

FOREST CERTIFICATION

Independent, third party certification of forest management is a rapidly evolving, voluntary, market-driven tool that has the potential to change the face of Maine's forest products industry and forest landscape. Independent third party auditors assess whether the management practices of a landowner are in accordance with specific standards of sustainable forestry. Depending on the system chosen, either the land or the land manager may be certified.

In June 2003, Governor Baldacci launched the Maine Forest Certification Initiative to "help grow Maine's forest industry by distinguishing Maine products in the marketplace while improving forest management on-the-ground." Specifically, Governor Baldacci desired to explore whether Maine might achieve this through increased use of forest certification.

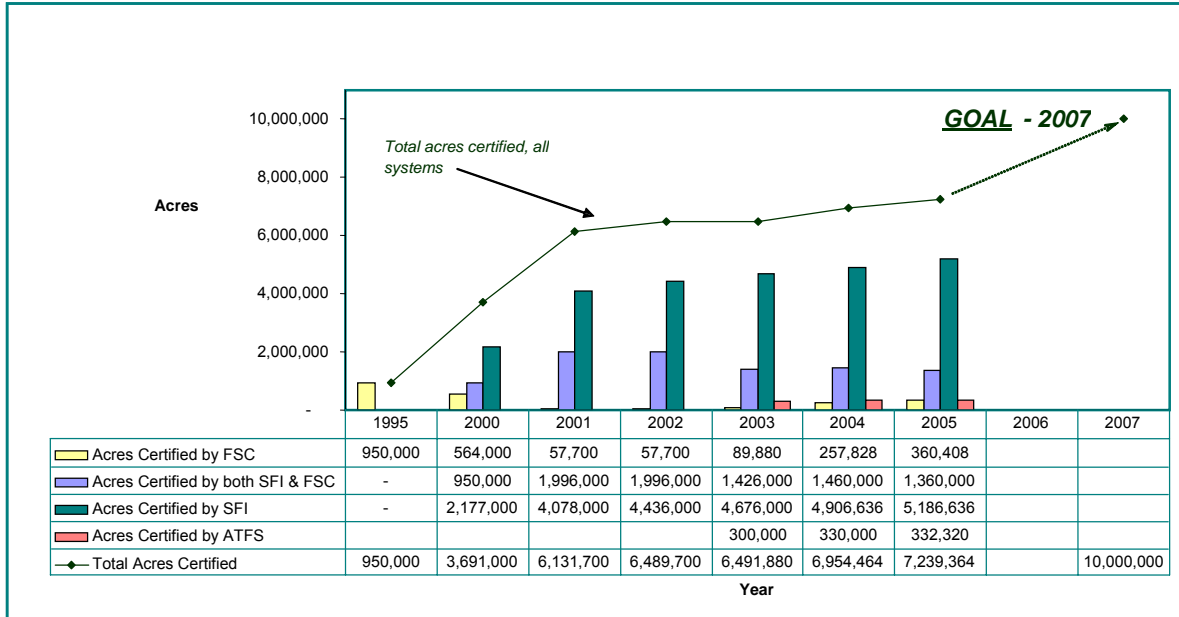
The Governor observed that "certification has been a significant force for improving forest management in Maine, increasing the attention paid to balancing harvest with growth, maintaining water quality, and achieving other environmental objectives." The Governor also recognized the potential for certification to complement regulations by providing "a positive, market-based approach to improving forest management."

To focus the initiative, Governor Baldacci issued the following challenge to Maine's forest landowners and the industry:

"To maintain and strengthen our leadership position regarding certification, the goal of this initiative is to increase the amount of certified forestland in Maine from 6.5 million acres to at least 10 million acres by the end of 2007."

Figure 29. Maine Certified Forestlands 1995 - 2005 (H. Whittemore, 2005, personal communication).

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The Governor identified several actions that the state could take to help the industry meet this challenge, including:

1. Certifying actively managed state lands;
2. Giving preference in state purchasing to certified wood and paper whenever practicable;¹⁷
3. Providing technical assistance, outreach, and encouragement for owners of both large and small landholdings who seek to become certified;
4. Providing preference in Maine Forest Service cost-share programs for landowners, resource managers, and loggers entering certification systems;
5. Paying part of the cost for foresters to become certified resource managers, and
6. Encouraging the expansion of the Master Logger Certification Program and the Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine's Pilot Tree Farm group certification.

To guide the certification initiative, Governor Baldacci formed the Maine Forest Certification Advisory Committee. The committee was charged with developing recommendations in four areas:

1. What can be done to increase the amount of land and wood products that are certified in Maine?
2. What can be done to increase the number of businesses producing certified wood products in Maine?

¹⁷ Executive order 8 FY 04/05, An Order Regarding the Use of "LEED" Building Standards for State Buildings.

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3. What can be done to enhance the markets for certified forest products from Maine and distinguish Maine in the global marketplace for certified products?
4. Reviewing the certification systems in use in Maine and recommending changes to make them more effective in achieving sustainable forestry.

The Certification Advisory Committee issued its report in February 2005. The report is posted on the Maine Forest Service's website:

www.state.me.us/doc/mfs/fpm/forcert.htm.

The committee also recommended a supplementary goal:

To complement and supplement the goal of 10 million acres of certified forestland, the state Maine and forest industry should seek to increase the volume of wood from certified sources to 60 percent of the statewide total by the end of 2009 and ensure that buyers desiring to secure even higher percentages from Maine sources are able to do so.

Over 7 million acres of forestland currently are certified through one of the three major systems. This includes approximately 500,000 acres of public land, 6 million acres of large-parcel private lands, and 350,000 acres of small-parcel private lands. Meeting the challenge will require adding 3 million acres of certified land. The committee recommended achieving this by adding 2.5 million acres of large parcels (parcels over 5,000 acres), 500,000 acres of smaller parcels, and 100,000 acres of public timberlands. Meeting the challenge will mean a 33% increase in large parcel acres and a 250% increase in small parcel acres certified.

Meeting the 10 million acre goal will significantly increase the volume of wood originating from certified sources. This will aid in reaching the 60 percent volume goal, but will not achieve it completely. In addition to increasing the amount of certified acreage, Maine must also identify ways to certify volume from lands where land certification is not possible in the near-term. The most realistic, credible way to do this seems to be harvest practices certification, whereby foresters and loggers are certified, and the volume originating from harvests overseen or conducted by these certified practitioners would contribute to meeting the state's volume goal.

The report made recommendations in four areas: (1) achieving the acreage and volume goals; (2) strengthening treatment of biological resources; (3) improving certification systems; and, (4) a final recommendation for the public. These recommendations are as follows:

Recommendations for Achieving Maine's Certification Goals

- Recommendation 1: Create a Maine Forest Certification Information System
- Recommendation 2: Expand Harvest Practices Certification
- Recommendation 3: Motivate Owners of Private Forests to Certify Their Lands
- Recommendation 4: Motivate Owners of Public Forests and Private Conservation Areas to Certify Their Lands

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- Recommendation 5: Track Wood from Certified Sources
- Recommendation 6: Market Maine's Certified Wood Products

The report also discussed implementation of the recommendations, suggesting that private and public sector forest certification interests should collaborate in the implementation of the recommendations. Specifically, these interests should:

1. Establish a leadership team to coordinate actions,
2. Identify funding and staffing requirements,
3. Establish implementation priorities,
4. Work with forest certification systems to integrate the Committee recommendations into their procedures, and
5. Develop and implement a strategy for monitoring progress.

The report makes several specific recommendations regarding the various certification systems operating in Maine. Finally, the report makes a recommendation to the public:

“Certification is, and should remain, market driven. To the extent that customers – both high volume purchasers of wood products and end consumers – demand and seek out wood products that come from well-managed forests, and are willing to pay an appropriate price for these products, forest landowners and the forest products industry will respond.”

In Maine, the total acreage certified continues to grow. New opportunities have opened up for small landowners, although challenges remain ahead for this landowner class.