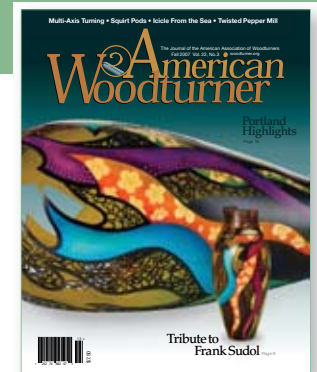
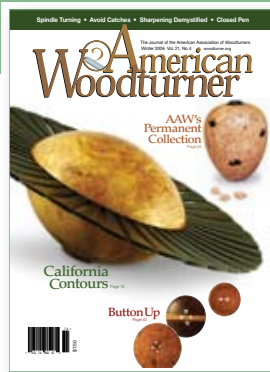


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Environmental Responsibility

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American Association of Woodturners

By Bradford Whitman

In the Winter 2007 issue, Brad Whitman explored the environmental impacts of woodturning with respect to the selection and purchasing of tropical hardwoods, endangered tree species, and tropical deforestation. Part II discusses the third-party certification of forest management and wood products by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and how woodturners can become environmentally responsible by shifting from blind purchases to certified wood purchases for lathe projects.

As explained in Part I, there are at least three essentials for environmental protection in the international wood trade: 1) correct identification of tree species and protection of those species that are endangered or threatened, 2) prevention of over-cutting, illegal logging, and the destruction of fragile and biodiverse ecosystems of high conservation value, and 3) verifiable chain-of-custody control over the importation and sale of wood products. The most reliable means of achieving these goals is through an independent, third-party certification system.

There are various certification systems around the world operated by industry groups, governmental bodies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) composed of representatives of environmental groups, indigenous peoples, industry,



and labor. As an environmental lawyer, I am familiar with a number of regulatory systems and their enforcement. In order to be effective and have integrity and credibility, a forest certification system must be transparent to public scrutiny and employ a network of inspectors and auditors who can apply clear and specific standards to the forestry operation and track the shipment of certified wood from the forest to the retail consumer.

Finally, a key factor in ensuring the long-term success and integrity of any system is the inclusion of local workers and indigenous peoples and the adoption of fair trade criteria that provide for their welfare.

I researched several forest certification systems, and I interviewed knowledgeable persons in industry, academia, and certain NGOs. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) system is superior to all other systems in its success in meeting the three key requirements.

Enforceable criteria for forest management

The FSC (fscus.org) was established through the efforts of the Rainforest Alliance (rainforest-alliance.org), the preeminent environmental group in tropical forest conservation. Since its founding in 1994, the FSC has established 57 enforceable criteria for forest management. The FSC addresses reforestation, biodiversity, the protection of threatened and endangered species, erosion control, the use of pesticides and other chemicals, and the welfare of workers and indigenous peoples.

The FSC system is multilayered. The FSC itself accredits separate entities like SmartWood (an affiliate of the Rainforest Alliance) to issue certificates for Forest Management and Chain of Custody trade. SmartWood works through and audits a network of local country partners who administer the criteria. FSC-certified wood products usually bear a green logo shown *opposite*. A list of FSC Certificates are summarized online at fsc-info.org.

Some people complain that the strictness of the FSC criteria inhibits the addition of new acreage. Any certification system is better than none, but unless the criteria are comprehensive and specific, the whole effort is a halfway measure at best, or a sham at worst. Although only slightly more than 10 percent of the world's harvestable forests are independently certified today, the pace of certification is definitely accelerating. In 2006, 3.7 million acres of forest in Brazil obtained FSC certification. In December 2007, there were more than 7,500 FSC Chain of Custody certificates in 84 countries.

Even the FSC encounters obstacles in ensuring integrity. In October 2007, there was a distorted media account of certification abuse by a corporate affiliate of FSC-certified Asia Pulp & Paper (AP&P) that destroyed rainforests in Indonesia and improperly sheltered its bad practices under its association with AP&P, which had certified operations in China. SmartWood reacted promptly with the FSC and The World Wildlife Fund, and took action against AP&P. The FSC published a tighter policy that would prevent the issuance of certificates and the use of the green logo when any affiliate of a certified operation destroys high conservation value forest or conducts logging illegally.



A pallet of timber carries the certification of the Forest Stewardship Council.

The number of abuses within the FSC certification system has been extremely small (fewer than 10 each year) compared to the number of certificates and the great differences in customs and cultures in these countries. The environmental benefit of FSC is unquestionably huge.

Getting on board

Woodturners have work to do to catch up to the environmental responsibility shown by the building and architectural trades, especially in the construction of new educational and corporate facilities and government buildings throughout America and Europe. Every year the annual meeting of the Green Building Council (usgbc.org) has grown. (The FSC certification is the only standard that this industry council recognizes as evidence of the wood product's sustainability.)

Several years ago, The Home Depot forced western softwood suppliers to join the FSC system in America and not sell old-growth timber. It all started with a boycott of Home Depot—i.e., the consumers educated by the environmental groups applying pressure. That's what the Green Building Council is doing on a much larger scale.

Admittedly, the woodturning market is much smaller in terms of board feet, but it is significant because it relies heavily on many species of tropical hardwoods, and the wood-purchasing is global, from the U.S. to Australia. And based on my investigation, the percentage of thick turning stock that is cut legally and in compliance with FSC's criteria is nil.

To test my conclusions, I sent an Internet query to a well-known supplier of woodturning stock that offers 89 different exotic hardwoods. I asked if FSC or other certification could be provided for turning stock of any of these types of wood. I received no reply.

I then submitted a dummy request for *Dalbergia* (the rosewood/cocobolo group) via the online "FSC Certified Product Inquiry" form found at fscus.org. I received prompt acknowledgements, but again no offers to sell stock.

Next, I searched through a less-restrictive system operated by Metafore (certifiedwoodsearch.org). Metafore said it carried four *Dalbergiae*, including "Northern rosewood." Later I received a "0 Supplier" response to my request, which confirmed my conclusions.

One web-based supplier, Diamond Tropical Hardwoods, also known as **Cocobolo King** (cocoboloking.com), showed images of salvaged logs that might be good for turning. Some of Cocobolo King's stock is from trees felled by a hurricane, and the company's local affiliate is planting cocobolo saplings on plantations. That was the only potential supply of *Dalbergia* turning stock that I could establish as meeting recognized environmental criteria.

African Blackwood

It's well documented that Blackwood (mpingo) is facing extinction in the wild, as stated in Part I of this series. The fascinating story of the African Blackwood Conservation Project (blackwoodconservation.org) is both shocking and inspiring.

In 2005, China soared toward the top of the list of hardwood importing countries when the Chinese government banned logging that had contributed to massive erosion and flooding. Illegal logging immediately exploded in Tanzania. The crisis spurred ABCP to raise enough money to grow mpingos from seed, to plant (and guard) 21,000 saplings (to the benefit of local mpingo carvers), to launch an endangered tree education program in the schools, and to plant other hardwoods for export and fast-growing fuelwoods needed by villagers.

—Brad Whitman

The woodturner's role

Woodturners interested in turning FSC-certified stock play a critical role in changing this situation.

First, several importers emphasized that turners must consider switching from familiar hardwoods (like *Dalbergia*) to alternative species that are abundant and could be certified in thick stock sizes. One supplier told me that it is simply illegal to export *Dalbergia*-type wood from certain Latin American countries in thicknesses greater than 11cm (4 inches). Think about carvers who switched from elephant ivory to other bone and other substitutes.

Or, as one member of my chapter said, "Think globally, turn locally."

Second, we must be willing to pay the premium of 20 percent to defray the costs of meeting the FSC criteria. A parallel example is paying a few cents more per cup for free-trade coffee than the popular brands.

Close to home, there is a Puerto Rican forestry operation, **Tropic Ventures** (eyeontherainforest.org), that uses ecologically protective measures to thin the forest and line-plant Blue Mahoe (*Talipariti elatum/Hibiscus elatus*) for small-lot sales to woodturners and others. The wood from this operation is not independently certified, but the practices are supervised by the Institute of Ecotechnics (UK). Tropic is experimenting with other species such as Honduras mahogany.

Third, the same helpful supplier encouraged me to ask SmartWood to help locate sources around the world.

SmartWood is a natural ally in solving this problem, along with its affiliate, Rainforest Alliance. SmartWood is already experimenting with a program called "Rediscovered Wood Operations" to market timber reclaimed from orchards, lakes, and rivers. A Canadian company, **Triton Logging** (tritonlogging.com), operates a similar program. Turners extoll this type of reclaimed wood for its interesting properties.

Fourth, there already exist tropical hardwood importers and distributors in this country who could assist woodturners, along with SmartWood, in developing a supply of certified turning stock. I spoke to Larry Percivalle, marketing manager of **EarthSource Forest Products** (earthsourcewood.com) based in Oakland, California. It holds FSC certificates for operations in Latin America and hopes to offer FSC wood from Africa this year. Its Guatemala operations have been praised as providing both good jobs and good protection of the rainforest. Among the fine crafts made from certified wood that are shown on EarthSource's website are a chair, music stand, and segmented bowls.

When wood is not stamped with the FSC logo, Jack Bockman of **EcoTimber** (ecotimber.com) of San Rafael, California, recommends

checking product invoices for FSC certification. If you purchase what you believe is FSC-certified wood but there are no FSC logos on the product packaging, it most likely is not certified (no matter what the rest of the information provided by the manufacturer or supplier might indicate). Jack explained that some importers having FSC-COC certificates also trade in uncertified timber.

I also spoke with Tom Wilson of **International Specialties, Inc.** (intlspecialties.com), based in Collierville, Tennessee. His company represents **Precious Woods** of Brazil and also imports from Bolivia and Peru under a SmartWood certificate. Many of the tropical hardwoods shown in images on his website are FSC certified.

Europe currently consumes thicker stock than the USA, and the unusable "shorts" from that production could be a good source for woodturners. As with all tropicals, turners must investigate toxicity before selecting any species.

Finally, we must recognize that we have a specialty need, not unlike the musical-instrument makers who formed a buyers' cooperative to obtain ebony and blackwood.

Proof positive that markets react to consumer pressure.

Brad Whitman (bradturnsgreen.com) is an AAW member from Wynnewood, PA. He is an environmental advocate, author, and arbitrator.

Woodturner Feedback

In the AAW's online Forum and by e-mail, members commented on Part I of "Environmental Responsibility." One view was that investigating adverse environmental impacts and exploring alternatives to the blind purchase of tropical woods had no place whatsoever in the journal.

Other AAW members wrote that they had been concerned and were looking for sustainable alternatives. One professional turner and AAW member cited an FSC certification registered under his name and viewed tree conservation as integral to his woodturning.

Together the two parts of this series make it clear that the topic deserves serious attention among woodturners and that turners have both a responsibility and a practical role to play.

There was criticism that applying environmental criteria ousts subsistence farmers from

their land. In fact, one of the critical components of FSC certification and of other successful long-term conservation efforts like the African Blackwood Conservation Project discussed on page 27 (and shade-grown coffee for that matter) is ensuring "fair trade" in a variety of forms for local peoples.