



From Global to Local:

Why is FSC Popular Around the World but not in BC?

I ATTENDED THE 6TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA) OF THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP Council (FSC) in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia in June 2011. This was my second general assembly and it fully lived up to my expectations as a thoroughly inspiring, stimulating and motivating event.

Every three years, the FSC hosts a general assembly to debate issues, celebrate successes and establish policy and future direction for the FSC. This one reminded me again why I have chosen to work as a forestry assessor and assessment team leader in the FSC system and to participate actively in the organization for most of the last 12 years.

FSC is the most widely recognized and accepted system for certifying forest management in the world. The FSC principles, criteria and regional indicators set the highest standards of forest management. They are also supported by the most thorough audits and most extensive chain of custody system. FSC certification requires the most extensive consultation with interested parties and the most transparent process.

Increasingly, FSC is the means by which corporations demonstrate their commitment to socially and environmentally responsible forest stewardship and maintain access to the global markets that are demanding products from well-managed forests. But FSC is much more than a standard and market access for companies.

This GA brought together over 400 people from 70 countries representing the full spectrum of interests in the management of the world's forests—indigenous peoples, forest workers, church groups, community and womens' groups from the northern and southern hemispheres, as well as academics, small forest land owners, forest farmers and a host of others. Senior managers of many forest corporations—from very large to very small—wood products distributors and retailers were prominently represented. These people come from all corners of the globe and from every type of forest—boreal to tropical, rainforest to dry woodland.

The GA participants share a common passion and commitment to confront the serious issues of deforestation, species and habitat loss and climate change, and share a strong sense of mutual respect for each others' interests. The FSC GA is a model of consensus building—a united nations for forest management—and a place of global leadership on forestry matters.

Returning home from this inspiring assembly, I wonder why FSC is still largely a non-event in BC and why we are so disconnected from the themes that are prominent within the FSC. BC is a major forest jurisdiction; BC companies are in global markets; we are recognized for good forest management plans and practices. So why are we so under-represented in FSC certification and at FSC events?

In Canada, there are over 43 million ha of FSC certified forest, in 60 certificates in nine provinces. FSC is growing rapidly and very soon, the area of FSC certification in Canada will surpass CSA and SFI. Several large

companies in other provinces proudly hold FSC certificates and were very active at the GA.

In BC, with our globally significant forests, we have just over two million ha FSC certified and only six certificates. Most companies and professional foresters continue to avoid engagement with FSC and BC had very little representation at the GA. Recently top executives of seven large pulp and paper companies in BC wrote a letter noting that FSC certification is a strong market preference, almost a market requirement, and expressing their strong interest in acquiring FSC certified fibre for their operations in BC. Yet the uptake from BC forest managers continues to be very slow.

There may be several reasons for this. Certainly, there are places in BC where our tenure system, particularly volume-based and non-replaceable tenures, appears not to meet the FSC requirement for a defined long-term forest management area. Issues have also been identified with the unsustainable levels of harvest associated with the beetle uplifts. However, there are FSC certified volume-based tenures in BC and there are certificates in areas of serious pine beetle attack, so these can be addressed.

Concerns have also been expressed about the requirement to recognize and respect the legal and customary rights of First Nations. Again, some companies in BC have developed very strong relationships with First Nations and have met the FSC requirements. Numerous other FSC requirements have also been identified as obstacles to certification in BC. However, related and similar requirements are being addressed by companies and foresters across boreal Canada and in BC.

The FSC BC standard is intended to set a high bar and it does present some challenges. However, from my perspective, much of the lack of uptake in BC continues to be rooted in the myths, misunderstandings and misconceptions from 10 years ago and an unwillingness to engage in new approaches to integrating social, environmental and economic interests in ways that respect First Nations rights. These new approaches are being implemented in other parts of the world and are being expected by consumers. These new approaches are embraced by the many diverse interests represented at the GA working together to address very difficult forestry issues.

It's time BC caught up. We need to learn more about FSC, put aside the past conflicts and embrace an organization that many world-leaders, professionals and corporations now recognize as a positive force for needed change in the management of forests world-wide. 🐾

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