

## Why the FSC needs to stop certifying industrial logging in intact forest landscapes

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Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) are irreplaceable. They have high conservation values, especially in relation to climate and biodiversity. They also provide crucial ecosystem services such as regulating rainfall. Much of their value, however, is being lost. Infrastructure such as roads – necessary to support the expansion of industrial logging and other large-scale activities – is fragmenting IFLs into smaller forest pieces.

IFLs help to stabilise the Earth's climate. Intact forests not only store vast quantities of carbon, but they take up carbon from the atmosphere, mitigating some of mankind's greenhouse gas emissions. Fragmentation of forests creates edges, which are prone to drought and vulnerable to fire. This increases vulnerability of the remaining forest to extreme weather events that may occur with climate change. In particular, the Amazon is predicted to experience increased periods of drought, and fragmentation increases the risk of it reaching a 'tipping point', whereby large swathes of its forest become savannah. Fragmentation not only causes immediate loss of forest carbon to the atmosphere, but the remaining forest is less able to take up carbon from the atmosphere. Coupled with the increased vulnerability of the remaining forest (and hence carbon stocks) to climate change impacts (especially drought), fragmentation creates a vicious cocktail, increasing the risk of runaway climate change by releasing carbon into the atmosphere and reducing the ability of the forest to remove carbon from the atmosphere is reduced.

Fragmentation of forests also substantially alters their ecology and causes biodiversity loss, such as local extinctions of tree species and the animal species that depend on them. Loss of biodiversity in fragmented forests risks collapse of vital ecosystem services that humans depend upon. Fragmentation is, at least over a few decades, irreversible, as it is usually the initial step in opening up an intact forest landscape to further degradation and ultimately deforestation.

To ensure crucial biodiversity and climate protection targets are met, forest protected areas need to be more than doubled from their current extent by 2030; an expansion several times the size of the current global area of FSC-certified forests, and encompassing most if not all of the remaining IFLs. These protected areas must include, in particular, community protected areas that accommodate low impact uses such as hunting and collecting.

Forest certification is a means of validating that good forest management is maintaining biodiversity, carbon and other benefits and values from the forest. The FSC's vision is "The world's forests meet the social, ecological and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations." The very specific ecological, social and economic values of IFLs must be secured for the future.

However, the FSC does not currently prevent the certification of the degradation of IFLs by industrial logging. Even with very carefully planned 'reduced impact' industrial-scale logging operations, their logging roads and infrastructure alone cause severe impacts. If a precautionary approach was used, at a minimum a moratorium on industrial logging would be placed over IFLs and keep them as candidates for protection in the future. It would instead focus industrial timber production on already fragmented forest landscapes, such as previously logged areas where additional fragmentation can be minimised and a lot of damage avoided compared to conventional industrial logging.

The FSC is currently the most credible global certification system. It is therefore alarming that it does not implement a precautionary approach to industrial logging, even though the precautionary principle is anchored firmly in its Principles and Criteria for Forest Management. Nowhere is the precautionary principle needed more critically in the forest sector than with the last IFLs.

However, the FSC has failed to give clear guidance that IFLs are areas with high conservation value, and instead takes a case-by-case approach where the general assumption is that restricted industrial harvesting will be allowed in IFLs. Industrial harvesting is a relatively recent event for intact forest landscapes and there is not sufficient evidence to satisfy a precautionary test that high conservation values such as absence of fragmentation can be maintained. If these harvesting restrictions turn out to be insufficient to protect the unique IFL values, the values are effectively lost.

The consequence of this is that the FSC risks certifying and promoting the systematic degradation of IFLs and the loss of parts of their biodiversity, carbon and other values and broader society benefits. To comply with its precautionary principle requirements it must stop certifying the expansion of industrial logging into IFLs. Instead, it should support the participatory land use and conservation planning that protects these forests, thus maintaining their unique values. Payments for ecosystem services (PES) including REDD, strictly protected areas, community protected areas and community forest management, all require credible third-party certification. Therefore, the opportunities for the FSC to further its vision and mission through an expanded portfolio are significant, particularly in IFLs as they are priority sites for protected areas, PES and REDD.

The FSC should also support the intergovernmental struggle at CBD and UNFCCC for intact forest conservation. As opposed to intergovernmental and governmental processes and decisions, the FSC cannot formally designate protected areas in IFLs. But it can avoid undermining their future protection opportunities during this long process by not contributing to their fragmentation through the certification of industrial logging projects. FSC must instead stay engaged with these forests to protect their values, including to prevent the worst possible outcome of conversion to another land use.

While this undoubtedly poses a constraint on the FSC – albeit a limited one given that most forests are outside of IFLs, it is also an opportunity as the environmental and ecosystem service gains far outweigh the short-term and minor financial benefits from timber extraction (estimated to be below 10% of the total value of tropical forest). Additionally there are the considerable actual and potential social benefits for traditional forest users and their livelihoods.

The FSC is at a crossroads in terms of positioning itself on how much influence and impact it would like to have on the remaining natural forests. If the FSC actively supports the systematic and irreversible fragmentation and exploitation of some of the last IFLs through the expansion of certification of industrial logging, the FSC's environmental reputation and role as a credible certification scheme would suffer serious and possibly irreparable damage. We call on the FSC to ensure/guarantee the protection of the remaining intact forest landscapes.

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