

Group standard revision



The background

To facilitate access to FSC certification, in 2009 FSC created the possibility of certifying groups.

By having several forests managed together as one certificate, the group manager can support the members in achieving sustainable forest management, and the economy of scale helps reduce costs. This is the main way in which smallholders are accessing FSC.

After a minor revision in 2017, FSC decided to fully revise the standard at the end of 2018 to make it more relevant to small forest owners.

“We want the Group standard to be simple, flexible and relevant for smallholders.”

What we are doing

It was requested that the Group standard be reviewed as part of Motion 46 at the 2017 FSC General Assembly in Vancouver.

The aim is to do three things: simplify the standard; include forestry contractor certification; and include a risk-based approach in the context of group certification.

Several engagement events have taken place to understand what is working and what is not working with the standard, as well as to understand the barriers that still prevent smallholders from accessing FSC. Based on some initial findings, a small revision of the standard took place in 2017. It was followed by a target survey in early 2018 and a meeting with certification bodies, before officially launching the full revision of the standard.

All these preparatory efforts confirmed that bringing additional flexibility to the standard will allow for better adaptation to the different realities that happen worldwide. There is also a need for clarity

and simplification; some terms are not equally understood and there are some inconsistencies in the application of the standard among countries.

Key features

- This revision is being implemented by the New Approaches project due to the importance of group certification for smallholders, and the link to other processes such as forestry contractor certification.
- The optional inclusion of forestry contractors in the group would imply shifting the focus from the management units (the forest area) to the management activities and their implementation on the ground, moving to a more performance-oriented evaluation. The risk associated to forest management can also be reduced by counting on trained contractors, who would also be evaluated based on their performance.
- The revision is considering different alternatives and analysing how internal monitoring could be

streamlined, with smallholders in mind, as well as how to empower the group manager to run an efficient group management system. A flexible approach that would allow each group define its needs for internal monitoring and management, while maintaining the conformance with FSC’s responsible forest management requirements.

Current progress and next steps

The first draft of the revision process was launched for the first public consultation in November 2019 – and feedback will be gathered and used to develop the next draft.

A second consultation is set for May 2020.

Reference documents

- FSC-PRO-01-001 Development and Revision of FSC Normative Documents
- FSC-STD-30-005 FSC Standard for Group Entities in Forest Management Groups

> [Process weblink](#)