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UNITED STATES

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Issue Overview: Climate Change

*To Support Public Consultation of the Forest Stewardship Council U.S.
National Forest Stewardship Standard (NFSS)*

October 5, 2020

Introduction

The Forest Stewardship Council U.S. (FSC US) developed this issue overview to support stakeholders who are interested in participating in the public consultation on Draft 1 of the revised FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard for the conterminous United States.

As the world's most trusted forest certification system, the existing FSC US Forest Management Standard offers a solid foundation for the current revision process. The issue overview is intended to facilitate actionable, informed input as FSC works to further refine Draft 2 of the revised Standard.

Ultimately the revision process is about identifying the appropriate balance between an existing "best-in-class" standard that is practical and achievable, with targeted refinements to streamline the Standard where possible, and incorporate changes that bring it into alignment with FSC Principles and Criteria Version 5, as approved by FSC's membership.

Summary

Climate change is a defining issue of our time and has been identified by the Standard Development Group as a priority for the revision process. The process included an evaluation of how climate change adaptation can be supported by the existing framework of the Standard, and incorporation of the concept of forest carbon as a natural climate solution.

This is the first time climate change is explicitly incorporated into the US standard. Well known conceptual climate change adaptation frameworks were used to help identify where changes to existing indicators or new indicators were needed to ensure that certified management units are responsibly managed given anticipated future changes in climate.

Organizations are expected to consider how climate change may affect their ability to conserve important environmental values or to achieve management objectives. There are new requirements for monitoring the impacts of climate change aligned with those addressing management planning, and also new flexibility for implementing climate change adaptation strategies.

The revision process recognized that many of the climate change adaptation concepts may be new to some Certificate Holders. To facilitate navigating the new requirements, a Climate Change Toolkit is provided in Annex L. It provides background information on adaptation planning, guidance on how to achieve compliance with the climate change requirements, and sources of best-available information.

The incorporation of climate change into the standard is not explicitly intended to address carbon capture nor how certification could lead to climate change credits or to high carbon stocks. It is also not intended to represent or replace the FSC Ecosystem Services initiative.

However, it is intended to promote forests as natural climate solutions. As such, this revision recognizes carbon sequestration and storage as important ecosystem services and makes it clear that management activities may have impacts on these services.

Find it in the Standard

A requirement to consider the potential future impacts of climate change and catastrophic disturbances has been added to the assessment of environmental values that may be affected by management activities in Indicator 6.1.1.

Indicator 7.2.4 requires that the management plan consider impacts of climate change on achievement of management objectives and desired future conditions, and also that it describe any climate change adaptation strategies that are being implemented.

Organizations' monitoring protocols will now be expected to address changes in assessments of potential climate change impacts and the effectiveness of implemented climate change adaptation strategies.

Indicator 10.2.2 provides situational flexibility for organizations to adapt to a changing climate by developing plans to allow for the use of non-native species for regeneration as part of a climate change adaptation strategy.

The following Criteria implicitly relate to climate change: C1.8, C4.3, C5.1, C5.2, C5.4, C6.1, C6.2, C6.3, C6.4, C6.5, C6.6, C6.7, C6.8, C7.2, C8.3, C9.1, C9.2, C10.1, C10.9, and C10.11

Rationale

An ever-growing body of scientific research indicates that forest ecosystems are reacting variably now and into the future due to changing climatic conditions. The implication is that for the foreseeable future, forest managers will need to incorporate a changing climate into management planning. This revision process creates a mechanism to help managers prepare their forests for climate change by providing the tools to apply the best-available information when considering their own forest management.

Impacts of the revision

Forest managers are now required to consider the specific ways a management unit is exposed to climate change and the impacts of current management activities as they relate to achieving future objectives in a changed climate.

Key questions for public consultation

- Has climate change been appropriately addressed in the Draft 1 revised standard?
- Will the changes result in indicators that are feasible for certified organizations?
- Is the guidance in Annex L sufficient for understanding and conforming with the associated requirements?

How to provide input

Individuals who are interested in participating in first phase of the public consultation on Draft 1 of the revised FSC US National Forest Stewardship Standard are encouraged to [visit the web pages dedicated to the consultation](#). Within these web pages, participants will find the draft revised standard, plus additional resource materials, learn about opportunities to participate in webinars, and how to submit comments on the draft.

Any comments that a participant wishes to be formally recognized must be submitted via the FSC Consultations Platform by Friday, December 18, 2020.