

FSC® Group Certification Toolkit





Foreword

This toolkit is a revised and updated edition of the group certification toolkit (2005) prepared for Estonia via the WWF IKEA cooperation on forest projects. Changes in the relevant FSC standards and guidelines, such as FSC-STD-30-005 (V1-0) Standard for Group Entities (2009), FSC-STD-01-001 V5-1 FSC Principles and Criteria (2014) and FSC-STD-01-004 V1-0 International Generic Indicators (2015) have been taken in to account. Also nationally adapted toolkits and materials from Denmark and Canada have been used as an example and inspiration for this document.

The toolkit has been drafted in an European context, but with an aim to make it as internationally applicable as possible. New national adaptations of this toolkit are welcome. When doing so, please include the reference

“adapted for (country x) by (author) based on the FSC Group Certification Toolkit”. In this version, whenever possible, comments have been added when regional or national adaptation is needed before use, especially regarding the supporting documents. The toolkit is comprised of three distinct parts. It is designed so that it can be either used together as a full manual or as separate guiding documents.

Under the coordination of FSC International, FSC Finland revised and edited the content. Editing and layout for publication was completed by FSC Denmark.

This toolkit is an official FSC document. It is published as a supportive document, and thus it is not mandatory. In case of discrepancy, the FSC Normative Framework shall prevail.

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Part

1

About FSC and certification

Operating under uniform principles throughout the world

FSC as an organization

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, not for profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of responsible forest management worldwide. FSC is a multi-stakeholder organization with open membership.

Founded in 1993, its mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests. To make sure no one viewpoint dominates the others, FSC membership has three chambers – environmental, social and economic – that have equal rights in decision-making. Also, to ensure a globally fair share in decisions, members represent either North or South sub-chambers. FSC operates on the ground through a network of Regional and National Offices and focal points in more than 40 countries.

The FSC sets forest management standards based on 10 Principles & Criteria for responsible forest management. These Principles and Criteria (P&C) are valid worldwide, whereas forest management standards are national or regional. In addition, the FSC membership has developed International Generic Indicators (IGIs), in order to help national stakeholders and certification bodies to interpret the P&C for a specific region or country and to bring global consistency to forest management standards.

FSC also provides a Chain of Custody standard for manufacturers and processors of forest products. The Chain of Custody standard allows credible tracking of certified wood and wood products from certified forests through trade and manufacturing to retailers and consumers. Over the past 20 years, over 183 million hectares in 79 countries have been certified according to FSC standards while several thousand products are produced using FSC certified wood and carrying the FSC trademark. About 150,000 smallholders participate in the FSC system, most of them organized in groups.

FSC Principles and Criteria

The FSC Principles & Criteria (P&C) describe the essential elements or rules of environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable forest management.

FSC principles

- 1** **Compliance with laws.**
Forest management shall respect all applicable laws of the country in which they occur, and international treaties and agreements to which the country is a signatory, and comply with all FSC Principles and Criteria.
- 2** **Workers' rights and employment conditions.**
Long-term tenure and use rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established.
- 3** **Indigenous peoples' rights.**
The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources shall be recognized and respected.
- 4** **Community relations.**
Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities.
- 5** **Benefits from the forest.**
Forest management operations shall encourage the efficient use of the forest's multiple products and services to ensure economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits.
- 6** **Environmental values and impacts.**
Forest management shall maintain, conserve and restore ecosystem services and environmental values of the forest, and shall avoid, repair or mitigate negative environmental impacts.
- 7** **Management planning.**
Forest manager shall have a management plan consistent with its policies and objectives and proportionate to scale, intensity and risks of its management activities. The management plan shall be implemented and kept up to date based on monitoring information in order to promote adaptive management. The associated planning and procedural documentation shall be sufficient to guide staff, inform affected stakeholders and interested stakeholders and to justify management decisions.
- 8** **Monitoring and assessment.**
Forest manager shall demonstrate that, progress towards achieving the management objectives, the impacts of management activities and the condition of the forest, are monitored and evaluated proportionate to the scale, intensity and risk of management activities, in order to implement adaptive management.
- 9** **High conservation values.**
The forest manager shall maintain and/or enhance the High Conservation Values of the forest through applying the precautionary approach.
- 10** **Implementation of management activities.**
Management activities conducted shall be selected and implemented consistent with the manager's economic, environmental and social policies and objectives and in compliance with the FSC Principles and Criteria collectively.

Shortly about certification

The certification process

Certification is always voluntary. FSC certification is a process during which a forest owner or manager applies for certification from what in the FSC system is called a Certification Body or “CB”.

The CB checks the compliance of forest management practices in the forests owned or managed by the candidate with agreed requirements. (The agreed requirements denote the applicable FSC national or regional forest management standard.)

When the certification result is positive, the candidate will receive an FSC forest management certificate, which is a proof of responsible forest management. After this the forest owner may use the FSC trademark when selling timber, which is a positive sign for timber purchasers, and provides them with the assurance that their purchasing choices support responsible forestry.

The CB conducts annual audits to make sure forest management practices continue to meet the requirements set out in the standard.

Group certification

Group certification makes it easier for small forest owners to become FSC certified. Group certification enables group members to share some of the costs related to certification, thus allowing reduced cost of forest certification per forest owner as well as per hectare and annually harvested volume unit.

Group certification also reduces the workload for each group member related to achieving and maintaining an FSC certificate by placing a significant part of the administrative duties on the group manager.

For a group to be successful in getting certified and also in retaining its certificate, it is vital that the group is well prepared. The group has to have the necessary systems in place to prove

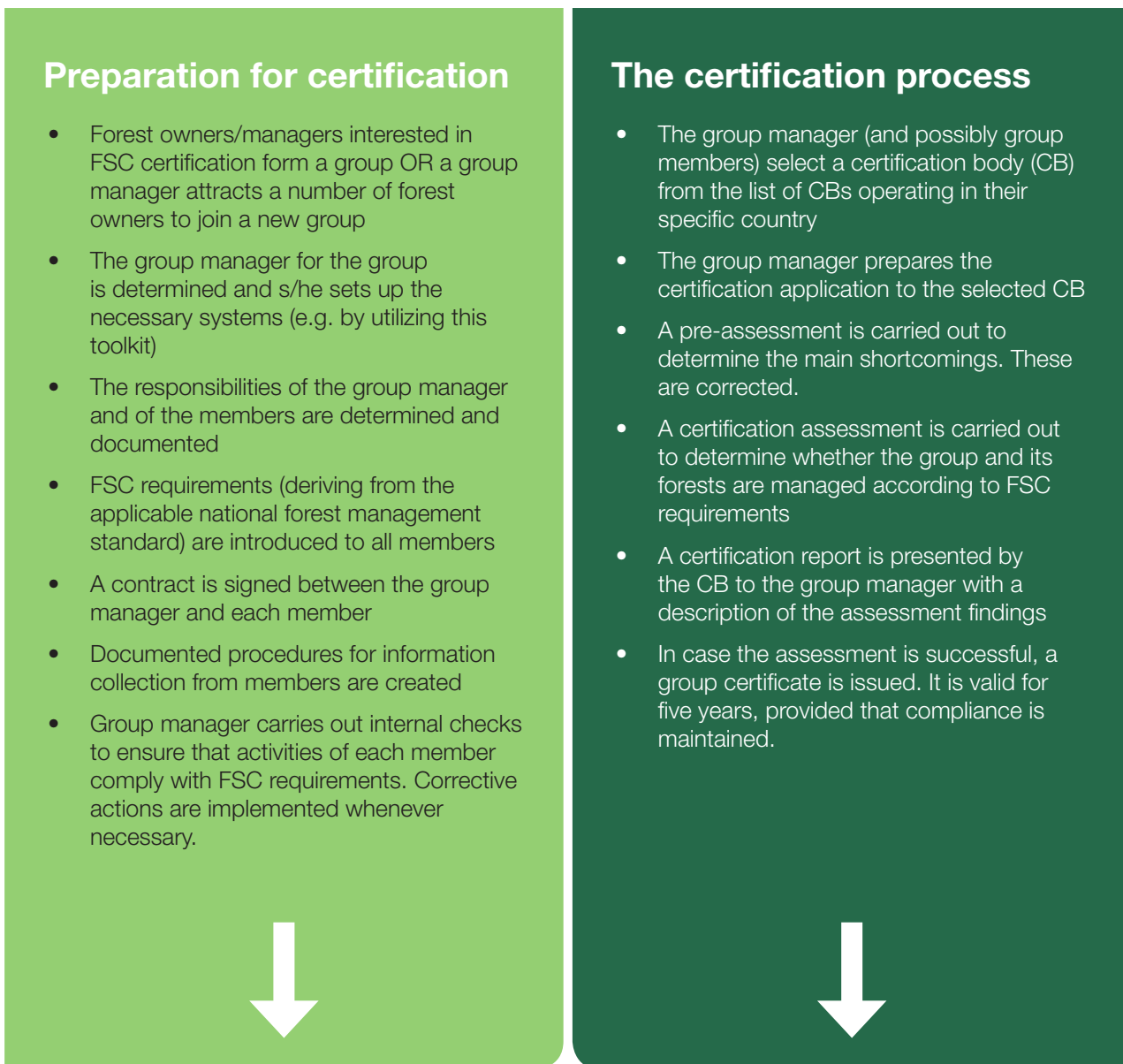
compliance with the FSC requirements. This toolkit contains various templates that can be used to build up the needed system as well as to maintain and continue to document compliance with FSC requirements and the high level of responsible forest management.

An overview of the certification process in case of a group certification is shown in Figure 1.



Overview of certification

Figure 1.



Maintenance of the FSC group certificate

- Sales summaries are periodically prepared for each group member and entire group entity
- Updated data of members are continuously maintained by the group manager
- Internal audits/checks or other means of internal verification of continuous compliance are implemented
- All non-compliances are addressed properly by issuing corrective action requests to group members and ensuring they are adequately dealt with
- The selected CB checks compliance with FSC requirements once every year with a special view on monitoring & evaluation as according to group procedures



Benefits of getting FSC certified

Benefits for the environment and society

FSC forest certification sets requirements for forestry operations aiming to lower the negative impact on the environment and biodiversity, as well to improve the means of local communities for benefiting from certification in numerous ways from recreational use to local employment.

Stakeholder consultation when planning forestry operations, provides the local communities and interested other parties a chance to express their views based on for example recreational activities or ensuring the traditional land use rights of indigenous people.

Benefits for the certificate holder

FSC certified forests provide the certificate holder and community with multiple benefits. It communicates that the certificate holder conforms to requirements set for responsible forestry and communicates about the values of the forest owner. Certification creates transparency to the forestry operations and can be understood as a license to operate and have active discussion with various stakeholders.

FSC certification is a market based system for ensuring the source for responsible forest based materials. It creates an international guarantee of the origin of the materials as well as a standard for managing certified forests. Because many companies have already chosen FSC as the desired system for ensuring responsible sourcing, many more are following their footsteps. FSC certification ensures better market access for timber and in some cases can even create a price incentive or price premium for forest owners who are FSC certified.

The next chapter illustrates two success stories from around the world where smallholders have applied for FSC forest certification. It depicts the values and aspirations of the forest owners in applying for certification as well as presents the benefits they have gained from association with FSC.

10 good reasons for choosing FSC

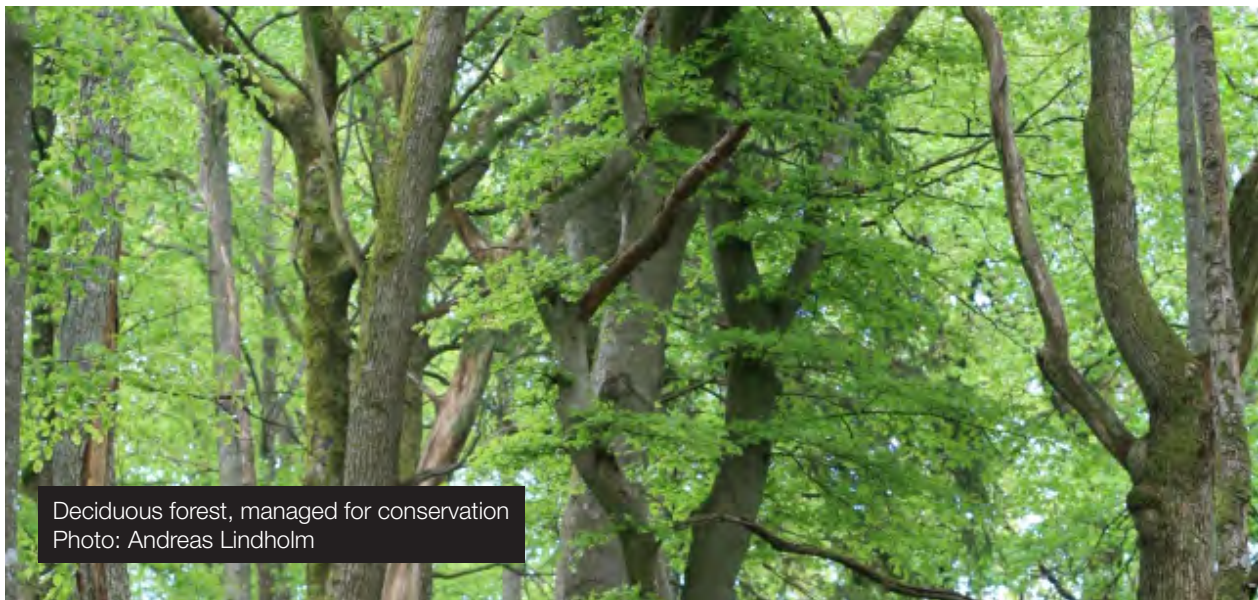
- Ensuring the right for future generations to benefit from forests
- Better working conditions for workers
- Endorsement from NGOs
- Embracing local communities
- Ensuring land use rights for indigenous people
- No conversion of forest land and ensuring responsible harvest rates
- Protecting forest biodiversity
- Improving water protection
- Being FSC certified shows that you comply with the highest social and environmental standards on the market
- Three chamber decision making

Success story #1

Company-driven certification of smallholders in Sweden

A large Swedish forest industry company, Södra, opted for introducing FSC certification for its some 51,000 forest owner members back in 2009. Södra offers domestic and international demand for the timber its members produce. President of Södra Cell International, Ulf Edman, sees a growing interest in FSC certified pulpwood.

“Demand is strong and as we are now receiving the volumes of FSC pulpwood we need, we can also deliver in line with customer demand,” he says. “Demand for FSC pulp was previously strongest in England. Now it’s growing in the rest of Europe also,” he adds.



Those members with certification receive a premium per cubic meter on delivering logs to the processing plants. For small forest owners, association and certification together bring important economic benefits. But equally important for some is the confirmation of their responsible forest management.

“The criteria for certification are very consistent with how I want to manage my forests,” says forest owner, Bodil Gunnarsson. “To get paid extra to do as one wants is a big advantage. Certification also helps ensure that contractors take responsibility in all respects.”

Södra’s smallholder-intensive group now consists of over 1.460.000 hectares of forest land.

Success story #2

The simplest benefit: A price premium for certified wood

Portugal is a country of many small forest owners – over 400.000 – and the vast majority of them own less than 3 hectares of forest each. For these very small forest owners, who often rely on forestry for a large part of their income, turning a profit from timber can be tricky.

To help their small suppliers – and supplement the production of FSC certified wood from their own forests – Portucel Soporcel group decided to offer a price premium to growers for FSC certified timber. The policy has proved so popular it has spread from the center-north of Portugal across to Spain, been emulated by competitors and spurred the establishment of several group forest certification initiatives.



To help small forest owners become FSC certified, Portucel Soporcel group promotes training, awareness raising and demonstrations for owners and forest association staff, as well as regular training for contractors. The company has also established protocols with the main organizations working in the sector, to support their certification efforts.

The scheme has turned out to be very successful. The simple act of offering a premium for FSC certified wood has provided the incentive for several forest certification group initiatives in the region, providing access to markets and greater income to an increasing number of forest owners.

Source: <https://ic.fsc.org/preview.celebrating-success-stories-of-fsc-certification.a-2199.pdf>



Sharing information between Network Partners

The toolkit has been composed with the aim of optimizing the GM's (as well as group members') time to check the compliance of forest management activities and preparation of reports for external audits. Since internal audits/checks are the main means for verifying the activities of group members by the group manager, attention has also been paid to planning and conduction of internal audits.

This toolkit also provides means for network partners and group managers to gain access to information within the network of affiliated organizations that can provide information on either setting up or streamlining group management activities.

Strengthening the system through cooperation

It is clear that information flow between national offices - Network Partners - is crucial for successful implementation of standards across national borders. Gathering information on 'best practises' and useful management models of smallholder group certificates is vital for increasing certification on a more uniform level. Sharing the practises of various countries is a vital method for increasing smallholder certification across the Network Partners.

Gathering information

For the purposes of this manual, we have gathered information on adopting the requirements of forest management standard as well as the group certification standard. This manual, however, presents a general overview of how to organise a group model and to maintain it.

In order to access information on streamlining group management model or methods, it is advisable to contact other Network Partners for more detailed information. Many Network Partners have already obtained expertise on group management models and have experience in presenting benefits from group certification.

Sharing information between National Partners

This toolkit works as an example of how the expertise can be distributed along the FSC Network. Because of the nature of national standards, a detailed presentation of requirements for the group manager and group members on forest management practises cannot be provided, but guidelines on implementing a framework for group certification can be produced.

Information about various group certification models can be enquired directly from Network Partners.

Overview of the toolkit

Purpose

This toolkit is designed as a reference and guidance material for anyone who wants to create an FSC certified group and/or act as a manager of an FSC group.

The materials in the toolkit are designed to enable the setting up of a new FSC group. In addition, the materials will help group managers to systematically collect and document the needed information in order to retain an FSC group certificate.

For an existing group manager, this toolkit offers many checklists and document templates that may be useful in systematizing the collection of information from group members and for the administration of the group.

For a new/prospective group manager, this toolkit intends to provide the majority, if not all, of the needed document templates to set up and administer an FSC certified group of smallholders.

Naturally it will be necessary for the reader to thoroughly go through each document template and each checklist to see what needs to be changed, modified or added to fit the needs of the specific country and group situation.

However this toolkit has been developed to lower the threshold for setting up and running groups as it provides such a wealth of templates to work from.

Structure

The toolkit is divided into three main sections (see Figure 2). The first, introductory part describes FSC and certification in general terms.

The second part is the central part of the toolkit and is specifically for group managers. A lot of the consent is important for group members as well. This toolkit is, however, focused on group managers rather than group members.

In the group manager section, we go through the establishment of a group scheme and assuring compliance with the technical requirements related to group management. There are check-lists that can be utilised for group members which will help each potential member to prepare for FSC certification. Thereafter, we look at maintaining responsible forest management in a systematic way.

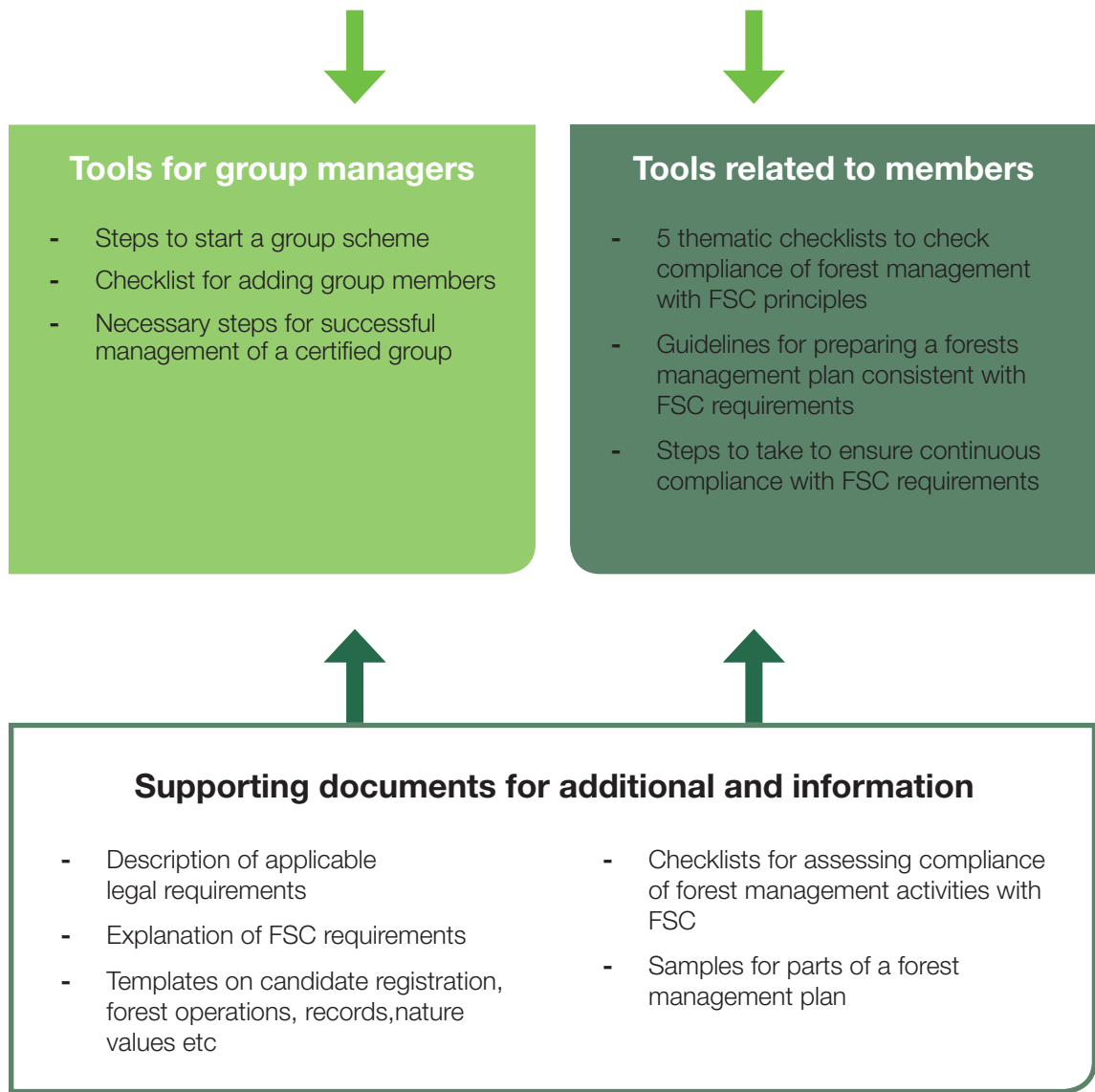
In case more information or help is provided at the end this toolkit in the part containing supporting documents, a reference to the relevant supporting document (more detailed explanations, templates and various forms) is provided in the checklist.

The third part of the toolkit outlines ways of adapting the toolkit to other regions. The last part of the toolkit are the supporting documents, which consist of checklists and templates to help the group managers to plan, monitor and check activities (see Figure 2).

Overview of the Toolkit

Figure 2

Introduction to certification and success stories





Part

2

Toolkit for a group manager

This group manager toolkit helps group managers to create a new certified group of forest owners whose activities would be in compliance with FSC requirements. It may also be helpful for existing groups to improve their management. This toolkit will aid groups and the managers in their certification process and help the group manager (GM) to ensure continuous compliance of the group's and its members' activities with FSC requirements.

To minimize the time and effort normally required to set up a group, create the needed documentation systems and prepare for FSC group certification, this toolkit contains various checklists and document templates that a group GM can freely utilize and/or adapt.

In addition to the parts in the group manager toolkit that relate to setting up and administering a group, the GM needs to plan the documentation that will be used to collect information from group members in order to understand the requirements set for group members, utilize or modify the given templates and thus manage the group more effectively.

The toolkit has been created with the aim of optimizing the GM's (as well as group members') time to check the compliance of forest management activities and preparation of reports for external audits. Since internal audits/checks are the main means for verifying the activities of group members by the group manager, attention has also been paid to planning and conducting internal audits.

Group members and group managers

Certification from the forest owner's viewpoint

Applying for FSC certification makes it possible for the forest owner to demonstrate his or her support for responsible forest management. The mission of FSC is to promote responsible forest management by creating market advantages for those who are managing their forests well and in accordance with FSC requirements. Having the FSC certificate may provide the forest owner with various advantages, including:

- The assurance that your forest management activities are environmentally appropriate, socially fair and economically viable;
- The possibility to prove it to your business partners and everybody else with the certificate issued to you;
- The possibility to mark the timber from your forest to markets demanding the FSC trademark, thus possibly giving you an advantage on the marketplace and sometimes providing you a higher price for your timber.

In case the forests are managed by a service provider, both the owner and the manager of the forests must agree to pursue certification.

What is the role of a Group Manager?

In group certification, the group manager takes responsibility to check the compliance of group members' activities with the FSC requirements. If non-compliances are identified, the group manager must ensure that they are followed up and corrected.

There are two main types of group managers:

- **Group manager** – manager of a group of forest owners/managers, who does not actively carry out forestry activities in their forest;
- **Resource manager** – manager of forest properties, where all forestry activities are planned, implemented and controlled by the group manager.

Groups are usually categorized by the type of the manager, where the Type I group would be the one with shared responsibilities between the group manager (or entity) and the group members. These may vary from administrative tasks to planning, silviculture, harvesting and monitoring with shared responsibilities between the group entity and the group members. The type II group is the 'resource manager' type of group in which the group manager (or entity) has basically assumed all operational responsibilities including administration, forest management and harvesting activities on behalf of the group members.

In reality group schemes are often of a combined nature, where some forests are managed by the group manager and others by their actual owners. Therefore group certification rules are quite flexible and possible schemes are not limited to the ones described above.

Starting a group scheme

Starting a group scheme is technically not difficult, although it requires some commitment. If you wish to act as a group/resource manager and there are forest owners who are committed to managing their forests in accordance with FSC requirements, it is very probable that your group will be successful in achieving FSC certification.

The following steps shall guide you through the process of establishing your group scheme.

Steps to set up your group scheme:

See:

1	Familiarize yourself with this toolkit, adapting when necessary. Select/compile the checklists & templates that will be the backbone of group administration.	The whole group certification toolkit and supporting documents
2	Identify forest owners/managers who are interested in joining a group scheme	
3	Provide member candidates with a copy of your checklist & template compilation and give them a basic training on how to use it	Toolkit and supporting docs
4	Carry out a candidate evaluation and membership registration	E 10, section III
5	Prepare a written description of your responsibilities as a group manager and a strategy for monitoring each group member's activity including a timeframe for internal audits	B 6-7, E 1
6	Plan and implement internal audits/checks and follow up on identified non-compliances	B 7, E 17
7	Plan and implement the chain of custody (wood tracking) procedure	B 4

<p>8</p>	<p>Establish procedures for approval of planned forestry activities and regular reporting, including a formalized procedure for monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p>B 6, E 8, E 19</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Prepare a public policy of commitment to the FSC Principles & Criteria</p>	<p>D 1</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Define training needs for the implementation of the applicable FSC standards within the group. Create an implementation and training plan</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>Optional: Prepare an environment policy of the group in close contact with all group members (This can be included in other policy or commitment documentations)</p>	<p>D 1</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>Make a pre-assessment of compliance against the FSC standard within the group to prepare for external FSC certification assessment</p>	
<p>13</p>	<p>Contact FSC accredited certification bodies (CBs), select the one your group wants to make contract with, and agree on an FSC certification assessment</p>	

Adding members to your group

The credibility of your group scheme depends significantly on the performance of your group members. Adding new members to your group is thus a step that should be preceded by careful examination of the candidate's forestry practices.

The general principle is that a group is open to all candidates, presuming that the group manager can manage the extended group, and the candidate's forestry practices are in compliance with FSC principles. There is no restriction on the maximum size of the group, but the group manager has to have sufficient human and technical resources to manage the group. Therefore it is necessary that the group manager specifies the maximum number of members that can be supported by the management system he or she sets up.

Usually group schemes are only applied to national groups which are covered by the same FSC standard. In cases where homogenous conditions between countries/ regions allow an effective and credible cross-border monitoring system, it is possible to request formal approval by FSC International to allow certification of such a group scheme.

Before a member can join a group, the GM should carry out an evaluation of their management practices against FSC standards. This can be achieved using the following checklist:

		Yes	No	If no:
1	Has the candidate carried out an evaluation of her/his practices (one of the checklists in this toolkit)?			Have those completed
2	Are completed checklists supported by documentary and field evidence?			Issue a CAR ¹ if necessary See C4

Assuming that the candidate is well prepared for certification and your internal audit did not identify major non-conformances with FSC standards, please proceed to the following steps:

3	Complete the candidate evaluation form	E10
4	If the candidate's performance meet FSC requirements, send a draft contract to the candidate forest owner/manager	E1
5	Update your group membership list with details of the new member	E16
6	Notify your FSC certification body (CB) about the planned expansion of the group and if required by the certifier, plan for an extra field audit prior to adding the new properties to the group	

¹ -CAR or Corrective Action Request is a term used in the FSC certification scheme for actions that are required by the certification body (CB) or you as a group manager from forest owners to address non-conformances with FSC requirements.

Managing an FSC certified group scheme

In addition to the actual performance of your group members, the credibility of your group scheme also depends greatly on the administrative system you set up as the group manager. This part of the toolkit helps you to systematize the needed documentation, as well as to keep track of the necessary management and monitoring activities related to the day-to-day management of an FSC certified group scheme.

The following steps are needed to keep your group scheme running See:

1	Review and approve planned forest operations by group members	E8
2	Collect information about completed forest operations	C3
3	Collect information about wood sales by each group member	E11, E12
4	Collect information about work accidents in group members' forests	E7
5	Collect information about illegal activities in group members' forests	E6
6	Prepare a monitoring timeframe and strategy according to the management intensity of group members and carry out regular internal audits/checks of your group members' forest management activities	B7, E17, C1-3
7	Issue corrective action requests to tackle non-conformances identified during audits/checks and follow up on them (ensure that all noticed problems are solved as soon as possible)	C4
8	Prepare and submit annual summaries on wood sales for your CB	E19
9	Cross check wood sales by group members with purchasing companies if possible	E11
10	Ensure that group members have valid forest management plans meeting FSC requirements (including a public summary)	D
11	Based on information collected from group members, prepare an annual summary report of the estimated annual overall FSC production and FSC sales	E19
12	Plan and coordinate external audits with your CB and group members	
13	Implement and solve CARs issued by the CB	

A group non-compliance may be caused by:

- The group manager (GM) not fulfilling his/her management responsibilities. For example the group members might not be informed sufficiently, or there is a lack of information, coordination and planning on the group level, or the group manager might lack required documentation and information about group members' activities etc.
- The non-compliance of the GM to ensure that all its members comply with the conditions and corrective actions issued by the certification body
- The GM not dealing with the small non-conformances and misunderstandings among the group members. This can happen if the GM lacks control over the supervision of group members' activities.

A member non-compliance may be caused by:

- The failure of an individual group member to comply with a certain FSC criteria or indicator. This, in turn, might result from the GM being unable to provide clear guidance on FSC requirements or guide the group member's attention towards possible non-conformance in order to quickly correct/prevent the non-conformance.

Information sources and contacts

For further information you may contact the FSC national office or focal point in your country, or FSC headquarters or FSC accredited certification bodies. FSC representatives will be happy to answer your questions regarding the FSC certification system or requirements in general. More specific information about the certification assessments and audit conduction, as well as interpretation and implementation of the FSC requirements in a certain area, can be obtained from FSC accredited certification bodies. A list of all certification bodies accredited by FSC can be found on the FSC homepage(ic.fsc.org) and often the homepages of national FSC offices or initiatives will also list the certification bodies active in that specific country.

Useful information about FSC certification and certified organizations may be found on the following homepages:

ic.fsc.org - Homepage of Forest Stewardship Council

info.fsc.org - Database of all FSC certified organizations and companies worldwide

www.globalforestregistry.org - Detailed information about FSC certified forests worldwide

What happens if management in the group is not in compliance with FSC rules?

Members and managers of certified groups must also be aware of the risks regarding the violation of FSC rules. If a major non-conformance is identified by the Certification Body (CB), it is necessary to take corrective action within 3 months, and for a minor non-conformance within 12 months.

In case forest management in a certified group is not in compliance with FSC requirements, the certificate that has been granted to the group may be suspended or even terminated. Non-conformance with FSC requirements may occur on the group level (group non-compliance) or may be caused by a single group member (member non-compliance). Both can be related to the group manager or group member's mistakes, however in the first case (group failure) the role of group manager is usually more significant.

Generally group failure results in the suspension or termination of the certificate, which means that the whole group will lose its certificate. Member failure must be addressed by the group manager and the member in question, and may result in the exclusion of the member if he/she does not correct the failure. Thus it is important to understand the potential causes of group- and member non-compliance.





Five checklists have been prepared to aid you as the GM to evaluate the activities of potential group members in relation to FSC requirements before they apply for certification. In case some shortcomings appear, various supporting documents, cited in the checklists, can be used in order to make corrections in the activities.

After these checklists, you will find the FSC requirements for a forest management plan. In addition, supporting documents provide samples, which can be used to design documents for a group member's forest management plan.

The last section covers activities and special occasions related to regular forest management in the light of FSC requirements and are intended to assist in making decisions accordingly.

The supporting documents of this toolkit have various purposes and contents. Some of them clarify existing requirements; others are templates or forms that the GM can use to prepare the group's own documentation system. You are most welcome to use them, however, please note that they are examples and present only one way among many.

The supporting documents also include several field checklists, which simplify the conduction of some required activities (e.g. monitoring and environmental impact assessment of felling work, documents C1-C3).

N.B. *In the following, we have written the text as if it were directed at forest owners. You as the GM are free to use or adapt the text according to what you see is best.*



Preparing for FSC certification

Before you apply for certification via a group and invite the auditor(s) from a selected certification body (CB) to come and assess your forest management activities, you should review all areas of management and ensure that everything is in compliance with FSC requirements, which are listed in the FSC standard of your specific country.

This toolkit helps you to do that by presenting the general standard requirements in a compact and logical way. In this toolkit, the requirements are presented by their general topic and adjusted to the small forest owner's perspective. Instructions on preparing a forest management plan are also included.

Five short checklists enable you to check your current status and identify areas that need special attention.

Check your compliance with the FSC principles using five simple checklists

Please go through all the checklists below and answer yes or no to all of the questions. The last column of every checklist indicates, which answer (yes or no) requires special attention. The checklists are compiled so that within the same checklist always the same answer indicates compliance.

Where necessary, the last column refers to the code of a supporting document where you can find more detailed information about a specific issue. You will find these supporting documents in the document templates provided by your Group Manager (GM).

Several templates, example documents and forms are provided.

Legal compliance

FSC requirements, in many cases, set a higher standard than the national legal requirements in place for forest management in a given country. Nonetheless, the fundamental prerequisite for FSC certification is compliance with all national and international legal acts.

Legal compliance

		Yes	No	If no, see:
1	Are you committed to paying all fees and taxes in full amount and in due time?			A
2	Is the ownership of your forests area legally clear and undisputed?			A
3	Are you aware of and do you follow all requirements of the national forest law and its subordinate documents?			A
4	In case you have nature protection values in your forest are they protected according to legal requirements?			A
5	In case you have heritage or cultural value sites in your forest, are they protected according to legal requirements?			A
6	Do you follow fire safety requirements in forest management activities?			A
7	When you hire workers, do they have all safety equipment and necessary qualifications for working in the forest?			A, B2
8	Do your workers have all required insurance policies?			A
9	Do you use under-age children as workers?			A

Community relations and social impacts

According to the FSC standard, you should be socially just and fair in your forest management. Activities in the forest should have a positive social impact on the local and neighboring communities.

		Yes	No	If no, see:
1	The local people have no complaints or do not protest about your ownership of forest land.			A
2	You know all the people whose land is bordering your forests and you have their contact information.			E13
3	You are informing your neighbors about forest management activities planned near their land.			E14
4	Local community and neighbors have no complaints about your forest management activities.			
5	Do you keep your forests open for recreation and mushroom/ berry picking? ²			A
6	Do local communities have access to the places of cultural, social or heritage value in your forest?			A
7	Are local communities able to get information about the management activities you plan and can they influence the decisions you make?			A, B2
8	If your forest is near or affecting indigenous people's lands, have you considered how to take care of their rights when managing your forests?			B5

² In many Nordic and Baltic countries there is a customary right for public use of forests called the everyman's right. The right is mainly for recreational purposes and usually does not include any substantial economic exploitation, such as hunting or logging, or disruptive activities. Even if there is no such a tradition or law in your country, the FSC standard requires upholding of the legal and customary rights of local communities.

Employee and contractor relations

There are multiple aspects to consider when you hire people to work in your forest, make deals with contractors or market your timber. Safety issues should be addressed first. Necessary qualifications of the workers, as well as strengthening the local economy, are both important.

To avoid later arguments and problems, it is advisable that contracts are signed both with contractors and self-employed workers before commencing work in the forest. A sample contract is provided in the supporting document E 02.

		Yes	No	If no, see
1	Before you hire workers, do you make sure they have all the necessary safety equipment?			B2
2	Before you hire workers, do you make sure they have necessary qualification and documents that prove it?			B2
3	Do you always make a formal contract between you and the paid workforce?			E2
4	When hiring people, do you prefer people living in the region?			
5	Do you pay employees a fair salary (not below average)? ³			
6	Do you prefer to use local contractors when possible?			
7	When you use contractors, do you demand that the technique they use is safe for the environment and technically in order?			B3
8	Do you regularly check the fulfillment of health and safety requirements of workers in the forest?			C2
9	Do you prefer to sell timber to local companies and sawmills (in case the price is not lower)?			
10	Do you keep a record of your workers and contractors?			E3, E4

³ FSC standard requires that the wages should meet or exceed the minimum forest industry standards or living wages, where these are higher than the legal minimum wage.

Environmental impact

Environmental considerations form the core of FSC certification. FSC strives to ensure that biological diversity is not weakened despite the economic use of forests. Although environmental requirements are often considered difficult to fulfill, the core idea and philosophy you should adapt to, is actually quite easy.

Before commencing any activities in the forest, consider the possible harm to biodiversity and high conservation values. If you identify any potential adverse impacts, think how you can reduce or minimize them. If it is not possible to reduce the harm to an acceptable level, consider other alternative activities.

NB! Unlike other checklists, the answer 'yes' requires special attention here

		Yes	No	If yes, see:
1	Are there any areas with special nature values in your forests (if you are not absolutely sure, see reference)?			E5
2	Are there any endangered or protected species dwelling in your forest (if you are not absolutely sure, see reference)?			E5,E9
3	Do you cultivate any alien species?			E8
4	Do you use any fertilizers or chemicals in the forest?			E8
5	Do you cultivate any genetically modified species in the forest?			
6	Do you use any biological control agents?			E8
7	Do you plan to build roads, restore or establish drainage systems or start any other large scale activities in your forest?			E8

You are required to assess and monitor the impact of your activities on the environment on a regular basis, and document it (write it down) systematically, so that it can be checked by your group manager (GM) and the CB auditor. The checklists provided by your GM will make this seemingly complex task a procedure that is easily performed.

Documents C1-C5 are three main monitoring checklists to be filled in before, during and after forest management activities. Furthermore, there is a separate checklist (C4) for documenting shortcomings (called non-conformances by the auditor).

Monitoring

The idea of monitoring is very simple: to know what's going on in your forest. There is a certain minimum amount of information you need to have to be able to make the right management decisions. Information you gather through monitoring provides a valuable base for decision-making. It is logical that this information also needs to be updated from time to time.

		Yes	No	If no, see:
1	Do you keep track of the volume of wood you fell from your forest?			C1-3
2	Do you have a system for discovering any illegal activities in your forest?			E6
3	Do you keep track of the environmental impacts of your forest management operations?			C1-3, B1
4	Do you check the status of protected or other conservation value areas in your forest?			E5, C1-3
5	Do you have written information about the genetic origin of seeds and seedlings used in your forest?			E15

Forest Management Plan

A Forest management plan (FMP) is a set of data and documents, updated at regular intervals, which helps you to make the right decisions in managing your forests.

In brief the management plan consists of two major parts:

- A description of your forest resources and nature values
- A description of the planned activities in the forest

The first part of an FMP provides basic information, which enables you to make decisions about management activities. FMP is not a static document and has to be renewed periodically. This is not only necessary because the forest itself evolves, but also because your activities in the forest change it. Thus it is important to also adjust the planned activities to the changes in the forest. In many European regions, an FMP is usually thoroughly renewed every ten years, although the plan can be updated more frequently to reflect major activities like felling work.

Since it is compulsory according to FSC Principles & Criteria for an FSC-certified forest owner to have an FMP, here you are provided with a clear and short overview of what should be included in your FMP. In some countries, you can order a basic FMP from a state organization or a licensed company, that inspects your forests, describes its resources, prepares maps and gives recommendations for management. It is also possible that you can prepare the FMP by yourself, based on your own expertise. In addition to the basic FMP, you need a few extra things to make it correspond to FSC requirements.

For your convenience, we have prepared templates for the required parts that may not be included initially in your FMP. Since every forest is different in its nature, in the same way forest owners are different in their purpose of management and preferences, it is not possible to make standardized FMP sections. Thus you need to adjust the templates to your personal needs and fill in some gaps.

On the following pages there is a list of essential components of an FMP that are required by FSC Principles and Criteria.

Reminder for the Group Manager to adapt/modify the lists for the group members whenever appropriate or necessary.

Forest Management Plan

Your Management plan should at least contain the following components:

1	Description of your forest management objectives, planned management activities and verifiable targets.	D1-2
2	Description of your forest resources, species composition, stand structure, age classes etc.	
3	Responsibilities of the group manager, group member(s) and third parties explained.	
4	Maps of your forests including all protection values.	
5	Whenever performing felling work, a description of the silvicultural system used is needed.	D3
6	List of places in your forest with high conservation value and their protection strategy. (See next checklist.)	

Identifying and managing the High Conservation Values (HCV) in Forests

High Conservation Values need to be protected because of their special environmental, cultural and/or social value. The general purpose of HCV protection is to ensure that no destructive activities take place in these areas which could harm, damage or destroy these special values.

To comply with the FSC requirements in the area of HCVs, please follow the steps below:

1	Contact relevant authorities to find out any identified valuable areas/species.	E9
2	Find any non-discovered valuable areas/species in your forest yourself.	E5,E9
3	Mark the (discovered) valuable areas/species on your forest maps, if not already done.	
4	Plan how you want to manage – if at all – the valuable areas.	
5	Include your decision for managing valuable areas in your forest management plan.	

It is good to keep track of changes in HCVs while you are visiting your forest during operation checking, audits or for other purposes. For example natural disturbances (storm, fire, insects etc.) or alien invasive species may cause serious alterations or damage.

It is also important to notify relevant state institutions/authorities if you notice changes, endangerment or damage of protection values or species in formally registered protected areas. For example if a storm has damaged a nest of strictly protected bird species and the nest site is formally registered, it is important to notify relevant authorities if the nest has been destroyed so that databases can be updated and the protection status of the area changed if necessary.

To find if there are any official HCV areas in your forests you can contact, for example, the national or local environmental service or other local authority.

Forest areas with high conservation value are:

- Rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems and habitats
- Areas which are suitable for threatened or specialist species where special living conditions exist
- Areas classified as suitable for any national conservation area network
- Areas that serve the conservation of landscape-level ecosystems and mosaics
- Areas that provide critical ecosystem services
- Areas with special cultural value defined by the relevant national or international authority for cultural heritage
- Other forest area with special social or community values.

Everyday management: Maintaining the certificate

When you have successfully set up your forest management to meet the FSC requirements and received your FSC certificate, there are certain things that are necessary in order to maintain your certificate. These lists will help to manage the FSC-certified forests responsibly and maintain the credibility of sustainable practices by providing a few simple instructions and some documents to use.

Felling and regeneration in your forests

In case you are managing your forest for the generation of financial income, you will probably want to perform felling work at some point. As a member of an FSC certified group, you need to inform your group manager about this before commencing the activities. You must naturally also do what your national/local legislation requires (e.g. send some planned felling description to the local authorities or receive a felling permit of some kind).

Whether or not you have to receive a written confirmation for the felling work from your group manager depends on the exact procedures that your group has (the terms and requirements should be specified in the certified group accession contract).

The following list helps you to remember the things you need to do to perform felling work according to the FSC requirements. The steps marked in *italics* are not compulsory, but are intended for those forest owners with an interest in and possibility of visiting their forest.

Steps from planning felling work to forest regeneration:

1	Fulfill the necessary steps for the approval of forest management operations or felling work in your local/national legislation. ⁴	E8
2	Prepare the site for felling, using the pre-harvest checklist provided.	C1
3	If you are using workers, find a professional contractor/worker and sign a contract.	E2
4	Walk the felling area through with the contractor, introduce the filled pre-harvest checklist, show relevant things on the field and provide a copy of the pre-felling checklist to the contractor.	C1
5	Visit ongoing work and fill in the ongoing operation checklist, enforce CARs if necessary.	C2, C4
6	When work is finished, fill in the post operation checklist, enforce or close CARs if applicable and close the work by ending the contract.	C3, C4
7	In case of a clear felling, regenerate your forest.	

⁴ The protocol for the approval of forest management operations or fellings may differ depending on national legislation. For example, in Estonia you need to send the planned felling declaration to local Environmental Service and wait for them to return the declaration together with felling approval to you. An approved felling declaration proves that you have legal right to commence felling activities.

Special activities

There are a number of special activities in the FSC Principles & Criteria, which are not allowed or are allowed only on very rare occasions if a clear and unavoidable need exists. Before you decide to do any of these, it is absolutely necessary that you contact your group manager, report your intended activity and ask for written permission. Furthermore it is also important to inform the group manager afterwards about the completed activities. Below is a list of such things and references to the templates that you can use for reporting your planned activity.

Activity	FSC Stand	See
Cultivation of alien species.	Allowed in special cases ⁵	
Usage of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)	not allowed	
Usage of biological control agents	not preferable	E8
Usage of fertilizers or chemicals	strictly not preferable, allowed in very special cases.	E8
Establishment of drainage systems	not allowed	
Maintenance of drainage system	only when unavoidable	E8
Establishment of new roads	according to need	E8

⁵ Use of alien species is allowed when knowledge or experience have shown that any invasive impacts can be controlled and effective mitigation measures are in place.

Unforeseen events

Besides common forest management activities, there are a few additional things you need to bear in mind. Unfortunately it is possible that some accidents happen or you discover illegal logging in your forest. In the event of such unforeseen incidents, you always need to report to the group manager and also to relevant authorities. We have prepared checklists that will help you.

Incident	Report to	See
You discover forest theft or other illegal activity in your forest.	Police / Environmental Inspectorate / Group Manager	E6
Someone gets hurt, injured or dies while working in your forest.	Work Safety Authority / Group Manager	E7
You get into forest management related disputes or conflicts with neighbors or local people.	Group Manager	E18
Other very unusual or important event or processes in your forest.	Group Manager	E8

Marketing your FSC-certified timber

Major retailers in Europe, North America, South America and Asia ask for FSC certification when ordering forest products in order to be able to assure their customers that the products they are buying support responsible forestry. FSC certification requires that a final product, which carries the FSC logo, is made of FSC certified wood (100%, if the logo is “FSC 100%” or 70%, if the logo is “FSC Mix”).

This provides the consumer with the assurance that he or she is supporting sustainable forest management and is contributing to the fundamental goal of certification: to create market-based incentives for more responsible forest management. This means that it must be possible to trace the origin of wood from the finalized product back to the forest where it came from. For this purpose, the so-called “chain of custody” (CoC) certification system has been created.

As part of an FSC group, you do not need a separate CoC certificate as a forest owner. The Group manager of an FSC group generally acquires a CoC certificate covering all group members. The GM will provide you with a sample sales document including the CoC code as well as a statement stating that the timber sold with this invoice is certified according to FSC principles. Do remember to use the code and the statement on all sales documents.

There are issues you need to consider to be able to market your timber as certified. The following things need to be addressed:

1	Keep an updated list of all timber that you have sold by buyers, volume and assortments.	E11
2	Make sure that the group’s Chain of Custody certification code is included in all invoices issued for the sold timber and other sales documents. Before achieving official certification, you need to have a form of sales invoices and other sales documents with a place for the CoC code. Also think about how you will ensure that the CoC code is included on all invoices (preprinted forms, write the code by hand etc.).	B4, E12
3	Periodically (at least once every year) send the summary of sold certified timber to your group manager.	E11

For more detailed information about CoC requirements and standard, please refer to document B 4.

Adaptation of the Toolkit to Various Regions

The following abbreviations have been used:

FSC = Forest Stewardship Council

FSC P&C = Principles and Criteria of the FSC

SD = Supporting Documents (resources in the toolkit such as templates and forms)

FMP = Forest Management Plan

Introduction

This toolkit has been compiled for global use, but the European context has been the starting point (e.g. in terms of possible legislation, administrative structure and social and environmental background) when compiling the templates and forms. However the main content of this toolkit can be applied and adapted also to other regions as well.

Since the FSC Principles and Criteria (P&C) are valid globally, the majority of the templates and instructions can be used as they are or in a modified format.

The following sections provide you with an overview of the sections that most probably require some modification in order to adapt the toolkit for use in other regions.

The main body of the toolkit consists of the part for the guide for group managers and the numerous supporting documents. The supporting documents include various templates, forms and explanations. The main parts require fewer modifications, but some of the supporting documents need to be rewritten or completely left out.

Adapting the main toolkit documents

As far as possible, the main toolkit documents have been prepared to be suitable for all regions. However you will probably need to add checklist points as appropriate in terms of your applicable national/regional standard.

For consistency, please make sure you revise the part for group managers only after you have updated all the supporting documents. This is in order to ensure that all document codes, names and references are correct.

Adapting the supporting documents

For effective use of this toolkit, you need to thoroughly go through the supporting documents to see what needs to be revised. The idea with the supporting documents is to ease the burden upon a group manager setting up a new group and maintaining the group certificate, as well as to help forest owners gain compliance with the FSC requirements.

Since the supporting documents need to provide more specific guidance, bringing the management level in compliance with the applicable standard and local legislation, they need more modification and revision. The supporting documents are divided into five main groups. Each of them has its distinct aspects regarding adaptation to other regions. These aspects have been described in the following table.

To help you estimate the work needed to modify and adapt these documents, the table below provides information about the estimated adaptation needs for each document in this group.

Green The supporting document can most probably be used as it is with only a few minor changes. Nevertheless, all the materials should be carefully read through to ensure that each document is valid in your country context and contains the correct language and format.

Yellow The supporting document probably needs moderate adaptations to the local administrative structure as well as to the local environmental and social context. Requirements of the applicable regional or national standard might also influence the contents. We suggest you read through all the documents and compare them against the requirements of the standard and all the other aspects of the local context.

Red The document probably needs a thorough revision or substitution with a new document.

Consider all the local aspects and the national/regional standard to come up with the best option.

Name of the supporting document	Comments
E1 FSC group certification contract template	
E2 Forest operations contract template	Annexes might need national adaptation.
E3 and E4 List of workers' and contractors' templates	
E5 Forest nature value assessment form	Some regionally relevant conservation values can be added.
E6 Illegal activities monitoring and reporting form	Information on national reporting practices needed or replacement with national form needed or replacement with national form.
E7 Injury reporting instructions	Canadian example form needs to be replaced by national form or modified to suit national/regional context.
E8 Forest management activities approval form	
E9 Template letter to local authority	The contents of the letter can probably be used in many regions; however the administrations and departments are country-specific therefore the number of letters and recipients needs to be reviewed.
E10 Template for candidate approval and registration	
E11 Sales report of forest material	National species and assortments needs to be added.
E12 Template for reporting wood sales by group scheme	
E13 List of neighbors template	
E14 Neighbors notification form	The letter needs to be checked to fit the local social and cultural context.
E15 Suppliers and origin of seed material template	
E16 Example of a group member record	
E17 Example of a field audit agenda	
E18 Disputes reporting form	
E19 Annual felling summary report	National species and assortments needs to be added.

FSC is...



Environmentally appropriate

forest management ensures that the harvest of timber and non-timber products maintains the forest's biodiversity, productivity, and ecological processes.



Socially beneficial

forest management helps both local people and society at large to enjoy long term benefits and also provides strong incentives to local people to sustain the forest resources and adhere to long-term management plans.



Economically viable

forest management means that forest operations are structured and managed so as to be sufficiently profitable, without generating financial profit at the expense of the forest resource, the ecosystem, or affected communities.

