

## DOVETAIL COMMENTARY

### A New Year, Some Fresh Ideas – Certification Revisits Past Challenges

January 2013

As we start a new year, it is always valuable to look for indications of what we can expect in the coming months and what might be on the horizon. There are three recent developments in forest certification that are worth noting and that may be a sign of things to come.

#### **FSC Rethinks Federal Lands Policy**

For those of us that have been following this issue for more than a decade, this is perhaps the most significant announcement in forest certification since the 2005 Time, Inc. announcement of deadlines for sourcing certified paper. On December 19th, 2012, members of the FSC-US Board of Directors sent a memo to FSC members in the United States announcing a change in FSC policy. The memo indicated that the effective moratorium preventing certification of U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management forests had been modified in order to “allow groups to explore what FSC certification might look like on federal lands...” Specifically, the revised policy no longer requires consensus by all stakeholders on specific harvest levels for federal lands. The policy still outlines two thresholds, or hurdles, for certification – willing landowner participation and the development of national-level indicators that address the special issues associated with federal ownership – so don’t expect anything to happen overnight, but this is the first movement in years on what has been a fairly contentious issue. Earlier in 2012, Dovetail released a report outlining the history of the discussion of certification of the National Forest System and the current barriers. Hat Dovetail report addressing *Certification for the Management of the U.S. National Forest System* is available through this link: <http://www.dovetailinc.org/files/DovetailNFSCert0412.pdf>. The details of this most recent FSC announcement and the associated policy documents are available at this FSC webpage: <http://us.fsc.org/technical-news.288.729.htm>.

#### **FSC Takes COC Online**

##### **Development of an “Online Claims Platform” for Chain-of-custody**

The last few years have been punctuated by various fits-and-starts related to chain-of-custody certification. What was once a fairly straightforward inventory-tracking requirement had become mired in complex policies related to credit systems, controlled wood, and controversial sources and risk assessments. Companies no longer just needed to know what they were doing, but they needed to develop systems that reported what all their suppliers were doing as well. Not an easy task for many companies, and a potentially costly one. As an indicator that FSC has been paying attention and seeking solutions to these challenges, in late-2012 the FSC announced the development of what is being called an “Online Claims Platform.” This approach has the potential to significantly streamline the chain-of-custody tracking and claims process (e.g., when certified material is bought and sold in the marketplace). The bottom line is that the system will

bring the process into the 21st century with the use of online systems that will allow suppliers and customers to directly provide the information necessary to verify certified products in real-time. Although it is sure to take a little getting used to, the development of this kind of data tracking is long overdue and essential to maintaining a credible system. It's about time we got an app for that! You can read more about the plans for rollout of the system at: <http://ic.fsc.org/online-claims-platform.181.htm> and FSC will be providing a monthly webinar as an introduction to the Online Claims Platform (OCP) on the last Wednesday of the month. Interested people can register at [http://claims-forum.fsc.org/demonstration/scheduled\\_webinars](http://claims-forum.fsc.org/demonstration/scheduled_webinars).

### **Growing Certification in China**

Finally, as a sign of things to come, the PEFC announced the establishment of a public consultation period for the review and potential endorsement of the Chinese Forest Certification Council's China Forest Certification Scheme (CFCS). While forest certification has been active for some time in China (FSC reports 48 forest management certificates there, <http://ic.fsc.org/facts-figures.19.htm>), participating in the mutual recognition system of PEFC could offer some significant opportunities for expansion. The growth of forest certification outside of Europe and North America has been a topic of conversation for many years, and developments like this may lead the way to important progress. The comment period remains open until Feb 19, 2013 and more information is available at: <http://www.pefc.org/news-media/general-sfm-news/1080-chinese-forest-management-system-open-for-public-consultation>.

From the looks of things, 2013 is likely to be another interesting year for the environment!

- *Jeff Howe, Ph.D*

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