



Forest Stewardship Council®

KEY BENEFITS FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES



Illustrated by
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FSC® F000205



THE UNIQUE BENEFITS OF FSC-CERTIFICATION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Canada is a small, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting healthy forests and the people who rely on them.

FSC Canada was established in 1993 as part of the global Forest Stewardship Council initiative and has been a leader in recognizing Indigenous rights, including alignment with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The organization is committed to transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. Decisions are made by members, who represent four distinct chambers: Economic, Social, Environmental, and Indigenous. Each chamber is given equal weight in approving policies and standards, ensuring that the interests of all members are balanced.

The Indigenous Chamber provides strategic direction on how FSC Canada recognizes Indigenous values, including development of the National Forest Stewardship Standard of Canada and the FSC Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). The Chamber was also instrumental in the establishment of the Permanent Indigenous Peoples Committee and the FSC Indigenous Foundation at the FSC international level.



FSC IS THE ONLY FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEM IN CANADA WITH FPIC REQUIREMENTS

To achieve and maintain FSC certification, forest owners and managers must uphold Free, Prior and Informed Consent requirements.

FSC Canada understands the true meaning of FPIC. “Free” means without coercion, manipulation, or intimidation. “Prior” means well in advance of any project or activity taking place. “Informed” involves providing all relevant information about the potential activity in a way that respects the community’s language and culture. This process provides Indigenous Peoples the right to grant, withhold, or withdraw consent for management activities affecting traditional lands.

We recognize that our FPIC requirements alone cannot fully address the complex challenges faced by Indigenous communities. However, they serve as a critical foundation for ensuring meaningful participation in forest management planning and creating opportunities for shared benefits. By fostering effective engagement, communities can enhance their self-determination and actively contribute to sustainable forest management practices, verified through third-party annual audits.

“FSC certification processes provide an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to directly engage in sustainable forest management including development and planning.”

LORRAINE REKMANS

Algonquin and French heritage, member of the Serpent River First Nation,
small business owner



BENEFITS OF FSC FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IMPACTED BY FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1 RESPECT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

FSC upholds Indigenous Peoples' rights through the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) requirements found in Principle 3 of the National Forest Stewardship Standard.

FSC is the only forest certification system with these requirements in Canada.

“FSC has brought Indigenous rights and titles to the forefront of forestry practice.”

VALÉRIE COURTOIS

Member of the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh, Executive Director at Indigenous Leadership Initiative, Registered Professional Forester (RPF)

2 HONOURING TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

FSC recognizes and respects the cultural values and traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, integrating wisdom for enhanced biodiversity (found in criterion 3.6 of the standard).

3 PROTECTION OF SITES WITH HIGH CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

FSC Canada requires forests or lands with “high conservation values” to be identified, protected and accessible for traditional practices and ceremonies.

These can include critical habitats for rare, threatened and endangered species, culturally significant sites, or areas of high social or economic importance (found in criterion 3.5 and 9.1-9.4 of the standard).



4 FOSTERING COLLABORATION AND NETWORK BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

The FSC certification process helps to foster collaboration and network building opportunities for Indigenous communities with government, ENGOs, unions, and businesses which can provide support, resources, and information-sharing opportunities.

“The FSC certification system provides a strong policy pathway of respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, responsibilities and rights. It gives me the most hope of all forest certification systems in terms of supporting Indigenous leadership to heal and rebalance human relationships with Mother Earth.”

LARRY MCDERMOTT

Algonquin from Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation,
Executive Director of Plenty Canada

5 ENABLING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

The FSC certification process respects Indigenous Peoples’ rights by requiring culturally appropriate engagement and collaboration in forest management decisions impacting traditional territories. If a disagreement occurs, parties need to follow a defined dispute resolution process in efforts to resolve the dispute (found in criterion 1.6, 3.1, and 4.6 of the standard).

“I support FSC because their national standard helps forest managers build purposeful, respectful long-term relationships with First Nations.”

DR. M.A. (PEGGY) SMITH

Miskwaanakwadook—Red Cloud Woman, Professor Emerita at Lakehead University, Faculty of Natural Resources Management, Registered Professional Forester (RPF)

6 TRANSPARENCY ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

FSC requires certificate holders to publish the results of progress towards achieving forest management objectives, impacts of forest management activities and the condition of the forest management unit (found in criterion 8.2 of the standard).

7 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

FSC can create economic opportunities by opening markets that prioritize sustainable and responsible sourcing of wood products including from Indigenous managed forests.

FSC certification also supports local employment opportunities for forest dependent communities (found in criterion 4.3 of the standard).



CASE STUDY

REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND FOSTERING COLLABORATION

FSC CERTIFICATION IN BURNS LAKE COMMUNITY FOREST

Burns Lake Community Forest is situated on the traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en Peoples and Carrier Nations. Since its inception the community forest has expanded from 23,000ha to 92,000ha. The majority of the community forest overlaps the Tsayu Tatl'at Bin, Gilseyhu Honeagh Bin, and Laksilyu Tselh K'iz Bin Clan and Houses.

In 2004, after six years of operation, BLCF struggled to create open communication with the public at large and specifically First Nations communities. Despite an initial alignment on the establishment of the community forest, challenges arose because of unclear management strategies, lack of appropriate engagement with Indigenous communities, and the absence of profit-sharing mechanisms. These issues were exacerbated by the impacts of the mountain pine beetle epidemic,

which peaked in 2005, hitting the local economy hard and further eroding community support.

Recognizing the need to rebuild trust and achieve high environmental standards to safeguard the long-term health of the forest, the community forest licence and forest management model were restructured in 2015 to align the social and environmental values with the community's expectations.

CASE STUDY TIMELINE

1998	2000	2004	2005	2007	2016	2016	2017
Applied to Community Forest Pilot Project	Obtained community forest pilot agreement	Transformed to a long-term community forest licence	Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic peaked	Community forest AAC increased	Developed the Beyond the Beetle Management Plan	Developed new communication strategy	Attained FSC certification



In 2017, Burns Lake Community Forest along with the Office of the Wet’suwet’en (Hereditary Chiefs), Ts’il Kaz Koh (Burns Lake Band) and Wet’suwet’en First Nation pursued and achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification.

The FSC certification system was selected for its enhanced forest management practices and proven frameworks to foster collaboration, unite stakeholders and improve the well-being of local communities.

This includes engagement in joint decision-making processes, exploring local employment opportunities, and co-creating a dynamic, shared vision for sustainable forest management.

The adoption of FSC certification also requires an annual strategic review and independent third-party audits which helped bolster trust through transparency.

The road to certification was truly transformative.

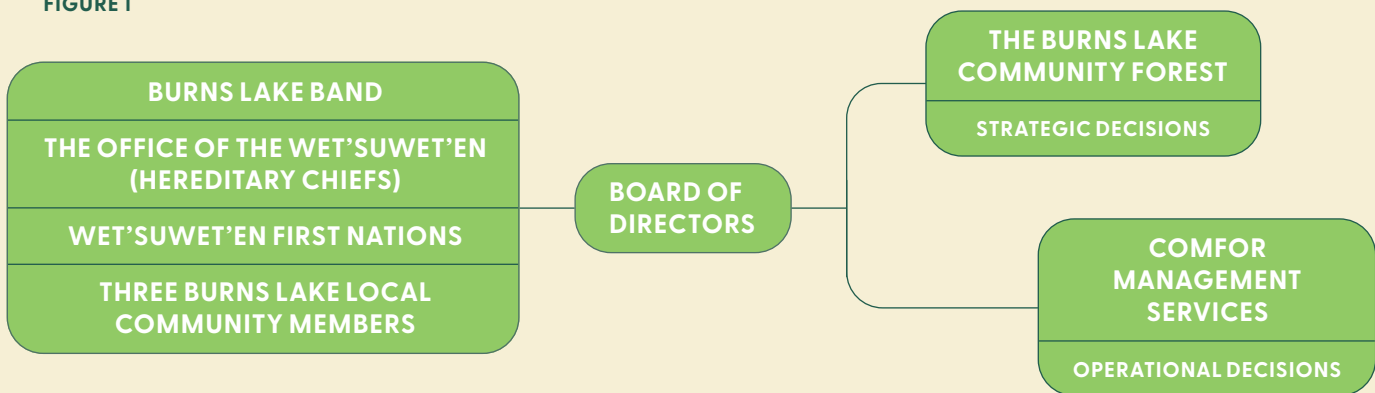
On-the-ground interactions became commonplace. An enhanced and aligned focus on environmental stewardship ensured that members of the community and partner Nations actively participated in forestry activities, sharing perspectives, and deepening mutual respect and understanding.

The collaborative efforts also resulted in an improved public engagement strategy, a balanced board of directors (see Figure 1), cultural preservation efforts including the protection of Indigenous cultural heritage sites, economic opportunities for local harvesting and silviculture contractors, and profit sharing models.

Burns Lake Community Forest actively communicates with its partner First Nations, participates in local cultural events, and prioritizes traditional knowledge sharing. Logs harvested on the community forest, are now sold to local facilities on a priority basis, with sales revenue and profits being equally distributed with First Nations partners and the shareholders. These funds support local community development, build social and economic capacity, and support non-for profit volunteer groups in the community.

Burns Lake Community Forest is not only one of the largest actively operating community forests in British Columbia, it is also a model for inclusive, sustainable and resilient forest management. Prioritizing communication, partnership, and shared decision-making unlocked the collective power of positive change ensuring the long-term sustainability of the forest and the prosperity of the Nations’ Territories.

FIGURE 1



“Burns Lake Community Forest is proud to be FSC certified since 2017. This certification demonstrates our commitment working collaboratively with First Nations for decision making and the on-going operations of the community forest. It also proves that we are managing the forest to the highest social and environmental standards.”

FRANK VARGA RPF

General Manager, Burns Lake Community Forest,
Registered Professional Forester (RPF)

“Becoming FSC certified ticked all of the important boxes when looking at overall area-based management of the Burns Lake Community Forest. Not only is FSC well respected it removed all the guesswork with relationship building with our First Nations partners. FSC Principle 3 ensures that the certified body upholds Indigenous Peoples legal and customary rights (UNDRIP). FSC certification has given us the confidence that regardless of board member appointment changes, our First Nations partners will continue to be consulted and protected in all decisions made on the community forest licence.”

CRYSTAL FISHER

President, Burns Lake Community Forest
(representing the public at large)



“This past year BLCF has started to gain insight and comfort in participating with our Indigenous gatherings. When we lost a community member, Hereditary Chief Madeek, it was an honour to participate in his farewell ceremonies and a teaching moment for our board. How we show up and learn from each other is important. Respecting and understanding our way of life helps further strengthen our relationships.

BLCOMFOR’s also participated in the Aboriginal Day parade.

We received so many positive compliments on the trees handed out at the parade, and children and youth were happy to plant a memory of that day near their home.

We are starting to truly bridge the gaps between our communities and I am grateful to be a helping hand in this process. I look forward to seeing how we continue to show our presence and support not only to our shareholders, but to all of the surrounding Indigenous Communities.”

TARA WILLIAM

Director, Burns Lake Community Forest, Wet’suwet’en First Nation



SOURCE DATA

- blcomfor.com/forest-management/
- wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Open_Case_Studies/FRST522/2020/The_Challenges_and_Benefits_of_FSC_Certification_to_Community_Forests:_A_Case_Study_of_The_Burns_Lake_Community_Forest,_British_Columbia,_Canada

CASE STUDY

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND FIRST NATIONS ROOTED IN FSC STANDARD

WAHKOHTOWIN, MISSANAIBI FOREST AND GREENFIRST

In 1925, Ontario created the world's largest game preserve on a 700,000-hectare area along the northeastern side of Lake Superior.

This forced the removal of two First Nations – the (New) Brunswick House Reserve and The Michipicoten Ojibwa. It also dispossessed them, as well as The Missanabie Cree, the Cree First Nation, and Ojibwe First Nation in Chapleau, from the treaty right to hunt and trap on their traditional lands.¹

For decades after, the Ontario government issued timber licences to forest management companies for the Superior, Pineland Martel, Magpie and Martel Forests – whose canopy, and tenure, overlapped with most of the preserve. Indigenous communities were frustrated that the forest management model excluded them from protecting the forests despite their being of cultural significance and value. Also excluded: any resulting economic benefits.

Local Chiefs had tirelessly advocated for their hunting and trapping rights for decades, and now they began to seek a say in forest management on their land too. In 2006, the Chiefs made a breakthrough in the form of bilateral agreements with then forest licence holder Tembec – who was pursuing Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification.

The spur was in the FSC standard's requirement to respect the rights of local Indigenous Peoples. It calls for active collaboration and the inclusion

of traditional knowledge and perspectives into forest management efforts; both strategically and operationally.

It means that all forest management activities, prior to being operational, are reviewed by community Lands and Resources staff in collaboration with forestry personnel. Stakeholders take joint field visits, whenever needed, to observe the land and understand Indigenous values, after which protection measures are confirmed.

In and around the preservation lands, the standard has enabled more trusting relationships between First Nations and companies such as Rayonier – which gained the forestry licence after Tembec. Now, Indigenous communities can actively participate in forest management decisions, providing a direct link to protect moose habitat, reduce herbicide use, safeguard wetlands and monitor forests through the Indigenous Guardians program.

In the late 2010s, Rayonier (now GreenFirst Forest Products), agreed to relinquish its single-entity forest license on the Martel Forest. Meanwhile, Ontario signaled its intent to end its management of the Magpie Forest. This chain of events helped set the foundation for the 2016 formation of Wahkohtowin Development GP (Wahkohtowin).

1. Calverley, D. (2009). The Dispossession of the Northern Ojibwa and Cree: The Case of the Chapleau Game Preserve. Ontario History, 101(1), 83–103. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065676ar>

Wahkohtowin is an Indigenous-led social enterprise with three owner nations – Chapleau Cree First Nation, Missinabie Cree First Nation, and Brunswick House First Nation. It provides one voice to advance new business opportunities in the forestry sector and beyond. They collaborate with industry partners to follow the FSC standard, assess forests, protect habitats, reconnect Indigenous youth with their land and traditions, create carbon benefit projects and even provide an end-to-end First Nations housing solution.

Inspired by the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs Forum, Wahkohtowin has played a central role in uniting provincial and municipal governments, industry and Indigenous communities together for a new approach to forest management. These efforts have led to a provincial revenue-sharing pilot that allowed for sustained annual financing to communities, a local Indigenous fund, stakes in a local lumber company, and a cogeneration plant that have brought new economic gains including a renewed energy contract.

In 2021, thanks to the work of a 10-member board of directors that included four First Nations Chiefs, a new forest management company was established. The resulting Missinabie Forest Stewardship Inc. (MFMI) now holds a new Enhanced Sustainable Forest Licence. And after an expansion audit in November 2023, all the Missinabie Forest’s 1.5 million hectares are now FSC certified.

It’s been a 100-year journey in upholding Indigenous rights on the northeast side of Lake Superior. Despite challenges and competing interests, the evolving collaboration will improve conservation efforts, and preserve Indigenous traditions and ensure sustainable forestry persists in Chapleau.

“What FSC is doing globally and domestically by implementing UNDRIP and FPIC into the national forest stewardship standard not only opens the door for economic opportunities and participation from communities, but also drives ecosystem resiliency.”

DAVID FLOOD

Member of Matachewan First Nation,
General Manager, Wahkohtowin Development GP
Inc., Registered Professional Forester (RPF)

“Together with Wahkohtowin, we’ve modified practices outside of the norms, working to reconcile modern forestry practices with the interests of the communities.”

CHRIS MCDONELL

Chief Forester - Ontario, GreenFirst Forest
Products, Registered Professional Forester (RPF)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Leticia Spence created all of the artwork and illustrations. Leticia is a two-spirit graphic designer and illustrator hailing from Pimicikmak. Growing up, Leticia stood between two worlds—one foot firmly planted in Winnipeg, a city known for its unique blend of grit, cultural diversity, and creativity, and the other rooted in Northern Manitoba, where Spence developed a connection and love for the land, the culture of their people and the stories that were imbued in the soil itself.

This dual existence cultivated a deep appreciation for beadwork, a craft that has become an integral part of their visual storytelling.

FSC Canada would like to thank Leticia for their support and artistry.



BACKGROUND & APPROACH

To help develop and shape the insights into the key benefits that FSC certification can provide Indigenous communities affected by forestry, we engaged members of the FSC Canada Indigenous chamber to participate in discussion or sharing circles.

These sharing circles were co-hosted by Indigenous leader and communicator, Ben Borne. Ben is a co-founder of Symmetry Public Relations and a member of Yellow Quill First Nation.

FSC Canada would like to thank Ben and all of the participants for their guidance and feedback.



To learn more about how FSC's standard can support your community, please contact info@ca.fsc.org and visit <https://ca.fsc.org/ca-en/making-a-difference/indigenous-peoples-rights>.





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