



SFI
CLIMATE SMART
FORESTRY
INITIATIVE

INDIGENOUS-LED CLIMATE SMART FORESTRY (CSF)

DISCUSSION SYNTHESIS

Québec, Canada 2025



**SUSTAINABLE
FORESTRY
INITIATIVE**

SFI-0001

This work is supported by:



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada



Background

SFI recognizes that Indigenous Peoples are at the forefront of various interconnected objectives, including those on fire and climate. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative Climate Smart Forestry Initiative (SFI CSF Initiative) is an effort to advance the identification and interpretation of Climate Smart Forestry (CSF) practices across Canada. With [support from Environment and Climate Change Canada \(ECCC\)](#), the effort aims to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the Canadian forest sector and to identify strategies to scale these efforts across multiple forest decision-makers. One central strategy is to support and elevate the critical role of First Nations in identifying Indigenous-led CSF practices through designated funding. The Initiative further emphasizes the co-creation of such strategies based on the priorities identified by Indigenous partners.

SFI is the leading forest certification standard in Canada, with a footprint nearly 100 million hectares certified to the [SFI Forest Management Standard](#). The [SFI Forest Management Standard](#) has requirements for climate, fire, biodiversity, and respect for Indigenous peoples' rights, among other crucial topics. More than 60 Indigenous entities are currently certified to SFI. The following objectives of the SFI Forest Management Standard are guiding this initiative:

- **Climate Smart Forestry:** Ensure that forest management addresses climate change through adaptation and mitigation (*Objective 9*)
- **Conservation of Biological Diversity.** Ensure that forests are managed to protect wildlife habitat and conserve biological diversity (*Objective 4*)
- **Fire Resilience and Awareness:** Minimize the risks of forest fires and raise awareness of wildfire benefits and interventions (*Objective 10*)
- **Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights:** This objective strengthens Objectives 4, 9, and 10 (*Objective 8*)

The SFI CSF Initiative is providing resources and building collaborative relationships to advance Climate-informed Principles (CLIPs) that can be applied to support decision-making for forest managers. The project only directly supports on-the-ground activities for Indigenous partners, which provide a unique opportunity for collaboration and development of CLIPs that reflect Indigenous values and knowledges. In March of 2025, SFI issued a [call for Expressions of Interest \(EOI\)](#) to support Indigenous-led CSF projects, awarding funds to 8 Indigenous entities.

SFI held an engagement session with key Indigenous collaborators alongside the [Silva 21 2025 Annual General Meeting](#). Participants included representatives from First Nations as well as Treaty-level natural resource units. The objective of this discussion was to 1) gather input from Indigenous collaborators on their interpretation of CSF, 2) gain insight into their related sustainable forestry practices that reflect their cultures, values, and lived realities, and 3) receive feedback to shape the SFI CSF Initiative grant-making component (e.g., monitoring and knowledge sharing). The discussion was facilitated by [Shared Values Solutions](#), is an "environmental and community development consulting firm ... committed to braiding Indigenous Knowledge with western science to further goals of prosperity, stewardship and self-determination."



SFI Role in Advancing Indigenous-Led CSF. Indigenous collaborators see a strong opportunity for SFI to support Indigenous-led Climate Smart Forestry (CSF) initiatives through meaningful partnership and tailored approaches. There is a positive foundation in SFI openness to learn from Indigenous knowledge, which can be strengthened by integrating traditional and cultural practices into certification standards.

- Education on climate change impacts and upholding free, prior, and informed consent are critical components for respectful collaboration.
- Supporting and connecting Indigenous Nations' networks across Canada and the U.S. will advance sustainable forestry and equity among claims holders.
- To be effective, funding should support for community-led projects, develop better engagement tools, and ensure licensees maintain accountable, ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities.

Participants focused on the value of Indigenous-led, climate-resilient forest stewardship that integrates traditional knowledge, promotes ecological regeneration, and prioritizes sustainable practices to ensure long-term environmental and cultural resilience. This can be accomplished by implementing the following actions:

- 1) **Advancing community-led forest monitoring** by integrating scientific tools (e.g., forest inventory, satellite and LiDAR technologies) with traditional knowledges, and ensuring early and meaningful involvement in research design, improved data access, and locally grounded climate adaptation strategies.
- 2) **Centering Indigenous leadership and values in forestry** by supporting Indigenous governance and Guardian programs, and redefining success to reflect cultural respect, ecological integrity, and intergenerational stewardship.
- 3) **Supporting sustainable, community-led economic development** by funding local forestry, creating revenue streams for biodiversity protection and other non-timber values, and investing in innovative, Indigenous-driven solutions that align economic opportunity with ecological and cultural well-being.
- 4) **Investing in long-term capacity building for Indigenous-led Climate Smart Forestry** by providing accessible training, simplifying funding processes, and fostering knowledge-sharing networks among Indigenous communities and organizations to support sustainable participation and leadership.
 - Reforming forestry policies and practices to improve or eliminate outdated tenure systems (e.g., volume-based), ensure meaningful consultation with all Indigenous rights and title holders to obtain informed consent, increase transparency to build trust, and prevent harmful practices such as inappropriate clear-cutting and unnotified pesticide use.
 - Enhancing governance by increasing Indigenous leadership and participation in decision-making, and augmenting government support to provide necessary funding and capacity-building aligned with Indigenous-defined priorities and climate urgency.



Indigenous-Led Climate Smart Forestry

Attendees shared perspectives and suggestions on Indigenous-led CSF and how it could be interpreted and supported in practice. The group also shared observations and priorities how to improve forest-based collaborations that engage or influence First Nations and Indigenous peoples, specifically in ways that ensure such projects and collaborations benefit them. While some of these observations were inspired by their participation in the Silva21 meeting, the conversation also reflected general perspectives and insights.

Each of the following section provides insights into reflections on elevating and improving approaches to CSF that engage, benefit, or elevate Indigenous forest management values.

Forest Stewardship, Conservation, and Climate Action

Forest stewardship, conservation, and climate action are deeply interconnected priorities that center sustainability, Indigenous leadership, and ecological balance. There is growing recognition that traditional knowledges, including cultural burning and location of medicinal plants, must be integrated into forest management. Sustainable practices must allow forests to regenerate, protect old-growth and riparian zones, and avoid harmful chemicals that threaten ecosystems. Climate resilience includes sustainable management as well as supporting Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and aligning any incentives (e.g., carbon offsets) with community values.

Key focus areas:

- Promoting restoration and replanting as both ecological and economic opportunities for communities
- Advancing pesticide-free practices to protect biodiversity (e.g., salmon on the West Coast)
- Strengthening Indigenous-led stewardship to ensure long-term forest health and climate stability

Harmonizing Scientific Research and Monitoring with Traditional Knowledges

Harmonizing scientific research and monitoring with traditional knowledges is essential to informed, adaptive forest management. There is strong interest amongst many Indigenous forest managers and decision-makers in using tools like tree ring analysis, satellite technology, and LiDAR to better understand changing forests. Climate change impacts, including changing ecological conditions and stress responses, highlight the urgency of localized, real-time data. Communities can and should be involved early in research design and data collection in support of blending local, traditional, and scientific knowledges.

Key focus areas:

- Exploring satellite and small-scale remote sensing solutions for hard-to-reach and remote areas
- Advocating for improved access to LiDAR and other high-value data sources by smaller entities
- Promoting community-led science that reflects both traditional and empirical methods



Incorporating Indigenous Leadership and Values in CSF

Incorporating Indigenous leadership and values is essential to creating a culturally respectful, ecologically sustainable approach to forestry. Indigenous stewardship traditions, including holistic relationships with land and wildlife, offer essential insight into forest health and intergenerational responsibility. This approach encourages harmonization of traditional knowledge and western science, addressing the disconnect that often limits meaningful integration. Honouring Indigenous governance, cultural values, and lived experiences helps redefine forestry success beyond profit, toward long-term community and ecosystem well-being.

Key focus areas:

- Strengthening Indigenous representation and awareness of conservation options and Guardian programs
- Promoting a forest ethic rooted in respect, balance, and protecting future generations

Balancing Economic Development and Community Well-Being

Balancing economic development with community well-being requires a shift toward sustainability, equity, and local empowerment. Communities are calling for forestry-related jobs that restore ecosystems and reflect long-term stewardship, not short-term profit. There is a clear need for compensation and funding mechanisms that support biodiversity protection and improve local living conditions. Ground-up, creative solutions—like seed supply chains and nature-based economies—can help align economic opportunity with community values.

Key focus areas:

- Creating local employment through restoration and guardianship roles
- Valuing non-timber forest products and cultural practices as part of forest management
- Pursue economic development that is rooted in sustainability, not profit maximization.
- Compensating communities for ecosystem services and non-timber forest values
- Investing in sustainable, Indigenous-led economic alternatives rooted in place and purpose

Supporting Implementation of Indigenous-Led Climate Smart Forestry Practices

Supporting Indigenous-led Climate Smart Forestry (CSF) requires building long-term capacity through accessible training and meaningful community engagement. Training must incorporate local knowledge and encourage community members to return and participate in forestry projects, strengthening local leadership. Funding processes should be simplified to reduce barriers, while recognizing that capacity-building timelines must respect each community's pace and readiness. Creating opportunities for knowledge-sharing among Indigenous communities and organizations can accelerate learning and innovation in CSF practices.

Key focus areas:

- Providing tailored training and technical support that integrates Indigenous knowledges
- Simplifying funding applications and supporting adaptive capacity development
- Facilitating peer-to-peer learning and partnerships with Indigenous-led organizations



Overcoming Challenges and Barriers with Private Sector

Overcoming challenges with the private sector requires addressing persistent practices and systemic barriers that limit Indigenous involvement and trust. Challenges to intensive harvest and old-growth logging continue despite Indigenous opposition, while policies and volume-based tenure systems can hinder meaningful reform and inclusion. Consultations are often inadequate or exclusionary, overlooking the diversity of Indigenous Nations and sidelining Traditional Knowledge in favor of western science. Greater transparency, respectful engagement, and shifts toward area-based tenures are needed to ensure Indigenous leadership and protect communities from harmful practices.

Key focus areas:

- Improving genuine, inclusive consultation processes with all rights and title holders based on the principle of free, prior, and informed consent
- Addressing misinformation and lack of communication on harmful forestry practices like herbicide use
- Reforming tenure systems to prioritize ecological health and Indigenous stewardship over volume-based models

Situating CSF within broader Governance, Policy, and Inclusion needs

Situating Climate Smart Forestry (CSF) within broader governance requires stronger policy engagement and genuine Indigenous inclusion. There is a clear need to bridge academic research with practical, community-driven action while adapting policies to reflect Indigenous priorities. Government support is critical to address capacity and funding gaps that currently limit Indigenous participation in forestry decisions. Creating space for First Nations to define and lead CSF initiatives ensures that policies respect their unique goals and sovereignty.

Key focus areas:

- Increasing Indigenous involvement in forestry governance and decision-making, with adequate participation of policymakers in critical
- Supporting adaptive management approaches that respond to climate urgency
- Strengthening government roles to provide funding and capacity-building support
- Creating space for First Nations to define CSF on their own terms, reflecting their distinctive and shared goals: “walk beside or behind us, not in front of us.”



Conclusion and Action Items

Creating meaningful change in forestry and climate action requires both time and sustained investment. To move forward, the forestry sector must shift practices to align with an emerging understanding of ecological sustainability and Indigenous leadership. Figure 1 illustrates how insights from engagement with Indigenous partners shaped the guiding principle and actions for the SFI CSF Initiative, to support broader forestry stewardship (Figure 1). Climate Smart Forestry is an opportunity to avoid a one-size-fits-all model and can instead be defined by the specific geography and the unique priorities of each Indigenous community. Further, those insights can inform forestry beyond their territorial borders to improve outcomes for forests at a landscape scale.

Figure 1. Indigenous-Led Climate Smart Forestry Guiding Principle and Actions



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