



SUSTAINABLE  
FORESTRY  
INITIATIVE



# California Forestry Regulations and Third-Party Certification

What's the difference?

A look at green building  
and sustainable forestry  
in California

# California Regulations, FSC and SFI Certification.

## What's the difference?

Concerns over global climate change have sparked an interest in green building, sustainable forestry and the use of wood — the only renewable, recyclable and biodegradable building material available.



Most green building standards cite a preference for wood grown and harvested in sustainable forests. In California, state laws regulate forestry activity on private forestland, and California's Forest Practice Rules (FPRs) are, in fact, aimed at ensuring sustainability. In addition, forestland owners may seek independent, third-party certification that their forests are well managed and sustainable. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) are the two largest independent certification programs. Each has its own standards, costs and independent audit requirements.

A 2003 study by Cal Poly State University-San Luis Obispo systematically compared the state requirements with the two certification programs. In almost all categories examined, California state rules were found to be as strict or stricter than FSC and SFI requirements. The study's conclusion: Forestry practices on California's private forestlands meet or exceed the requirements of the independent certification systems by complying with state law. A synopsis follows:

*The Cal Poly study examined the standards met by owners of California forestlands in various categories (symbols signify extent of requirements compared to other systems):*

- +** signifies a greater extent of requirements compared to other systems
- =** signifies an equivalent extent of requirements compared to other systems
- signifies a lesser extent of requirements compared to other systems

### Forestry Practices

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | + |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

**Licensing & Training**  
State Forest Practice Rules (FPRs) are more stringent than FSC and SFI because they require that a licensed Registered Professional Forester (RFP) prepare all forest management plans. They also require licensing for timber operators. FSC requires landowners to use "qualified" foresters, loggers and contractors, and they expect forest workers to have adequate training and supervision. SFI requires forest managers to be trained in water quality laws and California's Best Management Practices.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | + |
| FSC        | + |
| SFI        | = |

**Even-aged Management**  
Landscape diversity is encouraged in all three systems. State rules set a maximum size of harvest blocks lower than FSC or SFI and mandate specific stand ages be reached before harvest. FSC has the most stringent requirements regarding harvesting adjacent stands and requires retention of trees in the post-harvest stand. SFI allows for average harvest sizes up to 120 acres and requires that a verifiable policy exist to monitor harvest size.

|            |     |
|------------|-----|
| STATE REG. | =/- |
| FSC        | +   |
| SFI        | =   |

**Sustained Yield**  
All three systems require that harvest does not exceed growth over a long period. California requires Sustained Yield Plans (SYP) for ownerships greater than 50,000 acres and Non-Industrial Timber Management Plans (NTMP) for smaller landowners. State Timber Harvest Plans (THPs) don't necessarily address management across the entire ownership. SFI does not require a single forest-management plan to address all issues, but requires the landowner to protect soils, water quality, wildlife habitat diversity, aesthetics and other factors. FSC requires an account of the same plant communities, habitat and water resources, and requires an inventory of natural processes.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | + |
| FSC        | + |
| SFI        | = |

**Uneven-aged Management**  
The State allows for openings up to 2.5 acres, but not more than 20 percent of a THP area, and transition cuts are allowed. FSC requires managers to justify their systems, basing their decisions on ecological and economic characteristics. SFI protects advanced regeneration during overstory removal.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | + |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

**Harvesting Practices**  
All three systems have standards for harvesting practices. The State has extremely prescriptive standards while FSC has general standards. SFI typically relies on state Best Management Practices for its standards.

State: = for SYP,  
Option-a, NTMP;  
- for THP

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Regeneration

Regeneration after harvest is heavily emphasized in all three systems with many standards met by State regulations.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | + |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Intermediate Treatments

The State is the only system that has specific standards for thinning operations.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | + |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | - |

### Site Preparation

State requirements are more detailed than FSC, which focuses on slash and fuel reduction. SFI addresses site preparation once — in the context of protecting soil productivity.

## Environmental Considerations

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Soil

All three programs place a high priority on soil conservation and productivity. Most of the certification standards that pertain to soil can be met through the State regulations.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Water

Water quality is addressed consistently in State regulations and certification program standards that pertain to harvesting, site preparation, road construction, etc.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | - |
| SFI        | - |

### Air

Air quality issues are addressed in California's FPRs and are covered by regulations at the local, district and State level. FSC does not mention air quality at all. SFI states that one benefit of sustainable forestry is the conservation of air quality.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Fish & Wildlife

All three programs work to protect fish and wildlife. State regulations lean toward eliminating adverse effects to fish and wildlife habitat, while FSC and SFI tend to focus on encouraging species diversity.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Forest Protection

State regulations emphasize fire to a greater extent. While all systems offer standards on the protection of forests from fire, insects and disease, State regulations are more rigid and prescriptive.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | + |
| SFI        | = |

### Chemicals

State regulations address chemicals through Department of Food and Agriculture regulations. FSC is adamantly opposed to most types of chemical use except when research shows other efforts as ineffective. SFI allows some chemical use but it must be minimized to protect employees, neighbors, the public and the environment.

## Socio-economic Considerations

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | + |

### Aesthetics

Aesthetics are addressed by all three systems. SFI dedicates an entire section to minimizing the impact of harvesting on aesthetics. FSC says little in regard to aesthetics other than to inform local stakeholders of potential timber operations.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| STATE REG. | = |
| FSC        | = |
| SFI        | = |

### Significant Areas

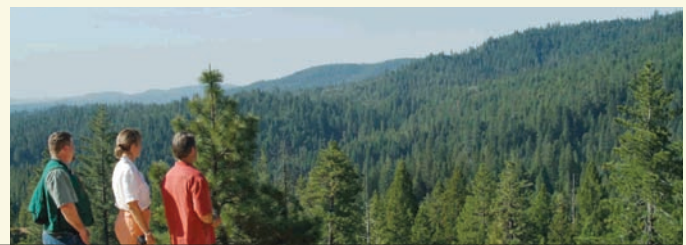
State regulations protect archaeological and historical sites. FSC requires landowners to request Native Americans assist in identifying sites of cultural significance. SFI requires lands to be managed in accordance with cultural qualities.

|            |     |
|------------|-----|
| STATE REG. | =   |
| FSC        | =   |
| SFI        | -/+ |

SFI: - for public input  
+ for research

### Community Involvement

All systems call for community involvement, but in different manners. The State seeks public input in the creation and evaluation of standards, while FSC requires public input when determining certificates and planning timber operations. SFI does not require public input, but exceeds in requirements for financial or in-kind support for research.



## Conclusion

California forestry on private land adheres to some of the highest environmental standards in the world. Companies harvesting trees on California's private forestlands inherently practice sustainable forestry and regularly meet or exceed the requirements of the leading independent certification systems.

Evaluations are based on "A Comparison of California Forest Practice Rules and Two Forest Certification Systems," April 2003. The full text of the study, which was funded by the California Forest Products Commission, can be found at [www.ufe.calpoly.edu/files/ufeipubs/CAFPC.pdf](http://www.ufe.calpoly.edu/files/ufeipubs/CAFPC.pdf). The FPRs, FSC and SFI standards are continually being amended. For a copy of the California Forest Practice Rules, go to [www.fire.ca.gov/rsrc-mgt\\_forestpractice.php](http://www.fire.ca.gov/rsrc-mgt_forestpractice.php) (look under "Forest Practice, More Info."). FSC certification standards can be found at: [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org). SFI certification standards can be found at: [www.sfiprogram.org](http://www.sfiprogram.org).



**Wood From Sustainable Forests<sup>SM</sup>**



**California Forest  
Products Commission**

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