

“The Truth About FSC-certified Wood Products Availability & Pricing”

Jason Shuey, Rainforest Alliance

Many architects and designers, armed with the knowledge that wood products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are some of the most environmentally responsible building materials available on the planet, are specifying FSC-certified products more and more. Often they are told by the contractors that the FSC-certified products are not available. While it is true that a few product types are not yet available as FSC-certified, most wood products are available and the forest products industry is listening to the demand from the green building movement and offering new FSC-certified products that were not available a few years ago. Also, there are resources available to help in specifying and sourcing FSC-certified wood products that make procurement easier than it has ever been. Be sure to plan ahead and allow adequate lead time for FSC-products to be processed, dried, manufactured, and shipped. For more information go to www.fscus.org.

Another myth is that FSC-certified products cost much more, sometimes more than twice as much, as wood products that are not FSC-certified. Often contractors and/or pro-dealers who do not want to put in the extra effort to source FSC-certified products will significantly mark up the quote of the products that are FSC-certified to sway the project manager toward not going with the FSC-certified products. Most contractors also like to deal with pro-dealers that they know and are comfortable with. So if these suppliers do not wish to locate and sell FSC-certified products to their contractors at a reasonable cost then the contractor needs to use the resources available to find and purchase FSC-certified materials from another FSC-certified supplier.

These false pretenses that FSC-certified products are either not available or cost much more left a negative impression with many project managers. Some architects and designers stopped specifying FSC materials in their projects. The truth is that most wood products used in construction are available as FSC-certified if people know where to look. While the price of these products does vary from product-to-product, region-to-region, species-to-species, and company-to-company, the same is true for products that are not FSC-certified. The best way to make sure you are getting a fair price is to request several quotes from different companies. FSC-products are value-added products and it does cost the companies involved to be FSC-certified chain-of-custody operations, so one should expect to pay a premium although it is not always the case. Some companies ask for more than others when it comes to premiums.

Some quotes will be higher and lead times will be longer based on factors not related to FSC-certification. Factors such as availability of species specified (some species are not commercially available whether FSC-certified or not) , dimensions specified (wider, longer, and thicker lumber costs much more as there is only so much of it in a tree), grade specified (clear grades cost more than character grades as there is only so much clear wood in a tree and waste increases as the lower grade material demand is less than supply), drying time required (varies from species to species and can take several weeks), and shipping costs.

You can make a positive environmental impact each time you specify and/or purchase wood products that are harvested from well-managed forests. Buying FSC-certified products is a reliable way to do your part to make sure the world's forests are managed in an environmentally sound, socially responsible, and economically viable manner. This will ensure that future generations will also be able to rely on these truly environmentally-friendly and renewable resources that we call wood products and the forests from which they come.

To find out more about FSC certification, how to become FSC certified, or where to find FSC-certified products please go to www.fscus.org.

“Green Building & the Wood Products Industry”

Jason Shuey, Rainforest Alliance

Wood products, when harvested from well-managed forests, are among the most environmentally-friendly resources available for use in construction. Yet use of wood products, that is any product made from the processing of logs into components, is often associated with negative environmental impacts such as deforestation. This is an incorrect and dangerous misconception as the future of our forests and the wood products industry depend on well-managed sustainable forests and the many positive attributes that go along with them, including recreation, carbon sequestration, water quality, erosion control and biodiversity.

Because of the positive attributes associated with a well-managed forest, there is support from environmental groups for wood products harvested from such forests, so long as there is credible, third party certification and a documented chain-of-custody (COC). The principles and criteria set forth by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) were created with input from various stakeholders including industry and environmental groups. Initiated in 1993, FSC “is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes the responsible management of the world’s working forests through the development of forest management standards, a voluntary certification system, and trademarks that provide recognition and value to products bearing the FSC label in the marketplace.”

While most wood products companies claim to practice sustainable forestry, and many do in some parts of the world such as Appalachia, where the hardwood forest regenerates naturally, but the definition of the word “sustainable” must be clear. Sustainable is defined as “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged”. While many companies are being truthful when they describe their forest management as sustainable, especially in Appalachian forests because growth minus mortality may meet or exceed removal, but what is done to ensure the forests are “well-managed” and remain sustainable? FSC’s 10 principles and 57 criteria require written management plans and policies that show exactly what is being done to “ensure forestry is being practiced in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable way.” FSC certified products come from “well-managed” forests that involve many more factors than sustainability. Sustainability occurred naturally by the above definition when Appalachia was clearcut at the turn of the century because of the ability of the hardwood species to naturally regenerate under those conditions and we have learned a lot about silviculture over the last century as well. Many ask why the wood products industry is held under such a microscope compared to other resources. When you consider the images of the devastation that occurred for years, how can the public not be skeptical of the industry?

People working in the wood products profession understand the numerous positive attributes of a productive working forest. However, not all people work in the industry and many associate cutting down trees with negative environmental impacts. This is partly due to the lack of a response from the wood products industry to public concern about deforestation over the last century. The industry is now moving in the right direction and consumers are more wary about how their purchases impact the environment than they have ever been. Some environmental groups and industry are now working together to raise public awareness about the benefits of a “well-managed” forest.

Currently, FSC is the only certification system that is recognized under the US Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) program. Also, every other major green building program recognizes FSC certification although not exclusively.

Wood products harvested from well-managed forests are some of, if not the most environmentally-friendly products on the planet, but how can consumers identify wood products from well-managed forests? Without actually going to the forest where the wood products were harvested while at the same time having expertise in forestry, consumers can buy in confidence when they purchase wood products that are third-party certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

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“A Deeper Shade of Green: Using Underutilized Species and Grades of Wood”

Jason Shuey, Rainforest Alliance

While it is proven that wood products harvested from well-managed forests are some of, if not the most environmentally-friendly products on the planet, how can we identify wood products from well-managed forests? Without actually going to the forest where the wood products were harvested and having expertise in forest management, consumers can buy in confidence when they purchase wood products that are third-party certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Launched in 1993, FSC “is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes the responsible management of the world’s working forests through the development of forest management standards, a voluntary certification system, and trademarks that provide recognition and value to products bearing the FSC label in the marketplace.”

While FSC-certification does provide a way for consumers to have a direct impact on forest management, FSC certification does not take into account species or grade of wood. This provides an opportunity for those looking to purchase the “greenest” wood products by specifying underutilized species and grades of wood that are also FSC-certified. Underutilized species and grades are those defined here as commercially available, but lack demand to meet supply. Consumer demand dictates that these species and grades are inferior products compared to the “cream of the crop”. This is far from truth and contradictive to truly green intentions.

Our hardwood forests are made up of several different species and only a handful of these species are available in quantities that can supply our needs. It is imperative that we all understand that not all species are readily available as many lesser-known species make up a very small percentage of the total forest inventory and therefore, must be harvested conservatively to protect the balance and biodiversity of the forest ecosystem.

Buyers should also know that their decision in species and grade has a direct impact on the environment. Wood products companies historically have harvested and processed the species and grades that you, the consumer have demanded. Many consumers want the most rare and clearest wood possible, or best grade, known as “uppers”. Obviously, trees are produced by nature and do not grow perfectly clear or square. The result of this uppers-only demand is many more trees of high genetic potential being removed from the forest to supply the demand.

A small percentage of a log reaches this upper grade status. Every log has other lower, underutilized grades left after the upper grades are processed. Often these grades are sold at much cheaper prices as sawmills must turn over their inventory as quickly as possible. These underutilized grades are not inferior, as hardwood grades do not rate strength as softwood grades do. Underutilized hardwood grades are “lower” grades due to imperfections such as color variation, knots from where tree branches were, and smaller cutting sizes from each board. These imperfections give the wood products far more character than clear wood and bring out the true beauty of wood.

If consumer behavior changes and more people demand the underutilized species and grades, it will make forest managers and sawmills more efficient as they will be able to utilize what species and grades are available. This efficiency also means less wood waste, which is never actually wasted, but used in other applications. When you combine FSC-certification with underutilized species and grades it translates into a very bright shade of green to the educated consumer!

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“Why Wood?”

Jason Shuey, Rainforest Alliance

Wood products, when harvested sustainably, are amongst the most environmentally-friendly resources available for use in building products, paper products, and many household items that each of us uses everyday. Yet use of wood products, that is any product made from the processing of logs into components, is often associated with negative environmental impacts such as deforestation. This is an incorrect and dangerous misconception as the future of our forests depends on sustainable forest management.

There are many environmental advantages of using wood products that are harvested from well-managed forests. Wood is a renewable resource where as many other products such as plastics and steel require petroleum and coal, non-renewable resources. Other common “wood alternatives” call for bamboo or other agriculturally-based products. While these products certainly grow faster than most trees, there is no evidence to show how these raw materials are managed in relation to social, environmental and economic indicators and no evidence to support that these rapidly renewable materials are as green as wood products from “well-managed forests”.

While it is proven that wood products harvested from well-managed forests are some of, if not the most environmentally-friendly products on the planet, how can we identify wood products from well-managed forests? Without actually going to the forest where the wood products were harvested while at the same time having expertise in forestry, consumers can buy in confidence when they purchase wood products that are third-party certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

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A report from Newsome and Hewitt in 2005 examined 129 FSC-certified forestry operations in 21 countries and found that the following social and environmental impacts were made through the certification process:

- 60% improved management of aquatic and riparian zones, sensitive sites, high conservation value forests, and threatened and endangered species
- 70% improved communication and conflict resolution with nearby communities
- 60% improved worker training and safety

In another report, Newsome, Bahn and Cashore (2005, *Journal of Forest Policy and Economics*) examined 80 FSC-certified forestry operations in the US and found the following impacts that were a direct result of FSC certification:

- 90% made changes to forest management plans
- 70% improved monitoring, inventory, and high conservation value forest management
- 60% improved management of woody debris/snags, aquatic and riparian areas, and threatened and endangered species

You can make a positive environmental impact each time you purchase wood products that are harvested from well-managed forests. Buying FSC-certified products is a reliable way to do your part to make sure the world's forests are managed in an environmentally sound, socially responsible, and economically viable manner. This will ensure that future generations will also be able to rely on these truly environmentally-friendly and renewable resources that we call wood products and the forests in which they come from.

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