

FSC US CONTROLLED WOOD REGIONAL MEETINGS CONVERSION



FSC REGIONS Southeast and Pacific Coast

CONVERSION IN FSC FSC considers materials that come from places where forests are converted to non-forest use or plantation to be unacceptable, no matter the reason for the conversion. FSC is working to ensure that there is a low risk of forest materials from forest conversions being used in FSC-certified products.

SUMMARY OF CONVERSION ISSUES IN THE US Overall in the US, the rates of forest loss are very low – with forest losses being balanced by forest gains. However, numerous sources indicate that the forest losses are most often driven by urban development. Rates of urban development are highest and most recent in the Pacific Coast and Southeast regions of the US. Therefore, the greatest risk of materials entering the supply chain from conversions will most likely be in these areas; however, the risk is not consistent across these regions.

IDENTIFIED DRIVERS OF CONVERSION In the United States, there is no legal framework that consistently or comprehensively governs conversion of forestland to non-forestland or from forestland to plantation. Regional analyses found that the rates of forest conversion are so small as to be statistically insignificant, and demonstrate that at this scale, forest cover is relatively stable. However, there is evidence that forest conversion continues to be an issue at a sub-regional scale.

Historically, the largest forest losses in the US were due to urban and agricultural expansion. The rate of forest loss in the US has slowed and some areas are beginning to gain forestland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has conducted a Natural Resources Inventory since 1982 that shows trends in land use on a state-by-state basis. Forestland cover changes depend on the state, and generally track other forestland change estimates. In every state, agricultural land diminished in that time frame, from a national total of 420 million acres in 1982 to 357 million acres by 2007. Concurrently, developed (urban) land increased by 40 million acres to 111 million acres. These data indicate that conversion to agricultural lands is likely no longer a driver for conversion of forested lands. Additionally, while tree plantations are expected to continue to increase in extent in the US, this will most likely occur through afforestation (from agricultural lands), not conversion of existing forests [18]. Urban expansion, however, continues to be a concern.

Population growth and associated urban development are a primary driver of conversion from forest to non-forest land uses. Rates of urban development vary throughout the United States with higher rates in the Pacific Coast region and portions of the Southeast Region. These two regions are also the regions identified as experiencing more recent forestland loss.

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 forests are being converted to non-forest use or plantation. FSC completed a US National Risk Assessment that identifies where this risk is greater than 'low.' Population growth by county between 2015 and 2016 and residential building permits issued by Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) over the same time period were used together as a proxy to identify counties where there is likely a greater risk of materials from conversions entering the FSC supply chain. CBSAs consist of the county or counties associated with a core urbanized or urban area with a population of at least 10,000. These data were analyzed using a population growth threshold of 2% and a building permits issued threshold of 1500. These thresholds were selected based on analyses done by the US Census Bureau and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Finally, non-forested portions of

counties were removed from consideration. The Risk Assessment identifies the forested portions of 53 counties across the FSC US Southeast and Pacific Coast Regions as areas where there is a risk greater than 'low' receiving forest materials from forest conversions. Companies that wish to use non-certified materials from the identified areas are required to either avoid sourcing from specific sites where forest conversion is occurring, or to implement mitigation actions that reduce the risk of sourcing from these sites.

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 and implement one or more from the options identified at the regional meetings.

For Conversion, the identified mitigation options must align with a framework established by the US Forest Service's Open Space Conservation Strategy, and help to achieve one of the following outcomes:

- A. Convene partners to identify and protect priority forest areas
- B. Promote national policies and markets to help private landowners conserve forests
- C. Provide resources and tools to help communities expand and connect forests
- D. Participate in community growth planning to reduce ecological impacts and wildfire risks

Please help us to determine what these mitigation actions should be, by visiting engage.fsc.us.org and joining the virtual discussion, or attending a regional meeting.

INFORMATION SOURCES THAT MAY HELP GENERATE MITIGATION IDEAS

- [US Forest Service – Southern Research Station](#)
- [US Forest Service – Pacific Northwest Research Station](#)
- [US Forest Service – Forests on the Edge](#)
- [U.S. Forest Service – Open Space Conservation Strategy](#)
- [Southern Group of State Foresters](#)

