Forest Management Certification in Canada and Around the World

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Has Forest Management Certification been good for forest management?

I say Yes! It has accelerated the implementation of the new forest management paradigm—Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). The SFM standards provide a comprehensive list of values and good forest practice. SFM targets are set and progress monitored. The prospect of an audit sharpens the minds of forest managers. The result is improved management performance as well as public and customer assurance that forests are well managed.

1. Forest Management Certification in Canada—2015—the present situation

The total area (Fig.1) certified by all three programs is 180 million ha. Some forests have been certified to more than one standard. With double counting removed, the total is about 161 million ha. Approximately 160 M ha of the 167 M ha of the large forest management units in Canada have been certified. Only about 0.6 M ha of the 19 M ha of private woodlots have been certified.

The CSA Standard, developed specifically for use in Canada's publicly owned forests, was an early leader but has dropped into third place with about 41 million hectares. SFI has shown steady growth since its introduction in 2000. SFI is now the leader with 88 million ha of forest land certified. The SFI Program includes the promotion of research, conservation and community grants. The FSC showed steady growth between 2002 and 2013, then things started to change. FSC reported 61 M ha certified in Canada for 2013 but at year-end

2015, only 50.6 M ha (FSC Canada), a reduction of 10 M ha (-16%). There has also been a reduction of FSC certified area in the United States.

Why has FSC lost so much ground?

There are no simple answers. According to observers in the US and Canada FSC has added new requirements to standards and is behaving more like a regulator than a standards and certification organization. In early 2016 people in the forest industry started to talk about the effects of Greenpeace's Motion 65, approved at the September 2014 FSC General Assembly. Motion 65 adds a requirement to all FSC forest management standards: 80% of the core of all "intact forest landscapes" within FSC-certified forest management units must be protected from human disturbance.

"Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) are defined as unbroken expanses of natural forest ecosystems showing no signs of significant human activity, and large enough (minimum 50 000 ha or 123 000 acres) that all native biodiversity, including viable populations of wide-ranging species, can be maintained".

FSC Motion 65 directs national FSC organizations and FSC Certification Bodies to develop, modify, or strengthen auditable standards to safeguard Intact Forest Landscapes in areas that are FSC certified. FSC Motion 65 is important, interesting and available on the internet. Pay particular attention to two points in the text of Motion 65.

1. "FSC will direct Standard Development Groups (SDGs) and Certification Bodies (CBs), where no SDG exists, to develop,

Fig. 1. 2000 – January 2015 trend lines for the three certification programs used in Canada

modify, or strengthen (according to standards revision processes) indicators within National Standards and CB standards that aim to protect the vast majorities of IFLs”.

This answers the question: How does FSC recognize certifications in the 50 countries where there are no FSC Approved Standards? These “standards” appear to be developed by Certification Bodies which places them in a potential conflict of interest.

2. “If by the end of 2016 a relevant standard has not been implemented, a default indicator will apply that mandates the full protection of a core area of each IFL within the management unit. *For this purpose, the core area of the IFL will be defined as an area of forest comprising at least 80% of the intact forest landscape falling within the FMU*”.

This states what will happen in the event that negotiations are not successful in reaching agreement on implementation of Motion 65. Eighty percent of the IFL must be protected and the wood supply reduced, or the FSC certification will be cancelled. It is clear that issuing an edict requiring the protection of vast areas of publicly owned forest is “Forest Land Use Planning”, with Greenpeace and FSC stepping into the regulator’s shoes.

What does Motion 65 mean in the Canadian forest management context?

If a forest management license covering 500 000 ha in Northern Canada was issued in 1965, about half the area would have been subject to harvest and regeneration operations during the first 50 years of operation up to 2015. The other half of the license, 250 000 ha, remains without much sign of human activity and is growing the wood to be harvested in the second half of a 100-year management plan. But 80% (200 000 ha) must be protected to meet the new FSC requirement, leaving 20% (50 000 ha) to supply wood for the next 50 years of operation. This will create a wood supply crisis for the company and community.

L. Lessard Minister of Forests, Quebec has expressed serious concern about the intrusion of a “third party” in the regulation of Quebec forests. (*Le Quotidien*, Chicoutimi

8/1/2015). What would a forest certification trendline graph look like if the Quebec industry dropped all FSC certificates covering 28 million ha of forest land? See Fig. 2. This is unlikely, but who knows?

The forest industry in Ontario has an additional 14 M ha of forest management licenses in the boreal forest with FSC certificates. These might be relinquished as well. Forest licenses in the Great Lakes-St Lawrence forest region are much less likely to include “intact forest landscapes” as they lie within the more southerly and populated regions of the provinces. Table 1 outlines, in round numbers, the national

Table 1- Forest Land Use Categories in Canada

Total Area of Forested land in Canada (39.7% of total land area)	396 M ha	100%
Area in private ownership (rounded)	25 M ha	6.3%
• 450 000 private woodlots – 20 M ha		
• Private “Industrial” forest land – 5 M ha (owned by pension funds, forest companies, institutions and investors)		
Publicly owned forest land	371 M ha	93.7%
Area not suitable or available for forest operations:	182 M ha	46%
• remote, slow growth, difficult terrain – “intact forest”		
Box A. Area of forest considered suitable for sustainable timber production and available for forest management operations	189 M ha	48%
Area of forest in Box “A” above, considered uneconomic by industry and not under license (more “intact forest”). 182 + 26 = 208 M ha “intact forest”	26 M ha	7%
Area of publicly owned forest under forest management license	163 M ha	41%

Fig. 2. Forest certification trend line if 28M ha of FSC certifications in Quebec are relinquished

forest land use picture as it was before the 2008 recession.

Canada has 208 million ha of forest that is substantially “intact” and will remain “intact” for the foreseeable future. This is 52.5% of our total forested area and is slightly larger than the combined land areas of: Germany, France, Finland, Sweden and Norway. Quite a lot of *de facto* intact forest.

On Jan 11, 2016, the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) sent a letter to the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec, copied to other federal and provincial ministers and industry associations. It was signed by 13 organizations in support of FSC certification and the protection of vast areas of Boreal Forest in Canada. The letter notes that “if companies abandon the FSC certification program—it will put at risk the business stability that industry and their customers have enjoyed because of the FSC”. An ominous statement!

Russia has 41 M ha of FSC certified forest land. It is likely that a significant area of these certified forests are also composed of “intact forest landscapes”. Did Vladimir Putin receive a similar letter?

What effect will this controversy have on FSC in Canada?

It will be hard to manage. FSC Canada might want to relax the impacts of Motion 65 but the requirements have been set by a decision of the 2014 FSC International General Assembly (The FSC’s Supreme Court).

Greenpeace and the FSC are ambitious organizations—but they are certainly not regulators. In the case of Motion 65 they have stepped over that line. In constitutional democracies, governments are in charge of regulation. I think we all prefer to live and work in a country of laws and regulations established through our democratic legislative procedures.

2. History of Forest Certification

Where did the idea of forest certification come from and how was it developed?

The Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection developed the idea of forest certification in the early 1990s. After the failure of nations to agree on a Convention on forest management at the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil, the idea was picked up by several environmental groups, led by WWF. The FSC program was formally established during the Founding Assembly of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in Toronto in October, 1993. The stated purpose was to “Stop Tropical Deforestation and Halt Illegal Logging”. The FSC has been actively promoted in Europe by “Forest Products Buyers Groups” established by FSC supporters in 14 European countries.

FSC certification has been widely adopted by forest owners and managers due in part to the enthusiastic promotion of FSC by a core group of ENGO supporters. They have encour-

Fig. 3. Top 15 countries harvest of industrial roundwood – FAO FRA 2010. The USA and Canada contributed 695 million m³ (48.7%) of the 1428 million m³ harvested by the top 15.

aged buyers and users of forest products to specify and purchase products only from FSC certified forests. Forest management organizations have adopted FSC certification in response to these market pressures. FSC is one of two international forest certification programs—the other is the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

Not all forest management organizations and private woodlot owners were comfortable having only one certification program available to them. People like some freedom of choice—so an alternative program, the Pan-European Forest Certification Council (PEFC) was founded in Europe in the mid-1990s largely through the combined efforts of many thousands of Family Forest owners (private woodlots) in several western European countries. During the 1990s several other countries developed their own national forest management standards. Examples are: the CSA Z809 and Z804 SFM Standards in Canada and the American Tree Farm System and Sustainable Forestry Initiative programs in the USA, as well as national standards in Chile, Australia, Brazil and others.

International trade in forest products is big and widespread—there are about 15 large producer/exporters and many smaller ones. Canada has the 3rd largest forest in the World, after Russia and Brazil and the second largest forest harvest after the USA. Canada is the largest exporter of forest products.

National SFM standards were being developed by many countries. The large producer countries were concerned by the difficulty of evaluating all these standards. A program of Mutual Recognition was proposed by members of the International Forest Industries Roundtable (IFIR). This was a fine concept if the number of forest management standards was small (2?) but with the prospect of 30 or more national SFM standards a different approach was required.

In 2003 the Pan-European Forest Certification Council recast itself to become the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). The PEFC developed a rigorous process for the assessment of SFM standards against a set of inter-governmentally approved SFM requirements. Standards that met the PEFC requirements were “Endorsed” by the PEFC. A second international forest certification program was launched.

Fig. 4. 2015 PEFC certified forest area showing the 162 M ha (60%) in Canada and the USA. Not surprising, considering that Canada and the US also share 68% of the roundwood harvest in the top 15 wood producing countries.

Fig. 5. FSC certifications world-wide showing proportions in Canada and the USA as well as the area certified to standards developed by FSC Certification Bodies.

The PEFC gradually became a truly international program and by December 2015 had recorded the certification of 272 million ha of forest in 32 countries—all to the requirements of standards assessed and Endorsed by PEFC. Both SFI and CSA are PEFC Endorsed.

Forest certification is now a recognized business practice used by organizations managing large areas of forest land.

3. Forest Management Certification—the International Picture. PEFC has endorsed standards in 36 countries and certified 272 M ha forests in 32.

FSC has 150.4 M ha (80%) of forests certified to FSC Approved standards in 30 countries. They also recognize 36.8 M ha (20%) of certified forest in 50 countries without FSC Approved Standards. The total FSC certified area is 187.2 million ha.

At least some of the 50 countries without FSC Approved standards use standards developed by FSC Accredited Certification Bodies (FSC Web site). This is contrary to accepted international standardization practice which requires that standards be developed and approved by certification programs before any audit and certification. Independent third-party audit and certification requires a clear separation of standards development, auditor accreditation and certification. Certification to standards developed by the CBs cannot be claimed as independent third-party certification.

The FSC styles itself as “The Gold Standard”. This implies excellence in four areas of standards practice.

1. The development of SFM standards and their approval by FSC International prior to implementation and auditing. This is not the case in 50 (575 certifications) of the 80 countries with a total of 1369 FSC certifications.
2. Recognition of certifications only to the requirements of FSC Approved Standards. This is not the case in 575 (42%) of 1369 certifications. It is clear that certification to standards not approved by FSC International is an accepted practice. If this was done by PEFC there would be cries of outrage from critics. But silence reigns.

Fig. 6. International forest certification trendlines 2000 to 2015

3. Avoidance of “conflict of interest” between standards development and the audit/certification function. Certification Bodies that develop standards and then audit and certify forests to their own standards create a potential conflict of interest.
4. Accreditation of CBs by an arms-length accreditation body. FSC Auditors are accredited by Accreditation Services International (ASI), established and owned by FSC. (FSC financial reports show revenue received from ASI). In contrast, CBs that certify to the CSA and SFI SFM standards are accredited by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) or by ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB). Both ANAB and SCC are members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF)—an ISO body. CBs

accredited to certify to PEFC endorsed standards in other countries are also accredited by national Accreditation Bodies that are full members of IAF. Adherence to items 1 and 2, avoidance of conflict of interest and the accreditation of CBs by an IAF member results in a “stainless-steel” system. Stainless-steel is better than “gold”.

A fair comparison between PEFC and FSC would be only the area of forest certified to Approved Standards. The FSC worldwide total of forest certified to FSC Approved Standards is 150.4 M ha. The PEFC worldwide total of forest certified to PEFC Approved Standards is 272.0 million ha. See maps showing the geographic distribution of countries with PEFC and FSC certifications.

Map 1. Geographic distribution of 80 countries with FSC certified forests as of December 2015.

Map 2. Geographic distribution of 36 countries with PEFC Endorsed Standards, 32 of which have PEFC certified forests as of December 2015.