



FSC®: a ready-made tool to support the implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy objectives on the ground

The Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) promotes the responsible management of the world's forests. We strive to support the Commission in developing a new EU forest strategy ensuring **environmental, social, and economic value** to forests. In Europe, almost **two third of forests are certified**¹. This should be considered to address European forests in a consistent manner.

The **EU Parliament**, in its **resolution of 8 October 2020 on the EU Forest Strategy** “encourages the use of forest certification systems in place, as suitable means of proof to verify the sustainability of forest resources”². Building on this, FSC calls the EU Commission to recognise the **complementary role of forest certification schemes meeting strict sustainability criteria**³, such as FSC, as **ready-made tools to support implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy objectives on the ground**. FSC can support the EU Commission's goals as it follows:

1. Driving the demand for responsible forest management

FSC promotes forest management practices that are environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable⁴. FSC forest management standards also include strong biodiversity protection rules that certified forest owners are obliged to respect⁵. Recent evidence demonstrates that the number of mammal species recorded in logging gaps in FSC-certified concessions was higher than in community-managed forests⁶. As more than 50 million hectares of forests are FSC-certified, FSC is a considerable driver for responsible forest management practices encompassing biodiversity protection across Europe⁷.

2. Enhancing forest protection – and strictly protect old-growth forests

FSC national standards require forest managers to maintain Conservation Area Network. Within this, primary and old-growth forests values can be protected because FSC-certified forest owners are required to manage them for conservation purposes. A study of boreal Swedish forest demonstrated that certified voluntary forest set-asides rules can play an important part in conservation of old-growth forests, with 25% of their area consisting of trees over 160 years old⁸.

3. Enabling the conditions for forest resilience

Resilient forests embody economic, social and environmental values⁹. For FSC, true value is captured in forests managed in accordance with robust Principles & Criteria (P&C) for forest stewardship. The P&C ensure that forests are managed sustainably. Protecting biodiversity, maintaining ecological processes, respecting indigenous people's rights are all rules which FSC-certified forest owners must respect. Managing forests according to these principles is therefore the necessary pre-condition to ensure the resilience of forest to climate threats¹⁰.

4. Supporting restoration of degraded forest ecosystems

FSC certification means that despite forest management interventions, forest's ecological integrity is preserved for generations to come. Therefore, FSC helps preventing the need for forest restoration. FSC certification is also being used in forest restoration projects in EU Member States¹¹. FSC requires forest managers to “maintain and/or restore a varying mosaic of species, sizes, ages, spatial scales and regeneration cycles appropriate for the landscape values in that region, and for enhancing environmental and economic resilience.”¹²

5. Promoting the import of products not involving deforestation

FSC does not allow deforestation, the conversion of natural forest areas into plantations or non-forest uses, or any other forms of forest ecosystem degradation in FSC-certified forests. This is complemented by specific requirements for the maintenance and/or enhancement of areas with high conservation value¹³. FSC requires forest owners/managers to minimize the negative impacts of forest management interventions to avoid and compensate for any form of forest degradation. Recent evidence demonstrate that deforestation is lower in concessions that have had an FSC forest management plan over a longer period¹⁴.

6. Ensuring consistency with international commitments and EU Green Deal goals

FSC certification is a tool to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs). For instance, by “promoting the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests” FSC is a ready-made tool for achieving SDG 15.2¹⁵. Moreover, FSC system ensures the protection of valuable natural forest areas and species, and fights illegal logging. FSC forest management standards require forest managers to prevent deforestation, avoid forest degradation, and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem functions – which are all goals shared within the EU Green Deal¹⁶.

About FSC

As the pioneer of forest certification, FSC has 25 years of experience in sustainable forest management and is widely regarded as the world’s most trusted forest certification system. FSC uses its expertise to promote the responsible management of the world’s forests, bringing together experts from the environmental, economic and social spheres. FSC standards are based on ten core principles designed to prevent deforestation and degradation, and safeguard biodiversity, water quality, carbon storage, and Indigenous Peoples’ and workers’ rights, among other key environmental and social values. More [here](#).

Footnotes

- 1 Maesano M, (2018). *Forest certification map of Europe*. *iForest* 11: 526-533. – doi: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327012960_Forest_certification_map_of_Europe
- 2 European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2020 on the European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward (2019/2157(INI)), available here: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0257_EN.html
- 3 See for instance ISEAL credibility principles: <https://www.isealliance.org/defining-credible-practice/iseal-credibility-principles>
- 4 FSC official website, “about us”, <https://fsc.org/en/about-us>
- 5 Jaung W, Putzel L, Bull GQ, Kozak R, Elliott C (2016). *Forest Stewardship Council certification for forest ecosystem services: an analysis of stakeholder adaptability*. *Forest Policy and Economics* 70: 91-98. - doi: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1389934116301216?via%3Dihub>
- 6 Lhoest S., 2020 *Conservation value of tropical forests: Distance to human settlements matters more than management in Central Africa*, *Biological Conservation*, Volume 241, 108351, ISSN 0006-3207, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2019.108351>
- 7 Harshaw HW, Sheppard SRJ, Jeakins P (2009). *Public attitudes toward sustainable forest management: opinions from forest-dependent communities in British Columbia*. *BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management* 10 (2): 81-103: <https://jem-online.org/index.php/jem/article/view/422>
- 8 Simonsson, Lars Östlund, and Lena Gustafsson, “Conservation Values of Certified-Driven Voluntary Forest Set-Asides,” *Forest Ecology and Management* 375 (September 1, 2016): 249–58, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2016.05.039>.
- 9 Folke C. 2006 *Resilience: the emergence of a perspective for social-ecological systems analyses*. *Global Environ. Change* 16, 253–267.
- 10 Lauren Fuller, Christopher P. Quine, *Resilience and tree health: a basis for implementation in sustainable forest management*, *Forestry: An International Journal of Forest Research*, Volume 89, Issue 1, January 2016, Pages 7–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/forestry/cpv046>
- 11 See for instance restoration projects in Spain, here: <https://es.fsc.org/es-es>
- 12 FSC Principles and criteria, criterion 6.8.
- 13 FSC website, *Deforestation, high conservation value forests and intact forest landscapes*, available here: <https://fsc.org/en/deforestation-hcv-ifl>
- 14 Isabelle Tritsch, Gwenolé Le Velly, Benoit Mertens, Patrick Meyfroidt, Christophe Sannier, Jean-Sylvestre Makak, Kenneth Hounbedji, *Do forest-management plans and FSC certification help avoid deforestation in the Congo Basin?*, *Ecological Economics*, Volume 175, 2020, 106660, ISSN 0921-8009, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800919305890>
- 15 Sustainable Development Goals, SDG indicators: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=15&Target=15.2>
- 16 Damette, Delacote, *Unsustainable timber harvesting, deforestation and the role of certification*, *Ecological Economics*, Volume 70, Issue 6, 15 April 2011, Pages 1211-1219: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921800911000553>