Deforestation-free forest products from 187 million hectares globally

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Global rates of deforestation, and the related environmental and social impacts, are alarming, particularly in tropical countries. Deforestation is also undermining efforts to combat climate change and protect global biodiversity.

Deforestation has several causes. The expansion of agriculture is the major cause, and infrastructure and urban development contribute, but damaging forestry practices are also relevant.

More and more companies that use agricultural or forest commodities are committing to 'deforestation-free' policies. For agricultural commodities, deforestation-free sourcing may be sufficient, but for companies using commodities from forests, ensuring that there are policies that prevent forest degradation is at least as important. A recent report by the Prince's Charity[1] concludes that tropical deforestation is responsible for 8 per cent of current anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, but that tropical forest degradation is responsible for 6–14 per cent of such emissions!

Deforestation is permanent
Deforestation refers to the permanent removal of forest cover and the conversion of forest to other forms of land use, such as agricultural land, reservoirs or urban areas. Forest management activities (such as harvesting trees) or natural disturbances (such as forest fires) do not necessarily lead to deforestation, as forest cover can be renewed by natural regeneration or replanting.

Degradation may lead to deforestation
Although agriculture is the main driver of deforestation, illegal harvesting and other damaging forest management practices can pave the way for deforestation. An overexploited, degraded forest loses its original functions, species composition and productivity. It delivers fewer benefits (such as the supply of wood and other products) and fewer protective or recreational services, and is therefore more likely to be subject to deforestation for short-term financial benefits.

For forest-dependent industries (e.g. paper and pulp producers, furniture makers, wood-panel suppliers, the construction sector, pellet producers), a tool for supplying deforestation-free products already exists, and has done for 20 years: **FSC certification**. This tool has proven its impact and universality, and comes with additional value in terms of preventing forest degradation and providing social benefits.

[1] The Prince's Charities' International Sustainability Unit (2015) *Tropical Forests: A Review*. The Prince's Charities, London.

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FSC prohibits deforestation and degradation

FSC has several strict requirements in place that ensure that certified forest managers maintain their forest cover, and maintain or enhance their forest's structure, function, biodiversity and productivity. These include indicators for planning and monitoring forest management interventions, assessing risks and evaluating the impacts on forests.

Requirements include:

- FSC does not allow deforestation, the conversion of natural forest areas into plantations, or any other forms of forest ecosystem degradation in FSC-certified forests.[2] This is complemented by specific requirements for the maintenance and/or enhancement of areas with high conservation value.[3]
- FSC requires forest owners/managers to minimize the negative impacts of forest management interventions in order to avoid and compensate for any form of forest degradation. From 2016, FSC will apply International Generic Indicators to increase the consistency between forest management requirements, while still allowing for specific interpretations of this requirement depending on the forest type and state, the size of the forest management units, and specific social and ecological situations.[4]
- To avoid involvement in the 'greenwashing' of earlier forest conversions, FSC has not allowed the certification of plantations that were converted from natural forest after 1994.[5] Currently, FSC is revisiting this rule to see how it can allow FSC certification where the conversion of degraded forests is instrumental in leading to positive environmental and social results.

FSC has a robust system of safeguards to make sure that certified forest owners/managers adhere to these requirements, including third-party certification and control, accreditation of certification bodies by a specialized organization, annual audits, stakeholder consultations, a dispute resolution system, and a policy for association.[6]

[2] Except for a very limited area and only under certain conditions, e.g. not high conservation value land, and only if this conversion would enable clear, substantial, additional and secure long-term conservation benefits. (see Criterion 6.10 of the FSC Std 01-001 Vers. 4). Forest roads, if planned properly (Criterion 6.5 and 10.6), can fall under this exception clause.

[3] See: FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship, FSC-STD-01-001 V5, Principles 6, 9 and 10.

[4] See: International Generic Indicators, FSC-STD-60-004 V1-0.

[5] Except when there is sufficient evidence that the forest owner/manager is not responsible, directly or indirectly, for such conversion, or the conversion affected a very limited portion of the area of the forest management unit and is producing clear, substantial, additional and secure long-term conservation benefits in the management unit. See: FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship, FSC-STD-01-001 V5, Criterion 6.10.

[6] See: FSC's website (https://ic.fsc.org/en), in particular the pages on 'FSC certification' (https://ic.fsc.org/en/certification) and the 'Stakeholder portal' (https://ic.fsc.org/en/stakeholders).

The impact of FSC today

As of November 2015, more than **187 million hectares are FSC certified and managed as deforestation and degradation free**. This represents around 15 per cent of the world's managed forests**.** Of this, roughly 21 million hectares are in the tropics and sub-tropics.

FSC has estimated that in 2014, 300 million cubic metres of wood came from FSC-certified forests, equaling 16.6 per cent of the world's industrial roundwood production.[7]

Many corporations with global reach have committed to further increase their use of FSC-certified materials. For example, Kimberly-Clark announced that by 2025, it "will strive to obtain 90 percent of the fiber for its tissue products from environmentally preferred sources. This includes Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified wood fiber, recycled fiber and sustainable alternative fibers".[8]

Another example is IKEA. In 2015, the company will have sourced 50 per cent of its wood from either FSC-certified or recycled sources and it has committed to reaching 100 per cent by 2020 for all its wood, paper and cardboard.[9] In line with this commitment, their 2015 catalogue was printed on FSC-certified paper and, according to IKEA, the 217 million copies were the largest print run ever to be FSC certified.[10]

Elsewhere, the Chilean company Arauco became FSC certified in 2013. It is one of the biggest forestry companies in the world, producing 3.1 million tonnes of pulp in 2014,[11] among other commodities. Through the FSC process, Arauco has "identified high conservation value areas covering 62,763 hectares. These include 37 ecologically significant areas and another 69 areas of social and cultural importance. It now has an active conservation plan in place for each."[12]

Science-based evidence of the impacts of FSC-certified forest management

Evaluation of the impacts of forest certification on avoided deforestation is widely requested, both by industries and by researchers. It is challenging to measure degradation, and it can be difficult to discern the impacts of certification from those relating to other factors that affect forest use and management. Despite this, a number of independent researchers have, over time, produced science-based evidence that certified forest operations do enable the management

[7] FSC (2015) *Global Volume of FSC Wood Produced Annually.* Forest Stewardship Council, Bonn. (Also available at https://ic.fsc.org/market-news.332.1234.htm).

[8] See: Kimberly-Clark's website (http://investor.kimberly-clark.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=864263)

[9] IKEA (2015) *People & Planet Positive: IKEA Group Sustainability Strategy for 2020*. IKEA, Delft. (Also available at http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_US/pdf/reports-downloads/sustainability-strategy-people-and-planet-positive.pdf).

[10] FSC (2014) IKEA Catalogue 2015 now fully printed on FSC-certified paper. Forest Stewardship Council, Bonn. https://ic.fsc.org/en/news/id/866.

[11] WWF (nd) Arauco. WWF, Zurich. http://wwf.panda.org/how_you_can_help/live_green/fsc/save_paper/paper_toolbox/environmental_paper_company_index_2013/south_america/arauco.cfm.

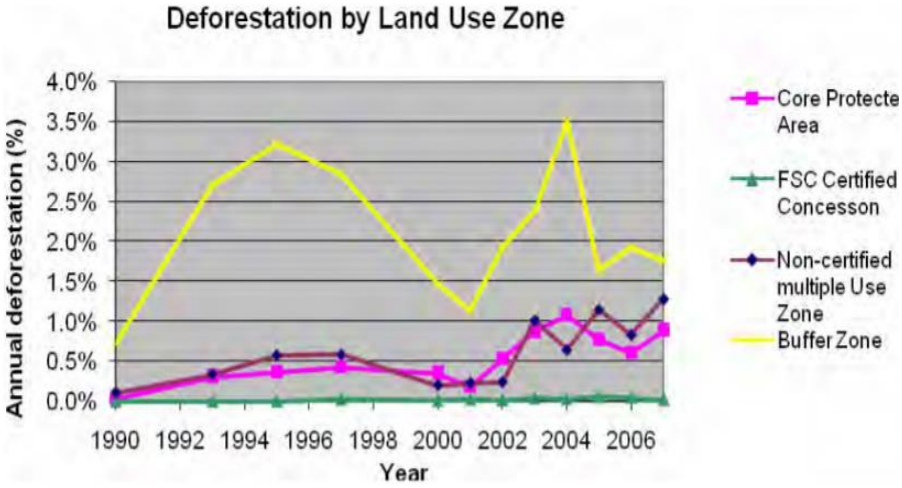
[12] WWF (nd) FSC in Chile. WWF, Zurich. http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/businesses/transforming_markets/solutions/certification/forestproducts/timber/casestudies/fsc_in_chile/.

of forests that are deforestation- and degradation-free, as shown by the following examples for tropical forests.[13]

Guatemala

Hughell and Butterfield (2008)[14] summarized the impacts of forest certification in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in Guatemala as follows: "**FSC certification has clearly played a pivotal role in protecting Petén's forest resources and will have an increasingly important role in the future in maintaining forest cover in the MBR.**" While the deforestation rate in FSC-certified concessions was close to zero, deforestation in other protected areas, where the harvesting of wood and non-timber forest products is prohibited, was significant and increasing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Comparison of annual deforestation rates by land-use zones in the MBR from 1990 to 2007



Source: Hughell and Butterfield (2008)

Satisfied with its experience of using voluntary certification as a basis for forest concessions in the MBR, the Guatemalan government has begun to promote the model outside protected areas, on National Forest Lands across the country.[15]

[13] All the following examples are focused excerpts from comprehensive papers based on long-term research. We recommend studying the full papers for more detailed information.

[14] Hughell, D., and Butterfield, R. (2008) *Impact of FSC Certification on Deforestation and the Incidence of Wildfires in the Maya Biosphere Reserve*. Rainforest Alliance. (Also available at http://www.rainforestalliance.org/forestry/documents/peten_study.pdf).

[15] Carey, C. (2008) *Governmental Use of Voluntary Standards Case Study 2: Bolivia and Forest Stewardship Council Standards*. ISEAL Alliance, London. (Also available at http://www.isealalliance.org/_data/n_0001/resources/live/E047_Bolivia_FSC.pdf).

Cameroon

Cerutti et al. (2011)[16] looked at 10 forest operations that were FSC certified after 2009 and identified some differences between legal and certified timber. They found, as a clear positive impact of certification that the requirement to lower harvest volumes (compared to legal limits) allows for a better recovery of valuable species for the next rotation period and a reduction in mechanical damage to the residual stand. **This constitutes an effective protection measure against forest degradation.**

South America

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has seen FSC certification lead to positive changes in land management. Its research in South America examined the indirect impacts of forest certification on elements of biodiversity conservation. The results are positive: **FSC-certified forests had no significant negative impacts on species diversity or abundance** in three certified forests in Bolivia, while in portions of Brazil's Atlantic Forest, **certified forests retained more natural areas than other parts of the watersheds.** These changes promote biodiversity conservation through measures such as expanded riparian protection, the identification and conservation of high conservation value areas, and protection for a broader range of rare species. Within the natural areas, the analysis showed that under a 'no management' scenario, the percentage of effectively conserved remnants was 17.3. Under the management scenarios required by FSC standards, there was an increase in effectively conserved natural remnant forests to 55.8 per cent. From a practical standpoint, this shows that in many cases FSC has provided land managers with a viable alternative to conventional timber exploitation in the tropics.[17]

Global evidence

Damette and Delacote (2011) analysed data from 2005 regarding certified areas (by FSC and other schemes) in 77 countries all over the world. They found that countries with higher levels of harvested timber tend to experience higher deforestation rates, suggesting that forest harvesting worldwide is not sustainable. They then conducted a cross-country analysis, which showed that timber certification is negatively correlated to deforestation. This supports the idea that **certification is a good indicator of sustainable forest management.**[18]

[16] Cerutti, P.O., Tacconi, L., Nasi, R., and Lescuyer, G. (2011) Legal vs. certified timber: Preliminary impacts of forest certification in Cameroon. *Forest Policy and Economics* 13(3): 184–190.

[17] Price, F. (2010) The Nature Conservancy and tropical forest certification. In: ETFRN News 51. *Biodiversity conservation in certified forests*. ETFRN, Wageningen. (Also available at http://www.etfrn.org/publications/biodiversity+conservation+in+certified+forests).

[18] Damette, O., and Delacote, P. (2011) Is timber harvesting related to deforestation? On the unsustainable nature of timber harvesting. *Ecological Economies* 70(6): 1211–1219. (Also available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227414578_Unsustainable_timber_harvesting_deforestation_and_the_role_of_certification).