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# Forestry initiative aids relations

Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. has long been known for setting standards in forest management. But SFI is setting standards of an equally important kind in its dealings with Canada's aboriginal people. SFI and the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the two groups to work together through the CCAB's progressive aboriginal relations program.

“One of the areas that we have been really focused on growing is our relationship, engagement and outreach with the aboriginal community,” says Kathy Abusow, president and chief executive officer of SFI.

“We just thought it was a perfect fit for both of our organizations to work together. SFI Inc. has a forestry certification standard and CCAB has a verification program for progressive aboriginal relations, and we just felt this was a terrific way to further mutual interests.”

“The CCAB is thrilled to have SFI taking part in the program,” says president and chief executive officer JP Gladu. “SFI is an organization with a wide reach in the forestry sector and they're all about implementing best practices and getting market

recognition for them. There is a really great alignment between us because they are going to leverage our PAR verification to help interested SFI program participants, who are SFI-certified, raise the bar in their strategic relationships with aboriginal communities.”

Partnering with SFI also builds the brand of the CCAB's progressive aboriginal relations (PAR) program, he says. “When you look at products, a dual logo process is going to highlight both the SFI and PAR. It will be a sign that the product comes from responsibly managed forests that involved progressive Aboriginal relations. It's a good thing.”

Chief David Walkem, a SFI Board member and Chief of the Cooks Ferry Indian Band, said, “The CCAB and SFI are committed to sustainable forestry and aboriginal involvement in the forestry sector. Both are also encouraging sustainable relations among First Nation, Inuit, and Metis people and the Canadian business sector. The CCAB's Progressive Aboriginal Relations will provide a useful mechanism for SFI program participants who are interested in building upon the language already in the SFI Standard that is focused on the identification of traditional values, incorporating cultural sites in forest management and en-



CCAB president/CEO JP Gladu and Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. president/CEO Kathy Abusow.

gaging with Aboriginal communities.”

SFI's involvement will help spread the word about the aboriginal relations program in the forest sector; there are thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations working with the SFI program. A glance at a long list of products will show its reach. SFI-labelled wood and paper products are available globally to help buyers meet their sustainability goals and promote responsible forest management.

SFI is an independent charitable organization that

promotes sustainable forest management. It works with landowners, forest product producers and buyers, government organizations and conservation groups to promote forest certification along the entire supply chain. Its forest certification standard includes measures to protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk, and forests with exceptional conservation value. To date, about 100 million hectares of forest land has been certified to SFI's standards in Canada and the United States.

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# Finding signs of success

## POWER

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Almost all believe they have achieved some degree of success, although younger corporations in particular recognize room for improvement, especially in their relations with the federal government. Only 27% believed the federal government's support for EDCs was positive, while 32% were neutral and 41% had a negative impression of those past relationships. The view of government support increases relative to relations with the Ontario government, where 62% had a positive impression, 24% were neutral and only 14% rated them negatively.

The survey also looks at best practices for aboriginal corporations to ensure political independence, strong governance, community consultation, building networks and relationships and to ensure their overall vision and determination.

Mr. Gladu says those elements are extremely important for the success of the businesses. “There needs to be a clear separation between church and state,” he says. “The businesses have to be able to function as a business with a board of directors made up of a combination of community members and business leaders. They need to have the autonomy to be able to do that, while at the same time keeping in mind community interests.”

Some EDCs are generating significant revenues, such as

Chippewas of Sarnia Industrial Developments (CIDL) at the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. The CIDL owns an industrial park that is home to both aboriginal entrepreneurs and non-aboriginal businesses. The park exports products to the U.S., Turkey and the Middle East, realizing more than \$100-million in annual sales.

Other examples include the Naicatchewenin Development Corporation, which has become a success working both small projects and larger economic opportunities. Northern Ontario's Rainy River First Nation EDC has been in operation more than three decades and today is among the first group to be consulted in regional business matters.

Thunder Bay's Wasaya Group of companies has grown from a joint partnership to a wholly First Nations-owned firm operating in multiple sectors from petroleum, mining, forestry and airlines to world-class industrial manufacturing.

The report suggested EDC needs and priorities were based on education and capacity-building, access to financing and networking opportunities. There was general agreement on the need for greater sharing of expertise, knowledge and success stories among EDCs.

As one respondent said, “Some First Nations have been an inspiration. The more you hear about success stories, it drives the point home that if you get community buy-in and financing, you can get many years of success.”

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SFI program supports North America's forest communities and workers.



SFI program supports Aboriginal peoples' forest values for cultural, spiritual and material needs.

# Good for Our Forests, Good for Your Business

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Inc. recognizes that First Nations rely on forests to meet their needs as well as to support cultural and spiritual traditions.

More than 1.85 million hectares of lands held by or managed for Aboriginal communities have been certified to the SFI forest management standard in North America – and SFI continues to look for ways to work with Aboriginals such as the recent **Memorandum of Understanding** with the **Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business**.

Look and ask for the SFI® label on any wood, paper and packaging product you purchase. It's a symbol of responsible forestry.

Learn more at [sfiprogram.org/buy-sfi](http://sfiprogram.org/buy-sfi)

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**Kathy Abusow, President & CEO, Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc.**



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**JP Gladu, President & CEO, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business**