

Profiles in Sustainable Forestry: *Jameson French and Northland Forest Products*

JAMESON FRENCH'S PASSION FOR TREES IS ROOTED in his childhood. As a boy growing up in New Hampshire, his father insisted that he learn the Latin names of local trees and identify them in winter by their bark. As a student, he successfully worked to stop the extension of his boarding school's dormitories into a 125-acre wildlife sanctuary and fought the spraying of pesticides on the historic campus elms.

French descends from a family of staunch conservationists. By the time his great-grandfather established a family-owned timber business in southern New England in the 1880s, half of New Hampshire's forests had already been cleared. In response to the widespread deforestation, the family business — which became one of the largest hardwood producers and distributors on the East Coast — was founded with a recognition of the importance of responsible stewardship.

In 1970, after the company merged with a paper company, French's father Robert established Northland Forest Products, a processor, distributor and exporter of quality hardwoods. Northland buys rough sawn red oak, maple, ash and cherry from East Coast suppliers; adds value by drying, planing, cutting and fine-sorting the wood; and then sells it to premier wood manufacturers and dealers locally, regionally and in 23 countries. Lower-grade hardwood is shipped to Asia and comes back to the U.S. in the form of gift items and casual furnishings.

An increasing percentage of Northland's wood supply is certified by the Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood program for meeting the standards of the Forest Stewardship

Council. As the pioneer in global forest certification, SmartWood certifies forestry operations that practice environmentally and socially responsible forestry, as well as companies like Northland that process and sell products that come from those sources. SmartWood is accredited for the certification of natural forests by the

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the internationally-recognized monitoring organization for forest product certification.

An Industry Leader

As one of the first lumber executives elected to the Forest Stewardship Council US Board of Directors, and the first chairman from the economic chamber, French was actively involved in the early stages of FSC development. "Northland's commitment to FSC in 1996

was a very important market signal for the FSC and SmartWood," explains SmartWood director Richard Z. Donovan, "Jamey, his family and his company are extremely well-respected in mainstream forest industry here in the US, and in key markets like the UK and China."

French remains an outspoken leader of the certified wood products movement in forums such as the National Hardwood Lumber Association and the American Hardwood Export Council. He is former board chair and a continuing supporter of the influential Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, a nonprofit SmartWood-certified nonprofit organization. According to Jane Difley, executive director and forester at the society, "Jamey, his father and the rest of the French family have always been there for New Hampshire's forests. Through Northland Forest Products, he has set an example of what



Northland Forest Products has a legacy of managing its forests to promote conservation in New Hampshire.

a good forest products company should do in supporting sustainable forestry.”

“Land stewardship is a family tradition,” says French. “When your livelihood relies on multiple-generation ownership of the forests, you know that the better you care for your resources, the better quality harvest you are going to have in the future.”

A Long-Term Commitment

Though markets have not always rewarded certified operations, French continues to push for benefits for those operations, by taking advantage of the international export markets and the relationships he has developed during more than twenty-five years in the US, Europe and most recently China. According to Richard Donovan, “Jamey just has a great way about him. He is very professional, very committed and constantly pushing everyone to improve, from SmartWood to the FSC to his colleagues in the forest industry.”

As French sees it, companies committed to conservation and certification are ethically obliged to support their position by carrying certified products whenever the wood is available. “Our commitment is to stock a certified supply in New England and central Virginia so that if an architect specifies certified wood, we can supply it at a competitive price. We support certification because we

believe it’s the right thing to do. We want our employees to take pride in their work and selling certified wood is one way of doing that,” he says. “We are in this for the long haul.”

Just like organic vegetables, once considered a novelty item, are now found in most supermarkets, French believes that as more consumers demand to know that their wood products are produced sustainably, certification will take off. With increased market demand for FSC-certified wood, French believes that more forest managers will become certified, giving his company and others better supply options. He, for one, is doing all he can to promote forest certification. He also believes that in the long run certification makes good business sense, not only in terms of the premium that some consumers might be willing to pay for certified wood, but in the quality of the raw materials his business depends on — better forest management means better quality logs and wood.

While French remains an active proponent of certification, he is the first to say that there is still work to be done. “We need nonprofits and retailers to convince their constituencies to buy certified forest products; we need more product and we need to streamline the process so that we have a stronger marketplace for certified products and a more efficient system for delivering certified goods,” says French, who is committed to lobbying for these changes.

SMARTWOOD Founded in 1989, the Rainforest Alliance’s SmartWood program was the world’s first program to certify responsible forestry practices. Our seal of approval assures customers that the wood products they are purchasing come from forests managed to conserve biodiversity and support local communities. SmartWood is accredited by the FSC, an international body that establishes certification standards and accredits and monitors certifiers. The FSC was founded by a number of foresters, sociologists and environmental groups, including the Rainforest Alliance, to help forge a consistent, comprehensive and reliable set of third-party certification standards, and to ensure that they are universally recognized and met. Around the world, the Rainforest Alliance sets the standards for environmentally and socially responsible forestry practices. 🌲



www.rainforest-alliance.org

The mission of the Rainforest Alliance is to protect ecosystems and the people and wildlife that live within them by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. Companies, cooperatives and landowners that participate in our programs meet rigorous standards that conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable livelihoods.

Rainforest Alliance

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