



FSC CERTIFICATION: PROTECTION OF BIODIVERSITY AND HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS (HCVF)

Forests only cover about 30% of the world's surface, yet they are home to about half of terrestrial biodiversity and millions of the poorest people. If managed responsibly, we can use forest resources and at the same time maintain forest areas for biodiversity, eco-system services and benefits for local and global communities.

FSC certification prioritizes the protection of especially valuable forest areas which includes both ecological and social values. To achieve this, FSC developed the concept of High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF).

HCVFs are forests of outstanding and critical importance. This could be due to the presence of endangered wildlife, or an unusually high number of rare plant species. Or it could be because the forest is of critical importance to local people because it provides them with food, water, income or sites of cultural significance.

Principle 9 of the FSC Principles and Criteria requires that forests with High Conservation Values (HCVs) increase or at the very least maintain these values.



High Conservation Value Forests

There are six types of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs):

1. Globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values
2. Globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape-level forests
3. Forest areas that are in or contain rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems
4. Forest areas that provide basic services of nature in critical situations
5. Forest areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities
6. Forest areas critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity

The classification of HCVFs is highly dependent on the particular socio-cultural and ecological context. HCVFs are determined following a broad and inclusive stakeholder consultation process.

Besides the particular attention given to HCVFs, FSC certification also protects biodiversity more generally through Principle 6.

The 10 Principles and associated Criteria is a set of internationally applicable requirements for responsible forest management.

FSC Principles for Forest Stewardship

1. Compliance with laws and FSC principles
2. Tenure and use rights and responsibilities
3. Indigenous people's rights
4. Community relations and worker's rights
5. Multiple benefits from the forest
6. Assessment of environmental impact
7. Management planning
8. Monitoring and assessment of management impacts
9. Maintenance of high conservation value forests
10. Responsible management of plantations

Certification protects socially and environmentally important areas

All FSC certified operations must have a forest management plan that includes an inventory for high conservation values. If such values are found, the management plan has to include concrete actions on how these values will be protected.

To strike a balance between conservation and use, low-impact management procedures must be adopted so as not to degrade, but to maintain or improve the forest integrity through management. Yearly surveillance audits prescribed by the FSC system control its effectiveness and implementation.



The HCVF concept is increasingly being used by other initiatives for mapping, conservation and natural resource planning and advocacy. The concept is also being used by companies setting precautionary purchasing policies and in discussions and policies by government agencies.





Areas of vital importance

Large areas of high biodiversity worldwide are critically affected by the exploitation of forests, whether by large-scale companies or small-scale community based management.

While HCVFs are a global phenomenon, tropical forests are by far the richest in biodiversity, making the protection of tropical forests the prime challenge for biodiversity conservation.

Globally, around 12% of all forest area certified to FSC's standards lies within the tropics or the subtropics. About 60% of these are natural forests.

12% might appear to be a small percentage, but this is partly due to the major changes needed to comply with FSC requirements. In this context, more changes often mean greater positive change and impact.

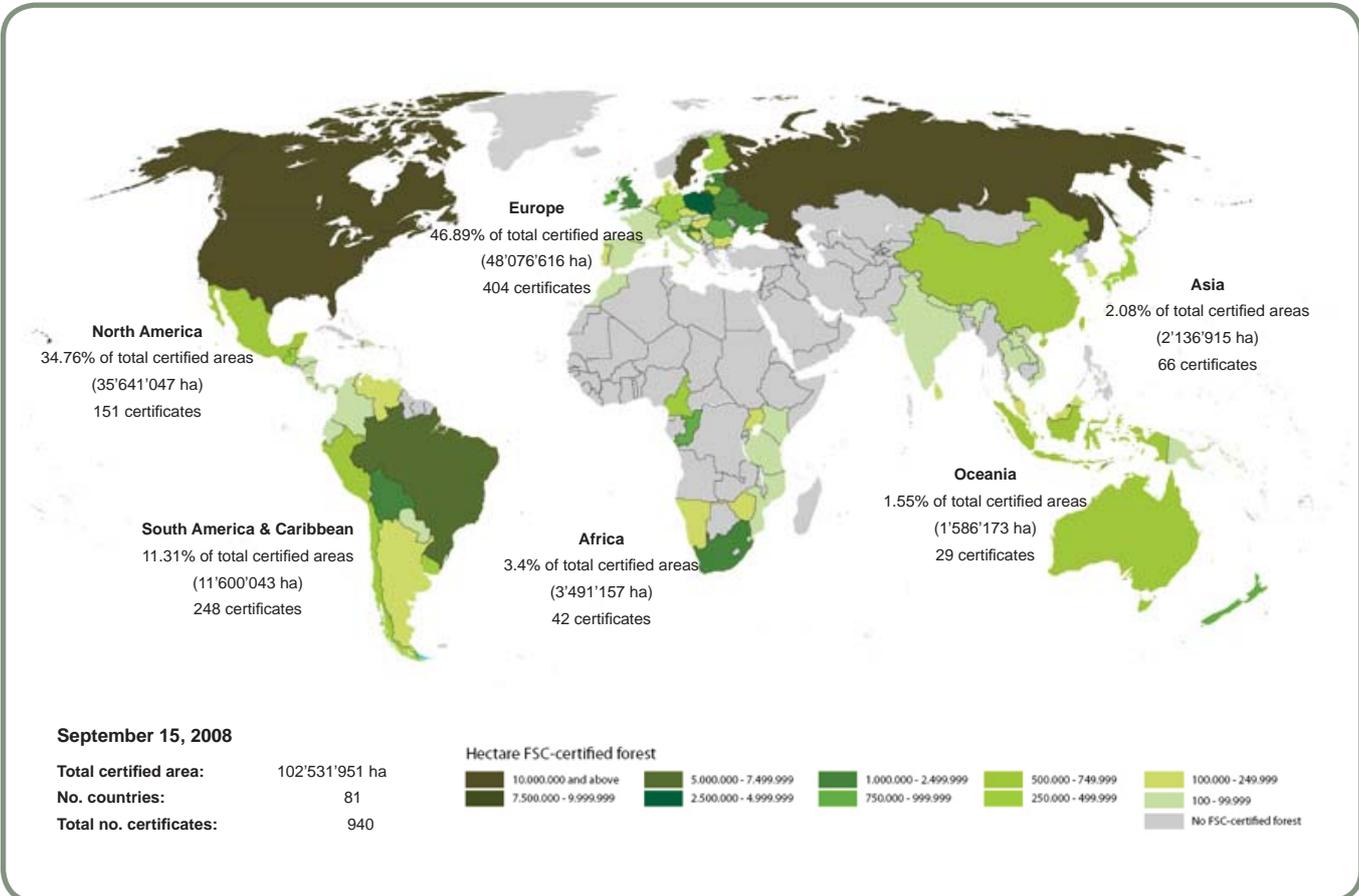
The FSC Global Strategy (2007) recognizes the need to develop further tools and mechanisms to increase FSC certification in the tropics. Also, among all forest certification schemes, FSC certifies by far the most forests in the tropics.

Strengthening HCVFs and biodiversity protection in FSC

In May 2005, FSC and its partners launched a four-year project to protect HCVFs and biodiversity through increasing access and reducing barriers to FSC certification, targeting small scale and low intensity forest operations.

The project is a partnership with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

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- **The HCVF toolkit**

FSC is currently developing an international step-by-step best practice guide for forest managers and owners to meet HCVF and biodiversity requirements. This resource will be especially valuable for certification in the tropical regions.

The toolkit is designed to help small and low scale forest managers, communities and non-timber forest product (NTFP) collectors understand and meet strict FSC requirements whilst continuing to meet their management objectives.

It outlines a practical methodology for defining HCVs at a national or sub-national level. It offers a unique and inclusive approach that integrates information from a range of sources. Furthermore, it describes how to identify, manage and monitor HCVs.

FSC is expecting to publish the guide by January 2009.

- **Locally appropriate indicators**

National standard Working Groups are currently developing national indicators for assessing the management and monitoring of HCVF and biodiversity in FSC certified forests. The three countries participating are Brazil, Cameroon and Mexico. The indicators will be integrated into the wider national forest management standards.

- **Innovative funding to offer incentives**

Innovative finance-market mechanisms are underway to offer small forest managers incentives for biodiversity conservation. These include markets for certified timber and non-timber products or for certified forest services, such as the conservation of biodiversity itself.

- **Database for monitoring biodiversity and HCVFs**

A set of standardized indicators for monitoring the conservation of HCVFs and biodiversity is under development. The database will include these indicators for on-going monitoring.

- **Building capacity and awareness**

To disseminate the results of the project internationally, FSC will offer a series of regional training courses for groups developing and promoting certification standards in the three project countries of Brazil, Cameroon and Mexico.



For further information on this project, please contact the FSC Policy and Standards Program at policy.standards@fsc.org.