

FOREST MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION FOR FOREST PRACTITIONERS



GUIDEBOOK



About this publication

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) has been involved in forest certification since 1999. We believe in forest certification as a viable opportunity for Ontario's forest sector to better access domestic and international wood markets, and as a means to publicly recognize the quality forest management occurring in our forests today.

This guidebook, drafted by Dean Johnson R.P.F, is intended to provide a general overview of certification for Ontario's forest landowners, consultants, and forest managers who are interested in better understanding the intricacies of a process that on the surface can be somewhat intimidating. It is not written to be a comprehensive guide to getting certified but rather a first step in becoming comfortable with what certification is, and how it can be applied to southern Ontario's forests. Experience and knowledge are mandatory for everyone involved in the certification process and readers are encouraged to seek other opportunities to better understand the topic and how it may fit with their particular situations.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Ontario government in helping foster the development of this product.

*A considerable amount of additional information can be found on the Eastern Ontario Model Forest website:
www.eomf.on.ca.*



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Introduction

Poor market conditions, increased competition from offshore wood fibre, a strong Canadian dollar, and increasingly stringent regulatory demands have negatively impacted Canada’s forest sector. In addition, today’s consumers are more aware of the harvesting and management practices behind the wood products they purchase. Consequently, forestry practitioners are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the often conflicting environmental, social and economic values that come from our forests.

As a forest practitioner you may be quite skilled at growing trees and managing our forest resources; however, it can sometimes be difficult to prove to consumers, to the general public, and to local, provincial, national and even international governments just how sound your management practices are. Forest certification offers a unique opportunity to do just this.

Forest Management Certification

Forest certification is a tool available to forestry practitioners who seek a credible, defensible, and verifiable means to publicly demonstrate their good forest management practices. This level of recognition is possible because independent third-party auditors have assessed the forest management operations against a set of standards to determine whether they meet or exceed a minimum threshold. If they do, the forest can be acknowledged as being “certified”. In Ontario, certification opportunities are available for private, community and crown forests.

Forest practitioners have two options when it comes to getting the forests they manage certified; they can either have their forests certified by themselves under single certificates, or they can join or develop a group certificate with other forest practitioners (see Figure 1).

Certification provides assurance that the production of wood products from a certified landbase does not damage the overall health of the forest, the stability of the ecosystems, or the livelihoods of local communities.

<p>Single Certificate</p>	 single forest owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one forest owner • one forest management plan • costs covered by certificate holder • best suited to large forest management entities with single forest management units
<p>Group Certificates (managed by a certificate manager)</p>	<p>forest owner 1 </p> <p>forest owner 2 </p> <p>forest owner 3 </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple forest owners • different management plans and activities • certificate manager administers certification activities and audits • costs distributed to forest owners • best suited to small private land owners and community forests

Figure: 1 Certificate Types in Ontario

The process of getting certified is similar for both certificate types, although group certificates inevitably mean a certain degree of cooperation, participation and commitment that goes beyond what would be required for one single landowner. In Ontario, most private and community forests fit well into a group certificate model.

Forests are certified for a predetermined period of years during each of which the forest management practices are subject to either a full forest management audit, or an annual (partial) audit. After the last annual audit (#4 in Figure 2) the forest manager has option to “renew” the certificate, at which time another full audit would necessary. The costs associated with this process can be significant and often represent the biggest barrier for smaller forests.

Certification is about more than just harvest practices. Forest practitioners can count on the following factors being evaluated to some degree:

- *protection of high conservation value forests,*
- *rights of Aboriginal peoples and local communities,*
- *protection of waterways,*
- *protection of wildlife species and their habitat,*
- *conservation of biological diversity.*

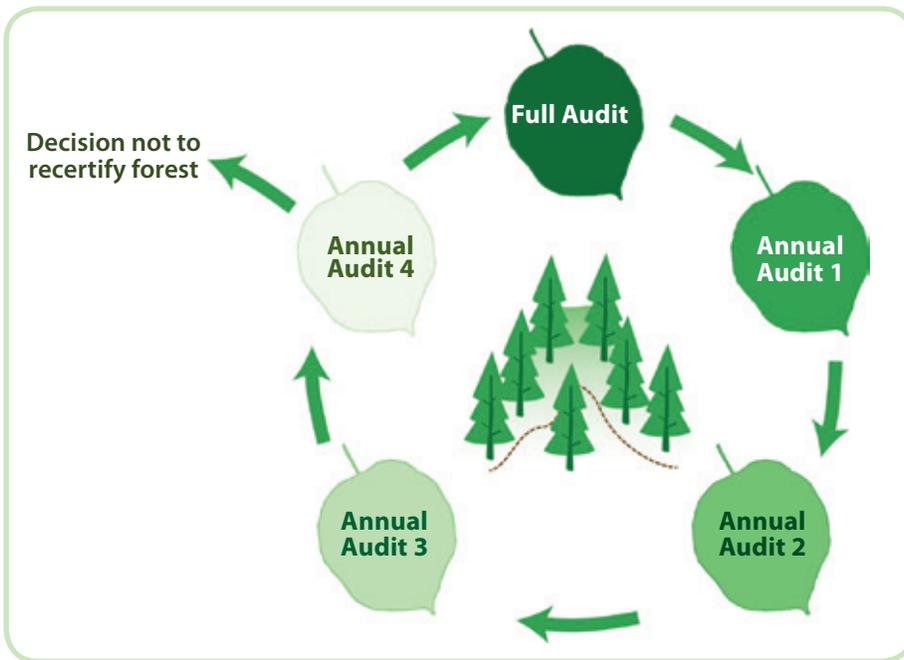


Figure: 2 The Forest Management Audit Cycle

Product Certification

Wood fibre from certified forests can be transformed and labelled as certified wood products through a process called Chain of Custody certification. The label distinguishes a product from similar non-certified products that may be of the same quality but cannot be verified as having come from well-managed sources. Consequently, product certification can be thought of as a “distinguishing factor” or “seal of approval” for the product.



Chain of Custody (CoC) certification is the process of tracking well-managed forest products through the supply chain from the forest to the end customer.

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Many retailers in Canada and abroad are favouring wood fibre certified to have come from well-managed sources.



The chain of custody starts in the certified forest.

CoC certification complements forest management certification and the forestry practitioner has an important role to play in each. The forestry practitioner provides that vital link between the forest and forest management activities, and the first “link in the chain” as the harvested wood fibre is loaded onto a truck and hauled away from the certified forest. The chain of custody might run from the forest to the mill and stop there, or it may continue through all stages of production right to the end consumer.

Forest product producers with CoC certification have met a set of standards that are different than those used to assess the forest management practices.

As a forest practitioner, your role is to ensure that the chain of custody is not broken while you have direct control over the harvested wood. To this end, there are several things that you can do to help ensure this does not happen.

- Forest managers must ensure that forest products are readily identifiable as originating from the evaluated forest. This may be achieved through the physical marking of the timber, a system of paper control, daily or weekly production records, or a combination of these and similar techniques.
- The forest manager must maintain control of the chain of custody of the timber up to the point of sale.
- Records such as the invoices or the bills of lading should specify the source of the timber, the date of sale, the quantity of certified timber sold by product, the point of sale (landing or mill yard), and the certification code.
- These invoices or bills of lading must travel with the truck to the delivery point.
- After a load is scaled, the scale slip can be affixed to the bill of lading to record the volume of species, product and grade.
- The bills of lading and scale data are kept together for record-keeping purposes.

The receiving mill is responsible for maintaining the chain of custody as the wood makes its way from forest towards final market. All facilities in the transformative process with control of the wood must be CoC certified.

Certification Systems

In Canada, there are three main certification systems (often called schemes) that provide forest and chain-of-custody certification opportunities. Each system is different, using its own set of standards.

All three are recognized internationally; it is this international recognition that provides credibility and substance to the system. Ultimately, all three promote sound forest management through a guiding set of standards. The

choice of certification system is usually made on the basis of regional market demand. Wood buyers will generally favour one system over another so it is important for you, the forest practitioner, to understand where your wood will be going once it leaves the forest, and then to certify to the system that best fits the demand for your product stream. All schemes:

- have optional on-product labels for use by organizations that have CoC certification;
- remain current and relevant through a periodic revisions process involving public input;
- are based on a balance of social, economic and environmental interests, and;
- require that independent third-party audits be done on a regular basis.



While the three systems available to Ontario forests vary in application, they all provide the assurance of good forest management.



Figure 3: Certification Systems

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Standards

As mentioned, forest management certification involves the verification, by a third-party certifier, that a forest meets a set of specific standards. All three certification systems set high thresholds, which the forest management practices must clear in order to be certified. In some cases, these standards exceed existing regulatory requirements.

Although different in their application and complexity, all three systems with application in Ontario have standards that address:

- conservation of biological diversity;
- maintenance of wildlife habitat and species diversity;
- protection and/or maintenance of special sites (biological and cultural);
- maintenance of soil and water resources, including riparian areas next to streams and lakes
- ensuring harvest levels are sustainable and harvested areas are reforested;

In order for certification to be sustainable on the southern Ontario landscape, it needs to be both affordable and beneficial for all those participating. Consequently, it is important to have a good set of standards that don't add an unnecessary burden to the forest practitioner and the day-to-day management of the forestry operation. The EOMF is committed to finding opportunities to make certification a viable opportunity for all stakeholders in southern Ontario.

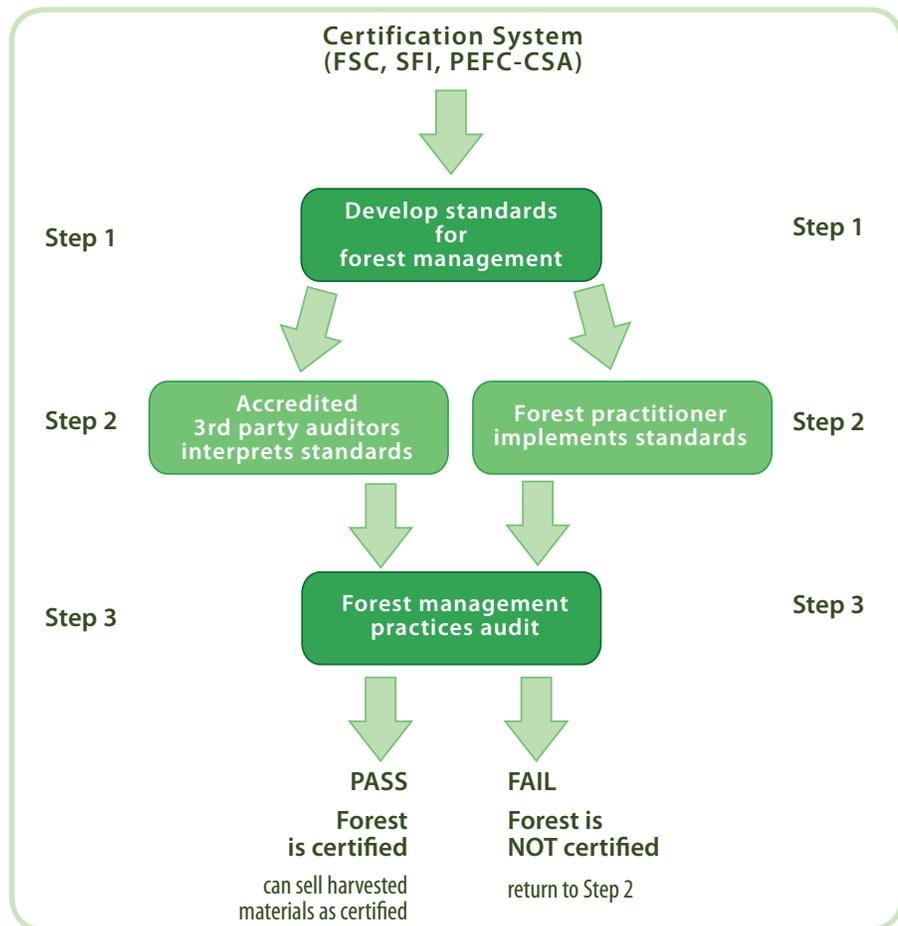


Figure 4: Each certification system develops a set of standards that are used by the third-party auditors to determine if your forest can be certified

- protection of forestlands from deforestation and conversion to other uses;
- exclusion of wood from illegal or unauthorized sources;
- Aboriginal rights and/or involvement;
- public disclosure.

Current standards can be found on the websites maintained by different certification schemes. For the forestry practitioner, the standards used by the chosen certification scheme will become a valuable management tool governing the way the forest is managed.

Benefits of Forest Certification

There are many reasons why landowners and forest practitioners participate in certification but generally certification can provide a range of benefits including:

- a framework to implement sustainable forest management,
- assurance of a forest well-managed for all values,
- credibility and accountability for forest management practices,
- an environmental management system,
- improved worker and safety training,
- improved record-keeping,
- access to unique markets,
- price premiums.

For forestry practitioners, certification may be a marketing tool used to assure clients and stakeholders that activities conform to a system with international recognition.

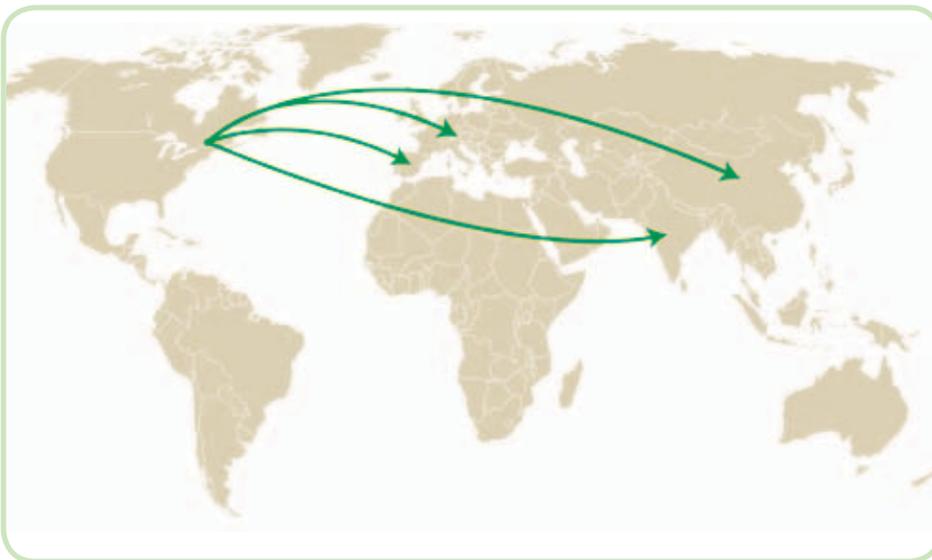


Figure 5: Market access is by far one of the main benefits of certification – it's a big world out there and Canada is rich in well-managed forest resources.



Many landowners take pride in the fact that their woodlot is certified.

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest has been managing a growing certification program since 2003. For the majority of the private landowners participating in this program timber harvesting is not their primary objective. In fact, some landowners have certified their woodlots with absolutely no intention of harvesting in the foreseeable future.

Wood harvested from your certified forest may flow to a CoC-certified company that will ultimately process it into products destined for international markets. In some jurisdictions, the absence of a chain of custody certificate has become a non-tariff trade barrier for Canadian wood products exports. More and more overseas buyers are demanding the verifiable assurance of good forest management provided by certification.

For most private forest owners, certifying their forest through a single certificate is simply not affordable under any of the three systems. In the settled landscape of southern Ontario, developing or joining a group certificate is really the only option available.

Certification Costs

The certification process adds a layer of complexity and increased costs to any forest management operation. Costs of certification can be divided into direct and indirect costs. The direct costs are “out of pocket costs” paid to the third-party certifier for the assessment, annual audits, and recertification. Indirect costs are those related to compliance with the standard. The indirect costs can be relatively minor in cases where forest management practices were good prior to certification. Indirect costs may include:

- management time,
- record-keeping,
- audit time,
- stakeholder consultation,
- staff training,
- compliance,
- writing a forest management plan.

The actual cost of certification will vary by region, by the size of the forest, and by how much work is required to meet the certification standard. One of the first questions that a forest practitioner may ask is “what does it cost to certify the forest?” A call to a certificate holder or a third-party certifier will give a good indication of what is involved and the resulting cost.



Getting a Forest Certified

While forest certification may seem rather complicated at first, it can be a relatively easy process to undertake once you understand the basic concepts and the path to obtaining and maintaining a certificate. To this end, the following steps have been crafted to help guide you along the process.

In many cases, management practices will not need to be changed significantly as forest practitioners work toward obtaining certification of the forests for which they are responsible; Ontario forestry practices are highly regarded for their ability to balance the many social, environmental and economic values of our forest resources.

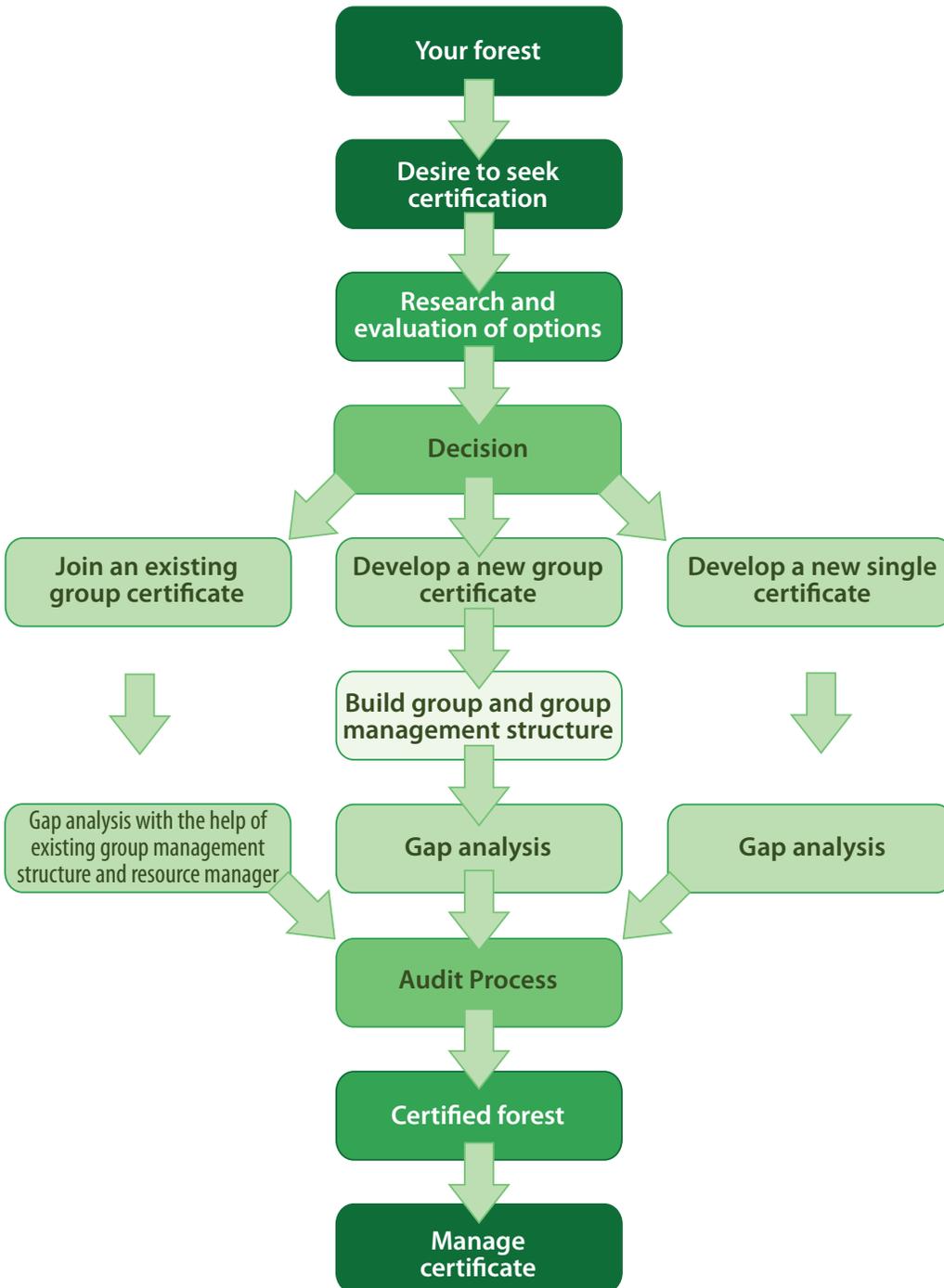


Figure 6: The Path to Certification

Keep in mind you don't need to be a certification expert to get your forest certified. Knowledge will also come through experience.

Research and Evaluation of Options

Understanding the certification process is crucial, and while this publication provides some generic information, it is by no means the only reference you will need; doing your homework ahead of time will lessen the hassles, and possibly the costs, of getting your forest certified. Here are some obvious tips:

- Check the web for information.
- Attend a certification seminar.
- Talk to certified landowners, forest managers and certificate holders.
- Contact one of the accredited certification auditors.
- Consult with a certification expert - paid advice is usually good advice.

By understanding the process associated with getting and remaining certified, you can make informed decisions about its application for your situation.

Decision – finding the right approach

You will be faced with a considerable number of choices as you move along the certification path and while it may seem a little overwhelming at first, be assured that the initial process of becoming certified is much harder than it is to stay certified. Some considerations you will need to make when you are first starting out will be:

- The forest certification system chosen – research each system to find out which one has the most appropriate application to your particular location and your forest area.
- Whether to join an existing group certificate or single certificate

There are currently three active group certificates operating in Ontario; you may be able to join one of the following:



model – we are pretty confident that unless you are managing a large commercial forest, group certification is really the only viable option.

- Finding a certifier to audit your forest operations – you will be entering into a long-term contract with the certifier so choosing the right one initially is very important.

Assessing the Gap

The next step would be to determine how much work would be necessary to move your current forest operations closer to the mandatory requirements of the chosen system. The gap analysis compares your current operation against the relevant standards for the chosen certification system. In all forest operations there will be “gaps” between where you are now, and where you have to be to become certified. Sometimes the gap is large, but in many cases it is quite easy to adjust the forest operations to meet the requirements of the standards.

A checklist of important criteria for a small woodlot can look something like this:

- forest management plan in place,
- identification of forest and non-forest values that need protection,
- harvest prescriptions written by qualified professionals (registered professional foresters),
- trees marked by certified tree markers,
- use of a logging company with WSIB coverage and liability coverage,
- a record of all forest products sold,
- bills of lading to track products delivered to the mills.

Incorporating these factors into your management operations will make it easier to pass the certification audit. If you are joining an existing group certificate, the resource manager for that certificate will be able to help identify what you need to do in order to join the group.

The Audit Process

Once you take the necessary actions to fill any identified gaps in your forest management practices, it is time to call in the audit team who will evaluate your operation against the standard.

While the length and complexity of the audit will vary depending on the size of forest, the amount of active forest management, and the organizational structure, the audit process generally consists of some in-office and in-field evaluation time. In the office, the auditors will evaluate your management structure, how you are accommodating various components of the standards, and your record-keeping ability. In the field, they will want to look at some current forest operations. Any gaps identified by the certifier will need to be



Harvest prescriptions and tree-marking are recognized as good forest management practices and an important part of the certification process.

While a difficult process to prepare for initially, an audit can be a positive experience that is reflective of your professionalism and management practices.

addressed, and evidence provided back to the certifier that you have adjusted your management system to accommodate the gap.

Managing the certificate

Once the forest has been certified, the forestry practitioner's job will be to adjust the management system to address any identified gaps and to implement an appropriate tracking and record-keeping system. After one year, it will be time to undergo another audit. It is generally much easier to prepare for the second audit. In all subsequent annual audits, the auditor will evaluate how you have addressed any gaps identified in the previous year. They will also carefully review any forest management operations that have been undertaken since the last audit.



Once certified the you have the opportunity to sell your harvest wood fibre to certified mills. A bill of lading will travel with the truck to the mill thereby maintaining the chain of custody.

Marketing your Success

Once you are certified it is time to promote the fact that your forest has met the standards set out by the internationally recognized, third-party verified, forest certification system - this is quite a feat and one that you should take pride in. Your fibre now has a value that goes beyond the monetary side of forest management. You have proven and publically demonstrated your commitment to good forest management.

The EOMF is committed to finding opportunities for certification in southern Ontario. As markets change and the forest sector evolves, we want to find strong markets for wood coming from our private landbase. We believe certification is one tool that can help us achieve this goal but for it to work, not just now but into the future, we want to see:

- more opportunities for forest practitioners to access certification services,
- increased export and domestic market access for certified Ontario wood,
- a stronger value-added sector that has access to certified Ontario wood,
- certification services that are affordable to all landowners,
- certification standards that are credible and applicable to the forests of the settled landscape.

For more information on the EOMF and our certification program: www.eomf.on.ca

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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the province.*

