

23/2020 Use landscape-wide approaches adapted to local conditions and strengthen Standard Development Groups (SDGs) to improve protection of Intact Forest Landscapes
 Edited Policy Motion

	Proposed By	Seconded By	Seconded By
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Chamber / Subchamber	Economic / North	Environmental / South	Social / South

Policy Motion (Motion text /high-level action request):

(ADMINISTRATIVE NOTE: THIS MOTION HAS BEEN EDITED 09/2022)

In order to overcome the deficiencies of Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC's) current approach to High Conservation Value 2 (HCV2) and Intact Forest Landscape (IFL) conservation and to deliver to the expectations of constituents and members, **the FSC shall review and revise the current approach to achieving effective IFL conservation; and enable and guide SDGs[1] to identify and recommend improvements to FSC's normative frameworks (especially the International Generic Indicators (IGIs)[2], including Annex H), to strengthen approaches for identification, protection, maintenance and/or enhancement of HCV2s, including IFL conservation at landscape level in National / Regional Standards.**

FSC's current approach shall be reviewed and revised to:

- support the intent of the FSC Principles & Criteria, especially Principle 9, and motions duly adopted by previous FSC General Assemblies (GAs) (i.e. Motion 65/2014, Motion 34/2017; Motion 71/2017); and address effective protection of the vast majority of HCV2s/IFLs at the level of the landscape; and
- be able to change current requirements at international level for placement and extent of IFL core areas and conservation measures (including thresholds for strict IFL conservation related to FSC certified Forest Management Units (FMUs)), and to hereby achieve best possible contribution to conservation of HCV2/IFL across the entire landscape within the specific environmental, social and socio-economic conditions in the landscape; and

- include in the identification, conservation and maintenance of HCV2s / IFLs (including core areas) within the landscape, best available information; the results of regional assessments (Motion 34/2017); expert knowledge and peer review (e.g. HCV Network[3]; Tropenbos[4]; WWF[5]; FORLAND[6]; STARLING[7]; WRI[8]; Global Forest Watch[9]); on-the-ground (below-the-canopy) analyses of ecological, social and socio-economic values and conditions including different degrees of intactness in terms of natural disturbances, forest types, human interventions, fragmentation and/or biodiversity values; and
- include risk analyses in the identification, prioritization and balancing of conservation and management measures for HCV2/IFLs protection at landscape level; by assessing risks & benefits as well as threats & opportunities related to biodiversity, forest carbon stocks, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, the FSC brand, certified operations, and other HCV2/IFL related values; and
- strengthen, clarify the role of, and rely on SDGs in adapting FSC's international approach and operationalizing requirements for HCV2/IFL conservation at landscape level within specific environmental, social and socio-economic conditions at local, national and/or regional level; and
- utilize consultation with Indigenous and Traditional Peoples who may rely upon or be affected by IFL conservation, and uphold their rights, including their right to Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) and following FPIC procedures wherever applicable; and
- be consensus based and equitably engage with all relevant stakeholders at national/regional level, especially local communities, and stakeholders who may rely upon or be affected by IFL conservation as well as governmental agencies where appropriate (e.g. as forest owner, as landscape planning authority, etc.).

While this review/revision process is ongoing and until a comprehensive global approach has been developed and agreed, **an interim rule shall apply**.

This interim rule shall enable approval of proposals duly adopted by national/regional SDGs temporarily requiring thresholds for strict IFL conservation within the FMU of less than the majority of the IFL.

FSC shall develop an advice note indicating criteria to apply this interim rule and present it to the Board of Directors for approval by 28 February 2023.

The FSC shall implement this motion with highest priority within 1 year.

The FSC Board of Directors and Secretariat shall formulate implementation guidance immediately after the FSC GA 2022, but not later than 31.3.2023, and include relevant aspects which are developed and agreed after the deadline for amending this motion.

[1] SDGs: national and/or supra-national (regional) Standard Development Groups

[2] FSC-STD-60-004 V2-0 EN - International Generic Indicators

[3] <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/>

[4] <https://www.tropenbos.org/>

[5] <https://wwf.panda.org/>

[6] <https://forland.io/>

[7] <https://www.starling-verification.com/>

[8] <https://www.wri.org/>

[9] <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/>

Background / rationale:

The proposers, seconders and supporters of this motion to the General Assembly (GA) of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) fully support the conservation of High Conservation Values 2 (HCV2s) including Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) and are prepared to contribute to the best of their ability. Through this motion they want to address their concerns that the approach to HCV2/IFL conservation currently taken by FSC is deficient.

It neither enables FSC constituents to contribute to the best of their ability nor is it making substantial advances in HCV2/IFL conservation by focusing exclusively on the rather limited portion of IFLs in FSC certified Forest Management Units (FMUs). The intent of the motion is to enable and advance HCV2/IFL conservation, and to change FSC's current course of action. FSC-certified operations want to be part of the solution to achieve the best possible contribution to conservation of HCV2/IFL across the entire landscape, without compromising FSC's statutory commitment to environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable (responsible) forest management.

Need for this motion

Much of the information learned during the past 8 years is not or only partially reflected in FSC's current approach to integrating IFL conservation into the HCV2 concept. Identification of IFLs is mainly based on globally applicable remote-sensing techniques. Dr. Potapov - one of the recognized experts who was involved in developing the IFL identification mainly used by FSC, stated clearly, that *"... our results are generally not immediately suitable for local-scale conservation planning, as our globally consistent criteria may be in conflict with locally used criteria and locally known disturbances may have been overlooked"* (Potapov et al., 2008^[1]).

IFLs are classified based on canopy disturbance (fragmentation) identifiable on satellite imagery as either “existing” or “not existing”, which seems to be de-facto an undue simplification of reality. In reality, forests exhibit varying degrees of “Intactness”, ranging from 0 to 100% in terms of human intervention as well as fragmentation and biodiversity levels. Recovery from natural and human made disturbance and “Intactness” of forests in terms of biodiversity are not considered comprehensively in FSC’s approach to HCV2/IFL conservation.

IFL mapping used by FSC was developed as an instrument for wide-scale ecosystem conservation planning – not for management planning at FMU level. It considers disturbances within FSC-certified FMUs without comprehensively considering whether and how forest management caused disturbances and whether disturbances are temporary and recover; and how they impact “Intactness” of forest landscapes.

FSC’s current approach is focused on threats related to forest canopy disturbance at FMU level but not including other threats to intactness of forests in terms of biodiversity, carbon stocks and/or other ecosystem values; and completely fails to consider economic and social benefits and opportunities for ICL maintenance arising from forest management. Threats and opportunities for HCV2/IFL conservation outside the FMU are not at all reflected.

The studies prepared as requested by Motion 34/2017 on social, environmental and economic impacts of FSC’s approach to IFL conservation within HCV2 are not reflected in FSC’s current approach. The reports show that, in the regions studied, only 0.6 to 7% of existing IFLs are addressed through the FSC approach focusing on certified FMUs; and even for this rather small portion, affected FMUs have mostly expressed that they cannot maintain their commitment to FSC, if the current course is continued.

The development of comprehensive IFL conservation within HCV2 has been ongoing since 2014 (i.e. 8 years), but the outcomes and approaches currently applied are still not delivering to the expectations of FSC constituents and members. Discussions are continuing and 5 motions have been proposed to the FSC GA 2022 to change and improve the present course of action.

Therefore, this Motion 23 is needed to change FSC’s current approach to effectively implement HCV2/IFL conservation.

FSC Statutes

The FSC Statutes stipulate in article 5 “*The purpose of the Organization [FSC] shall be the following: (1) To promote the responsible management of forests, by providing the assistance required to achieve an environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable use of natural resources and provision of ecosystem services, to avoid deterioration or misuse of such resources, or of the ecosystems or surrounding communities. (2) To promote viable management of forest resources and a forestry production that preserves the environment and respects civil rights and the rights of indigenous peoples, traditional peoples and local communities*”.

It must be concluded that the FSC's approach to HCV2/IFL conservation is not only technically deficient (as outlined above), but fails to deliver to FSC's purpose. The exclusive focus on some select environmental aspects of IFLs may be 'environmentally appropriate' but it is questionable that it is 'socially beneficial', let alone 'economically viable'. The current approach does not provide "... assistance required to achieve an environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable use of natural resources..." and it does not "... avoid deterioration or misuse of such resources ...".

Objective of this motions

The objective of the motion is to further develop FSC's current norms and systems for IFL conservation within HCV2 at FMU level into an approach which:

- addresses IFL conservation at landscape level with the FMUs being an integral part of the wider landscape;
- complements identification of IFLs and associated conservation measures with ground-based (below the canopy) environmental, social and socio-economic surveys and impact analyses;
- comprehensively uses best available information and expert knowledge (e.g. HCV Network; Tropenbos; WWF; FORLAND; STARLING; WRI; Global Forest Watch); and identification of overall protection status and conservation priorities through comprehensive review and research;
- takes into account risks & benefits as well as threats and opportunities to HCV2/IFL conservation;
- strengthens and relies upon national/regional SDGs to operationalize requirements for IFLs conservation at landscape level;
- bases on consensus and equitable engages with all relevant stakeholders at national/regional level;
- enables FSC-certified operations to contribute to the best of their abilities to HCV2/IFL conservation rather than compromising and excluding them;

Landscape approach

In FSC's current approach, maintenance of IFL is only addressed through a small sub-set of FMUs, which voluntarily commit to FSC standards and certification, but not in the context of the adjacent, much less the wider landscape.

This Landscape Approach shall consider all HCVs within the broader social, environmental and economic context in the landscape, not only the portion which is located in FSC-certified FMUs. This approach shall be integrated with land-use and conservation planning as well as conservation efforts in the wider landscape so that efforts are directed to places where they are most relevant (e.g. where IFLs and/or ICLs exist), most needed (e.g. where biggest threats exist) and most effective (e.g. where measures can maintain viable sets of HCVs at significant scale).

The FSC's Focus Forests Initiative aims to formulate FSC's approach to forests with special environmental and social value. It has great potential to contribute to understanding landscape approaches and IFLs in the wider setting of forests with special value, , including:

- development and testing of methodologies for improved stakeholder dialogue to confirm legitimacy of proposals or decisions made,
- development and testing of ideas for how features in the wider landscape can be considered in decisions for how IFLs should be managed inside FSC certified FMUs.

- Identification of the biodiversity and social values of the IFL based on field and historical data obtained below the canopy.

IFL identification and mapping

FSC's current approach needs to be complemented with ground truthing, and on-the-ground (below-the-canopy) analyses of ecological and social values. This is especially true and relevant for the identification and maintenance of Indigenous Peoples Cultural Landscapes (IPCLs or ICLs). Identification of IFLs should be expanded from one being based on current canopy disturbance only, to equitably incorporating historical and current human and nature interactions, which shaped forest landscapes, conform with ICLs, and consider existing environmental, social and socio-economic conditions, as well as (local, national and regional) development aspects related to HCV2 conservation and maintenance.

In addition, the precautionary approach needs to be considered. In some regions, reduced logging has led to conversion of natural forests to forest plantations or alternative land-uses. Safeguards must be considered to prevent these and other unintended consequences.

Engagement with interested and/or affected stakeholders at landscape level

It is essential that all relevant and/or affected constituents and stakeholders are equitably engaged in developing consensus based, landscape-wide approaches to comprehensive HCV2/IFL conservation. This must especially include traditional communities, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and stakeholders who may rely upon or be affected by IFL conservation. Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) is central to developing fair, equitable and acceptable solutions to comprehensive HCV2/IFL conservation.

Around the world, forest lands are often owned and managed by governmental agencies, and many governments are responsible for land-use and landscape planning. It is essential for FSC's contribution to landscape-wide HCV2 conservation that local / national governments and authorities (e.g. as forest owner, as landscape planning authority, etc.) are engaged, and that their expectations are considered and accommodated.

Comprehensive engagement with relevant and/or affected stakeholders of the landscape is critical of identification of IPCLs and IFLs; and related core areas and management measure. Related processes must safeguard that concerns, aspirations, expectations, needs, rights, opportunities and benefits, risks and threats are duly considered in the establishment, implementation, and monitoring of IFL conservation not only within the FMU, but at landscape level.

Flexibility in FSC's current approach

It is obvious that forests as well as environmental, social and economic values, aspects and conditions vary widely around the world.

In some globally important regions (e.g. Russia, Canada) FSC's current approach was translated by SDGs into operational requirements for FSC-certified FMUs which enable viable forest management and contribution to comprehensive HCV2/IFL conservation in the spirit of the FSC Statutes.

These experiences clearly show the important role of SDGs in adapting FSCs global strategies into operational approaches actionable in the local/national/regional context. Furthermore, these successful examples are an indication for the importance of reflecting local/national/regional environmental, social and environmental conditions; and using best available knowledge.

In contrast, experience in other regions (e.g. Amazon Basin, Congo Basin) shows that FSC's current approach, in spite of best effort, did not lead to viable operational solutions enabling effective contribution to HCV2/IFL conservation. Some of the requirements included in FSC's current approach seem to be directly compromising economic viability of forest management (and indirectly associated social benefits and environmental appropriateness) contrary to the spirit of the FSC Statutes.

In particular, within FSC's current approach the global requirements for placement and extent of IFL core areas and the thresholds for strict conservation seem to be making economic viability of forest management impossible and blocking progress. These experiences clearly show that the approach FSC is currently taking does not lead to promoting and assisting responsible forest management world-wide, but only that it works in some regions and not in other situations.

Recognizing and appreciating that environmental NGOs in an effort to overcome blockages due to FSC's deficient approach proposed that "*the proportion of IFL conservation required for the management units may be able to decrease (below 50%) if the proportion of full IFL protection increases in the landscape(s) containing the management unit.*" it seems obvious that current challenges are not the result of a lack of willingness among stakeholders and constituent to collaborate and find agreeable solutions to enable best position contribution to HCV2/IFL conservation, but an outcome of FSC's current course of action.

With great appreciation it is recognized that Motions 23 has been developed in collaboration with social, environmental and economic members of FSC, proposing an inclusive process to change FSC's approach to implementing HCV2/IFL conservation without asking for or pre-empting particular outcomes of this process.

The proposer, seconders of Motion 23, on behalf of the many social, environmental and economic members of FSC who contributed to Motion 23, ask the FSC members for their support.

[1] Potapov, P., A. Yaroshenko, S. Turubanova, M. Dubinin, L. Laestadius, C. Thies, D. Aksenov, A. Egorov, Y. Yesipova, I. Glushkov, M. Karpachevskiy, A. Kostikova, A. Manisha, E. Tsybikova, and I. Zhuravleva. 2008. Mapping the world's intact forest landscapes by remote sensing. *Ecology and Society* 13(2): 51. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss2/art51/>