



RESOLVING COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES IN THE FSC SYSTEM

Because Forests and People Matter

Forest stewardship requires balancing social, economic and environmental values. Inevitably there are differences of opinion and disagreements as to whether forest managers, certification bodies or FSC have got the balance right.

If you have a complaint about FSC, an FSC National Initiative, Certification Body, certificate holder, or any FSC decision, we want to know about it. It is important to us that our system is fair to everyone affected by and involved in our work.

Our complaints and disputes resolution system is designed to help people make their concerns known, and to find the best way of resolving any complaints. A complaint or dispute can be resolved at different levels within the FSC system. Suggested steps for resolving disputes are highlighted in this fact sheet.

Resolving a Complaint

If possible, concerns should first be taken to the people who can resolve the issue directly.

FSC suggests the following first steps to resolving a complaint:

- **Talk** to the forest manager, Certification Body or National Initiative that you have a grievance with. Explain why you are concerned, and listen to their explanation.
- Try to **come to a solution**. This is often the fastest and easiest way to solve a problem.

The following box may help you work out who to talk to first:

For a complaint about ...	Talk to ...	How to make contact ...
How a certified forest is managed	The forest manager	If you cannot find out how to contact the forest manager, the Certification Body that issued their certificate will be able to provide you with the contact details (see below).
The process by which a forest was certified, or the activities of a Certification Body	The Certification Body	A list of the contact details of all FSC-accredited Certification Bodies is published under the FSC document centre on the FSC website at www.fsc.org . (Document 5.3.1)
The process by which a Certification Body has been accredited	The FSC Accreditation Program, FSC International Center	Send an email to: accreditation@fsc.org
National or sub-national forest stewardship standards	The National Initiative or Working Group responsible for developing the standard	A list of all FSC National Initiatives is published on the FSC website at www.fsc.org . (Document 5.1.2)
FSC international policies or standards	The FSC Policy and Standards Unit, FSC International Center	Send an email to: policy.standards@fsc.org
Other complaints about FSC	FSC International Center	Send an email to: fsc@fsc.org or contact us by phone, fax or letter through the contact details listed on this fact sheet.

All FSC-certified forest operations, Certification Bodies and National Initiatives have a system for managing and responding to complaints. FSC hopes that most complaints can be resolved in this way.

The FSC Accreditation Program undertakes an annual review of complaints received by each Certification Body. If you are not satisfied with the way in which a Certification Body has dealt with your complaint, you may contact the Accreditation Program directly at accreditation@fsc.org.

After talking to the person or group directly concerned, if you feel your complaint has not been addressed satisfactorily, you may wish to submit it to FSC for dispute resolution.

Resolving a Dispute

Complaints become disputes when they cannot be resolved by talking with the person or organisation concerned. Dispute resolution is expensive, detailed and time-consuming. FSC encourages all efforts to resolve complaints before they become disputes. FSC has a formal system for resolving disputes. The following is a summary of the procedures.

- Only FSC members in good standing may file a dispute. Non-members should contact a member to bring their dispute to FSC.
- FSC is an organisation with a limited budget, and cannot always cover the costs of resolving a dispute. The cost for resolving a dispute are allocated by FSC's Dispute Resolution Committee in accordance with its findings. Costs may be allocated to the party filing the dispute. For this reason, FSC encourages you to avoid formal dispute resolution processes, and try to resolve your complaint by talking with the group or person concerned.

When does a complaint become a dispute?

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Before filing a formal dispute ...

Before filing a formal dispute, write a short, simple letter to the FSC Executive Director. In it:

- Describe the dispute
- Describe how you were involved in the activities leading to the dispute, and
- Suggest a solution

FSC will try to resolve your dispute first through a more informal process. The Executive Director will review the letter, and forward it to either the chair of the FSC Board of Directors or the chair of the FSC Dispute Resolution Committee (depending on the nature of the dispute). The chair will work with the involved parties to try to resolve the case within 30 days. The chair will decide the process for resolving the dispute. The parties will be informed of, and must agree to cover any costs resulting from the resolution before the process can start.

Formal Dispute Resolution

If the issue is still not resolved to your satisfaction after this process, formal dispute resolution may begin. FSC's formal dispute resolution is complex, with detailed steps and timelines. For more information, refer to the Interim Dispute Resolution Protocol (April 1998), available on the FSC website: [www.fsc.org/Document Centre](http://www.fsc.org/Document_Centre) (Document 1.4.3).

Accreditation Appeals

FSC members in good standing can appeal an accreditation decision by the board. Non-members should contact a member if they wish to raise an appeal.

For information on FSC's accreditation appeals procedures, refer to the FSC Accreditation Manual (January 1998) Part 2.3, available on the FSC website.

Improving access to FSC's dispute resolution procedures

FSC recognises that some of our stakeholders currently find it difficult, or do not know how to raise a dispute with FSC. FSC is committed to implementing a full review of our current dispute resolution procedures. An initial analysis has been completed and further work is planned for 2006.

FSC is always interested in hearing your thoughts, concerns, enquiries and suggestions. Send us an email, a letter or call us.