



FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL™
UNITED STATES

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Topic Overview: Family Forest Indicators

*To Support Public Consultation of the Forest Stewardship Council U.S.
National Forest Stewardship Standard (NFSS)
Draft 1 Phase 2*

April 14, 2021

Introduction

Forest Stewardship Council U.S. (FSC US) developed this topic overview to support stakeholders who are interested in participating in the public consultation on Draft 1 Phase 2 of the revised FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard for the conterminous United States.

The first phase of our Draft 1 public consultation was held in late 2020. That consultation focused on the ‘base indicators’ that will be applicable to most FSC certified forest management organizations. We are now holding the second phase of the Draft 1 public consultation, which addresses alternate indicators for Family Forests (i.e., small and low intensity managed forests) and for Plantations, in addition to supplementary requirements for federal lands. *Please note that the Draft 1 base indicators are out of scope for this consultation.*

As the world’s most trusted forest certification system, FSC’s existing US Forest Management Standard offers a solid foundation for the current revision process. This topic 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

US family forests represent the global FSC concept of Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests (SLIMF), and in the US are defined as non-public management units that meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Small: A management unit with a total forest area of 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) or less; OR
- Low Intensity:
 - a) The rate of harvesting is less than 20% of the mean annual increment (MAI) within the total production forest area of the unit, AND
 - b) EITHER the annual harvest from the total production forest area is less than 5000 cubic meters,
 - c) OR the average annual harvest from the total production forest is less than 5000 m³ / year during the period of validity of the certificate as verified by harvest reports and surveillance audits.

Federal lands are proposed to be ineligible to use the Family Forest Indicators, regardless of size or management intensity, and non-Federal public lands are proposed to continue to be

eligible if they meet the size threshold, but not if they meet only the management intensity threshold.

Most FSC-certified family forest management units in the US are part of group certificates. While every group is organized differently, the same requirements apply on the ground for all SLIMF/family forests, regardless of the group or even if they are not in a group at all. Approximately 4.5 Million acres of family forests are FSC-certified in the US, but there is huge potential for a great many more to become so.

Find it in the Standard

The Family Forest Indicators proposed by the Standard Development Group (SDG) include indicators that are applied in slightly different ways, although they follow the same basic framework as the existing standard:

- Some base indicators are designated as “not applicable” for family forests, and family forests are not required to be in conformance with them.
- Some base indicators are designated as “low risk” for family forests, and conformance with these is assumed unless an auditor has information suggesting otherwise (in which case they should be audited).
- Some base indicators have an alternate indicator for family forests, and conformance with these is required instead of with the base indicator.
- Some base indicators have family-forest specific guidance to help clarify how family forests are expected to conform with the base indicator.

There are a total of 102 base indicators proposed to have Family Forest Indicators within the above framework. This is a significant increase over the existing standard, which has 70. As in the existing standard, the revised draft includes Family Forest Indicators in all Principles. However, the proposed indicators are not spread evenly throughout the standard – Principle 9 (High Conservation Values) has only four Family Forest Indicators proposed, whereas Principle 7 (Management Planning) has twenty-six.

Rationale

The SDG believes that there is an opportunity in the US to improve outcomes for economic, social and environmental values associated with family forests through FSC certification. While inclusion of the initial Family Forest Indicators in the existing standard was seen as a huge improvement in making the standard more accessible to family forests, only a very small percent of eligible forests are currently certified. While 36% of forests in the US are owned by families and individuals, less than 2% of these are FSC certified. A key objective of the current revision is to increase the accessibility of FSC certification to family forests by better reflecting the level of risk they represent, given their size and level of management intensity.

Impacts of the revision

To increase the potential for positive impact from FSC-certification on family forests, the revision focuses on increasing the feasibility for these kinds of lands to be certified, while still ensuring conformance with the FSC Principles and Criteria (when deemed possible for family forests). The SDG did this by streamlining the Family Forest Indicators (i.e., simplifying language and reducing prescriptiveness), improving how the risk to economic, social and environmental values from forest management on these lands is characterized, clarifying how the Family Forest Indicator framework is to be applied during audits (i.e., how an auditor handles “not applicable” and “low-risk” indicators?), and on ensuring that the framework would not at any

point leave a family forest in a critical situation where they are unable to conform with a requirement due to their size or level of management intensity.

On balance, compared with the existing standard, the SDG's proposed Family Forest Indicators represent: 1) fewer base indicators designated as "low risk"; 2) many more base indicators with alternative indicators for family forests; 3) many fewer base indicators with only family forest-specific guidance, applicability or intent language; and 4) more base indicators designated as "not applicable."

The SDG also streamlined the overall framework for Family Forest Indicators by removing a requirement in the Introduction section of the existing standard that requires the managers of group certificates to complete a risk assessment on their family forest group members and decide which of the Family Forest Indicators should apply to the group members. As proposed by the SDG, all Family Forest Indicators would apply in the same way to all management units that meet the eligibility requirements for family forests (with the exception of two indicators where the Family Forest Indicator is not applicable to non-federal public lands). This also aligns with global guidance that national standards may not include requirements specifically for certified groups (these are addressed through the Forest Management Groups standard, FSC-STD-30-005).

Key questions for public consultation

- Do any of the proposed Family Forest Indicators fail to adequately address the decreased risk of negative impacts on environmental or social values associated with the smaller size and less intensive management within Family Forest management units?
- Are there any additional base indicators where there the size of and/or less intensive management within Family Forest management units may result in a low risk of non-conformance and/or low risk of negative impacts on environmental or social values?
- Are there any base indicators that do not currently have proposed Family Forest Indicators that are not feasible for Family Forest management units?

How to provide input

Individuals who are interested in participating in the public consultation on [Draft 1 Phase 2](#) 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 Monday, June 14, 2021.

ADDENDUM: Guide to the Consultation Platform

For the best user experience, FSC recommends using the consultation platform on a laptop or desktop computer instead of a tablet or other mobile device, if possible. This allows for easier referencing of the context information (yellow background). On a wider screen, the context information appears to the left of the associated consultation questions, instead of below them.

Note that at the bottom of each page in the Consultation Platform, there is a gray drop-down list of all of the sections (either between, or just below, the green “Previous Section” and “Next Section” buttons) that allows you to jump to any section at any time. *A list of these sections is also provided below.*

IMPORTANT NOTE: When you have completed entering your comments, you must jump to the final section (i.e., ‘Concluding Comments’) and press the ‘Submit’ button for your comments to be formally submitted.

You may save and return to your comments before you formally submit them. You may also return and edit your comments after formally submitting them until the consultation period ends.

The following provides an index to the Consultation Platform sections for the Family Forest Indicators consultation.

1. Background Information
Provides a brief description of the FSC US National Forest Stewardship Standard revision process. Introduces the second phase of the consultation
2. How to Participate in the Consultation
Provides important information for respondents to participate in the consultation and requests information about respondents
3. Adequacy and Feasibility of Family Forest Indicators
High-level questions that address adequacy, invite suggestions for other unique issues, and provide opportunity for feedback relating to conformance with base indicators
4. Introduction: Family Forests
Questions pertaining to the “Introduction” section of the Standard
5. Principle-Specific Sections
Each Principle begins with any targeted questions from the Standard Development Group for indicators or issues associated with the Principle (NOTE: not all Principles contain targeted questions from the SDG). Then, respondents are provided with a framework for sharing any indicator-specific comments.
 - Principle 1: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 2: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 3: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 4: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 5: Targeted Question
 - Principle 5: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 6: Targeted Questions
 - Principle 6: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 7: Targeted Question
 - Principle 7: Indicator-Specific Comments

- Principle 8: Targeted Question
 - Principle 8: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 9: Targeted Question
 - Principle 9: Indicator-Specific Comments
 - Principle 10: Indicator-Specific Comments
6. Annexes: General Comments
Requests general feedback regarding the appropriateness of the annexes for family forests
 7. Concluding Comments
Provides a final opportunity for any additional comments