can a critical mass of such parties defend themselves from the competing claims of groups that do not accept their core consensus on standards and practices?

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[1] There have been other concerns raised about the FSC by a range of interests. Many environmental groups in the US do not support forest certification for public lands, where they fear that their efforts to preserve these lands from harvesting might be hurt (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom 2002). Others have argued that forest certification is difficult

to apply in situations where there is very little forestry infrastructure, and circumstances where no extensive body of relevant law exists. Still others have argued that certification is best in places where little law exists, as it provides a new arena for institutionalizing law (Meidinger 2001).