State's forest products industry to benefit from recent decision

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Last month's decision by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), to open LEED, the world's most recognized green building standard, to more certified wood products was more than 10 years in the making. This is a huge victory for Mississippi forest owners.

Building to "green" building standards is becoming increasingly common worldwide as more companies seek to engage in environmentally responsible and sustainable building practices.

Buildings, like the Southaven Southern Thunder Harley-Davidson dealership, are built to "green" building standards, LEED or Green Globes, as a way to show that their owners support sustainability and environmentally conscious design.

Builders can earn LEED status by earning credits. One credit is available for using certified wood products. Certified wood products come from forests whose owners meet rigorous criteria for best management practices. This includes: practicing sustainable forestry; complying with laws, reforesting tracts; protecting air, soil, and water; conserving biodiversity; and more.

Until now, LEED only allowed builders to get credit for using wood from forests certified through one certification standard, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), leaving out the two largest sustainable forest certification programs in the U.S.: the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS).

Since LEED's inception, many have argued using only FSC-certified wood was discriminatory to American tree farmers who own and manage family land, one of the largest sources of wood in the country.

In Washington, Mississippi Republican Reps. Gregg Harper, Trent Kelly and Steven Palazzo, along with Democrat Rep. Bennie Thompson, championed inclusion of ATFS and SFI-certified wood. This included writing letters to USGBC in support of our position.

In Jackson, Gov. Phil Bryant signed legislation in 2013 specifying that building projects funded by the state our tree farm is in nearby Holly Springs. Last year, we sold approximately 140 tons of loblolly pine to our local mill.

Besides being tree farmers, we are also land stewards. We have a forest management plan that focuses on conserving water and wildlife habitat. We are committed to protecting forest health.

The larger market created by the USGBC action will be a boon to Mississippi tree farmers and the Mississippi economy, creating more demand for ATFS-certified wood. This will help us continue to be able to practice good forestry. We believe it will encourage other private landowners to manage

Companies now can find it easier to comply with sustainable timber and forestry practices due to a decision by the U.S. Green Building Council.