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# FSC'S CONTRIBUTION TO FOREST RESTORATION

## Forest Restoration – FSC is on board!

Although the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is well known for promoting sustainable forest management, it is less known for forest (and landscape) restoration. FSC certification means that in spite of forest management interventions forests remain for generations to come, and that their ecological functioning is maintained. Therefore FSC's biggest contribution is in preventing the need for forest restoration. FSC certification is also being used in forest restoration projects. In addition, restoration has become an explicit objective in the revised FSC Principles & Criteria for Forest Stewardship (Version 5, 2012), in a number of ways.

FSC certification plays a role in achieving the ambitious targets set by the Bonn Challenge on forest restoration, particularly to move from commitments to reality. It has therefore joined the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration and is keen to work with the other organizations in this partnership for concrete results.

FSC also offers a practical tool that contributes to successful restoration of former forest lands that are not yet certified. Successful stakeholder engagement procedures and practices developed by FSC can help make forest restoration a success by effectively engaging local communities. Moreover, the commitment of reforestation projects to FSC certification can trigger investments and provide a better economic perspective.

## The FSC perception of forest restoration

FSC's perception of forest restoration is pragmatic. We are not necessarily aiming for restoration into the original, virgin ecosystems as they existed before human intervention.

Ongoing pressures due to population growth, in particular where forests are most under threat, and even faster growth of demand for resources, create increasing competition for land and natural resource uses. Environmental pressures such as the effects of global warming also impact the conditions for forests. Adaptation is unavoidable.

FSC aims to protect and increase the resilience of forests and associated ecosystems by protecting and enhancing their biodiversity and ensuring their roles in providing ecological services, such as biodiversity, water, soil management, and carbon capture and storage.

Forest restoration should also lead to improved livelihoods for those directly dependent on the forests, so the productive and relevant ecosystem functions of forests need to be taken into account.

So, forest restoration is not just planting fast growing, or economically valuable trees. Degraded forests need to be

Photo: FSC GD





improved or ‘enriched’ so that they have increased multiple benefits, from environmental to social and economic.

Natural forests should not be converted into plantations. However, where natural forests no longer existed, certification of established plantations is possible. National FSC standards will further define to what extent grassland, bushland, wetlands and open woodlands fall under the definition of natural forests<sup>1</sup>. For plantation managers wanting to claim the provision of ecosystem services, conversion of wetlands, peatlands, savannahs or natural grasslands is prohibited<sup>2</sup>.

FSC-certified plantations play an increasing role in providing timber resources, while taking specific measures regarding protection and/or recreation of biodiversity hot-spots, labour conditions and Indigenous/local People’s rights. They also restrict the use of pesticides and do not allow genetically modified organisms.

## FSC on restoration

### Restoration elements in FSC’s forest stewardship standards

Until 2012, the word ‘restoration’ only appeared in a chapter on plantations in FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship.<sup>3</sup> It required plantation managers to include explicitly “natural forest conservation and restoration objectives” in their management plans and activities. This would have to include, in the layout of the plantation, “wildlife corridors, streamside zones and a mosaic of stands of different ages and rotation periods ... consistent with the scale of the operation.” And this to be “consistent with the patterns of forest stands found within the natural landscape.”

This shows that as early as 1996 FSC required plantation managers to consider the landscape beyond their own management unit in designing and implementing their activities, with the provision that “a proportion of the overall forest management area, appropriate to the scale of the plantation and to be determined in regional standards, shall be managed so as to restore the site to a natural forest cover.” The standard also expressed a clear preference for the use of native species in restoration efforts.

The new FSC requirements for forest management, adopted in 2012<sup>4</sup> and currently being transformed into national

1 Page 79, International Generic Indicators, Definitions FSC-STD-60-004 V1 EN

2 Annex 3, International Generic Indicators, Definitions FSC-STD-60-004 V1 EN

3 Next quotes from FSC International Standard – FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship – FSC-STD-01-001 Version 4

4 Quotes from FSC’s International Generic Indicators, FSC-STD-60-004 V1-0 EN, 2015. These IGLs relate to the Principles and Criteria for Forest

Stewardship Version 5, of 2012 and complement these with indicators that are to be used globally as basis for national standards.

FSC forest stewardship standards, go into more detail. Besides the continuation of relevant requirements for plantations, there is now a more general requirement that forest managers “maintain and/or restore a varying mosaic of species, sizes, ages, spatial scales and regeneration cycles appropriate for the landscape values in that region, and for enhancing environmental and economic resilience”<sup>5</sup>.

A number of restoration activities must be performed, covering:

- i. rare and threatened species and habitats;
- ii. water bodies and riparian zones;
- iii. landscape connectivity, including wildlife corridors;
- iv. declared ecosystem services;
- v. representative sample areas (of environmental values in their natural conditions);
- vi. high conservation values.

### FSC’s policy for plantations on degraded lands

FSC certification of new plantations or planted forests created on degraded land requires an approved forest management plan and the related monitoring and assessment procedures (Principles 7 and 8).

The plan must show how the forest manager will comply with the relevant components of the other principles. The most obvious are compliance with laws (Principle 1), workers’ rights and employment conditions (2), Indigenous Peoples rights (3), community relations (4) and benefits from the forest (5). An essential one is also Principle 10, implementation of management activities, which focusses in particular on regeneration and silvicultural methods, which expresses a clear preference for native species and covers pest management issues. This principle and its criteria and indicators also give relevant guidance on infrastructure development and harvesting and extraction practices.

The remaining principles (6: Environmental values and impacts and 9: High conservation values) also apply, but must be interpreted in the unique context of working from degraded land to a plantation or planted forests. Degraded landscapes can contain valuable ecosystems that become part of a new forest environment. Their functions must be protected and enhanced, as contributions to the created forest and for the benefit of the local population.

## Potential new plantation approaches

5 Criterion 6.8.





FSC's 2017 General Assembly voted for a mechanism to enable “compensation for past conversion”, which must include environmental and socio-economic values. This decision aims to create a solution for plantation owners/managers who are keen on FSC certification but who are faced with the current FSC rule that a plantation cannot be certified if it was the result of conversion of natural forests after November 1994<sup>6</sup>.

Besides this, FSC collaborates with New Generation Plantations (NGP)<sup>7</sup>, whose role is to learn about better plantation management through real world experiences, and influence others to follow good examples. NGP brings together leading plantation companies and some government agencies that manage and regulate plantations. FSC certification often is one of the objectives to achieve, providing a permanent tool for verification of compliance.

## New FSC tools to incentivize and measure restoration outcomes

FSC is targeting to launch its ecosystem services procedure in 2018. This procedure can be used by FSC-certified forest management units, on a voluntary basis, to make specific additional claims to demonstrate the conservation and/or restoration impacts of management activities on ecosystem services (carbon, biodiversity, water, soil and recreational services). It is believed that FSC ecosystem services claims will increase the confidence of governments, investors, buyers, and businesses in ecosystem services markets.

The procedure has been tested on thirteen sites globally, including five sites where the focus was restoration of natural forest cover. Through these tests, positive impacts have been verified on watershed services, carbon sequestration and storage and biodiversity<sup>8</sup>.

## Examples of FSC related restorations in tropical countries

6 Criteria 6.10 of FSC Principles&Criteria V5, 2012.

7 <http://newgenerationplantations.org/>

8 More information on: <https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc/what-we-do/preserving-ecosystem-services>

### Africa

In South Africa the SiyaQhubeka forests<sup>9</sup> were FSC certified in 2002. They border with the iSimangaliso World Heritage Site. Since then, inside the certified area, some 4,500 hectares (some 17 per cent of the total certified area) have been restored to wetland forest which then has become part of the world heritage site. This approach is a practical example of NGP, which several of FSC's large plantation stakeholders are involved in.

In Tanzania, FSC certification is an important tool in limiting forest degradation and enabling forest restoration. Such an example is found at Kilombero Valley Teak Company, which is certified to forest management controlled wood since 2013. Here a total area of about 28,000 hectares is under management. Seventy per cent of this consists of Indigenous woodlands and other ecosystems. This area is under a rigorous conservation management regime that includes enabling forest restoration.

In Ghana, FORM International received a 24 million US dollar loan from the African Development Bank (AfDB) for the restoration of 3,700 hectares of degraded forest into a plantation. It was the first time AfDB supported such a project. The company had already planted 8,000 hectares of degraded land, which received FSC certification. This experience with FSC certification and the objective to use that for the new project as well, helped to align with the sustainability requirements of the bank.

In September 2016, the membership of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) adopted a motion to support forest restoration work in Africa, and in particular the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), a country-led effort to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into restoration by 2030. It called upon the IUCN leadership to “establish cooperation with internationally recognised forest certification schemes with experience on the ground in several parts of Africa (such as the Forest Stewardship Council), as they can contribute to sustainable management of restored forest areas and increase socio-economic perspectives.”

### Latin America

There are examples of reforestation of degraded cattle lands in Nicaragua. The largest one is probably the teak plantation of the company Opera (9,000 hectares). Another interesting example is the 3,500 hectares of EcoPlanet Bamboo, where almost 1,000 hectares of the area is set aside to recover natural forest.

9 <http://www.siyaqhubeka.co.za/page/sustainability>





Panama also has some examples, such as the teak plantations of Sustainable Timbers (9,000 hectares) and two much smaller ones, Panama Teak & Forestry, and Ecotopia.

A company that has triggered some of the reforestation projects in Panama and Nicaragua, Futuro Forestal has also developed a new tropical forest concept called ‘the generation forest’. A generation forest is not finally harvested like a plantation, but rather is a permanent forest composed of native tree species of high value and all kind of other vegetation and fauna. It is aimed at being used by many stakeholders in combination with their existing land use (coffee, cattle, cacao and many others). The objective is to achieve FSC certification in the future.

In Chile, in the Cuenca Río Mechaico, FSC is engaged in a project to reverse escalating problems with the water’s quality and quantity, largely caused by deforestation and forest degradation. The forested land in the river basin is owned by low-income farmers, who have traditionally used it for rearing livestock and establishing small farms. One of the aims is to reduce pressure on the degraded forested lands and restore lost forests. Several measures are taken, including cattle management and fencing, which will reduce cattle intrusion in the forests, and planting trees. Together with other measures the intention of the project is to restore ecosystem services, in particular drinking water supply, which will then be paid for by users. **The positive impacts of the restoration have been verified through a pilot test of the use of the FSC ecosystem services procedure. This certification will be used by the water fund to demonstrate that the measures defined to improve water quality are actually implemented.**<sup>10</sup>

#### Asia

On the island of Lombok, Indonesia, WWF initiated a payment for ecosystem services project in 2004. The aim was to protect the water supply of Mount Rinjani for the residents of Mataram, the capital of Lombok, and West Lombok district. That supply was threatened by plantations, clearance (leading to soil erosion), illegal logging, forest fires, and encroachment by local communities. Upstream communities committed to reforestation action, and the Lombok water utility company started to collect contributions from its customers to pay these communities for this ecosystem service. Soon the effectiveness of the upstream activities became apparent. FSC’s ecosystem services project was promoting additional incentives from the company and authorities, and also structuring and communicating about the restoration activities under FSC certification. The impacts of these reforestation efforts are already visible. For example, the main river from the Sesao watershed used to run dry at certain times of the year, then flood during the rainy season. The community management activities helped to regulate this water flow. The positive impacts on the watershed verified

<sup>10</sup> More details in: “ForCES: FSC is creating incentives for the preservation of valuable ecosystem services in responsibly managed forests, October 2017, page 19-20. <http://forces.fsc.org/download.forces-final-report.58.pdf>

through FSC pilot testing will be used as evidence of the initiative’s effectiveness, and to expand the scope of the fund.<sup>11</sup>

## FSC’s approach to stakeholder dialogue

FSC certification for forest restoration is voluntary. However, in cases where this tool is not seen as appropriate or achievable, forest restoration projects can still benefit from the experience of FSC.

FSC’s success is built on balanced multi-stakeholder decision-making procedures which are systematically applied throughout the organization and its standard implementation. FSC has developed specific standards and procedures, several of which could be applied for decision-making and/or implementation of forest and landscape restoration processes. These are publicly available and can be the basis of future restoration efforts:

- FSC’s international generic indicators for responsible forest stewardship can be an inspiration for management plans with specific requirements in terms of social and/or environmental quality.
- FSC’s process requirements for the development and maintenance of national forest stewardship standards can be useful for developing national/regional forest and landscape restoration plans.
- FSC’s stakeholder consultations for forest evaluations prove useful for engagement of stakeholders in specific projects on forest and landscape restoration.

Using these FSC tools as a basis for future restoration projects does not mean that they can be referred to as guarantees for success. Formal reference is conditional to full application of all FSC’s conditions, such as certification and the related third-party verification processes.

<sup>11</sup> More details in: “ForCES: FSC is creating incentives for the preservation of valuable ecosystem services in responsibly managed forests, October 2017, page 21-23. <http://forces.fsc.org/download.forces-final-report.58.pdf>



Photo: FSC GD

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