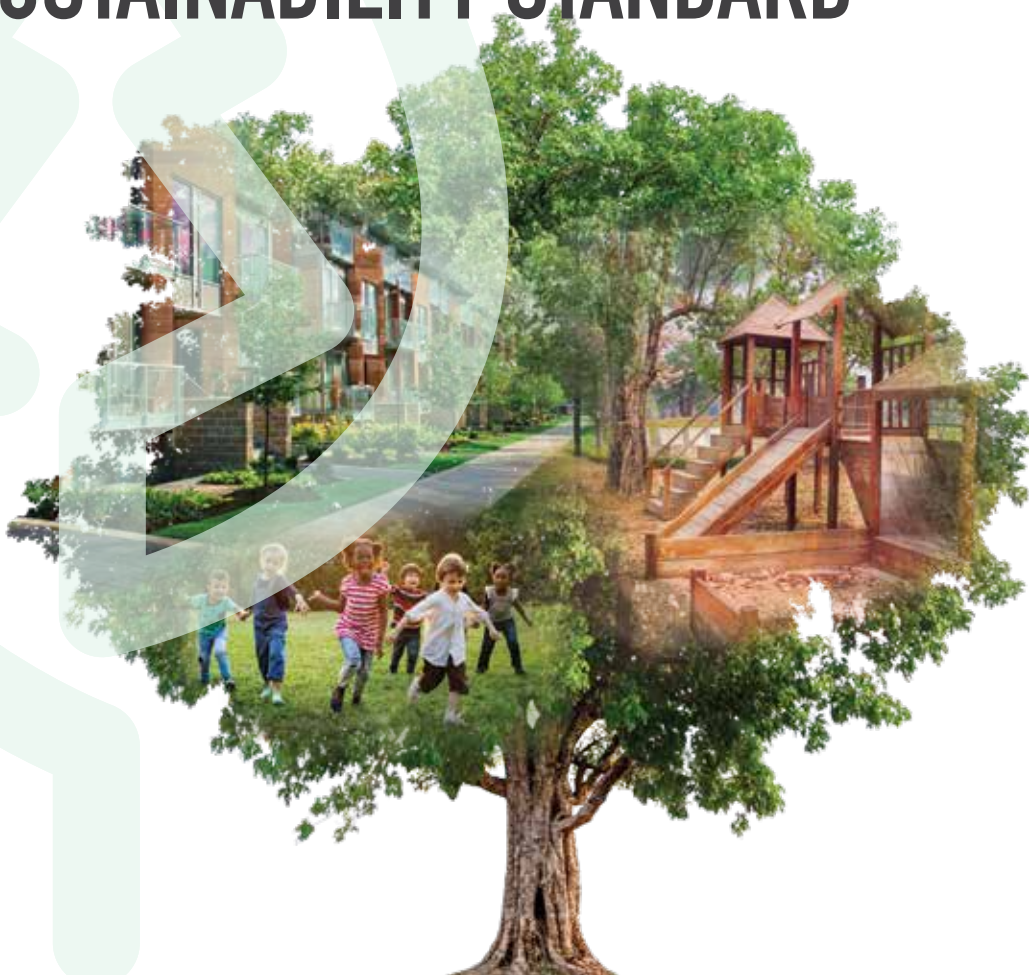


# GETTING STARTED WITH SFI CERTIFICATION



## SFI URBAN AND COMMUNITY FOREST SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD



# WHY IT MATTERS

Sustainable urban forest management enables your organization to advance public health, climate action, biodiversity protection, and economic vitality by proactively caring for your trees, green spaces, and forests.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative's (SFI) Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard is a globally applicable set of requirements and guiding principles that support proactive urban and community forest management.

SFI certification is a voluntary system that your organization can leverage to demonstrate its commitment to responsible forest management and conservation. Certification provides the benefits of a sustainably managed forest while connecting your organization to SFI's collaborative and purpose driven network.

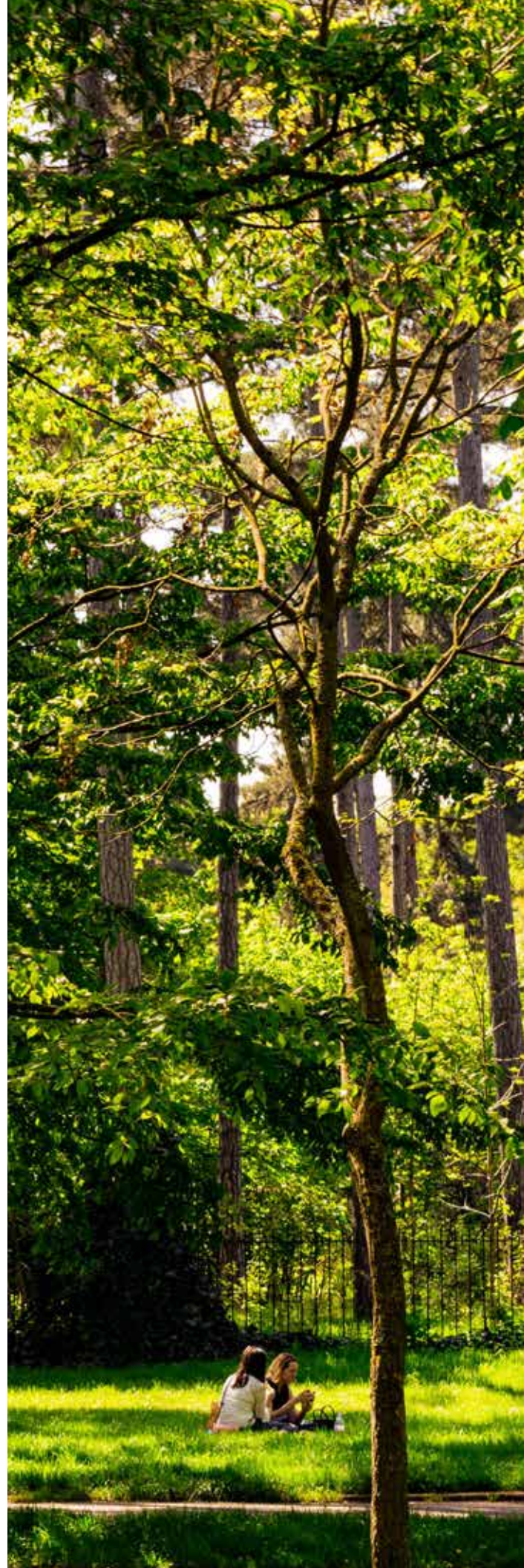
This guide is intended to help you understand the key features and uses of the SFI Standard and explains each step of certification.

# WHO IS SFI?

At the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, we believe that sustainable forests are critical to our collective future. As an independent, non-profit organization, we work with our diverse network of SFI-certified organizations, community and conservation leaders, Indigenous representatives, government officials, researchers, and educators to advance sustainability through forest-focused collaboration.

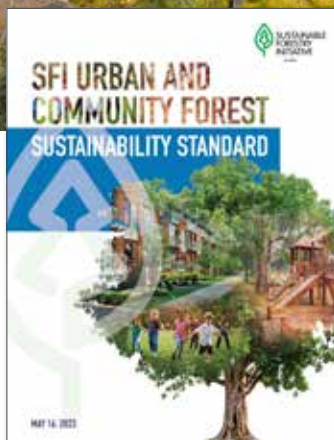
Our work is grounded in four interconnected pillars: advancing responsible forestry and sourcing through SFI Standards, promoting nature-based solutions through conservation, cultivating environmental leadership and a lifetime of learning, and fostering community collaborations that create meaningful change.

Urban and community forests are essential to each of these aspirational goals. These are the forests closest to communities, providing green spaces where most people live, work, learn, and connect with nature.



# WHAT IS THE SFI URBAN AND COMMUNITY FOREST SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD?

The SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard includes 16 objectives focused on critical areas such as biodiversity, climate resilience, and community engagement, as well as forest and tree health. As the first of its kind, the Standard empowers communities to champion thriving urban forests into the future.



This Standard is appropriate for organizations that own, manage, or are responsible for urban and/or community forests. Participating organizations can come from a diverse range of sectors. The Standard is geared toward those with green spaces, including but not limited to governmental organizations (i.e., municipalities, counties, states, provinces), non-governmental organizations, Indigenous Peoples, community groups, healthcare organizations, educational organizations, and corporate organizations.

**FOREST SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD**

The Standard is appropriate, by default or subject reference, for use by other public bodies. These standards and associated requirements are based on the appropriate science and best practices for urban and community forests. For more information, see the latest edition of the public consultation report.

**Normative References**

**ISO 26000:2017** — Guidance on Organizations — Requirements for Establishing, Implementing, and Improving Management Systems

**Section 3 — SFI Protocol**

**Section 4 — SFI 2020 Audit Procedures and Auditor Qualifications and Accreditation**

**Section 11 — Communications and Public Reporting**

Requirements for the Requirements of the SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard

**Normative References**

**Guidelines for the SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard**

**Section 1 — Basis for Use of SFI On-Product Labels & Product Claims**

**Section 2 — SFI Standard Development and Approval Process**

**Section 12 — Public Inquiries and Official Comments**

**SFI C21 2023 Urban and Community Forest Management Requirements**, November 20, 2023

This standard is based on **Leading Principles**:

- Urban and community forests are vital for community well-being, health, resiliency, and sustainability.
- Urban and community forests are essential green infrastructure that provide a wide range of benefits to communities.
- Urban and community forests and trees depend upon understanding, awareness, appreciation, and engagement by communities and people in order to thrive.
- Urban and community forests and trees require proper planning, care, and management to optimize benefits and minimize risks.
- Urban and community forests and trees are nature-based solutions to pressing issues and essential green infrastructure.

**REFERENCES**

SFI URBAN AND COMMUNITY FOREST SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD



## THIS STANDARD IS BASED ON FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- 1. Urban and community forests and trees are vital for community well-being, health, resiliency, and sustainability.**
- 2. Urban and community forests and trees and their associated benefits should be accessible and available to everyone.**
- 3. Urban and community forests and trees depend upon understanding, awareness, appreciation, stewardship, and engagement by communities and people in order to thrive.**
- 4. Urban and community forests and trees require proper planning, care, and management to optimize benefits and minimize risks.**
- 5. Urban and community forests and trees are nature-based solutions to pressing issues and essential green infrastructure.**

# CERTIFICATION IN ACTION

## EARLY ADOPTERS



In 2025, **CLEMSON UNIVERSITY** in South Carolina, United States, became the world's first organization certified to the full SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard. By integrating sustainable forest management into education, campus planning, and well-being initiatives, Clemson shows how higher education institutions can lead in building resilient communities. For Clemson, urban forestry isn't just an environmental initiative, it's a commitment to human health and quality of life.



In 2025, the **REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK** in Ontario, Canada was recognized as the first-ever municipality to achieve certification to the full SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard. This achievement reflects York Region's ongoing commitment to promoting green infrastructure, protecting natural heritage, and serving the community. SFI certification helps York Region deliver on the priorities of its Greening Strategy.

## WHAT CAN SFI-CERTIFICATION DO FOR MY URBAN OR COMMUNITY FOREST?

SFI certification for urban and community forests is a voluntary process that strengthens your implementation of long-term strategies and goals. Earning and maintaining certification involves independent, third-party audits by an accredited certification body. Audits verify that your organization is meeting the requirements of this Standard, providing credibility and assurance. This process fosters continuous improvement, supporting learning from and the application of best practices in sustainable urban forestry and conservation.

BY MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS STANDARD, YOUR ORGANIZATION IS ALSO:

**BUILDING TRUST AND CREDIBILITY**

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

**IMPROVING COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**ACCELERATING CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

**BOOSTING LOCAL ECONOMIES**

**OPTIMIZING THE BENEFITS OF TREES AND GREEN SPACES WHILE MINIMIZING RISK**



# WHAT ARE THE PATHWAYS TO SFI CERTIFICATION?

SFI OFFERS TWO UNIQUE CERTIFICATION OPTIONS



## 1. FULL CERTIFICATION

Certify to all 16 objectives to claim your urban or community forest as certified to the full SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard.

### 16 OBJECTIVES

- Objective 1: Community, People, and Indigenous Participation
- Objective 2: Human Health and Well-being
- Objective 3: Conservation and Protection of Biodiversity
- Objective 4: Stewardship of Natural Resources including Air, Water, and Soil
- Objective 5: Urban and Community Forest and Tree Health and Vitality
- Objective 6: Special Sites, including Natural Areas
- Objective 7: Climate-Smart Management
- Objective 8: Urban and Community Forest Planning
- Objective 9: Management and Care of Urban and Community Forests and Trees
- Objective 10: Disaster Readiness, Response, and Recovery
- Objective 11: Capacity-Building
- Objective 12: Urban Wood and Community Forest Utilization
- Objective 13: Communications
- Objective 14: Science, Research, and Technology
- Objective 15: Legal and Regulatory Compliance including Indigenous Rights
- Objective 16: Reporting

## 2. THEMATIC CERTIFICATION

Focus on the areas that matter most to your community. Thematic certification lets your organization focus resources on priority objectives, showcase existing strengths, and build momentum toward full certification over time.

### ● **COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND HUMAN HEALTH**

**PROMOTES** public health by embedding equitable access to green space and opportunities for recreation, mental health, and social connection into forest planning and management.

*(Certified Organizations have met objectives 1, 2, 13, 15, 16)*

AND/OR

### ● **URBAN FOREST IMPROVEMENT**

**DRIVES** continual forest improvement by setting long-term objectives for the management and care of trees and forests, reinforcing best practices, and tracking measurable results.

*(Certified Organizations have met objectives 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16)*

AND/OR

### ● **CLIMATE AND DISASTER RESILIENCE**

**POSITIONS** your organization to confront climate risks by tracking ecosystem services, reducing carbon footprints, and prioritizing vulnerable communities through equitable urban forestry strategies.

*(Certified Organizations have met objectives 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16)*

AND/OR

### ● **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP**

**VALIDATES** your community's role as an environmental leader, demonstrating stewardship of biodiversity, water, soil, and habitat while reinforcing sustainable management of resources.

*(Certified Organizations have met objectives 3, 4, 5, 6, 15, 16)*





SFI certification for urban and community forests is designed to complement programs like the Arbor Day Foundation’s Tree City USA and Tree Cities of the World recognition programs, as well as the Urban and Community Forestry Society’s (UCFS) Accreditation Program. These achievements highlight a commitment to urban forestry along a continuum of excellence. Moving along this continuum to the most rigorous option, SFI certification is a structured way to set sustainability goals, track progress, and report impact.

## WHAT INVESTMENT IS REQUIRED FROM MY ORGANIZATION TO EARN AND MAINTAIN CERTIFICATION?



Certification is appropriate for organizations with management systems in place to plant, grow, and care for their trees, green spaces, and forests. The Standard is meant to accompany existing investments your organization is making to sustain your urban or community forest.

Specific certification costs include:

**PREPARING FOR  
CERTIFICATION AUDITS**

**ENGAGING AN ACCREDITED CERTIFICATION  
BODY TO CONDUCT THE AUDITS**

**AN ANNUAL SFI  
TRADEMARK LICENSE FEE**

## HOW OFTEN DO AUDITS OCCUR?

SFI certification involves annual audits over a five-year cycle.

**YEAR 1**

**A FULL INITIAL  
CERTIFICATION AUDIT.**

**YEARS 2-4**

**SURVEILLANCE AUDITS THAT SAMPLE INDICATORS  
AND CONFIRM CORRECTIVE ACTIONS.**

**YEAR 5**

**RECERTIFICATION AUDIT (SCOPE SIMILAR  
TO THE FIRST AUDIT) AND A REVIEW OF  
PERFORMANCE OVER THE CYCLE**

# HOW DOES MY ORGANIZATION GET SFI CERTIFIED?

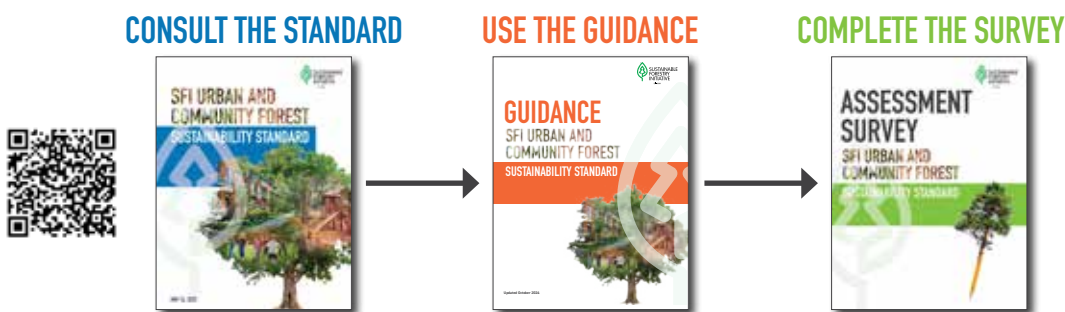
All SFI standards require third-party independent certification audits by competent and accredited certification bodies. All certification bodies must be accredited by a member of the International Accreditation Forum — ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB) or the Standards Council of Canada (SCC).

STEP 1: **GET STARTED** — Select full certification or the certification theme that aligns with your organization’s goals. The SFI’s Urban and Community Forestry Team is here to provide guidance, tools, and resources to support your implementation goals.

STEP 2: **ASSESS EXISTING PRACTICES** — Develop your management procedures to meet the SFI Standard’s requirements, train individuals in their roles, and implement your processes.

STEP 3: **CONNECT WITH SFI** — Complete and submit the [SFI PARTICIPATION APPLICATION FORM to SFI](#). Certification bodies cannot issue an SFI certificate to an organization that does not have an approved application.

STEP 4: **PREPARE FOR AN AUDIT** — Ensure your operations meet the SFI Standard requirements and contact a third-party accredited certification body to schedule an audit.



STEP 5: **GET AUDITED** — The certification body you select will visit your operations and determine if you meet the SFI Standard requirements. Your auditor will register your new certificate with SFI.

STEP 6: **SIGN A SFI TRADEMARK LICENSE AGREEMENT** — This will allow you to use the appropriate SFI label on signage and promotional items in your community.

STEP 7: **USE SFI TRADEMARKS** — SFI will provide the necessary artwork to use the SFI promotional and on-product labels and any certification statements to support your certification and trademark use. Our team will work with your organization and support communication efforts as you promote and showcase your certification online and through physical structures.

HOW TO CERTIFY



Contact us to learn how SFI certification and other resources can support your goals for people and trees

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# GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

## SUPPORTING THRIVING URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTS

The SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard's development was guided by the expertise of a task group of key urban forestry partners. The Standard also underwent two public reviews, integrating diverse perspectives and addressing priorities shared by urban and community forests worldwide. It leverages the expertise of urban forest leaders and provides a clear framework for sustainable forest management that urban forest professionals can use in their work.

### PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



### A SPECIAL THANKS

**In appreciation of the SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard Development Task Group for their service in the development of the SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard.**

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- Owen Croy, Formerly City of Surrey, Canada
- Asia Dowtin, Michigan State University
- Rachel Holmes, The Nature Conservancy
- Sharon Jean-Philippe, University of Tennessee/TreeFund
- Paul Johnson, Development Project Director
- Geoff Kempter (Kieran Hunt alternate), Utility Arborist Association
- Cecil Konijnendijk, European Forum on Urban Forestry
- Jacques Larouche, Canadian Forest Service
- Ian Leahy, American Forests
- Mike Marshall, Marshall Tree Farm
- Rachel Milette, National Association of Friendship Centers
- Margo Morrison, Nature Conservancy Canada
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- Kim Statham, City of Toronto
- Alana Tucker, Arbor Day Foundation
- Danielle Watson, Society of American Foresters
- Keith Wood, National Association of State Foresters



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