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**Earth Day Founder Speaks Out: All Certified Wood is Not Equal**

***Denis Hayes Disavows “Strong-arm” Effort by Industrial Forest Companies to Force the U.S. Green Building Council to Award Points for Wood from All Forest Certification Systems in its LEED Program***

**Minneapolis, MN (April 19, 2010)** – On the eve of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, Denis Hayes – the coordinator of the original Earth Day in 1970 and International Chairman of Earth Day 2010 – has issued a pointed reminder that we must be vigilant in scrutinizing what passes as “green” in our expanding marketplace for eco-friendly products. In a [*Seattle Times* op-ed](http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/opinion/2011591237_guest13hayes.html) last week, Hayes, a nationally recognized leader on conservation policy, cautions the U.S. Green Building Council not to let its prestigious Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program be “diluted” by allowing timber industry-set standards for forest management to pass as equal to those of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), “the gold standard for good forestry.”

“If the U.S. Green Building Council yields to timber industry demands to include the weaker SFI [Sustainable Forestry Initiative] standards for forest products,” writes Hayes, president of the Bullitt Foundation, whose mission is environmental protection and sustainability in the Pacific Northwest, “…LEED certification would lose much of the green cachet it currently enjoys; FSC would suffer a serious blow; and our forests would be the losers.”

Hayes also takes on two misleading points cited repeatedly by the SFI community – namely, that using FSC favors foreign timber producers over domestic suppliers and that it harms small family forest owners – calling such statements “at variance with the truth.”

For 10 years, the LEED rating system has rewarded responsible forest management through its MRc7 Certified Wood credit, awarding one point per building project for the use of FSC-certified wood. LEED demand has been a principal driver in bringing more than 116 million acres of U.S. and Canadian forestland into compliance with FSC standards.

But as the market for green building and LEED has expanded exponentially, conventional timber companies have aggressively lobbied the U.S. Green Building Council to recognize their *status quo* practices in LEED. In response, the council is developing an independent benchmark to define “exemplary forestry,” with the intention of setting objective requirements so that any forest certification system could choose to meet those requirements and thus be recognized in LEED. In February, the council issued a third draft of its benchmark for comment; a final version is anticipated in the coming months.

Hayes’s op-ed was precipitated by an opinion piece written by the CEO of the Society of American Foresters, which ran in the *Seattle Times* on April 2. “That column,” writes Hayes, “argues that LEED should embrace ‘greater inclusivity’ by recognizing all forest certification systems. But inclusivity is the polar opposite of market transformation. The whole reason for LEED certification, as with FSC forestry, is to use the market to promote environmental excellence, not merely compliance with the law.”

“Given his life-long commitment to environmental conservation, Denis’s voice comes at a critical juncture, with the integrity of America’s green-building movement on the line,” said Corey Brinkema, President of FSC-US. “He affirms that this is a pivotal fight to determine what constitutes true environmental leadership – and that the outcome will have far-reaching ramifications both in the marketplace and in our forests.”

Links:

[FSC’s perspective on the current draft LEED certified wood benchmark](http://www.fscus.org/green_building/usgbc_third_comment_leed.php)

[Dennis Hayes Op-Ed](http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/opinion/2011591237_guest13hayes.html), *Seattle Times*, April 12

**About the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**

The Forest Stewardship Council is an international, non-governmental, not-for-profit organization established to promote the responsible management of the world’s forests. It provides standard-setting, trademark assurance and accreditation services for companies and organizations interested in responsible forestry. Products carrying the FSC label are independently certified to assure consumers that they come from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and ecological needs of present and future generations. FSC is also the only forest certification organization endorsed and promoted by such major environmental groups as World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club and Greenpeace. There are currently more than 116 million acres of FSC-certified forestland in the United States and Canada and more than 320 million acres globally. More than 17,000 manufacturers and distributors are certified to buy and sell FSC products, representing more than $20 billion in FSC-labeled product annually. [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org/)