Public forest policies in Canada matter. Canada’s forests cover over 41 percent of the country’s land area (Canadian Forest Service 2007), account for about 8 percent of the world’s forest area (FAO 2005), and are integral to the country’s history, culture, economy, and environment.

Forests are the traditional home to a majority of Canada’s Aboriginal people, who, for thousands of years before the arrival of European settlers, relied on them for food, clothing, shelter, medicines, material for tools and crafts, and as a source of spiritual inspiration. Since the earliest days of colonization, forest products have been the economic mainstay of local, regional, provincial, and national economies. Today, the forest sector remains an essential component of the economy.

When it comes to how the country’s forests are managed, Canadians expect an approach that combines ecosystem conservation with the wise use of forest resources for economic and social purposes. Since 1992, Canada has been committed to developing and adopting such an approach. It is known as “[sustainable forest management](http://www.sfmcanada.org/en)” (SFM).

Far from the timber-focused management approach of the past, SFM is a system that works to meet society’s need for maintaining a vibrant forest economy while protecting the health of forested lands and maximizing the many environmental and social benefits we value those lands for. Balancing the ever-shifting suite of economic, environmental and social expectations associated with Canada’s forests is a complicated undertaking. For this reason, SFM is an adaptive process. It requires assessing and adjusting forest practices continually, in response to new circumstances, scientific advances and public input.

To date, Canada has made great strides in transforming SFM theory into practice and in achieving many of its SFM targets.

**Putting SFM theory into practice**

The SFM model is in place across all of Canada’s public forests.

* **In policy and law**. In every national forest strategy since 1992, Canada has set the course for SFM, supporting policies to [enhance forest governance](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/400), conserve ecosystem integrity, protect representative forested areas and promote society’s sustainable use of forest resources. The [Canadian Council of Forest Ministers](http://www.ccfm.org/english/index.asp) has endorsed adoption and implementation of SFM across the country.
* **In planning.** [Forest management planning](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/372) is a rigorous, comprehensive and open process in all provinces and territories. Public participation and consultation with all stakeholders are integral to SFM.
* **In monitoring and evaluation.** The tools, processes and [science-based indicators](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/111)that Canada has developed to measure and assess SFM results make it possible to track progress and constantly make improvements. [Forest certification](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/144)complements this approach by further demonstrating industry compliance with international third-party standards for SFM.

**SFM’s adaptive strength**

Those in Canada’s forest sector, from on-the-ground industry personnel to researchers and regulators, use the principles of SFM daily to inform their decisions and guide their work as conditions and objectives change. This adaptive strength of the SFM system enables Canada to:

* optimize and balance the multitude of benefits associated with forests to meet both current and long-term needs
* measure, assess and report changes to forests and the forest sector as they occur, and to report on the country’s progress in meeting its SFM goals
* capitalize on the collaborative networks now formed among government, industry, researchers, the public and public agencies
* harness the country’s scientific capacity to study and find solutions to emerging issues that may affect forest sector sustainability, such as [biodiversity](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/1), [bioenergy](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/65)and [climate change](http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pages/34)