

FSC at risk

A joint 4-step action plan to strengthen and restore credibility

March 2013

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is the only forest certification system that has been internationally recognised by major environmental organisations and social movements. Organisations such as Greenpeace have helped to build, support, and indeed promote FSC, because the system offers assurances of responsible forest management from an ecological, social, and economic perspective. The FSC's strong foundations, perceived credibility and legitimacy have given FSC-labelled products a competitive edge and an enhanced market value. As a result, the system has experienced dramatic growth and subsequent demand in the last decade.

Unfortunately, as the system has expanded, FSC has not been successful in applying its system and standards consistently. Furthermore, many of the FSC's on-the-ground performance criteria are either weak, under threat of being weakened, or not properly implemented. We consider FSC to be in a serious situation and are deeply concerned over the rapidly eroding integrity and credibility of the system.

Greenpeace is committed to addressing the shortcomings within the FSC system and is seeking the support of others who share the vision of a strong and meaningful FSC. FSC is the only existing global system with the ability to have a real impact on the ground in the forests.

Below is a summary of identified shortcomings in the application of the FSC system:

Failure to maintain High Conservation Values (HCV) in certified forests

- In regions around the globe, FSC certificates are being issued to companies whose practices are destroying High Conservation Value forests that include the habitat of endangered species, old-growth and forest areas important for indigenous peoples/forest-dwelling communities.
- FSC is systematically awarding certificates that threaten HCVs in Canada, Russia, Sweden, Spain, Indonesia, and the Congo Basin.

Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) being degraded by logging

- IFLs are huge areas of relatively undisturbed forests with a crucial role in combating climate change, conserving biodiversity, and other ecosystem services that many millions of people directly depend upon.
- IFLs are disappearing at a rapid rate around the world, which contributes to deforestation. While they are identified as HCV by FSC, certificates that degrade intact forests are nonetheless routinely granted. FSC does not put even the most sensitive forests on the planet off-limits to logging – this needs to change.
- Greenpeace has collected evidence of FSC-certified operations exacerbating IFL degradation in Canada, Russia and the Congo Basin.

High-risk regions – social conflict

Some FSC-certified operators are involved in, or exacerbate conflict with, local and indigenous communities over land and use rights.

- Greenpeace has collected evidence of this in Congo Basin, Indonesia and Brazil.
- In Canada, there is ongoing conflict with indigenous peoples and FSC operators.
- In all cases where there is not indigenous consent, certificates should be revoked.

High-risk regions – human rights violations

FSC has been expanding into some of the most controversial forest regions, such as the Congo Basin, which are characterised by rampant corruption, poor governance, and a lack of land-use planning, transparency and stakeholder involvement.

- Greenpeace has filed two Policy for Association complaints linked to incidents of gross human right violations in the DRC.

Controlled wood is “uncontrolled”

FSC is allowing controlled wood classification based on weak risk assessments without sufficient proof of low risk.

- High-risk wood (for example, that which threatens HCVs and is associated with social conflict) is entering the FSC system.
- Companies are using controlled wood as a permanent solution and not a transitional one as originally intended. Too often companies are relying on controlled wood and not moving their wood suppliers or their own forests to full forest management certification. This diminishes the value of FSC in all regions.

Weak interpretation / application of standards and poor certification body performance

This has contributed to systematic performance problems such as lack of or poor stakeholder consultation, poor public reporting, failure to adhere to best available science and the precautionary principle. The interpretation of the Principles and Criteria is weak, and the International Generic Indicators (IGIs) must address their weakness. Because certifying bodies are paid by certified companies, there is an inherent conflict of interest in the way certification is done.

In order for FSC to maintain its reputation as the only credible certification system, and for FSC products to maintain their privileged position in the marketplace, these challenges must be addressed. If they are not, producers will be required to provide additional assurances to their customers, which may prove to be costly and time-consuming; and organisations such as Greenpeace will be forced to pull back their support.

The weakening of FSC and the misapplication of its framework present a risk for members of the FSC economic chamber and major purchasers of FSC-labelled products. For almost two decades, forest managers and wood product purchasers have invested in a FSC that is a meaningful assurance. By not holding the line, hard-earned certificates are at risk of being equated in the marketplace with unscrupulous operations. In addition, unless the FSC is maintained as a credible certification system, purchasers won't be able to rely on FSC assurances that certain sources are low risk.

The other systems

Greenpeace does not believe that other forest certification systems, such as PEFC, SFI and CSA, have the ability to ensure responsible forest management. While FSC faces challenges, we believe that it contains a framework, as well as principles and criteria, that can guarantee socially and ecologically responsible practices if implemented correctly. The other systems lack even the most basic requirements to protect social and ecological values.

The Solutions

Greenpeace believes that if all FSC supporters work together, we can resolve the shortcomings the system currently faces, and ensure FSC's continued market advantage. We are committed to working with you to ensure that FSC continues to be a source of responsibly managed forests, and that companies who support such practices continue to be rewarded in the marketplace.

Tell them that:

1. Intact Forest Landscapes and other HCVs must be conserved in order for FSC to maintain the support of key environmental stakeholders;
2. Certificates must not be granted in “high risk” regions facing rampant social conflict and human rights violation until sufficient safeguards are in place;
3. Controlled wood system must be tightened to ensure that high risk wood is not entering the system, and that companies eventually transition to full forest management certification; and
4. FSC’s principles and criteria implementation is strengthened via the IGI process, and certification bodies must be held accountable for ensuring they are reflected in the certificates they approve.

To review FSC’s progress on Greenpeace’s recommendations, please visit:
www.greenpeace.org/international/FSC-at-risk

For more information about more specific actions you can take to ensure that FSC remains credible, and continues to enjoy public support from Greenpeace, please contact:

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