

# FSC US CONTROLLED WOOD REGIONAL MEETINGS MESOPHYTIC COVE SITES



## FSC REGION Appalachian

**HCVS IN FSC** A High Conservation Value (HCV) is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance. FSC is working to ensure that our system helps to maintain and enhance the special places that support these values. For more information on HCVs, see the Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values.<sup>1</sup>

**WHY ARE MESOPHYTIC COVE SITES CONSIDERED AN HCV?** Mesophytic cove sites are considered an HCV because they are a rare ecosystem that is at risk at a national or regional scale. These types of HCVs were identified using guidance associated with the FSC US Forest Management Standard and are supported by other information sources and through expert consultation.

**SUMMARY OF MESOPHYTIC COVE SITES** Mesophytic cove sites are highly diverse, closed-canopy hardwood forest occurring on sheltered sites at low- to moderate-elevation (1000-3600 ft), and sometimes higher. They tend to occur in large patches on concave slopes that accumulate nutrients and moisture. They are characterized by high species diversity and a complex forest structure. The ground level flora in particular has high species richness, often with abundant spring ephemerals. Rich cove forests have very fertile soils with a diverse herb layer containing few shrubs. Acidic cove forests are less fertile than rich coves, but otherwise similar.

While the sheltered, mesic sites that support Cove Forests are not particularly rare, examples that retain structural components like the dense canopy and high species diversity (both in the overstory and understory) are very rare. These characteristics may take 200 years to develop. These sites will not have evidence of having been previously clear-cut or farmed (followed by regrowth of the forest). Typically, they will include basswood, buckeye, cucumber, walnut, and magnolias in the mid-story and yellow-poplar, beech, sugar maple, northern red oak, white oak, ash, and hickories in the overstory.

## IDENTIFIED THREATS TO MESOPHYTIC COVE SITES

The most significant current threats to this forest type are invasive species and conversion to other uses. Threats also include **incompatible forest management that results in alterations to the structure and composition of the forest or conversion to other forest types (white pine)**, climate change, chronic deer herbivory, harvesting of herbs and pollution. Cove forest sites can be managed in a compatible way using methods that do not disturb soil productivity, hydrology or the understory, that maintain the diversity of the overstory without losing oak or moving toward monocultures of maple or poplar, that limit openings and that don't result in 'high-grading' the forest (removing all trees of high commercial value and leaving the remainder). Incompatible forest management occurs when these guidelines are not followed and remains a threat to these systems in the Appalachian region.

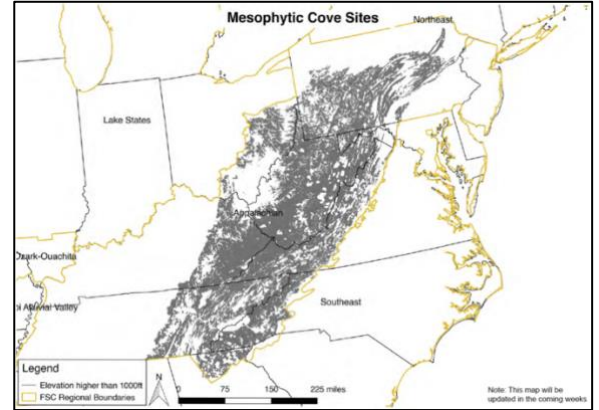
While less severe disturbances, such as logging and fire, may not reduce herbaceous species richness or diversity to the same extent as more severe disturbances like mining and agriculture, they can still affect herbaceous species composition or abundance and therefore the quality and functioning of the system.

<sup>1</sup>Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values (<https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc-certification/consultations/archive/hcv-common-guidance>)

Overall, the magnitude of impact on the herbaceous species from activities that occur within these sites is directly proportional to the severity of disturbance.

## WHAT ARE MITIGATION ACTIONS AND WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO ACHIEVE?

Companies that mix FSC-certified forest materials and non-certified materials to make products with an 'FSC Mix' claim/logo are required to address certain risks before using the non-certified forest materials. One of these is the risk that their forest materials come from areas where HCVs are threatened by forest management activities. FSC has completed a US National Risk Assessment to identify where this risk is greater than 'low' and mesophytic cove forests are one of these places - specifically, the areas that occur within the portions of the FSC US Appalachian Region that are also within the WWF Global 200 Appalachian & Mixed Mesophytic Forests ecoregion, are above 300m elevation, and are not effectively protected<sup>2</sup>. Companies that wish to use non-certified materials from the identified places are required to either avoid sourcing from specific sites where the threats are occurring, or to implement mitigation actions that reduce the risk of sourcing from those sites. For this rare ecosystem, any mitigation actions will need to address the threats identified above in **bold**.



The FSC US National Risk Assessment also introduces the concept of holding regional meetings to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively identify effective and practical mitigation actions. We are asking participants to consider landscape-scale mitigation actions, that will help to reduce risks across the landscape in which the companies source forest materials. An effective way to do this may be to build on existing programs and projects that are already tackling these issues. The companies implementing mitigation actions are required to select one or more from the options identified at the regional meetings.

**Please help us to determine what these mitigation actions should be, by visiting [engage.fsc.us.org](https://engage.fsc.us.org) and joining the virtual discussion, or attending a regional meeting.**

## HERE ARE SOME SOURCES THAT CAN HELP GENERATE MITIGATION OPTION IDEAS

- [NatureServe Explorer](#)
- [The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission](#)
- The Nature Conservancy
- [The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation](#)

<sup>2</sup> Effective protection is demonstrated by GAP Status 1 & 2 areas in the PAD-US dataset (<https://gapanalysis.usgs.gov/padus/data/download/>) and USFS Inventoried Roadless Areas (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/roadless/2001roadlessrule/maps/?cid=stelprdb5382437>).

