



Small, low intensity and community forests Forest Stewardship Council

case studies

Forest Producers Association of Coruche (APFC) Group Scheme in Central Portugal

This case describes a group certification scheme for owners of small and medium mixed forest in central and northern Portugal. The principal products are cork, roundwood, and pine nuts. The group was formed to seek FSC certification and respond to the international market demand for certified cork stoppers; the group also benefits from a market premium for certified eucalyptus wood, present in several of the certified forests. This scheme makes an important contribution to the preservation of biodiversity in the Mediterranean cork oak forests and safeguards local employment.

Background

About 38% of mainland Portugal is forested: the predominant species being maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*), cork oak (*Quercus suber*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus spp*) and holm oak (*Quercus ilex/ Quercus rotundifolia*). Portugal is the world's most important cork producer; responsible for 50- 60% of world cork production.

In the Coruche region cork oak forest represents some 60% of the total area. This is a landscape known as 'montado' - an agro-silvopastoral landscape, encompassing traditional land-use patterns of cork oak with livestock and agriculture.

In 1992, private forest owners in the region founded the Forest Producers Association of Coruche (APFC) - to provide technical support to producers. Today, APFC has some 300 members (associates) who together own a forested area of around 174, 000 ha.

“The main drive for FSC responsible forest management certification was the international market request for certified cork stoppers, which lead to a national request from the industry for FSC certified cork.”

Group Certification

In 2006, industry interest in certified natural cork stoppers led some of APFC's associates to request help from the association to obtain FSC certification. APFC technicians recommended group certification and created a group scheme called *APFCertifica*. The group began with 4 members managing 9 forest management units (FMUs) covering approximately 6500 ha. The process was initiated in 2006 and an FSC certificate was awarded in April 2008. Subsequently the group has grown to 12 members, 19 FMUs and 10320 ha.

The reasons for choosing group certification were to:

- improve access to information and technical support
- have common management documents
- reduce the costs related to FSC Certification and external audits
- share the costs of professional training, monitoring, public consultation and external consultants



Overcoming Major Challenges

Low levels of Documentation: Since management practices were not generally documented, developing appropriate documented management plans and monitoring records was an early challenge. Progress was also hindered by limited experience within Portugal of developing plans and records for group management. However the group benefited from a number of training events to understand the requirements, including:

- a training programme and participatory pre-assessment for FSC Forest Management Certification offered by the certification body SA Woodmark Mediterranean Programme (Sativa), and
- a training on FSC Group Certification in England organised by FPPF (the Portuguese Forest Producers Federation) and Sativa, which enabled *APFCertifica*'s group manager to visit a number of certified groups and learn from their experience and procedures.

The group also used the guidance and templates provided in the publication "Group Certification for Forests: a Practical Guide" (ProForest 200X) to develop documentation and records, and learned from the experience of SILVICAIMA, a Portuguese forest company previously certified by Woodmark.

It took several meetings between forest owners and APFC technicians to develop, discuss and agree the final management planning documentation and records to be set in place at the FMUs.

Landscape Level Biodiversity Conservation and Management:

The group worked closely with WWF who consider the forests of this region to be of extreme significance to the maintenance of biodiversity in the Mediterranean ecoregion.

The forest owners' management practices are generally sympathetic to biodiversity conservation and cork oak management is a low impact activity - during cork harvest only the bark of the tree is removed, and this only occurs every 9 years. However, there was a lack of knowledge within the group about threatened species, the definition of conservation and protection areas, and the management measures required in order to maintain/improve the environmental role of these forests.

Furthermore the forest technicians, conservationists and auditors were unclear on whether it was necessary to set aside areas as protected from commercial harvesting. WWF highlighted the conservation value of cork oak woodlands that results from their mosaic of uses and habitat heterogeneity, comprised by grassland patches and shrublands of different ages; concluding that as long as the management maintains this mosaic there is no need for protected non-intervention areas. **Nevertheless following auditing advice APFC and the group decided on the creation of conservation/protection areas – setting aside 5% of the total area as fully protected. These include setting aside some non-productive ecosystems and excluding cattle from some parts of the cork oak areas.**



Forming a partnership with WWF

At the conservation level, a partnership with WWF has been fundamental in clarifying conservation and protection concepts, and in biodiversity identification in the FMUs. This has involved field visits, workshops and technical assistance on the identification of HCV attributes, together with advice on the management required to maintain and ameliorate such values, and how to monitor this.

Lessons learnt

The group manager concludes that meetings between the forest owners seeking FSC certification and the APFCertifica forest technicians were a key element in improving the documentation and records developed by the group, and to adapt the ProForest group certification templates.

Additionally they provided an opportunity for revising management planning documentation and records in light of practical experience at the field level.

These meetings also promoted broader discussions about FSC Principles and Criteria which was then taken forward into participation in national level working groups on the National FSC Standard, HCVF National Interpretation, Controlled wood standard interpretation group

Results

There have been some very positive outcomes from the formation of a group scheme:

- Establishment of a single Forest Management Plan for all members
- Improved organization of management and planning documentation generally
- Implementation of surveillance records related to the forest activities
- Increased knowledge related to environmental issues and forest management
- increased knowledge related to social issues and forest management

Furthermore there have been financial benefits for the group members from the sale of FSC certified products: Certified eucalyptus timber is sold for a premium of 4€/m³ and certified cork for a premium 0.5 € / XX over the same non certified products.

So successful has the group been that the group's advisors identify group expansion as next major challenge, as the APFCertifica Group continues to integrate new members.

Facts & Figures

Certificate details

SA-FM/COC-001873 issued for natural cork, wood in the rough and edible nuts, on 16th April 2008.

Area

10319,50 ha

Membership

12 participants representing 19 FMUs; Average farm size: 737ha (range: 166 to 2204 ha)

Quantities

Cork: 825 tons/year; Eucalyptus wood: 4300 m³/ year; Annual turnover: 1,5 M€

Information provided by Conceição Santos Silva, Group Manager and Luis Neves Silva, WWF

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