

FSC Family Forests Alliance -- The Path Forward

2008 Action Plan

Introduction

In July 2007, the FSC Family Forests Alliance hosted a national strategic planning meeting at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Conference Center. This meeting, *Advancing Private Lands Conservation Through Family Forest Certification*, brought together diverse public and private interests with a shared goal. The stated purpose for the meeting was:

"Using Forest Stewardship Council certification as an organizing principle, this conference will expand cooperation and define a national growth strategy among landowner associations, government agencies, and other family forest advocates"

The resulting 2008 Action Plan provides the path forward for the 10 Action Areas that emerged from the discussions at this meeting¹.

Background on the Alliance

The FSC Family Forests Alliance² has been created to provide a national mechanism for bringing together individuals and organizations committed to promoting responsible forest stewardship through FSC standards.

By creating a forum for communication, cooperation, and information sharing, participants in the Alliance can pursue issues of common interest, learn from one another, and enlarge the community of landowners and small businesses practicing responsible forestry.

Alliance Organizers:

- Blue Ridge Forest Cooperative, Christiansburg, VA
- Community Forestry Resource Center, Minneapolis, MN
- Dovetail Partners, Minneapolis, MN
- Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative, South Deerfield, MA
- Northwest Natural Resource Group, Port Townsend, WA
- Southern Forests Network, Asheville, NC
- Trust to Conserve Northeast Forestlands, Hebron, ME

The four primary purposes of the FSC Family Forests Alliance are to:

- 1 Advocate for FSC policies, public policies, and procurement policies that better serve FSC-certified family forests.
- 2 Operate as a forum to share information and strategies for successful models of certification, forest management, policy development, and market development.
- 3 Provide more visible networks and membership opportunities for family forest owners who feel underserved by existing forest management models and landowner organizations.
- 4 Work collaboratively to develop new resources and tools for group certification programs.

¹ For additional information about the agenda and participants in the event, please visit: <http://rapid-improvement.com/wingspread/>

² For more information about the FSC Family Forests Alliance: <http://www.familyforestsalliance.org>

2008 Action Plan - The 10 Action Areas

The 2008 Action Plan outlines the 10 Action Areas where the Alliance and its partners will be placing energy and effort over the next 12 months.

1) Secure & Extend the Value of the FSC Family Forests Alliance

The FSC Family Forest Alliance emerged organically over the past year from groups and associations that have been working to extend forest certification to family forest owners. In its development and through the meeting at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Center in July 2007, the value of this central organizing Alliance was confirmed. A number of areas of action were identified that the Alliance and its partners can lead, while supporting and encouraging the work of the Forest Stewardship Council.

Activities to be undertaken by the Alliance in the next 12 months to address this Action Area include:

a. Web Available Resources for Group Certification

Develop links to existing materials (template management plans, monitoring guides, etc.) that can be made available at the Alliance website to assist the growth of group certification. (Future work may include identifying gaps in existing materials and the development of new resources.)

b. Complete MOU between FSC-US & Alliance

The FSC Family Forests Alliance can serve as a central communications hub for working private woodland owner groups across the country, providing them with a variety of services and quickening their learning pace regarding forest certification opportunities. The efforts of the Alliance can help support the broader efforts of the FSC-US. The development of a shared agreement regarding roles and responsibilities for the two entities would help maximize the mutual benefit.

c. Develop Case Studies of Family Forest Certification

Develop up to 10 case studies that provide examples of family forest certification models that can be replicated and enhanced. The case studies would be made available through the Alliance website.

d. Develop Position Papers on Key Tools & Innovations

The development of position and/or issue papers regarding key tools, innovations, barriers or opportunities related to the advancement of family forest certification. Potential topics include applying the controlled wood policy to family forestlands and point-of-harvest certification.

e. Implement Membership Fee Structure and Growth Plan

To expand and maintain the effectiveness of the Alliance, the core organizers will develop plans for a membership structure, benefits and services, and a stable revenue stream.

2) Expedite Improved Family Forest Indicators

The FSC-US is currently engaged in a Standards Revision Process that includes the development of national Family Forest Indicators and guidance for their use. These indicators are essential for making the FSC standard more useful and less complex for family forest landowners and their service providers. The development of the Family Forest Indicators is essential to extending FSC standards to significantly more private woodland owners across the country. With sufficient funding, it is estimated that the process could be expedited. The Alliance and its partners are committed to participating in and supporting the FSC-US's Standards Revision Process.

a. Mobilize Pulp Industry Support for Speeding Standards Process

The pulp and paper industry is a key sector with a current high need for FSC certified fiber from private woodland owners. They have strong interest in getting this process up to speed quickly and can potentially contribute significantly throughout the process of developing, field-testing, and implementing the Family Forest Indicators.

b. Include Mixed Scale Groups in Standards

In the United States, the FSC currently provides streamlined auditing requirements for ownerships that are less than 1,000 hectares (~2,500 acres) in size. However, group certificates may include landowners that exceed this size. There is an opportunity for the Alliance and its partners to advocate for an FSC policy or guidance document that would instruct auditors to apply the streamlined auditing and other small property accommodations at the individual property level.

3) Proactive Communications with Key Partners

There are many organizations concerned about the status of FSC certification for family forests and actions that will help increase participation. Communications to key interests and partners are important to let them know the work of the Alliance, results of the Wingspread planning, how they can be involved in the development of the Family Forests Program of the FSC-US and the potential benefits from the Family Forest Indicators. The Alliance is committed to communicating with its partners about these opportunities.

4) Confirm Ramp-Up Plan for Post Standards Upgrade

When the FSC-US completes the development of the Family Forest Indicators and guidance, there is anticipated to be a strong interest from a variety of partners to employ them. The Alliance is working to organize the opportunities for field testing and immediate implementation of the Family Forest Indicators. Initial field tests may include "super groups" such as the development of large, statewide group certificates as well other types of family forest certification efforts that help test the effectiveness of the Family Forest Indicators.

5) Establish FSC Regional Resource Forums

To increase the impact and benefit of forest management certification, it is important to connect with the marketplace. To build these connections, the Alliance and its partners are working to establish communication networks in various regions. The goal is to provide quarterly meetings that convene certified business and business interests in at least four regions of the country. These events and communications may occur in conjunction with the well-established SFI³ Implementation Committees.

³ Sustainable Forestry Initiative

6) Engage the American Forest Foundation

There are many organizations in the United States who are committed to advancing the stewardship of family forestlands. Key among these organizations is the American Forest Foundation (AFF) and its American Tree Farm System. The Alliance and its partners will explore opportunities to engage AFF and work on common interests.

7) Advance Area Group Certification Pilots

Forest certification is currently complex and costly for family forestland ownerships that are small and include many independent decision-makers. There may be opportunities to test modified approaches to group certification that help overcome these challenges. Efforts in Maine and Wisconsin are currently exploring opportunities for new group certification models. The Alliance is engaged in these efforts and will work to ensure that the learning is shared and replicated where possible, and that the efforts help inform certification programs and policies.

8) Align Carbon Credit Market with FSC

There are significant potential synergies between forest certification and the carbon credit market and markets for other ecosystem services. Alliance leaders in Maine and Washington have already begun establishing models that link FSC certification on family forestlands with carbon credit markets. The Alliance is actively seeking additional support to expand these efforts and their potential impacts and benefits.

9) Confirm Useful Group Management Certification Web Tool

Managing a group certification program includes record keeping and monitoring responsibilities that could be accomplished more effectively and efficiently through electronic and online data management tools. Alliance leaders and partners are pioneering web-based group management tools that have the potential to greatly expand family forest certification potentials.

10) Engage Demand Side Partners

There are many public and private organizations and individuals who have been effective in building market demand for FSC-certified products. The Alliance is committed to working with these interests to ensure a shared understanding of the importance of family forest stewardship in meeting common interests in responsible forest products.

Summary

The 2008 Action Plan outlines the 10 Action Areas where the Alliance and its partners will be placing energy and effort over the next 12 months. The plan includes work around communications, providing resources to support certification efforts, and helping support strategic efforts by the Forest Stewardship Council, including a standards revision process. As with any product marketing plan, by first increasing awareness of family forest certification opportunities, the Alliance aims to spur interest, acceptance - and ultimately - greater adoption of certification as a tool for forest stewardship.

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