

Grain Surfboards

Frequently Asked Questions



Section 6: Sustainability

1. **What is "sustainability"? Are Grain Surfboards a sustainable product?**
2. **How do sustainability concepts relate to finished products (like surfboards) and to raw materials (like wood)?**
3. **What about Grain? Do you have Chain of Custody Certification or use "Sustainable Certified" raw materials in Grain Surfboards?**

1. **What is "sustainability"? Are Grain Surfboards a sustainable product?**

Grain Surfboards has undertaken the production of surfboards made principally of wood in part to provide surfers an alternative that is "greener" than foam. Our efforts in this regard cross virtually all aspects of our production and operational methods (see FAQ Section 5, Environmental Responsibility).

We also believe that wood surfboards are a net gain environmentally in surfboard manufacture compared to foam in that wood boards are primarily constructed of a renewable resource (i.e. wood - whether certified sustainably harvested or not) that is so durable and beautiful that it is unlikely to be discarded - ever.

However we don't want to give the impression that our process as a whole should be considered "sustainable". ***The concept of sustainability implies a conduct of human activity the result of which is a society - or a company - that is able to meet its needs in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, maintaining these ideals indefinitely through planning and continued sustainable actions.***

We still use some materials at Grain Surfboards that are chemical or petroleum based and - though we believe the exceptional strength and beauty of Grain boards will give them longer life - we cannot document the full life-cycle of the components that we use once they are delivered to the customer. This sort of "life-cycle" planning would be a requirement in any comprehensive sustainability framework.

2. How do sustainability concepts relate to finished products (like surfboards) and to raw materials (like wood)?

Sustainability concepts can be applied to small systems (for example, in the use and management of a particular natural resource) or to large ones (such as when considering the future of the human race). In some cases, "standards" of sustainability have been developed. One comprehensive standard called "The Natural Step" (TNS) is a framework of sustainability concepts and performance standards that are being adopted by companies the world over. A laudable example is Interface, the world's largest commercial-flooring company which became the first in the U.S. to adopt the TNS framework. The goal of CEO Ray Anderson is to produce zero waste and to "never take another drop of oil from the ground." Innovations include leasing carpets instead of selling them and powering a factory with solar energy. These products would be considered "sustainably produced" under the TNS standards. These would be fine goals for our young company to work toward in the future.

By some accounts, the term "sustainability" was originally coined in relation to the management of timber, and accordingly, there are certification standards for timber management as well; some are developed by the industry (e.g. SFI) and others are overseen by independent organizations (e.g. FSC). Certifications can be earned by a particular woodlot when a forest management plan and subsequent audits of harvesting and land use practices are verified. Another type of certification can also be stamped onto forest products (like furniture) when "chain of custody" documentation can verify which components came from lands that are certified as sustainably managed. All certifications of this nature are expensive for land managers and manufacturers to acquire and maintain, so there usually has to be enough demand for "certified products" to make it worth the expense.

3. What about Grain? Do you have Chain of Custody Certification or use “Sustainable Certified” raw materials in Grain Surfboards?

Grain Surfboards has undertaken to primarily use sustainably managed northern white cedar in our boards. But investigation with large Maine timber land managers, the Forest Stewardship Council (the FSC certifying authority) and the Maine Forest Service have determined that there are *no producers of northern white cedar in Maine that are actually certified for sustainable harvesting of that particular forest product.*

While Sustainability Certification would definitely be a guarantee of sustainable practices, the absence of that guarantee doesn't mean that the forest product isn't sustainably managed. In fact, Peter Lammert, a leading forester with the Maine Forest Service, has told us that it would be difficult to find a forest management plan anywhere in Maine that targets sustainable harvesting of northern white cedar in Maine simply because it grows so abundantly there. *In other words, the resource sustains itself without active management at current harvesting levels.*

In the long run, this is no consolation - human history is riddled with failed civilizations that once thought their resources were so abundant that they didn't have to plan to preserve them. Also, FSC certification includes standards for habitat preservation, forest soil conservation, and metrics related to sustainability of other than the forest product itself - none of which are guaranteed just because cedar sustains itself without management in Northern Maine.

Portage Mills, Grain's principal supplier, ensures us that they share our concern for a lasting forest resource. Their website promises that "Portage Mills purchases superior cedar logs from local professionally certified logging contractors whom [sic] practice sound sustainable forest practices". In response to our direct inquiries and citing their own interests as well as those of environmentally minded consumers, they were unequivocal in stating that "We do in fact care [about] the preservation of our forests."

But mills like Portage only buy and sell timber from logging operations - the mills themselves are only certifiable as "sustainable" when they confirm that the wood they buy comes from certified timber management operations (unless they become timber managers



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themselves). This is called "chain of custody" (CoC) certification which is costly to establish and maintain. When there is little demand for certified lumber, mills can't justify the expense of the certification. This is currently the case for northern white cedar - no Maine mills have CoC certification. This means that it is impossible for Grain to obtain the certification either - unless we purchased whole trees directly from FSC certified lands and opened our own sawmill.

This also means that we have no choice but to fall back on other indicators of sustainable harvesting. One modest indicator is that Maine loggers that supply Portage Mills are certified annually by the state as Certified Logging Professionals (CLPs). This certification is not a "sustainability certification" but it does include a component of training on sustainability issues and ensure that loggers have familiarity with timber harvesting "best practices" that contribute to resource sustainability. Forestry laws that logging operations must adhere to also help contribute to sustainability of forest resources by protecting soils, seed trees and habitat.

In the coming years, Grain Surfboards will be examining ways to make our operations approach sustainability, and will seek out vendors who pursue similar goals. In the near term, we are planning a road trip to northern Maine to learn more about sustainable harvesting of northern white cedar, and we continue to search for FSC certified northern white cedar sources.