

FSC THE SYSTEM

Recognition of Social Values

Over 90% of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty around the globe depend on forests for some part of their livelihood. In addition, thousands of people are enslaved in the cattle and timber industry in Brazil. Only FSC explicitly balances the very important social impacts of logging with the environmental outcomes and economic values that well managed forests provide. Not only are social and community values and labor rights reflected in FSC standards, but indigenous peoples and civil society organizations are represented in the FSC membership. Bringing these voices to the table is a distinctive feature of the FSC system. Fundamental issues of resolving who owns the land and full community engagement in decision-making are attributes reflected in FSC's process of stakeholder engagement.

Transparency at every stage

All processes and decisions of the Forest Stewardship Council are open for public review and comment. Even non-members are engaged in the refinement of new policies and standards. Certification assessments are subjected to public review before they become finalized. Transparency is a core value of the system and one of its unique strengths.

Stakeholder diversity and membership

FSC's standards reflect the holistic nature of the membership that comprises the organization—balancing environmental, social and economic concerns in the management of the world's forests.. Major global environmental groups, native tribes, forest products manufacturers, foresters, scientists, and advocates for human and civil rights all contribute to the governance of the FSC system. By bringing this array of perspectives into the fold, FSC strengthens its standards and creates an army of committed individuals and organizations prepared to advocate for the importance of the system in the marketplace.



FSC'S STANDARDS

Protection of high conservation values

FSC standards include set asides and special measures related to managing forests with high conservation values. The most significant forested eco-systems are identified in every certified operation and care is taken to ensure that values such as biodiversity, sensitive aquatic habitats, unique species and plant and animal communities are all protected. The model put forth by FSC is so strong that major wood and paper buyers often require their suppliers to implement a high conservation value forest inventory in the areas where they operate, even where they are not seeking FSC certification. The rigor of this system is so widely recognized that other certification systems incorporate similar models. Unfortunately, no other system has reached the levels of protection afforded by FSC.

Conservation of natural forests

In the last 50 years we have done more damage to natural forests than in the previous 80 centuries of human activity. FSC certification is not provided to forest management operations that have converted natural forest stands to ecologically simplified "plantations" since 1994 (FSC's first implementation year.) No other certification system precludes this practice from being certified. FSC holds that conservation and management of natural forests is a priority. Existing (before 1994) plantations can only be certified where they meet high performance standards for protecting and encouraging the restoration of native biodiversity.

Performance versus intent

There are certainly specific differences among certification systems in terms of their on-the-ground requirements. Many systems require policies or plans for dealing with issues like chemical use or worker's rights. FSC requires actual performance against standards, not just on-paper intention. Differences exist in types and size of buffer areas that cannot be harvested near streams, the size of areas allowable for clear-cut logging, the requirements for mapping and documenting procedures and so on. The bottom line is, when added up with all of the differences noted above, there are no "apples to apples" comparison between FSC and any other system. FSC is the largest, oldest, strongest, and most visible system ever devised for linking responsible forestry to markets.

For more information, visit www.fscus.org.

Our mission:

Create a marketplace that promotes well-managed forests by ensuring forestry practices that are environmentally responsible, socially equitable, and economically viable.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL-US

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