



FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL™  
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## Issue Overview: High Conservation Value Areas, Representative Sample Areas & the Conservation Areas Network

*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

#### High Conservation Values

The FSC Principles and Criteria give special attention to biological, ecological, social, or cultural values of outstanding significance. These values, referred to as High Conservation Values (HCV), and the areas needed for their existence and maintenance, are subject to the requirements of Principle 9.

Many of the resources that receive High Conservation Value designation, such as concentrations of rare species, are also addressed under Principle 6. The challenge for landowners seeking FSC certification is distinguishing between those resources that are adequately covered under Principle 6 (or other Principles) from those that rise to the level of consideration under Principle 9, in addition to identifying HCV that are not addressed elsewhere in the standard. Due to the threshold of significance, importance, or rarity required for HCV status, not every management unit will have an HCV.

FSC recognizes six types of HCVs:

- HCV 1 – Globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity
- HCV 2 – Globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics
- HCV 3 – Rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia
- HCV 4 – Critical ecosystem services
- HCV 5 – Sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic needs of local communities or Indigenous Peoples

- HCV 6 – Globally or nationally significant cultural, archaeological or historical places, and/or sites of critical importance for Indigenous Peoples.

#### Representative Sample Areas

Previously, expectations regarding Representative Sample Areas (RSA) focused on existing representative examples of common and rare native ecosystems that were well protected, either within or outside of the Management Unit. This revised Standard now requires that all Management Units – except for very small ones – have areas identified for maintenance or restoration of native ecosystems that occur or could occur within the Management Unit. The establishment of these areas is to be proportionate to the size of the Management Unit, intensity of management, and how much of the landscape in which the Management Unit occurs is already protected.

Flexibility has been built into establishing RSAs by allowing organizations to forgo protection or restoration of ecosystems that are already well represented (beyond a particular threshold) within the landscape, and to still recognize RSA outside of the Management Unit if the organization played or plays a role in safeguarding the area.

Same areas may be recognized as both RSA and HCVA, particularly if associated with native ecosystems that support high concentrations of biodiversity, are large and landscape-sized in scale and/or are extremely rare.

#### Conservation Areas Network

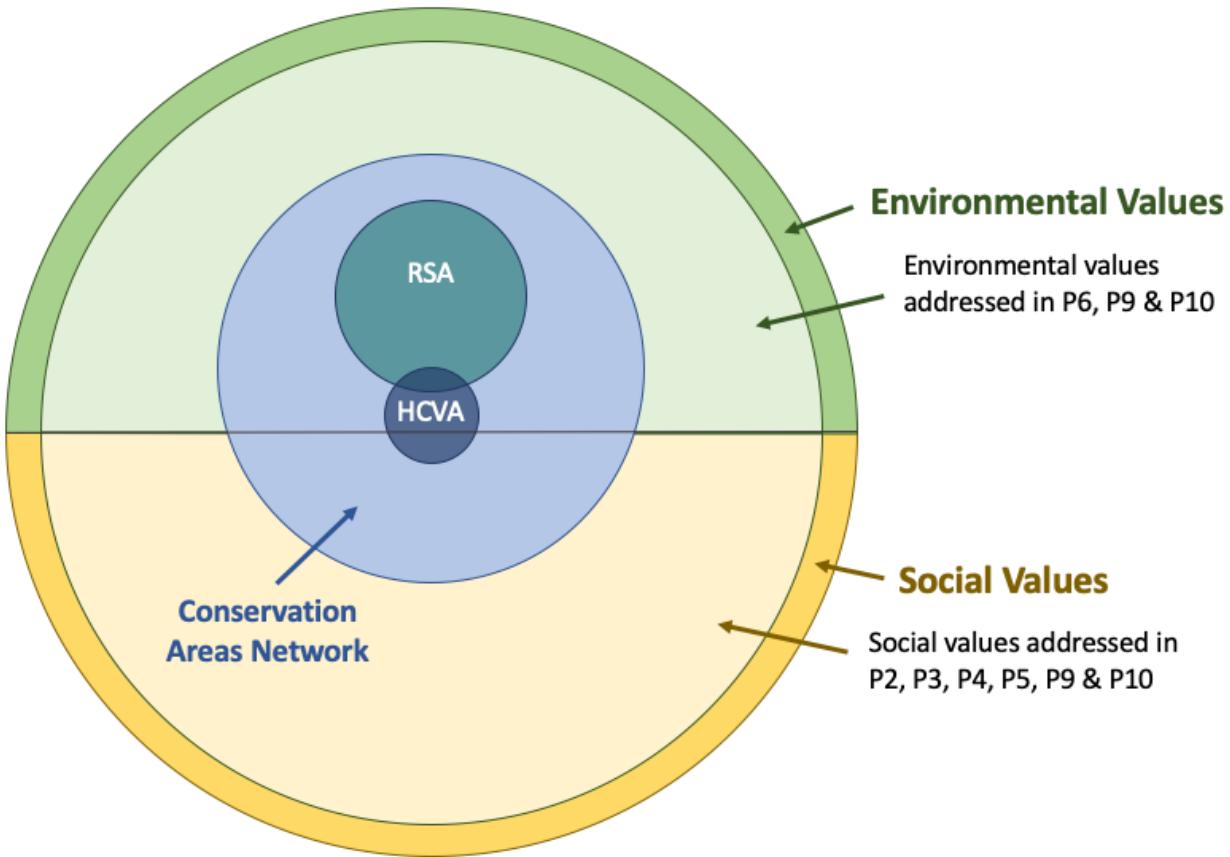
The Conservation Areas Network (CAN) is a new concept first identified in the International Generic Indicators. Generally, the Network is a set of areas within the Management Unit that are managed primarily to conserve environmental or cultural values for the long-term (i.e., they are specifically designated for reaching objectives other than timber production, but do not necessarily prohibit timber production).

Both RSA and HCV areas will be part of the Network, as will areas with a primary objective of conserving rare species and/or rare ecological communities, protecting important cultural sites, protecting ecosystem services, providing connectivity, and protecting water bodies and aquatic habitats. While termed a ‘network,’ the associated conservation areas do not need to be spatially connected.

The Network does not require additional conservation outcomes, so much as it puts together a complete picture of conservation-oriented objectives, comprised of various conservation zones and/or protected areas recognized and required by specific elements in other parts of the Standard. However, the Network must comprise at minimum 10% of the Management Unit and therefore new conservation areas may need to be established if this minimum threshold has not been met.

As with RSA, flexibility has been built into establishing the Network by allowing organizations to recognize conservation areas outside of the Management unit if the organization played or plays a role in safeguarding the area.

## **Environmental and Social Values that Occur within the Management Unit & Areas Designated to Conserve Them**



### **Find it in the Standard**

Principle 9 focuses on High Conservation Values, including how to identify them (per Criterion 9.1), determining (per Criterion 9.2) and implementing (per Criterion 9.3) appropriate management measures, and monitoring both implementation and effectiveness of these measures (per Criterion 9.4). Additional guidance on identification, assessment, management and monitoring of HCV is provided by Annex K's HCV Framework.

Criterion 6.5 requires Certificate Holders to identify and protect Representative Sample Areas of native ecosystems and/or restore them to more natural conditions. Annex G provides guidance and a methodology that may be used to help decide which areas to establish as RSA.

Per Indicator 6.5.6, all but the smallest management units will need to formally establish a Conservation Areas Network within the management unit. Guidance regarding conservation areas associated with other parts of the Standard that may be considered part of the Network is provided in Annex H.

### **Rationale**

High Conservation Values demand a greater degree of protection to ensure their long-term maintenance or enhancement, particularly if they may be negatively affected by management activities. Because they represent the most important environmental and social values, the FSC International Generic Indicators require development of a High Conservation Value (HCV)

Framework (Annex K) to provide guidance on identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring HCVs in conformance with Principle 9.

As biodiversity becomes more and more threatened due to land use changes and climate change, RSA and other areas within the Conservation Areas Network will help to provide refugia for a broad range of native species.

### **Impacts of the revision**

Based on analysis during the revision process, FSC believes Certificate Holders generally over identify High Conservation Values. Therefore, a goal of the revision is to establish clearer thresholds for HCVs, relative to other environmental and social values. As a result, Principle 9 outcomes should become much more focused on those values that are truly deserving of the extra protections it affords and become much more consistent among certificate holders. For existing certificate holders, this may require a new HCV assessment, but over the long-term, resource investment needed for protection of HCVs should be more focused.

FSC anticipates that a greater portion of most management units will need to be established as RSA. However, by providing guidelines to assist with RSA decisions, this revision will help to increase consistency in RSA establishment between management units and help to address the oft repeated question, "How much is enough?"

The Standard Development Group expects that for many organizations, previously established conservation areas, in addition to areas established to address other requirements in the Standard, will be adequate for conforming with the new Conservation Areas Network requirement.

The revised standard also attempts to clarify that RSA, HCVA and other conservation areas are not 'set asides' by default. New guidance and revised indicator language in Criterion 6.5, and in Principle 9, along with revised definitions for 'conservation zone' and 'protected area' are intended to increase clarity regarding management and other activities within conservation areas.

### **Key questions for public consultation**

#### **High Conservation Value Areas:**

- Have High Conservation Values 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 K sufficient for understanding and conforming with the associated requirements?

#### **Representative Sample Areas:**

- Have Representative Sample Areas 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 G sufficient for understanding and conforming with the associated requirements?

***Conservation Areas Network:***

- Have Conservation Areas Networks been appropriately addressed in the Draft 1 revised standard?
- Will the indicator be feasible for certified organizations?
- Is the guidance in Annex H 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.***