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## Tracking Stewardship from the Forest to the Page: Topline Printing Leads the Way in Alberta

By Joyce Hildebrand, AWA Conservation Specialist

It seems fitting that the *Wild Lands Advocate* is the very first FSC-certified product to roll off Topline Printing's press, marking a significant milestone for both the journal and the printer. In fact, Topline's Forest Stewardship Council certificate is so fresh that it is being framed as this issue goes to press.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) promotes responsible management of the world's forests and accredits independent third party organizations to certify companies like Topline to international standards. Topline's certifying company is SmartWood, accredited by the FSC through the Rainforest Alliance, a global nonprofit conservation organization. Established in 1989, SmartWood is now the world's leading nonprofit forestry certifier.

For Topline, the foundations for certification were laid long ago. Bill Peris and his brother Fernando established the company in 1983 and have been leaders in environmentally responsible printing in Alberta since the early 1990s. When Bill returned to Calgary in 1992 after five years in Toronto, where waste paper recycling was well-established in the printing business, he found Calgary lagging far behind. At that time, Topline was landfilling its waste at a cost of \$1,100 per month. It made business sense to recycle, and Topline was one of the first printers in the city to start.

But if the Peris brothers' motives for running Topline in a way that minimizes ecological impact were economic, they would never have proceeded along this path. Getting FSC certification represents a significant cost with absolutely no revenue increase. Although certified paper is no more expensive than non-certified paper, there are extra administrative costs, including audits and staff training.

The paper in this issue of the *Advocate* can be tracked all the way back to forests that have been certified to FSC standards. This "chain of custody" – including all stages of processing, transformation, manufacturing, and distribution – requires meticulous invoicing, record-keeping, and storage. "If we were to send a product to another company for any part of the printing process," says Bill, "they would also have to be FSC-certified." In Topline's case, every step of the process is in-house, which simplifies tracking procedures.

Still, every company involved before the paper arrives at Topline must be certified: the forest company, the mill, and the paper merchants. Topline's employees had to undergo special training to ensure that the third-party SmartWood audits would go smoothly. Not only does SmartWood conduct a compulsory annual audit, but according to the FSC agreement, they can audit Topline randomly at any time.

Although awareness of FSC-certified wood has been growing for some time, consumers have been slow to make the connection between the forests they hike through and the paper that flows steadily from printer to desk to trashcan or recycling bin. Bill believes that the proliferation of computer printers and photocopiers has led to massive waste and overuse of paper.

From the consumer's perspective, products that come from commercial printers are even further removed from trees. "Printers consume a tremendous amount of pulp," says Bill, "but people sometimes don't recognize that paper is wood." Even if individuals make that connection, agencies who use printers are generally interested in one thing: price. Bill emphasizes that use of certified paper will increase only when agencies start to request it. "That's how the shift will happen. Then the printers will have to start asking the paper merchants for FSC paper and it will be recognized as a cost of doing business."





Meanwhile, there is absolutely no financial benefit to Topline for their environmental initiatives. "For us, it's a hard expense," Peris says. "At this point it's so new in Calgary, it comes right off the bottom line. This choice has nothing to do with finances." If Topline were primarily interested in increasing profit, they would purchase paper from developing countries. "It's difficult to compete with companies in South America that are supplying paper brokers in the US and Canada. Regardless of whether forests were being clearcut or not, it's just not the right thing to do. It's also not good for Canadians: we should be supporting our own mills in Canada."

So why do it? All of Topline's environmental initiatives have come from a commitment to minimizing the business's ecological footprint. "As a Scout leader," Bill says, "I tell the boys to leave no trace, stay on the trail, etc. What I preach to our youth, I have to practise at work, regardless of the cost." The Scout movement has been Bill's strongest influence with respect to the environment. "That, and our involvement with the *Wild Lands Advocate*," he adds.

As an AWA member, Bill used to squint at the black and white photos in the *Advocate*, trying to make out what they represented. He knew that as a non-profit organization, AWA simply didn't have the funds to print in colour, but as a printer, he also knew that colour images would increase the impact of the journal tremendously. Although Topline's already generous donations to the community had reached their limit, as an expression of his commitment to conservation, Bill decided to sponsor colour printing and process. The *Advocate* took a giant leap from grainy half-tones to professional full-colour photographs.

As you enjoy the colour on these pages, you may be wondering: "But what about the ink?" Topline was one of the first printers in Alberta to switch to vegetable-based ink, and in one corner of the plant is a small, fire-proof room containing a few large barrels. Peer into one of them and you will see a swirl of brilliant colours: unlike most small printers in Alberta, Topline has all its leftover waste ink picked up and recycled. Aluminum plates are neatly stacked in corners, also ready to be collected for recycling.

Another recent change at Topline involves the "direct-to-plate" system, the mechanism by which information is sent directly from the computer to the device that fuses the image onto the plates. In November, Topline switched to a waterless system. Based on the last six months, calculations indicate that this system saves 480,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water per year. Since water is (still) cheap, this represents minimal financial savings, but it is a significant reduction in water use.

Although Topline's decisions regarding environmental and social responsibility don't translate into increased profits, this doesn't concern Peris. Because of the quality of their service, customers keep coming back and referring them to others. Staff turnover is minimal: most employees have been with the company for 5 to 15 years. And for Peris, decisions like FSC certification are bigger than the bottom line: "This is good for Canada. The wider the spread of FSC certification, the broader the market for Canadian pulp and paper manufacturers. It creates employment. It's good for the economy as well as for forests, wildlife, and watersheds." How refreshing in an increasingly globalized world where most things are viewed solely through an economic prism!

