



**SFI NEW AND UNIMPROVED**

**ANALYSIS OF REVISED SUSTAINABLE  
FORESTRY INITIATIVE STANDARDS**

**ForestEthics**

# SFI NEW AND UNIMPROVED

## Analysis of Revised Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standards 2015-2020: SFI Labels Allow Illegal Practices, Logging Old Growth, Human Rights Abuses, & Phony Claims

### INTRODUCTION

In January 2015 the Sustainable Forestry Initiative released updated standards for its forest certification and wood and paper product labels. ForestEthics reviewed the new Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standards and concludes that changes to the revised SFI standards are superficial and will result in no improvements in the forestry practices of logging companies associated with SFI. Even those small changes that may appear to mark improvements are process-oriented (rather than outcome-oriented) and are rife with loopholes that will result in no increase in the social and environmental sustainability of products bearing SFI labels.

In January 2015 ForestEthics released [Peeling Back the Eco-Labels<sup>1</sup>](#), a report comparing the rigor of forest audits conducted in Canada by the two leading forest certification systems: the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). The report concluded that the SFI certification program is misleading and seriously flawed.

This report evaluates the revised SFI 2015-2019 Standards & Rules released in January 2015.

### KEY FINDINGS

- 1. The revised SFI Forest Management Standard fails to protect key ecological values or require any particular ecological outcomes in certified forests** – not even for sustainable harvest, wildlife protection, water quality, or compliance with environmental or human rights laws.
- 2. The revised SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard and Certified Sourcing Label deceptively provide little or no assurance of how so-called “certified” forests are managed.** This assurance of “certification” can be applied to products from forests that do not even meet the weak SFI Forest Management Standard. Nor does the label guarantee that products with this SFI label avoid the most controversial sources, such as: old growth, conversion of natural forests to plantations, important wildlife habitat, or forests cut in violation of the rights of Indigenous People. SFI’s “Certified Sourcing” label is little more than deceptive marketing.
- 3. The revised SFI Chain of Custody labels may mislead purchasers into thinking they are getting more paper, wood, or fiber products from SFI Forest Management certified forests than is often the case.** Gaps and loopholes in the SFI Chain of Custody Standard mean that significant amounts of pulp and fiber from illegally-harvested forests and other controversial sources may be in products that carry this label.



THE REVISED SFI FOREST MANAGEMENT STANDARD FAILS TO PROTECT KEY ECOLOGICAL VALUES

1 <http://www.forestethics.org/january-15-2015-sfi-background>

**4. The SFI certification program fails to sufficiently define forest management, conservation, or restoration standards in terms of outcomes.**

SFI is a systems-based (rather than performance-based) certification process. SFI requires that forest managers develop a policy, process, or plan at their own discretion, ignoring any measurement of the effects of logging on forests, waterways, wildlife, or surrounding communities.

**5. SFI relies heavily on inadequate regulatory minimums.** In many crucial instances, the SFI standards default to existing forest protection laws and state Best Management Practices. Compliance with laws and BMPs alone by no means represents responsible forestry. More often, it represents status quo forestry; and in other cases, it requires only very modest improvements that still fall well short of genuine environmental protection, ecological sustainability, or social responsibility.

### **SFI HISTORY OF DECEPTION**

Brands rely on eco-labels to communicate their commitment to social and environmental responsibility – and, thanks to a growing green marketplace, they often profit from them. In 2013 the United Nations Environmental Program estimated that the global market for certified forest products was more than \$20 billion per year<sup>2</sup> and certified wood can bring a 15 to 25 percent price premium.

Meaningful certification is independent, rigorous, and scientifically valid. Sustainable forest products certification should reliably identify wood, paper and products from forests where core ecological and social values are protected and restored, and controversial and unnecessarily destructive management practices are prohibited. In many cases, this means environmental and social performance that is well above regulatory minimums.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative was created by the logging industry in response to public concern over destructive industrial logging practices and desire for sustainable pulp and paper products. SFI reflects the logging industry's desire for its own label to compete with other green labels. From its founding, SFI has "certified" harmful logging practices in the US, Canada, and overseas. SFI labels are allowed on forest products from companies that violate human rights, degrade water quality, log old growth forests, decimate wildlife, reduce forests to ecologically barren tree plantations, and convert natural forests to other land uses. SFI labels on wood, paper and fiber products mislead consumers who expect a responsible product when they see the label.

### **IN SUMMARY:**

- 1.** SFI is a marketing scheme created, governed and financed by the same large logging companies that it certifies.
- 2.** SFI misleads consumers by greenwashing forest destruction and human rights violations.
- 3.** SFI fails to guarantee any level of sustainability or responsibility above existing state and federal rules and regulations.
- 4.** SFI undermines science-based, independent certification programs.
- 5.** SFI remains a significant threat to the integrity of the brand of any company using SFI logos as a claim to environmental sustainability or social responsibility.



**SFI LABELS ARE ALLOWED ON FOREST PRODUCTS FROM COMPANIES THAT LOG OLD GROWTH FORESTS AND REDUCE FORESTS TO ECOLOGICALLY BARREN TREE PLANTATIONS.**

## SFI LABELS

SFI has two types of labels that consumers may see on products: one Certified Sourcing label and multiple versions of the Chain of Custody label.



### SFI CERTIFIED SOURCING LABEL

The revised SFI Certified Sourcing label provides virtually no assurance of how forests are managed or that products bearing this label are certified to any standard. The label does not even require use of the SFI's own insufficient Forest Management Standard, but instead adheres to the SFI's extremely cursory Fiber Sourcing Standard.

The Certified Sourcing label is the most common SFI logo; used on an estimated 90 percent of the products that receive an SFI label, including copy paper, paper cups, and grocery bags. But the label signifies nothing about sustainability or forest management. As SFI's website states, "The SFI certified sourcing label does not make claims about certified forest content."<sup>1</sup> The Certified Sourcing Standard requirements are so weak that the label might be thought of as signifying only that SFI was paid by the producer to use the logo on the product.



### SFI CHAIN OF CUSTODY LABELS

The SFI Chain of Custody labels imply that products contain far more content from SFI certified forests than is often the case. SFI allows non-SFI-certified content to be counted as certified input in products that carry these labels. Examples of such non-SFI-certified content include virgin fiber by-products; such as sawdust from any source, as well as wood and fiber from the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), a system that lacks most of the SFI Forest Management Standard requirements and is not generally regarded as a credible certification system.

A CONSUMER BUYING A PRODUCT WITH AN SFI LABEL HAS NO ASSURANCE THAT THE "CERTIFIED SOURCE" FORESTS ARE MANAGED TO SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS OR IN A SUSTAINABLE, SOCIALLY OR ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE WAY.



## CONCLUSION

The revised SFI standards fail to correct the most serious problems with earlier versions of the SFI eco-labeling scheme. Despite some superficial improvements the new standards avoid meaningful measures that would protect forests, wildlife, water quality, or communities.

- 1.** SFI does not require adequate consultation with stakeholders and experts during assessments – this is especially problematic for First Nations, Tribes, and rural communities whose health, human rights, and sovereignty are threatened by industrial logging operations.
- 2.** SFI fails at sustainability: SFI allows massive clear-cuts and timber harvest rates that exceed forest growth rates.
- 3.** SFI permits the routine, intensive spraying of toxic chemicals, including herbicides and pesticides that can contaminate waterways, and poison nearby people and wildlife.
- 4.** SFI permits the destruction of the last-remaining habitat of federally-listed threatened and endangered

species and riparian areas that protect waterways, drinking water, and endangered fish species.

- 5.** SFI has no requirement to protect old growth forests, no meaningful limits on the size and intensity of clear-cuts, and no adequate ecological protection measures such as restricting road sediment delivery.
- 6.** SFI allows landowners to convert natural forests to tree plantations, even with non-native species and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).
- 7.** SFI includes loopholes that can allow products from illegally-managed forests to receive an SFI label.
- 8.** Though it recognizes climate change and the role of forests in capturing carbon pollution, the new SFI standards have no requirements to address the problem.

SFI CONTINUES TO MISLEAD CONSUMERS, UNDERMINE HUMAN RIGHTS, AND DAMAGE FOREST AND HUMAN HEALTH IN NORTH AMERICAN AND AROUND THE WORLD.

// THE SFI CERTIFIED SOURCING LABEL DOES NOT MAKE CLAIMS ABOUT CERTIFIED FOREST CONTENT. // - SFI

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