

High Conservation Values and Biodiversity: identification, management and monitoring

FSC forest management standards include several requirements for the protection of environmental values and services from any negative impacts, and also for managing critically important forest areas, known as High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs).

All forests are valuable... but some have additional critical environmental and social values that require special consideration. These are called High Conservation Value Forests

How to manage biodiversity and High Conservation Values

There are 3 simple steps to protecting biodiversity and critically important forests: identification, management and monitoring:



Assess your forest for biodiversity and HCVs

Make a management plan that includes biodiversity and HCVs

Keep checking that you are protecting what you planned to protect

Find out what you've got and where it is. Consult with others about this!

Based on what you identified:
 - decide your priorities for protection
 - identify the main obstacles to doing this
 - decide what actions to take
 - take those actions!

If necessary, revise your management plan using your monitoring results - and any new scientific information.

Having High Conservation Value Forests doesn't mean that you have to turn everything into a conservation area! What you choose to do will depend on the critical values you identify, and the sort of forest management you already do.

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Keep it simple

Assessments for HCVFs, for environmental impacts and actions to promote conservation should be “appropriate to the scale and intensity of the forest operation”. Small or low intensity operations can reasonably be expected to devote less time and resources to an assessment than large or high-impact operations would. If your operation is small or low intensity, keep it simple!

STEP 1 IDENTIFY



Identification

The first step is to be sure of what you've got in the forest, and where it is. This includes working out if your forest - or a part of it - has High Conservation Values.

You need to carry out an assessment of the forest. For very small forests, or where the intensity of harvesting and interventions is very low, this assessment should be kept simple. Consultation is an important part of any assessment, especially for identifying High Conservation Values: you will need to consult with local people and experts.

Your assessment should answer the following:

Species: Are there any rare, threatened or endangered species (e.g. species that are protected under national laws)? What they are and where are they?

HCVF: If there are lots of such species (“significant concentrations”) this forest would probably be considered a HCVF.

Ecosystems/Habitats: Are there any special or unusual types of vegetation (e.g. types of forest, wetlands, grasslands)?

HCVF: If you have areas of forest that are particularly rare in your country or globally, this forest would probably be considered a HCVF.

Environmental services: Are any parts of the forest providing important services to the community, or to others living downstream from the forest area (e.g. protecting drinking water sources, preventing landslides)?

HCVF: If these services are critically important, this forest would probably be considered a HCVF.

Social and cultural values: Are there communities that are dependent on the forest for any products (e.g. timber, firewood, animals, bark, seeds, etc)? Are there communities for whom the forest has cultural or historical significance (e.g. burial grounds, old village remains, sacred sites)? To answer these questions you will need to involve these local communities, and talk to them about the forest, and the way they use it.

HCVF: If these forests are critically important to communities for access to products or for cultural reasons, this forest would probably be considered a HCVF.

Whether or not you classify the forests as High Conservation Value Forests, you need to take the biodiversity, environmental services and social uses of the forest into account when deciding how to manage the forest.



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Definitions

Biodiversity: the variety of nature - the variety (or diversity) of species, of populations and of ecosystems.

High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) are forests of outstanding or critical importance. The significance of these forests is that they support extremely important environmental or social values (High Conservation Values).

The 6 Types of High Conservation Value Forests

HCV 1 Forest areas that contain globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values (this includes: protected areas, rare or threatened species, endemic species, and seasonal concentrations of species)

HCV 2 Globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape-level forests

HCV 3 Forest areas that are in or contain rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems

HCV 4 Forest areas that provide basic services of nature in critical situations (this includes: protection of watersheds, and protection against erosion and destructive fire)

HCV 5 Forest areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities

HCV 6 Forest areas critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity

(These six types are an elaboration of FSC's definition of HCVs, - see glossary of terms in FSC standard FSC-STD-01-001)

To be a High Conservation Value Forest, it is only necessary for the forest to have critically important values in one the categories. It could be that all of your forest is considered to have High Conservation Values, or it might be that only part of your forest has these values, and that's the part that you'd have to manage in such a way as to protect those values.

STEP 2 MANAGE



Management

Once you've done some basic identification of important aspects of the forest and its biodiversity, you need to make sure that your management plan protects these. To do this:

Work out what your objectives are: what do you need to conserve or protect? (e.g. we have endangered bird species, so "we want to protect the forest in which they nest").

Identify any problems for doing this: what are the threats? (e.g. "logging disturbs the birds when they are breeding" and "there are poachers who steal these birds' eggs").

Decide what actions to take: what can you do? (e.g. "avoid logging during the nesting season in that part of the forest" and "ask the local wildlife protection service for help to prevent poaching" [you may not be able to control an external threat, but you should at least show that you have taken steps to reduce it]).

Take those actions! There's no point doing assessments, making plans and then not taking any actions. Examples of actions taken to manage biodiversity and protect HCVFs might include:

- Creating a special protected zone around an important cultural site or a wetland area
- Avoiding any disturbance to the forest during the breeding season of a particular species
- Taking measures to reduce illegal hunting of a protected species
- Modifying logging plans to reduce the overall level of disturbance to soil or water.

STEP 3 MONITOR



Monitoring

You should regularly check what is happening with the biodiversity and/or High Conservation Value Forests - and especially if your management is helping to conserve these.

Monitoring does not need to be complex or expensive. Answer the following:

- What are you going to monitor and why?
- How you are going to do it?
- Who will do it, and how often?
- With whom will you discuss the results, and how will you use them?

A simple monitoring plan can be made with the answers to these questions. (see Briefing Note 5 "Simple Monitoring Methods" in this series, for more help on this topic)

If some - or all - of your forest is considered to be High Conservation Value Forest it **does not automatically mean that you can't harvest there**. It does mean that you *may* need to take special precautions so as not to damage the value that exists there.

If your operation is very low intensity, it is quite likely that your current activities are not affecting overall biodiversity or HCVs (but you need to check!); in some cases the management of the forest may actually be conserving it better than if there were no management. In these cases you should be able to demonstrate that your activities do not substantially negatively affect the biodiversity and/or HCVs.



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Conservation Areas

Some FSC standards make reference to the need to create conservation areas to make sure some species are protected, and/or to make sure that for each type of natural vegetation that is found in your forest there is a protected area. However, for each case you should see if this is really useful or appropriate. Often for small forests the size of any conservation area would be too small to be useful. In the case of many low intensity operations (e.g. where you're only harvesting fruits or nuts) a conservation area may not be necessary to protect the vegetation or biodiversity: you may already be protecting it enough!

For groups of small forests it may make sense to consider conservation at the group level, rather than having individual conservation areas.

The case of group certification

Certified groups are very different: they vary in organization, size, intensity of management, forest type, and how close together the group members are located.

Due to this variation, different groups will manage biodiversity and HCV forests in different ways.

The group manager, group members and certification bodies will need to use their judgement and agree at what level they wish to handle the biodiversity and HCV aspects of their group certification. They should document that decision so that the responsibility for managing biodiversity and HCVs is clear and well understood by all.

There are 3 main types of groups, which will normally have different strategies to manage biodiversity and High Conservation Value Forests.

<p>An FSC Group of Forest Properties that Resemble a Single Forest (Group members' properties are next to one another and collectively have ecological characteristics resembling a large single forest.)</p>	<p>The more the group collectively resembles a single large forest the more appropriate collective action will be, & the more likely that a conservation management plan for the whole area will be more beneficial and cost effective than many small-scale individual actions.</p> <p>For this type of group it is likely that some identification, management and monitoring will be appropriate at a landscape level.</p> <p>In this case greater responsibility for managing values may be taken at the group level - although individual actions and consultations are also needed at the site-level.</p>
<p>Small FSC Forest Properties in a Non-Forest Landscape (Group members' forests represent forest islands in a non-forest landscape.)</p>	<p>It is less likely that joint management will be of benefit to any critical values identified. It's usually more appropriate for each member to make his/her own decisions about managing the environmental values identified.</p> <p>But it may still be appropriate to develop some group-level identification, management or monitoring to reduce costs.</p>
<p>Small FSC Forest Properties in a Non-FSC forest landscape (Group members' forests form part of a large forest landscape, but their properties are not contiguous. Other forest properties within the forest landscape are subject to different management regimes, and do not form part of the certified group.)</p>	<p>Usually appropriate for each property manager to manage relevant values, but also try to coordinate with other group members to manage broader values collectively and influence non-group neighbours to act responsibly.</p> <p>Actions (or non-actions) of those forest properties which don't form part of the group may be risks.</p> <p>Group members may not be able to control these threats - but should usually to develop some simple strategy to try to work with the non-group properties to manage the risk.</p>

FSC Requirements

The FSC expects forest operations to:

Protect rare, threatened and endangered species (of birds, plants, reptiles etc.).

Protect the areas in which these species live, feed, and breed (their habitats).

Control inappropriate hunting or collecting of animals and plants.

Protect the 'natural functions' of the forest. In other words, make sure that there is still a balance of trees of different ages, including seedlings, and that there is still a natural range of species and types of vegetation present.

(adapted from FSC Principle 6)

FSC is particularly concerned about critically important forests, and expects forest operations to:

identify whether there are any High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) within their forest management area;

consult with other people about what these values are and how to manage them;

manage these forest areas in a way that protects their valuable qualities;

monitor the use of the forest, and the HCVF areas, in order to see whether they are being protected, as planned.

(adapted from FSC Principle 9)

Where to find more information

Resources Online: Briefing note 5: "Simple Monitoring Methods" www.fsc.org/smallholders

The High Conservation Value Resource Network: www.hcvnetwork.org

Specific documents: Step by Step guide to Meeting FSC Certification Requirements for the Management and Monitoring of Biodiversity and High Conservation Value Forests – for Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests (ProForest/FSC, expected 2009)