

Setting the Standard: Certification, Governance and the Forest Stewardship Council

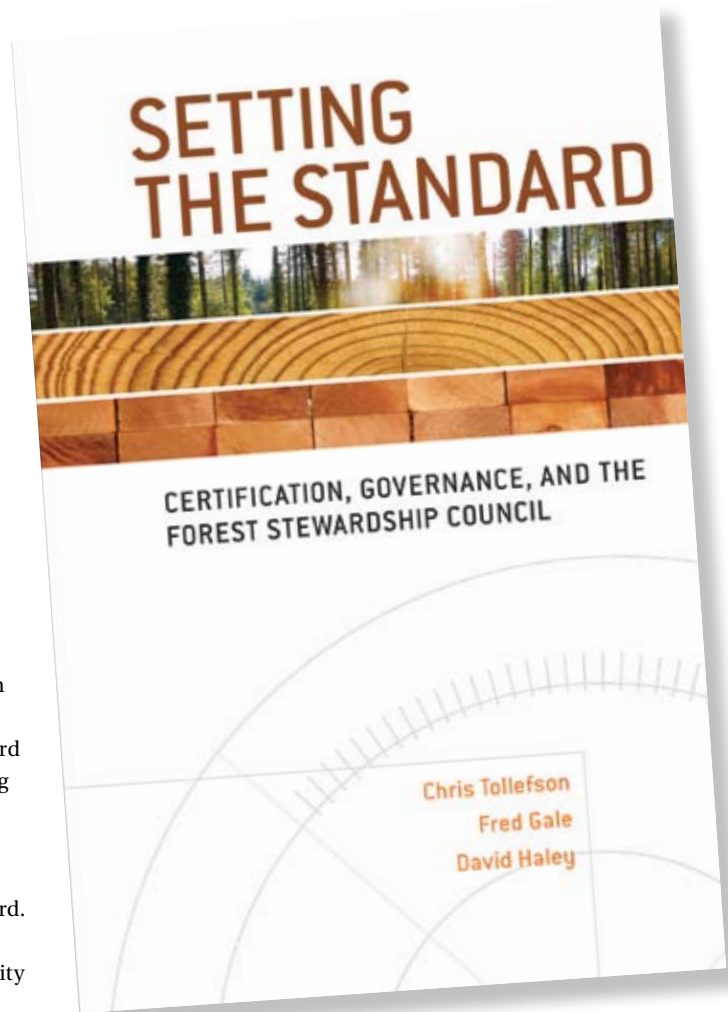
Tollefson, C., F. Gale & D. Haley
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IN THE WORDS OF THE PREFACE, THIS IS “AN IN-DEPTH COMPARATIVE study of an organizational icon of new governance and regulatory theory, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).” It is detailed and scholarly—apparently written for fellow academics and students of political economy.

Arranged in four parts with copious endnotes, an extensive bibliography, a necessary list of acronyms, and appended details of the ‘FSC International Standards: principles and criteria for forest stewardship,’ the book gives a comprehensive account of development of the specific BC standard. Part One, in four chapters, details the fraught negotiations leading up to the standard finally accepted, compares it to those agreed in other jurisdictions and contrasts it with other certification schemes. The next four chapters, Part Two, examine application of FSC’s principles in light of forest tenure in BC, rights of communities and forest employees, indigenous peoples’ rights and, finally, environmental values. Again BC’s standard is compared to those for the Maritimes, US Rocky Mountains, US Pacific Coast and Boreal forest jurisdictions. The third part, in three chapters, has perhaps the least relevance for practising foresters being largely an academic discussion of the politics of standards development, government and governance. The two chapters of the concluding fourth part continue this analysis of FSC governance and re-examine the struggle to complete the BC standard. The authors conclude that the FSC has successfully developed a governance system but is weak in areas of regulation and applicability in developing countries. They hint at but do not elaborate on the possibility of conflict between government rule and FSC governance.

This is not easy reading. It speaks principally to students of government and political economy and only implicitly addresses the impact of FSC standards on day-to-day forestry practice in the province. The writing is sometimes opaque—what exactly is meant by, “What might be termed the ‘ecological’ conception of social reality emerging from Freeman’s and Wood’s work suggests that a botanical approach to instances of governance and regulation, which identifies several dimensions of difference, will prove more instructive than one premised on a single dichotomous continuum ?” It is sometimes ponderous and bombastic with occasional lapses into the colloquial and a too frequent use of the conditional—“we would argue,” or “we would contend”—when the present tense is appropriate.

There are some other flaws: silviculture is misspelled; “plantations or other non-forestry uses” suggests either carelessness or lack of understanding; there is frequent repetition—“as is detailed in Chapter 4,” “we revisit these details in Chapter 11;” and it is debatably asserted that



“Constitution change is somewhat easier in Canada [than in Australia].” The bibliography cites such publications as *Hammond’s Seeing the Forest amongst the Trees* but questionably omits Kimmins’ *Balancing Act* and Moore’s *Green Spirit*. These may seem picayune criticisms but one looks for a higher standard in a university publication.

RANKING: 3.5 OUT OF 5 CONES



Reviewed by Roy Strang, RPF (Ret)