

Northwest Certified Forestry in the USA

This US case is an example of a successful group FSC forest management model designed to support family forest owners and small forests generally access a growing market for certified products. The group, run by Northwest Certified Forestry (a program of the Northwest Natural Resource Group), has grown from an initial 7 members in 2005 to 80 members in 2008, and has expanded from the State of Washington to neighbouring Oregon. Northwest Certified Forestry has worked hard to make certification as simple and affordable as possible for its members. They offer a suite of services designed to help landowners manage their forests for ecological and economic diversity, including: marketing assistance for certified products, help with identifying financial aid programs, and more recently, ecosystem service market development (eg: carbon credits).

Background

Originally founded in 1992, The Northwest Natural Resource Group (NNRG) aims to *"promote innovative forest management strategies that improve the health of forest and freshwater ecosystems while increasing economic development in rural communities"* throughout the Pacific Northwest of the US.

As a core part of this mission, and through its Northwest Certified Forestry (NCF) program for small landowners, NNRG supports the growth of a profitable, sustainable, and environmentally sound timber industry. Through its membership of landowners, and the active support of staff in developing new supply chains, NCF is creating a growing network of landowners, manufacturers and distributors that specialize in locally produced forest products certified to FSC standards.

Accessible & Affordable Certification

NCF is building a community of landowners and individuals who are pursuing innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to forest management. NCF uses a group certification model to provide low cost certification services, and has made the process of becoming FSC certified as simple as possible

Currently, 80 landowners are members of the group which totals more than 21,000 acres (8500 ha) of certified forestland: members average 272 acres in size, with a median size of 48 acres. The program is open to many types of landowners in Washington and Oregon including: family forests, small forestry companies, tribes, conservation groups and public agencies.

"FSC offers us an opportunity to distinguish our products in the marketplace and NCF group certification cut our costs by more than half." Richard Pine, O'Neill Pine Company



© NNRG
Cedar trees at the Evergreen Land Trust forest, Deming, Washington

NCF provides a suite of services that enable small landowners to take a more proactive approach to managing their woodlands and marketing their forest products. NNRG and its NCF program have been active in developing national support networks to help assist with overcoming the challenges of pursuing FSC certification. NNRG was one of seven organizations that formed the FSC Family Forests Alliance (www.familyforestsalliance.org) in 2006: this works at a national level to assist group managers, and to implement strategies and priorities for advancing family forest certification. NNRG also participates in the Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities Partnership (HFHC), a program managed by Sustainable Northwest. HFHC maintains a group CoC certificate that currently has 15 members offering lumber, flooring, cabinets, windows, doors, furniture and other FSC-certified products.

Lessons Learnt

> For group certificates to work efficiently and effectively, it has been important to develop documents that identify the purposes of the group and to create a list of member services with tangible outcomes that benefit a large number of member landowners. Various examples of documents developed for these purposes are available through the NNRG website.

> It is vital to maintain frequent communications among group members - via field days, newsletters and other events – as these are essential for maintaining linkages and reporting progress towards outcomes. In-person meetings are also important to develop relationships among geographically dispersed members.

> There are challenges related to serving a large geographic area (two American states), and NNRG has responded by establishing satellite offices to serve specific areas and building contract auditor networks in areas too distant from staff.

> For operations to run smoothly, it is valuable to identify an individual who will be responsible for coordinating activities and tracking the group certificate, and can also serve as a single point of contact for group members and potential supporters or funders.

> Although there is growing demand for FSC-certified products, the region suffers from a lack of supply because most of the large public and private landowners have not had their forests certified. This has resulted in relatively few sawmills getting certified because of supply concerns. This has been addressed by NNRG's efforts to educate and advocate for greater participation in forest certification throughout the region, and this year the Washington State Department of Natural Resources achieved FSC certification for a portion (145,000 acres) of their state-managed lands.

Facts & Figures

Certificate details: SA-FM/COC-1394, for group of SLIMFs, issued for round wood, sawlogs, pulpwood, firewood, sawn wood, timbers, furniture, flooring, and mouldings on 7 January 2005

Area: 1109 ha in 2005, 8500 ha in 2008

Membership: 7 members in 2005, 80 members in 2008

Quantities: 4 million board feet



© Nisqually Land Trust

A view of Ohop Valley, Washington in which the Nisqually Land Trust, an NCF member, owns six properties.

The Future

Northwest Certified Forestry recently completed a strategic planning process to address goals and milestones for the continued growth of the certification program.

> The primary remaining challenge is to grow the group to a size that is economically viable and self-sustaining, and NNRG aims to grow the size of the NCF group to roughly 500 members by 2012

“NCF is one of the best models I’ve seen for connecting small landowners to markets and services.”

Joe Kane, Executive Director, Nisqually Land Trust

> To maintain management of such a large number of group members, NNRG is developing database software and member management systems that will support record keeping needs and auditing requirements.

> Creating more landowner value, diversification of program revenue, and increased operational efficiency are all critical for the program's continuing success.



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NCF member John Hendrikson of Wild Thyme Farm.

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