



Backgrounder: Use of Wool in Outdoor Products

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Background

The unique properties of wool make it an excellent choice for certain outdoor industry performance apparel applications. This is especially true for merino wool, which can be very soft and non-itch, with natural anti-odor properties. It is breathable and moisture-wicking, and warm in cold weather while cool in the heat. And unlike petroleum-based synthetics, wool is a renewable resource that is also recyclable and biodegradable at end of life.

The outdoor industry uses wool as part of a balanced portfolio of both natural and synthetic fibers. As with any fiber that is an animal byproduct, the industry is committed to ensuring that the wool it is sourcing is being produced using responsible and ethical practices, and leveraging its presence in the wool supply chain to collaborate with all involved stakeholders to achieve these best practices at scale.

The Outdoor Industry and Responsible Sourcing

In January 2012, the OIA Sustainability Working Group launched its Materials Traceability Working Group (MTWG) to collaboratively establish tools, resources, and best practices toward responsible sourcing of materials critical to outdoor industry products. The group currently includes more than 130 participants from brands, retailers, suppliers, NGO's, and other stakeholders.

In August 2012, the OIA MTWG established the Wool Task Force, to address challenges specific to the shared global supply chain for wool.

Shared goals of this group include:

- Establishing traceability mechanisms to verify the presence and amount of specific raw materials.
- Identifying (or developing, where needed) and enabling verification requirements and standards that support the sustainability of these materials.
- Establishing and implementing shared best practices for responsible animal welfare throughout the shared outdoor products supply chains.

The MTWG applies the following guiding principles to identify priority sustainability impact areas and opportunities across the full life cycle of a product:

- Ensure healthy, humane animal treatment
- Protect, conserve and enhance soil, air, water, wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Optimize water use in cultivation or production of raw materials and in manufacturing
- Conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Minimize waste and encourage recycling in operations, supply chain, and end-of-life
- Reduce the use of chemicals and potentially hazardous materials which pose health or environmental risks
- Support safe and fair working conditions

As with other issues related to the shared global supply chains of outdoor apparel, footwear, and gear, the outdoor industry believes that pre-competitive, multi-stakeholder collaboration via the OIA Sustainability Working Group is the most effective approach to address supply chain and sourcing challenges and make progress toward implementing responsible sourcing practices at scale across the industry.

For more information about these efforts, please contact Beth Jensen, OIA's Director of Corporate Responsibility, at bjensen@outdoorindustry.org.