

natural assets

partners in conservation

THIS OLD FOREST

The Home Depot Pitches in to Help Indonesia's Forests

Most consumers have never heard of "certified" wood. Ron Jarvis, merchandising vice president for The Home Depot, knows this. Customers don't usually ask The Home Depot to carry wood products from forests that are sustainably managed and harvested—and independently verified as such.

Despite the absence of significant consumer demand, The Home Depot recently threw its support behind a Nature Conservancy project that aims to create a supply of certified wood from Indonesia, where unlawfully harvested wood—including protected species and trees felled in national parks—accounts for two-thirds of the wood cut annually. "Part of our culture is doing the right thing," explains Jarvis.

The partnership comes at a critical time, as Conservancy-sponsored scientists recently discovered a large population of orangutans in Indonesia's East Kalimantan province, living in forests that have been awarded to timber companies for logging. In November, the Conservancy signed a joint declaration with the Berau District Government of East Kalimantan—home of the newfound apes—and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, committing all three to conserving and managing orangutan habitat. They also pledged to protect the ecology of the area and promote forest certification.

Enter The Home Depot, which is giving the Conservancy \$1 million to combat illegal logging and promote sustainable forest management over the next five years. The project is beginning with a 3-month demonstration of wood tracking using new systems to separate legal timber from illegal timber on a half-million-acre site in Berau district. Later the project will expand to involve communities and timber companies throughout East Kalimantan.

The Home Depot's influence reaches far beyond its gift, however. The world's single largest buyer of wood products,



the company in 1999 announced that it would give purchasing preference to wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, the most rigorous forest certification system in North America. Since then, says Jarvis, The Home Depot has been researching the origins of its 50,000 products in an effort to halt imports from endangered ecosystems.

Now, with the company's support and funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Indonesian forest certification has both conservation and market forces behind it. If successful, says Steve Volkers, the Conservancy's director of corporate partnerships, the project should lead to more certified wood products on U.S. store shelves and greater consumer demand for them.

"Strategic partnerships with leaders like The Home Depot can change the market over time," he says. "Certification is a win for conservation and for the communities that depend on forestry for their livelihood."

—KATHERINE SHARPE

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The Home Depot at a Glance

Founded: Atlanta, Georgia, 1978
Number of Employees: 280,000
Sales in 2001: \$53.6 billion
Corporate Charitable Contributions in 2001: \$25 million
Number of Retail Stores: 1,459
Number of Retail Stores Opened in December 2002: 15
Typical Square Footage of New Retail Store: 134,000 square feet (3 acres)
Location of Retail Stores: Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, United States