



FSC AND HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS

Because Forests and People Matter

What is a High Conservation Value Forest?

The concept of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) was developed by FSC for use in forest certification (FSC Principle 9). High Conservation Values (HCVs) include environmental and social values that are considered to be of outstanding significance or critical importance. Examples may include concentrations of endangered species, protection of a stream that is the sole source of water to a local community, or a site with special religious significance.

High Conservation Value Forests are those forests that contain or are essential to maintaining High Conservation Values. Depending on the value identified, a High Conservation Value Forest may be part of a larger forest management unit, for example a sacred burial site, or the whole of a forest management unit, for example when the forest contains several endangered species distributed across the whole area.

FSC ensures that High Conservation Values are identified and maintained or enhanced in forests where they occur. FSC certification thus ensures that management decisions in certified forests are consistent with the protection of these critical social and environmental values.

The HCVF toolkit

First defined by FSC, the HCVF concept is increasingly being used by other initiatives for mapping, conservation and natural resource planning and advocacy. The concept is also being used by companies setting precautionary purchasing policies and in discussions and policies of government agencies.

FSC has identified the need for widely available and consistent guidance in defining, identifying and managing HCVF. The HCVF toolkit provides a framework that can be used by standards setting groups and others to define the HCV within their country, and gives guidelines to forest managers on how to identify, manage and monitor HCVFs. In the absence of national standards, the toolkit can also be used directly to identify and manage HCVF.

How can the toolkit be used?

The HCVF toolkit outlines a practical methodology for defining six types of HCV at a national or sub-national level. The toolkit explores what information must be collected, questions that should be asked and guidance that can be used by anyone wishing to find out if a particular forest contains any HCV. The toolkit also provides guidance on how each type of HCV should be managed and monitored.

The toolkit provides a unique, inclusive methodology that enables information from a range of sources to be integrated to define HCV. The defined values can then be used for assisting forest management decision-making; meeting FSC standards; prioritising land uses or implementing policies related to HCVFs.

Progress to date

To ensure the maintenance of HCV during the forest management process at local level, in the last years, projects have been undertaken to develop national indicators and guidelines according to the requirements of FSC Principle 9 in Ecuador and Bolivia.

In addition, FSC is also undertaking a major project in partnership with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to help small scale and low intensity forest operations identify and protect the HCV in the forests they manage. The aim is to increase access and reduce barriers to certification in order to protect biodiversity. At the same time, innovative funding mechanisms will be developed to provide improved incentives for biodiversity conservation for these small and low intensity operations.

The tools and incentives developed will be tested in three contrasting tropical countries, Brazil, Cameroon and Mexico, and will be disseminated internationally through a series of regional training courses for groups developing and promoting certification standards in other tropical countries. Further details about this project can be obtained from FSC: policy.standards@fsc.org

