



**FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL™
UNITED STATES**

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Issue Overview: High Grading and Other Exploitative Practices

*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 grading generally refers to management practices that selectively remove the highest grade of timber without regard for the residual stand or regeneration objectives. Similar practices include diameter limit cutting, economic clear cuts, and selective harvests, which are collectively referred to as exploitative harvests. These practices result in a degraded condition for the remaining forest and are generally driven by short-term economic gain. In some parts of the country, these practices remain common, although not in FSC-certified Management Units.

The maintenance of an outcome-oriented approach in the revised standard will help to ensure that these practices are not possible within FSC-certified Management Units. The existing FSC Forest Management Standard includes a suite of indicators that together make exploitative harvests like high grading virtually impossible. These have been maintained, and in some places enhanced, to ensure achievement of desired future conditions, including maintenance of healthy forest ecosystems and naturally occurring species composition, distribution and frequency within them.

Find it in the Standard

The most relevant indicators designed to prevent exploitative harvests like high grading include the following:

- Indicator 5.2.3, which specifies that rates and methods of timber harvest must achieve desired conditions and improve or maintain health and quality across the management unit.
- Indicator 6.6.2, which requires that management practices maintain or enhance plant species composition, distribution and frequency of occurrence similar to those that would naturally occur on the management unit.

- Indicator 7.2.14, which specifies that the management plan must include descriptions of how the silvicultural and other management systems will sustain forest ecosystems over the long-term.
- Indicator 10.11.1, which requires development of harvest plans that describe how the harvesting activities will achieve desired outcomes and protect and/or enhance potentially affected environmental values.

Rationale

By definition, exploitative practices like high grading involve degrading a forest, and therefore, they should not be possible on an FSC-certified Management Unit. However, harvesting practices that have these kinds of negative impacts may not always be identified as high grading because terminology and practices vary regionally. Accordingly, the revised standard continues to deter high grading and other exploitative harvesting practices by using an outcome-oriented approach, as opposed to banning it by name.

Impacts of the revision

It is made clear that exploitative harvesting practices like high grading are unacceptable for FSC Certificate Holders. Any FSC Certificate Holders implementing harvesting that resembles high grading will have to meet a very high bar for proving the practices are acceptable under FSC certification.

Key question for public consultation

- Have high grading and other exploitative practices been appropriately addressed in the Draft 1 revised standard?
- Are the associated indicators feasible for certified organizations?

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.