

**Testimony before the Committee on  
Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
Regarding Amendment to LD 1985 – An Act to Authorize Removal of Requirements of Forest  
Certification Systems from the State’s Forest Management Plans**

**March 22, 2024**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Nadine Block, and I am the Senior Vice President for Community and Government Relations at the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI).

SFI is an independent, nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with our network – consisting of conservation groups, federal, state and county governments, Indigenous peoples, private landowners, loggers, manufacturers, universities and more – to advance sustainability through forest-focused collaboration. We leverage SFI-certified forests and products as powerful tools to help solve sustainability challenges such as climate action, conservation of biodiversity, provision of water, education of future generations, and sustainable economic development. We invite you to learn more at [forests.org](https://forests.org).

**Our position is "against" the amendment to LD 1985 – An Act to Authorize Removal of Requirements of Forest Certification Systems from the State’s Forest Management Plans.**

Specifically, we oppose the prohibition on the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry from “obtaining or maintaining certification from a voluntary, nonprofit and nonstock corporation organized under the District of Columbia Nonprofit Corporation Act, including, but not limited to, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc.” This prohibition would hinder the state’s ability to advance its conservation, social, and economic objectives.

**We therefore urge the committee to vote against the measure.**

Please accept our testimony providing information on the SFI standards and our work across Maine and nationally.

In particular, I want to emphasize several key points, on which I elaborate below:

- SFI makes important contributions to Maine’s forests, communities, and economy.
- State agencies benefit from participation in the SFI standards.
- SFI standards are developed through a transparent process with diverse participation and are backed by independent, third-party audits.
- SFI standards require compliance with laws that protect workers’ rights.
- SFI advances logger and contractor training and workforce development.

In addition to what is included below, additional detail on specific requirements in the SFI standard can be found at <https://forests.org/sfi-2022-standards/>.

**1. SFI makes important contributions to Maine’s forests.**

SFI operates forest certification standards that are used across the United States and Canada, including a Forest Management Standard and a Fiber Sourcing Standard. In Maine, 7.3 million acres are certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard.

SFI standards include requirements to conserve wildlife habitat, provide clean water, train logging professionals, respect Indigenous rights, and support conservation research. SFI-certified organizations must meet or exceed applicable water quality laws and regulations, with measures to manage and protect wetlands and riparian zones on certified lands. They must continually evaluate habitat and biodiversity impacts from forest activities – which leads to improved habitat quality, and protection of imperiled or critically imperiled species.

SFI standards have been recognized by federal and state agencies, including a 2016 rule issued by the US EPA on forest roads and water quality. EPA recognized the role of forest certification programs, including SFI, which “have made important contributions to improved BMP implementation through logger training, landowner outreach, and water quality requirements.”

## **2. SFI makes important contributions to Maine’s communities.**

SFI responds to local needs through SFI Implementation Committees (SICs) at the state, and regional levels. These committees work with local associations, universities, government agencies, loggers, landowner groups, conservation groups, and many others. They play a vital role in promoting logger training, landowner outreach, youth and adult education, community engagement, the integrity of SFI’s work, and responsible forestry at local levels. Participation in SICs is a requirement of the SFI standards, with specific responsibilities spelled out in the standards.

The Maine Committee is a leader among the 35 SFI Implementation Committees. Maine was announced as the winner of the 2023 SFI Implementation Committee Achievement Award at the 2023 SFI Annual Conference on May 17. The Maine Committee was selected for its collaborative leadership in addressing key enhancements to the SFI Forest Management and Fiber Sourcing Standards related to climate smart forestry, fire resilience, and forests of exceptional conservation value.

## **3. SFI makes important contributions to Maine’s economy.**

Forest certification standards make important contributions in the marketplace, providing sustainability assurances about products from our forests. They help build trust and transparency in the marketplace. Maine is recognized nationally as an environmental leader in forest management in part because of its certification profile. Numerous mills in Maine are interested in fiber from certified forests. Across the U.S. and Canada, 79% of SFI-certified organizations reported steady or increased demand for SFI-certified products – more than any other forest certification standard. The SFI label was one of the top certifications that consumers look for on packaging (according to a study by Sterling Brands in 2023).

It would be detrimental to Maine’s economy for the legislature to limit the marketability of Maine’s products.

## **4. State agencies benefit from participation in third-party forest certification programs.**

Seventeen US states have public lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard, including the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. Other states include Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

State officials have pointed to the benefits of SFI certification, including that it:

- raises the profile of sustainable forestry in the state,
- identifies potential improvements to on-the-ground-management,
- provides an enhanced “social license” to operate,
- offers new market opportunities for the state’s forest products industry,
- increases collaboration within the agency and with key external partners,
- provides credibility through independent audits,
- allows the state to lead by example.

State legislation should avoid restricting public agencies from choosing forest certification and the specific forest certification standard that is appropriate for its management.

## **5. SFI standards are developed through a transparent process with diverse participation and are backed by independent, third-party audits.**

The SFI standards revision process ensures credibility and transparency by allowing everyone to participate. The revision process follows international standards development guidelines and is based on principles of stakeholder engagement, balanced representation, consensus, continual improvement, and transparency.

The process to develop the 2022 SFI standards included participation from a diverse group of individuals including the forest sector, conservation organizations, academia, researchers, brand owners, loggers, landowners, educators, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and government agencies at every step of the process. Eight different loggers and logger representatives participated in SFI standard revision task groups.

A cornerstone of the SFI standards is third-party independent certification, which verifies that the requirements set out in the relevant SFI standard and supporting documents have been met. While SFI sets the standard, independent, third party-accredited certification bodies certify organizations to the SFI standards. Auditors from accredited certification bodies visit each organization to ensure operations in their forests, mills, plants, or other places of business conform to SFI's principles, objectives, performance measures, and indicators.

After a successful audit against the SFI standards, public summaries are posted to the SFI website. These summaries include general descriptions of conformities, non-conformities, corrective action plans, opportunities for improvement, and exceptional practices.

## **6. SFI standards require compliance with laws that protect workers' rights.**

SFI standards require SFI-certified organizations to comply with all applicable social laws at the federal, provincial, state, and local levels. Examples of social laws include civil rights, equal employment opportunities, gender equality, diversity, inclusion, anti-discrimination and antiharassment measures, workers' compensation, Indigenous Peoples' rights, workers' and communities' right to know, prevailing wages, workers' right to organize, and occupational health and safety. SFI-certified organizations must also respect the rights of workers and labor representatives in a manner that meets the spirit and intent of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

SFI is governed by a three-chamber Board of Directors with equal representation from the environmental, social, and economic sectors. Labor unions are represented on the SFI Board by Jeff Bromley, Chair of the USW Wood Council, and on the SFI Resources Committee by Bob Walls, IAM Woodworkers Department Director and Vice President of Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) North America Region.

## **7. SFI advances logger and contractor training and workforce development**

Organizations certified to the SFI standards must ensure that they work with qualified professional loggers who are aware of sustainable forestry principles and best management practices, including streamside management and road construction, maintenance, and retirement.

SFI recognizes that loggers play a critical on-the-ground role in forest sustainability; as such, logger training and the use of qualified logging professionals are core requirements for SFI certification. More than 220,000 resource and harvesting professionals have been trained to ensure understanding of water quality, biodiversity, and other sustainable forest practice requirements since SFI standards were introduced in 1995.

The SFI standards require appropriate training of personnel and contractors. Training courses must include content to address U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, wage and hour rules, and other provincial, state, and *local* employment laws.

SFI is also committed to workforce development. The pool of young people entering “green jobs” is not sufficient to meet demand for tomorrow’s workforce. Green jobs include foresters, loggers, arborists, wildlife biologists, park rangers, green building designers and builders, energy auditors, farmers and ranchers, solar engineers, and so much more. Through our Project Learning Tree (PLT) program, SFI has helped to place more than 1,300 young adults into Green Jobs, with a total of over 7,000 work placements since 2018. SFI’s mentorship program connects young people directly to forest, conservation and parks sector professionals. By helping youth explore the diversity of careers in the forest, conservation, and sustainability sectors, we are helping to build the next generation of future forest leaders across North America.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.