



Forest Stewardship Council®



# FSC standard for group entities in forest management groups

FSC-STD-30-005 V1-1 EN

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## **FSC STANDARD FOR GROUP ENTITIES IN FOREST MANAGEMENT GROUPS**

FSC-STD-30-005 V1-1 EN

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, not for profit, non-government organization established to support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests.

FSC's vision is where the world's forests meet the social, ecological, and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations

## **Foreword**

The FSC General Assembly in 1996 approved the development of new approaches to certification of small landholdings by establishing a consultative group, and a process involving certification bodies and other FSC Members.

In 1998 FSC approved a Policy on Group Certification focused on guidelines for certification bodies. In 2005 FSC identified the need to start a review process of the Group FM Policy in order to incorporate streamlined requirements for both, forest managers and certification bodies.

This standard presents the basic requirements to be implemented by Group entities wishing to apply to an FSC accredited certification body for forest management group certification. The requirements are based on the FSC Policy Document “Group Certification: FSC Guidelines for certification bodies (July 31st 1998)”. Additionally, specific requirements to address issues that have been raised by certification bodies and stakeholders regarding Group Forest Management certification have been incorporated.

The standard includes changes that reflect the results from pilot tests on group certification held in Estonia, France and the United States in 2009. It also incorporates comments submitted by stakeholders and group members during the consultation periods in November-December 2008 and May-June 2009.

In 2017 small changes were made to the *FSC Standard for Group Entities in Forest Management Groups* FSC-STD-30-005 to clarify some terms and definitions.

### **Note on use of this standard**

All aspects of this standard are considered to be normative, including the scope, standard effective date, references, terms and definitions, notes, tables and annexes, unless otherwise stated (e.g. as examples).

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## A Scope

This standard specifies the requirements for the evaluation and certification of group entities (the certificate holder) managing a group of forest management units under a single certificate, a process referred to as 'group certification'.

## B Normative dates

Approval date	21 December 2017
Publication date	01 January 2018
Effective date	01 April 2018
Period of validity	until replaced or withdrawn

## C References

The following referenced documents are relevant for the application of this document. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

*FSC-STD-01-001V5-2 FSC Principles and Criteria for forest stewardship*  
*FSC-STD-01-002 FSC glossary of terms*  
*FSC-STD-01-003 SLIMF Eligibility Criteria*  
*FSC-STD-20-007 V3-0 Forest management evaluations*  
*FSC-STD-60-004 V1-0 International Generic Indicators*  
*FSC-PRO-01-001 V3-1 Development and Revision of FSC® Normative Documents*

## D Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this International Standard, the terms and definitions given in *FSC-STD-01-002 FSC Glossary of Terms*, and the following apply:

**FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship (FSC P&C):** set of requirements for forest managers to implement environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable forest management on their properties. In the context of this standard the operational FSC-approved version of the FSC P&C developed by FSC Working Groups or certification bodies for application at the forest management unit level is referred to as the “applicable Forest Stewardship Standard”.

**Group entity:** The group entity is the entity representing the forest properties that constitute a group for the purpose of FSC forest management certification. The group entity applies for group certification and finally holds the forest management certificate. The group entity is responsible to the certification body for ensuring that the requirements of the FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship are met in all forest properties participating in the group. The group entity may be an individual (e.g. a 'resource manager'), a cooperative body, an owner association, or other similar legal entity.

**Group member:** forest owner or forest manager who participates in a group scheme for the purpose of FSC forest management certification. Group members are responsible for implementing any requirements of group membership. Group members

do not hold individual FSC certificates, but as long as they comply with all the requirements of group membership, their forest properties are covered by the forest management certificate issued to the group entity.

**Landscape level requirements:** requirements of the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard that are implemented at the level of the group entity in a forest management group (e.g. protection of representative samples of ecosystems, protection of high conservation values).

**Resource Manager:** a person or organization that has been given the administrative responsibilities by forest owners over their forest resources. The Resource Manager shall oversee all operational Forest Management activities and shall assume the responsibilities regarding compliance on behalf of the individual forest owner.

NOTE: Roles and responsibilities, such as administrative responsibilities must be clearly defined and agreed by all parties and fixed in a verifiable agreement.

Administrative responsibilities can include the following documentation:

- a) copies of applicable laws
- b) long term management plan(s)
- c) technical management guides relating to roads, nurseries, planting, harvesting, inventory
- d) concession agreements
- e) documentation showing tenure or land-use rights
- f) up to date maps of roads, management sites, protected areas
- g) inventory records
- h) work instructions
- i) contractor contracts
- j) agreements with affected local communities
- k) agreements with affected Indigenous Peoples
- l) records of payments of royalties, fees, or taxes
- m) records of complaints/disputes and their resolution
- n) records of payments to workers
- o) wildlife evaluation records
- p) environmental impacts monitoring records, e.g. on water quality, soil condition
- q) social impact survey results
- r) results of monitoring forest growth and health
- s) harvesting and production records
- t) chemical use records
- u) communications with stakeholders
- v) purchasing and sales documentation

**Resource Management Unit (RMU):** Set of FMUs managed by the same managerial body (e.g. the same resource manager). In the case of small operations, RMUs may be used as the basis for sampling.

### **Types of forest management groups:**

**Type I group:** group with shared responsibilities between the group entity and the group members. These may vary from administrative tasks to planning, forest operations and monitoring with shared responsibilities between the group entity and the group members.

**Type II group:** 'Resource manager' type of group in which a Resource Manager has overall responsibility for ensuring conformity with the FSC P&C within the scope of certification.

NOTE: The definitions of Type I and Type II are models for possible setups; in reality there are more options in the way responsibilities can be shared within groups.

## **PART 1 QUALITY SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

### **1 General requirements**

- 1.1 The Group entity shall be an independent legal entity or an individual acting as a legal entity.
- 1.2 The Group entity shall comply with relevant legal obligations, as registration and payment of applicable fees and taxes.
- 1.3 The Group entity shall have a written public policy of commitment to the FSC Principles and Criteria.
- 1.4 The Group entity shall define training needs and implement training activities and/or communication strategies relevant to the implementation of the applicable FSC standards.

### **2 Responsibilities**

- 2.1 The Group entity shall clearly define and document the division of responsibilities between the Group entity and the Group members in relation to forest management activities (for example with respect to management planning, monitoring, harvesting, quality control, marketing, timber sale, etc).  
NOTE: The actual division of responsibilities may differ greatly between different group certification schemes. Responsibilities regarding compliance to the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard may be divided between the Group entity and Group members in order to take into account of a landscape approach.
- 2.2 The Group entity shall appoint a management representative as having overall responsibility and authority for the Group entity's compliance with all applicable requirements of this standard.
- 2.3 Group entity staff and Group members shall demonstrate knowledge of the Group's procedures and the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard.

### **3 Group entity's procedures**

- 3.1 The Group entity shall establish, implement and maintain written procedures for Group membership covering all applicable requirements of this standard, according to scale and complexity of the group including:
  - I. Organizational structure;
  - II. Responsibilities of the Group entity and the Group members including main activities to fulfil such responsibilities (i.e. Development of management plans, sales and marketing of FSC products, harvesting, planting, monitoring, etc);
  - III. Rules regarding eligibility for membership to the Group;
  - IV. Rules regarding withdrawal/ suspension of members from the Group;



- V. Clear description of the process to fulfill any corrective action requests issued internally and by the certification body including timelines and implications if any of the corrective actions are not complied with;
  - VI. Documented procedures for the inclusion of new Group members;
  - VII. Complaints procedure for Group members.
- 3.2 The Group entity's procedures shall be sufficient to establish an efficient internal control system ensuring that all members are fulfilling applicable requirements.
  - 3.3 The Group entity shall define the personnel responsible for each procedure together with the qualifications or training measures required for its implementation.
  - 3.4 The Group entity or the certification body shall evaluate every applicant for membership of the Group and ensure that there are no major nonconformities with applicable requirements of the Forest Stewardship Standard, and with any additional requirements for membership of the Group, prior to being granted membership of the Group.

NOTE: for applicants complying with SLIMF eligibility criteria for size, the initial evaluation may be done through a desk audit.

#### **4 Informed consent of Group members**

- 4.1 The Group entity shall provide each Group member with documentation, or access to documentation, specifying the relevant terms and conditions of Group membership. The documentation shall include:
  - i Access to a copy of the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard;
  - ii Explanation of the certification body's process;
  - iii Explanation of the certification body's, and FSC's rights to access the Group members' forests and documentation for the purposes of evaluation and monitoring;
  - iv Explanation of the certification body's, and FSC's requirements with respect to publication of information;
  - v Explanation of any obligations with respect to Group membership, such as:
    - a. maintenance of information for monitoring purposes;
    - b. use of systems for tracking and tracing of forest products;

- c. requirement to conform with conditions or corrective action requests issued by the certification body and the group entity
- d. any special requirements for Group members related to marketing or sales of products within and outside of the certificate;
- e. other obligations of Group membership; and
- f. explanation of any costs associated with Group membership.

NOTE: In some groups, it may be sufficient to provide individual members with a summary of these items, provided that full documentation is readily available on request at the Group entity's offices. The information should be presented in a way adapted to the language and knowledge of the Group members.

- 4.2 A consent declaration or equivalent shall be available between the Group Entity and each Group member or the member's representative who voluntarily wishes to participate in the Group. The consent declaration shall:
- i include a commitment to comply with all applicable certification requirements;
  - ii. acknowledge and agree to the obligations and responsibilities of the Group entity;
  - iii acknowledge and agree to the obligations and responsibilities of Group membership;
  - iv agree to membership of the scheme, *and*
  - v authorise the Group entity to be the primary contact for certification and to apply for certification on the member's behalf.

NOTE: A consent declaration does not have to be an individual document. It can be part of a contract or any other document (e.g. meeting minutes) that specifies the agreed relationship between the Group member and the Group entity.

## 5 Group Records

- 5.1 The group entity shall maintain complete and up-to-date records covering all applicable requirements of this standard. These shall include:
- i List of names and contact details of Group members, together with dates of entering and leaving the Group scheme, reason for leaving, and the type of forest ownership per member;

- ii. Any records of training provided to staff or Group members, relevant to the implementation of this standard or the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard;
- iii. A map or supporting documentation describing or showing the location of the member's forest properties;
- iv. Evidence of consent of all Group members;
- v. Documentation and records regarding recommended practices for forest management (i.e. silvicultural systems);
- vi. Records demonstrating the implementation of any internal control or monitoring systems. Such records shall include records of internal inspections, non-compliances identified in such inspections, actions taken to correct any such non-compliance;
- viii. Records of the estimated annual overall FSC production and annual FSC sales of the Group.

NOTE: The amount of data that is maintained centrally by the Group entity may vary from case to case. In order to reduce costs of evaluation by the certification body, and subsequent monitoring by FSC, data should be stored centrally wherever possible.

- 5.2 Group records shall be retained for at least five (5) years.
- 5.3 Group entities shall not issue any kind of certificates or declarations to their group members that could be confused with FSC certificates. Group member certificates may however be requested from the certification body.

## **PART 2 GROUP FEATURES**

### **6 Group Size**

- 6.1 There is no restriction on the maximum size that a group certificate can cover in terms of number of group members, their individual forest property size or total forest area. The Group entity shall have sufficient human and technical resources to manage and control the Group in line with the requirements of this standard.

NOTE: The number of Group members, their individual size and the total area will however influence the evaluation intensity applied by the certification body in their annual audits.

- 6.2 The Group entity shall specify in their procedures the maximum number of members that can be supported by the management system and the human and technical capacities of the Group entity.

### **7 Multinational groups**

- 7.1 Group schemes shall only be applied to national groups which are covered by the same Forest Stewardship Standard.
- 7.2 In cases where homogeneous conditions between countries/ regions may allow an effective and credible cross- border or multi-regional monitoring system, the Group entity shall request formal approval by FSC IC through their accredited Certification Body to allow certification of such a group scheme.

## PART 3 INTERNAL MONITORING

### 8 Monitoring requirements

8.1 The Group entity shall implement a documented monitoring and control system that includes at least the following:

- i. Written description of the monitoring and control system;
- ii. Regular (at least annual) monitoring visits to a sample of Group members to confirm continued compliance with all the requirements of the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard, and with any additional requirements for membership of the Group.

8.2 The Group entity shall define criteria to be monitored at each internal audit and according to the group characteristics, risk factors and local circumstances.

NOTE: The Group entity may focus its monitoring during a particular annual surveillance evaluation on specific elements of the applicable Forest Stewardship Standard, with the provision that all aspects of the Forest Stewardship Standard are audited during the period of validity of the certificate.

8.3. The minimum sample to be visited annually for internal monitoring shall be determined as follows:

**a) Type I Groups with mixed responsibilities (see section D Terms and definitions)**

Groups or sub-groups with mixed responsibilities shall apply a *minimum* sampling of  $X = \sqrt{y}$  for 'normal' FMUs and  $X = 0.6 * \sqrt{y}$  for FMUs < 1,000 ha. Sampling shall be increased if HCVs are threatened or land tenure or use right disputes are pending within the group.

**b) Type II Resource Manager Groups (see section D Terms and definitions)**

Group entities who also operate as resource managers may define the required internal sampling intensity at their own discretion for the forest properties they are managing, independent of their size and ownership (the minimum numbers as defined above do not apply here).

NOTE: for the purpose of sampling, FMUs qualifying as SLIMF according to FSC-STD-01-003 V1-0 in connection with FSC-STD-01-003a, and managed by the same managerial body may be combined into a 'resource management unit' (RMU) according to the proposal made in FSC-STD-20-007 Annex 1.

8.4 For monitoring purposes the Group entity should use the same stratification into sets of 'like' FMUs as defined by the certification body in their evaluation. National SLIMF eligibility criteria should be considered.

8.5 The Group entity should visit different members in their annual monitoring than the ones selected for evaluation by the certification body, unless pending

corrective actions, complaints or risk factors are requiring a revisit of the same units.

- 8.6 In the selection process of members to be visited, the Group entity should include random selection techniques.
- 8.7 The Group entity shall issue corrective action requests to address non-compliances identified during their visits and monitor their implementation.
- 8.8 Additional monitoring visits shall be scheduled when potential problems arise or the Group entity receives information from stakeholders about alleged violations of the FSC requirements by Group members.

#### **PART 4 CHAIN OF CUSTODY**

##### **9 Sales of forest products and use of the FSC trademark**

- 9.1 The Group entity shall document and implement a system for tracking and tracing of forest products produced by the Group members which are supposed to be sold as FSC certified.
- 9.2 For the purpose of ensuring that non certified material is not being mixed with FSC certified material, FSC products shall only be sold according to a sales protocol agreed by the Group members and the Group entity.
- 9.3 The Group entity shall ensure that all invoices for sales of FSC certified material are issued with the required information (see *FSC-STD-40-004 V2-0* Clause 6.1.1) and are filed by the group members.
- 9.4 The Group entity shall ensure that all uses of the FSC Trademark are approved by the responsible certification body in advance.