USGBC’s Announcement Supports Family Woodland Owners and an Increase in Wood Use in Building Construction

On Tuesday, April 5, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the governing body for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system, announced plans to create a new opportunity for using wood products in buildings, including wood from family forests certified by the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS).

USGBC’s Announcement Is Good for Forests and Rural America

- **Markets for wood help keep forests as forests:** Most of America’s forests are owned by private and family landowners. Markets for wood products provide income for landowners to keep their land as forests, pay taxes and conduct management.

- **Markets for wood support the nation’s 22 million family woodland owners:** Families are the largest ownership group of forests in the U.S., owning more land than the federal government or corporations. USGBC’s announcement to accept wood from ATFS, the nation’s largest certification program for family woodland owners, can help stimulate markets for their sustainable wood products.

- **Markets for wood create jobs and support rural economies:** More than 1 million people rely on forests for good paying jobs, and forests generate more than $233 billion in sales each year, which means income for rural communities across America.

- **Using more wood in buildings helps mitigate climate change:** Wood products used in construction store carbon and emit fewer greenhouse gas emissions when manufactured, compared to alternatives like steel and concrete.

**USGBC’s Announcement Levels the Playing Field, Allowing All Credible Forest Certification Systems:** USGBC’s new alternative compliance path will allow wood from all credible forest certification systems operating in the U.S. including from ATFS, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Systems (PEFC), and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

**USGBC’s Announcement Supports American Wood Products:** Previously, USGBC only recognized wood certified by FSC. With more than 80 million acres certified by ATFS and SFI in the U.S., and only 33 million acres certified by FSC, opening LEED to ATFS and SFI means more American-grown wood products can be used.

For more information, visit: www.forestfoundation.org/wood-a-better-way-to-build
How did USGBC create this opportunity for more wood use in buildings?
USGBC created a pilot ‘alternative compliance path’ in the LEED rating system, which allows builders to earn credits for using wood certified by any credible certification system recognized by ASTM International, the global leader in development of voluntary and consensus based standards. ATFS, SFI, PEFC and FSC are all recognized by ATSM.

For builders to earn credit under this alternative compliance path, 100% of the wood used in the project must come from legal sources, with at least 70% from responsible sources, which includes wood from ATFS, SFI, PEFC, FSC or other responsible sources. In addition, builders must have 25% of the cost of their permanently installed building materials (the structure itself) come from certified sources, including ATFS, SFI, PEFC and FSC.

Why is this a pilot? Like other new elements USGBC has introduced into the LEED rating system, a pilot is first created for builders to use and test. If the pilot credit is used, it will become part of the LEED system during the next revision.

Why is this a federal, state and local government issue? Isn’t USGBC a private standard? While USGBC’s LEED system is a private sector, voluntary standard, many government entities have adopted policies requiring building construction or renovation to meet the LEED standard or other standards such as the Green Building Initiative’s Green Globes rating system. Before this new path, policies that required LEED standards created barriers to using wood in government buildings.

Does this mean all barriers to using wood in LEED buildings have been removed? While this removes a critical barrier to using wood in LEED buildings, there is still more USGBC can do to ensure that the environmentally-preferable qualities of wood are recognized. An important area where LEED still has room to improve is providing a full set of tools and guidelines to compare the environmental impact of different building materials to each other.

Join the conversation by using the hashtag #buildwithwood and thank USGBC for encouraging the use of more sustainable wood products, especially from family-owned forests, whose owners work to ensure we have clean water and air, wildlife habitat and much more.

Follow us on Twitter at @AmForestFndn

For more information, visit: www.forestfoundation.org/wood-a-better-way-to-build