



Forest Certification For Community Forests in Ontario



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FSC® C018800

Forest Certification

The concept of forest certification arose in early 1990's in response to the growing concern surrounding forest sustainability. The idea was to develop a process for certifying forest management practices to a set of standards that define sustainable forest management. Independent third-party auditors would then evaluate forest operations to determine whether they meet the standards. Forest certification ensures that forest owners, practitioners, and operators comply with established and accepted forest management standards. Certification provides assurance to forest owners, managers, operators, consumers, and the local community that the management, recreational use, and production of wood products from a certified forest maintains the health of the forest, the stability of the ecosystems, and the livelihoods of local communities. In many cases, certification can help improve or restore forest values. Certification applies to forested landscapes, including wetlands, natural meadows, old fields, and natural, non-treed areas. It is a voluntary, market-based system.

The two dominant forest certification systems in Canada are the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI). The Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) chose the FSC system as the most appropriate system for small-scale, group forest certification. FSC has standards specific to local and small-scale forests. FSC is an international organization with a brand and certification system that is recognized by consumers and environmental and social groups throughout the world.

Forest Stewardship Council

The Forest Stewardship Council (fsc.org) was founded in 1994 by a group of concerned people from environmental non-governmental organizations, timber and wood products companies, and human rights organizations. They had the common goal of maintaining, improving, and protecting the world's forests. Together they developed a forest management standard based on 10 core principles (see page 10). FSC has since grown their standard into the world's largest and most recognized forest management standard. The Canadian arm of FSC, FSC Canada (ca.fsc.org), oversees the adoption and implementation of FSC standards in Canada. Canada currently has the largest area of certified forest in the world at 164 million hectares. The countries with the next most certified area, Russia the United States, have only 68 and 40 million hectares of certified forest respectively.

FSC uses a consultative and transparent process to develop regionally specific standards that can be used to implement sustainable forest management (SFM). The standard applicable to the EOMF focuses on local forest types, community forest management, Indigenous Rights and intrinsic and monetary benefits to local communities.



Benefits of Certification

Community Forests are expected to be leaders in sustainable forest management in Ontario. There are many stakeholders and Indigenous communities and peoples who have a keen interest in the well-being of community forests. Following FSC principles provides an iron clad testament of good forest management, ensuring benefits to the local community, ecosystems, and the reputation of the FSC certificate holder. FSC certification, guarantees that a forest has worldwide recognition as to the quality of forest management activities. In communications with stakeholders, Community Forests can use this to enrich the great story they have to tell. It is a reputation enhancer. It makes it easier to withstand challenges from concerned citizens about forest management activities. It makes stakeholders proud to be partners with a top-notch conservation organization. Finally, certified community forests become beacons of superior forest management to the local private woodlot community.

Furthermore, forest certification provides:

- A framework to implement sustainable forest management that is robust to staffing changes
- A culture of continuous improvement through implementation of best practises
- Assurance that the forest is well-managed and all values are being maintained or enhanced
- Credibility and accountability for forest management practices
- Enhanced product value from the perspective of forest users
- Satisfying pre-requisites for selling carbon offsets

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest Certification Program

The EOMF manages an FSC Group Forest Management Certificate (FSC C018800) on behalf of private woodlot owners and community forests in Ontario. The EOMF Forest Certification Program provides an opportunity for community forests and private woodlot owners to become certified to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards. The Program allows for numerous private woodlot owners and community forests to share the benefits and costs of FSC certification by certifying their lands under one certificate. Group certification significantly reduces the time and costs of certification.

There are two fees community forests pay to participate in the EOMF Certification Program. First, there is a one-time on-boarding fee to cover the time and effort of the EOMF Program Coordinator to bring the forest into the Certification Program. Second, is an annual fee paid by each forest to support the operation of the program. Modest additional costs include a consultant fee to develop specific materials required for meeting forest certification standards. The EOMF Program Coordinator can provide information on all fees.

Benefits of Joining the EOMF Certification Program

The EOMF brings almost 20 years of experience in forest certification on private lands in Ontario. The goal of the program is to provide all the administrative support and coaching needed for a forest to achieve and maintain certification. A suite of publications and tools for forest certification has been developed and refined and includes a Policy and Procedures Manual, and relevant templates such as forest operations prescriptions, pesticide application documentation, and timber sale contracts. The EOMF group format provides cost savings of well over 50% when compared to forests trying to certify alone and weeks of saved time. Supporting the group enables many other forests to become certified that otherwise could not. The EOMF hosts two Certification Working Group meetings annually that provide an opportunity to learn about best practices, network, and participate in field tours. The Program Coordinator also pursues opportunities to benefit the group including training, marketing the group to the public, pursuing funding, developing partnerships, and developing markets for products.



Lacey Rose, County Forester for Renfrew County's FSC Certified forest, leading a Certification Working Group Tour with fellow Community Forest Managers

Forest Carbon Offsets

The voluntary or regulatory need for carbon emitters to reduce their emissions has created a demand for carbon offsets. Carbon markets provide the opportunity for private forest owners, including community forests, to monetize the carbon stored in their forests. Sustainable Forest Management is a pre-requisite for selling carbon offsets. Sustainably managed forests sequester carbon and are widely recognized to be a key tool in the fight against climate change. The revenues from carbon offsets can be substantial. In Southern Ontario an acre of forest produces, on average, between one and three carbon per year credits (one credit equals one tonne). In 2022, forest-based carbon credits were selling for \$12 to \$16. More information on carbon offsets can be obtained from the EOMF Program Coordinator.



Quite Conservation tree marked as part of a Carbon Offset Plot

Steps to Certification with the Eastern Ontario Model Forest

The process to certification with the EOMF is relatively simple, but requires an upfront commitment of time, energy, and funds. After certification is achieved and management systems are in place, the cost and effort diminish significantly. The EOMF Program Coordinator will coach all interested forests through the whole process and provide all the administrative support needed after a forest achieves certification.

The steps to certification:

1. Review the Requirements for Community Forest FSC Certification on Page 9
2. Assess current forest management practices against the general requirements for FSC Certification.
3. Contact the Program Coordinator to express interest and obtain information on costing and resolve any initial questions.
4. Review documents provided by the Program Coordinator to assess specific requirements of certification.
5. Share the benefits of forest certification with your colleagues and decision-makers. The Program Coordinator can provide materials and conduct presentations or calls to support this process.
6. Contact the Program Coordinator to indicate that Certification will be pursued and negotiate a contract with the EOMF to cover the costs of the on-boarding process.
7. Work with the Program Coordinator to conduct a detailed review/audit of current practices, including a site visit and develop an action plan to address any gaps between current practices and practices required for certification.
8. Implement action plan and close gaps.
9. Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the EOMF and pay annual fee to achieve certification.

Following Certification, forests are required to:

- Commit to managing to FSC Standards.
- Pay annual fee to EOMF.
- Host visits with EOMF for internal auditing, as needed.
- Be available for participation in the EOMF's annual surveillance audit, as needed.
- Participate in EOMF Certification Working Groups to stay current on certification requirements. and participate in field tours and networking events.



FSC Certification protects and enhances recreational opportunities for local communities.

Requirements For FSC Certification for Community Forests

The following list includes key examples of forest management requirements for certification. This is not an exhaustive list. All items required for certification are listed within the EOMF Forest Certification Program Policies & Procedures Manual and the gap analysis template that can be provided by the Program Coordinator.

- Organizational commitment to FSC Principles and Sustainable Forest Management.
- Public consultations for management planning – for example, making use of forest advisory committees made up of groups representing diverse forest values.
- Forest Management Plan with appropriate detail.
- Identification and protections for High Conservation Values, such as:
 - o Species at risk and their habitat
 - o Key ecosystems (Provincially Significant Wetlands or Woodlots, Important Bird Areas, etc.)
 - o Areas of Natural or Scientific Interest
 - o Cultural and spiritual values
- Harvest Prescriptions are approved by Registered Professional Forester or Associate Member of the Ontario Professional Foresters' Association.
- Use of Certified Tree Markers.
- Judicious use and documentation of pesticides applications.
- Property lines are well established and are not in contention.
- Notice to adjacent landowners and signage of operations.
- Monitoring of harvests and pesticide applications.
- Movement towards natural forest condition in plantations.
- Use of local workers where possible.
- Ensure all forest workers have WSIB coverage and public and employers liability insurance.
- Contracts in place with all forest workers and contractors.
- Use a bill of lading process for wood tracking.

FSC Standard Principles

Each principle has a list of criteria that certified community forests must adhere to. The Program Coordinator will review these criteria with interested community forest managers.

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| PRINCIPLE 1 | COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS AND FSC PRINCIPLES |
| PRINCIPLE 2 | TENURE AND USE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES |
| PRINCIPLE 3 | INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS |
| PRINCIPLE 4 | COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND WORKERS' RIGHTS |
| PRINCIPLE 5 | BENEFITS FROM THE FOREST |
| PRINCIPLE 6 | ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT |
| PRINCIPLE 7 | MANAGEMENT PLAN |
| PRINCIPLE 8 | MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT |
| PRINCIPLE 9 | HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS |
| PRINCIPLE 10 | PLANTATIONS |

For more information see: <https://www.eomf.on.ca/programs/certification> or contact Glen Prevost, OWA Program Coordinator at 705-358-7913 or glen.prevost@ontariowoodlot.com



FSC certification ensures protection for species-at-risk such as monarch butterflies and their habitat.