

Forest Stewardship Council Canada Playing Key Role in Green Building and Design

When the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was founded in 1993, it followed almost a decade of concern regarding forest management practices, and a growing fear about the status of the world's forests; particularly those in the tropical regions.

The international non-profit came together for the first time in Toronto in 1993, and brought together representatives from environmental groups, the timber industry, the forestry profession, Aboriginal organizations, and community forestry groups from 26 countries to ensure responsible forest management practices.

"It is an international certification and labeling system for responsibly sourced forestry products," said Maia Becker, Manager of Communications and Client Services with FSC Canada. "It is a balance of representatives from each of these groups that work together to ensure our forests are being managed in a responsible manner."

Under FSC certification, forests are certified against a set of strict environmental and social standards, and fibre from certified forests is tracked all the way to the consumer through the Chain of Custody certification system. The result is a product carrying the FSC label that provides an assurance to consumers that it comes from a forest-friendly source. All FSC certification is carried out by independent third-party auditors.

In Canada, the movement began in 1996 with regions in the Maritimes and British Columbia taking a more proactive role on forest certification. By 1998, FSC Canada was incorporated with a national office, and the first FSC Canada annual meeting was held. It was also the same year that the first ten million hectares of FSC-certified forests were declared worldwide.

"All of our standards and our Board of Directors are still based on the same concept of balanced representation from the groups that founded the FSC," Becker explained. "There are four chambers; economic, social, environmental, and, in Canada, Aboriginal. Each of these chambers has an equal voice in decision making, ensuring that FSC's

standards are a balance and a consensus from these groups of what practices will ensure our forests are sustainable."

Now, almost ten years later, the Forest Stewardship Council of Canada (FSC) is finding more recognition, as FSC-certified products are playing an increasingly important role in the green building and sustainable design market.

"Over the last two years, we have seen an incredible shift in the demand for FSC certification," said Becker. "Firstly, it was on the paper side with major banks, corporations and utilities coming on board. Now on the wood side there is a growing interest in FSC products, largely from the increasing interest in green building and LEED."

The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) green building rating system is at the forefront of the green building movement in North America. This system evaluates buildings based on their ability to meet criteria in six different categories, and provides points or credits for the use of responsible technologies and materials, such as FSC-certified wood products.

Part of the growing interest in FSC is the result of a growing availability of FSC certified products. Becker pointed out that four years ago there were only four million hectares of FSC certified products in Canada, while there are now 22 million hectares. According to Becker, this means 13 per cent of Canada's managed forests are FSC-certified.

"FSC is a market-based system in terms of pricing and demand," Becker explained. "Pricing depends on availability. So as more products have come onto the marketplace and demand has increased, prices have started to decrease."

In fact, one of the largest misconcep-



FSC certified wood is stamped with the FSC logo on site.

tions about FSC-certified products is that they will always cost considerably more than other wood products. While this may be true for some specialty products, Becker said it is not usually the case. She added that in most situations, the price difference is fairly small.

On the supplier side, the general feeling is that FSC-certified products are becoming more popular as the supply chain is able to grow. The ability of the Forest Stewardship Council to take a guidance role in sustainability and responsible forest management has had a significant impact on that growth.

"People are very receptive to FSC. FSC has shown leadership on a global level but also to a regional level," said Luc Leonard, Product Engineer at Columbia Forest Products. "FSC and their certified members can always be found at Design Shows or Expositions. People now recognize the FSC logo and understand the importance of good forest management in the wood products they purchase."

This sentiment was reiterated by other suppliers. In fact, much of the growth in demand for FSC certified products has come from the green building and sustainable design market, and particularly those who are building LEED certified.

"I would say that there is a growing awareness of FSC products and a growing market for it," said Duncan Alexander, sales manager with Nicholson and Cates. "I would say that about 95 per cent of it seems to be driven by the quest for LEED points, and obviously the popularity of LEED buildings is expanding significantly."

"In the past, it was more difficult to pass on the added cost, although small, to customers. Back then it was more of a feel-good buy," added Leonard. "The introduction of the LEED Green Building System has opened up new opportunities and made FSC a household name. The market is good and will get better as the architectural and design community realize the benefits of using FSC certified wood."

Some of those benefits include the superior lifecycle analysis of FSC-certified wood products, said Becker.

"In terms of a lifecycle analysis, which calculates the overall environmental impact of a product over its lifetime, wood is one of the most environmentally friendly products, providing it is from a responsible source," Becker explained. "The fact that wood is a renewable resource and the energy for processing the logs is generated by the mills themselves, contributes to a smaller ecological footprint."

In fact, because of the FSC's rigorous standards and independent audits on FSC forests, which cover everything from which trees can be harvested and how these are removed to what areas are protected and what is left behind after logging, Becker maintained that FSC-certified products can guarantee that the wood products used in building and design are environmentally responsible.

In addition, for any building seeking LEED points, the use of FSC-certified products can also contribute at least one, and up to seven points. Becker, who is also an elected board member of the Canada Green Building Council's Greater Toronto Chapter, pointed out that many builders can meet their LEED requirements by using FSC products.

"A number of suppliers are showing how using FSC products can get builders several LEED points," she said. "As an example, there are points for using regional products, sourcing FSC-certified wood products and using a product without urea formaldehyde."

With that, the Forest Stewardship Council Canada will continue to promote FSC-certified products and their use in green building. They have a partnership with WWF Canada and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority on the Archetype House; a demonstration and education site North of Toronto built using green design principles, technologies and materials, such as FSC-certified wood products.

Beyond that, Becker said FSC Canada will continue to improve on the FSC supply chain, expand the number of FSC products on the market, and promote the use of FSC product in green building and design.

"As the area of FSC-certified forests has increased and continues to grow, our challenge has been ensuring that every step between the forest and consumer is FSC-certified," Becker said. "As each link in that chain becomes certified, more and more product becomes available to consumers to utilize at lower prices."

More information about FSC Canada as well as a list of FSC certified suppliers can be found at www.fsccanada.org. More information about the Canadian Green Building Council and the LEED rating system can be found at www.cagbc.org.

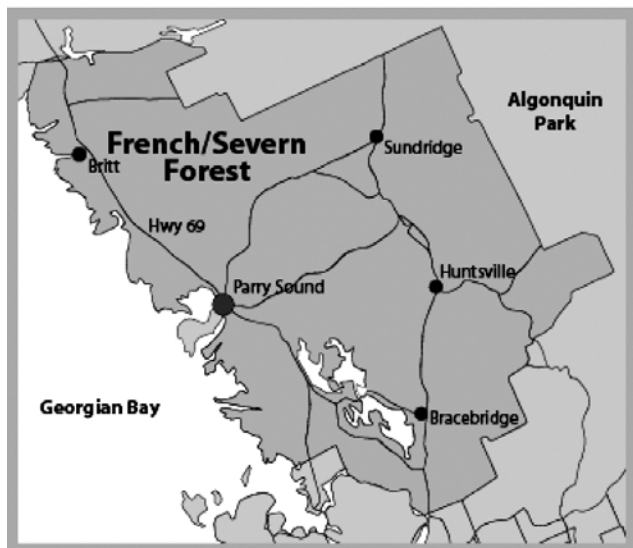


The FSC certified French / Severn Forest is managed by

Westwind

WESTWIND FOREST STEWARDSHIP INC.

(705) 746-6832 / www.westwindforest.ca



Help support your Ontario neighbours, by buying local, high quality FSC certified forest products at great prices!

Almaguin Forest Products
South River, (705) 386-1750

Goulard Lumber Ltd.
Sturgeon Falls, (705) 753-2220

Muskoka Timber Mills Ltd.
Bracebridge, (705) 645-7757

Portelance Lumber Ltd.
Capreol, (705) 969-2121

R. Fryer Forest Products
Monetville, (705) 898-2286

Tembec Industries
Huntsville (705) 789-2371

Products ranging from lumber, flooring, mouldings, doors, panelling, and custom furnishing are available from our many partners in sustainable forest management.