



**Draft 3 v.5 FSC-US Family Forest Standard:
Indicators and Guidance Specific to Family Forests
A Companion Document to Draft 8.1 of the FSC-US FM Standard
Prepared for approval by FSC-International
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Background

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) strives to ensure equity of access to certification. In 2004, as a response to the challenges faced by small, non-industrial private landowners in accessing FSC certification, the FSC approved its Small and Low-Intensity Managed Forests “SLIMF” policy. This policy allows for SLIMF operators, known in the U.S. as Family Forests (see applicability criteria below) to be evaluated for FSC certification using modified certification procedures and a set of forest management standards that take into account scale and intensity of small forest management operations.

To date, the certification process has addressed family forests by allowing evaluation of conformance to some indicators to be based, to some degree, on scale and intensity of operation and the associated risk of negative social or environmental impact. While such allowances helped make it possible for family forests to access FSC certification, there was strong interest among multiple parties (FSC-IC, FSC-US, Certifying Bodies, family forests and group manager, and other US-based stakeholders) to formalize and provide greater consistency in the application of scaling requirements.

This document contains the FSC-US proposed adjustments to the FSC-US Forest Management Standard to take into account Family Forests. This document is to be used as a companion document to draft 8.1 of the FSC-US Forest Management Standard, which is currently undergoing approval by FSC (a copy can be found at www.fscus.org, under the ‘Standards Revision Process’ webpage).

Wherever Family Forest-specific indicators, guidance, intent, or applicability language is not provided (i.e.: is not listed in this document), the landowner, land manager, or group manager must comply with the Indicators stated in draft 8.1 of the FSC-US Forest Management Standard. Also, Indicators and guidance in the draft Forest Management Standard explicitly noted as applicable to only large, or medium forests are not applicable to family forests. Once the FSC-US Standards revision process is complete, the information in this document will be integrated into the National FSC-US Forest Management Standard. User-friendly materials on Family Forest requirements will also be developed.

Applicability of the Family Forest Standard

Definition of Family Forest: A “family forest” in the United States is equivalent to a “Small and Low Intensity Managed Forest” (SLIMF) as defined in the FSC global system.

Any non-public forest management unit (FMU) that meets the FSC definition of ‘Small and Low Intensity Managed Forest’ is eligible to be considered a Family Forest and to use this FSC-US Family Forest Standard. According to FSC, these eligibility requirements are:

- Small: An FMU with a total forest area in the unit of 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) or less;
OR
- Low Intensity:

- a) the rate of harvesting is less than 20% of the mean annual increment (MAI) within the total production forest area of the unit, AND
- b) EITHER the annual harvest from the total production forest area is less than 5000 cubic meters,
- c) OR the average annual harvest from the total production forest is less than 5000 m³ / year during the period of validity of the certificate as verified by harvest reports and surveillance audits.

Public Lands: Public lands will be eligible to utilize the Family Forest standard only in very limited situations. City and county parks and forests are eligible, as well as other public lands that are determined by the Certifying Body to be within the definition of the ‘Small’ component of SLIMF, but not the ‘Low Intensity’ component, provided by FSC and also to be of low risk with respect to negative social and environmental impact in those Indicators that are different in the Family Forest Standard. For public lands that are deemed eligible to use the Family Forest Standard, all Indicators in the National FSC-US Forest Management Standard that are identified as applicable only to public lands are also applicable to public lands using the Family Forest Standard.

Group certification and the Family Forest Standard

Group certification is a process by which multiple landowners or forest managers are certified under one FSC certificate, and a Group Manager holds the certificate. There are several advantages for the owners/managers of family forests to form or join a group. The benefits include economies of scale when it comes to preparing multiple management plans, implementing management activities, conducting sales and marketing, as well as sharing the costs of preparing for, obtaining, and managing certification. Group managers are also often better equipped at providing landscape-level guidance, perspectives and management options on ecological systems and functions.

Group certificates and level of risk

The need to evaluate conformance with an identified Criterion or Indicator will likely increase with the size of a group and will be influenced by the configuration of the group due to the cumulative capacity of a group to influence ecological or social objectives, such as affecting landscape level ecological factors or influencing local economies. The “low risk of negative social or environmental impact” designation of some Indicators may not always be appropriate for larger groups and CBs should consider both the cumulative area covered by a group certificate and spatial structure of the group (e.g. multiple members within a single watershed) when considering the appropriateness of low risk designations when auditing group certificates. A Group Manager who wishes to have some or all group members audited to the Family Forest Indicators will conduct a risk assessment of the Group to evaluate which of the FF Indicators and guidance are appropriate for that group, and will base this risk assessment on group size, scale and intensity of operation, likelihood of impact, and other considerations. The CB will evaluate that risk assessment. These are particularly important for: Criteria 4.1, 4.4, 5.4, 5.6, 6.4 and Indicators 6.1.b, and 9.2.a and 9.4.a, where likelihood of HCVF presence would also be taken into consideration.

The risk assessment must be conducted and evaluated as part of the evaluation process or, in cases where pre-evaluations are required, at the pre-evaluation stage.

Procedures for group certification

This document provides a modified set of requirements which may be used in assessing family forest conformance to the FSC Forest Management standard. In addition to standards, it should be made clear that there are also specific procedures which must be followed by group managers and members. These include both internal and CB monitoring and audit

procedures, sampling sizes for auditing, group manager requirements, etc.

Terminology

“Low risk of negative social or environmental impact” – Some Indicators in the standard have been determined to be a low risk to negative environmental or social impact in the context of family forests. In the absence of evidence presented to, or otherwise brought to the attention of the Certifying Body (CB), the CB can assume that the landowner/manager is in compliance. In cases where there is cause to believe there is a likelihood of non-compliance with an indicator (e.g., observed violations, substantiated complaints) or in cases where local conditions warrant a higher rigor of audit, CBs are expected to assess compliance with these requirements.

“*Inapplicable*” – Where Criteria or Indicators do not apply to family forests (e.g., they are specific to public lands) then they are designated as “inapplicable.” For public lands utilizing the family forest standard, these Criteria and Indicators are still applicable.

Principle 1: Compliance with Laws and FSC Principles

Indicator 1.1.a guidance: The first paragraph is the same for Family Forests as in the National Standard. The second paragraph is replaced with, “The management plan provides a brief qualitative description of applicable laws. There are no violations observed during the assessment and audit process.”

Indicator 1.1.b supplementary guidance: on-the-ground observations show no evidence that employees and contractors are not observing applicable laws and regulations.

Criterion 1.2 (and all associated Indicators): Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: The level of tax regulation in the US allows for the CB to assume that this indicator is being met, and if the landowner is ‘on the books’ as a legal owner then they are in compliance with fees and taxes. Further, the burden of demonstrating compliance to the CB is perceived to outweigh the risk of negative impact].*

Criterion 1.3 (and all associated Indicators): Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: US law covers these requirements and the CB can assume that this indicator is being met. Further, given the scale of harvesting, the intermittent harvesting frequency and the minimal or no employees, the burden of demonstrating compliance to the CB is perceived to outweigh the risk of negative impact.]*

Indicator 1.6.c: “The forest owner, manager or group manager notifies the Certifying Body of significant changes in ownership, the certified land base and/or significant changes in management planning prior to the next scheduled annual audit, or within one year of such change, whichever comes first.”

Intent statement: “The purpose of the Indicator is to ensure that changes to the land area that are included in the certificate are communicated to the CB. This includes changes in group membership as well as additions or excisions within individual ownerships.”

Guidance: “The determination of what is a significant change is to be verified by the CB.”

Principle 2: Tenure and Use Rights and Responsibilities

Indicator 2.1.b Applicability: “Documentation must be provided only in cases where there is concern about infringing on legally established use and access rights.”

Criterion 2.3 (and all associated Indicators): Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: The US has in place legal structures for resolving legal disputes; requirements also overlap with Principle 1].*

Principle 3: Indigenous People’s Rights

Indicator 3.2.a Guidance: “For family forests that meet the eligibility requirements of having a small forest, direct consultation between small private landowners and tribal representatives is encouraged but may not be feasible. Instead, small landowners may rely on consultation between appropriate state and federal agencies and tribes and then abide by the outcome of those government to government negotiations or settlements. For family forests that are larger in size but meet the eligibility requirements due to the low intensity of operations, direct consultation must be attempted.”

Indicator 3.3.a: “The forest owner or manager maintains a list of sites of current or traditional cultural, archeological, ecological, economic or religious significance that have been identified by state conservation agencies and tribal governments on the FMU or that could be impacted by management activities.”

Applicability: “Where state conservation agencies and tribal governments are not able to provide a list of sites, the landowner may not be able to maintain this list.”

Guidance: “Direct consultation with tribal representatives is not required in order to identify or develop the list of sites of current or traditional cultural, archeological, ecological, economic or religious significance. However, if these sites do exist on the FMU then the forest owner or manager must consult with the appropriate state, federal or tribal representatives as per the requirements in Indicator 3.3.b ”

Principle 4: Community Relations and Worker’s Rights

Indicator 4.1.a: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: This is partially covered under Principle 1 and family forests have lower capacity given size and scale to impact the requirements in this indicator.]*

Indicator 4.1.b: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: family forests have a lower capacity given size and scale to impact the requirements in this indicator]*

Indicator 4.1.c: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: the requirements in this indicator are covered in Principle 1]*

Indicator 4.1.d: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: family forests have a lower capacity given size and scale to impact the requirements in this indicator].*

Indicator 4.1.e: “The forest owner or manager, as feasible, contributes to the local community.”

Guidance: “Examples for contributing to the local community include but are not limited to: providing employment opportunities, purchasing local goods and services, providing forest product sales opportunities to local harvesters and value-added manufacturers and supporting learning opportunities about forest management.”

Indicator 4.1.f: Inapplicable, as relevant requirements have been integrated into Family Forest Indicator 4.1.e

Indicator 4.1.g: Inapplicable, as relevant requirements have been integrated into Family Forest Indicator 4.1.e

Indicator 4.2.a: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: the requirements of this indicator are adequately covered in Principle 1].*

Indicator 4.2.c: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: the requirements in this Indicator are adequately covered by other Indicators in Criterion 4.2 and by Indicators pertaining to Criterion 7.3.]*

Criterion 4.3 (and all associated Indicators): Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: the requirements in this indicator are adequately covered by US law, and also overlap with Principle 1]*

Criterion 4.4 Guidance (applicable to all Indicators in Criterion 4.4): “Evaluations of social impact are based on the scale and intensity of forest operation. For family forests with limited capacity to influence local communities, evaluations may be brief and non-technical.”

Criterion 4.4. Intent: Supplement current Intent with “People directly affected by management operations should also include the landowner and landowner families.”

Indicator 4.4.a: The forest owner or manager understands the likely social impacts of management activities, and incorporates this understanding into management planning and operations.

Guidance to supplement FM Guidance: Family forest owners or managers may utilize social impact evaluations conducted by state conservation agencies (such as Statewide Forest Assessments required under the US Federal Farm Bill) or other organizations as a resource. These, and other resources, should be valid and credible, as evaluated by the CV. Social impact considerations are incorporated appropriate to the scale and intensity of their operations, unique characteristics of the property, and the individual family’s needs or objectives. Related evaluations may be brief and informal.”

Indicator 4.4.b: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact for individual family forests.

Indicator 4.4.d: Inapplicable

Indicator 4.5.b guidance: “Family Forest landowners/managers can be considered compliant through informal communications with neighbors and in the absence of disputes.”

Indicator 4.5.c: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: the key parts of this Indicator are covered in Indicator 4.5.b and also by US law]*

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Principle 5: Benefits from the Forest

Indicator 5.2.a: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: key parts of this indicator are covered in Principle 4 and Criterion 5.4; further, the ability for a family forest to affect the requirements in this indicator is low.]*

Indicator 5.2.c: Inapplicable.

Criterion 5.4 Guidance (including for all associated Indicators): “The capacity of forest management to affect the local economy is dependent on the scope and scale of operation. Large, highly productive ownerships as well as groups with landowners operating within proximity of one another may have a greater capacity to affect the local economy and should thus explore more thoroughly the range of diversification opportunities than should a smaller, less intensive operation.”

Indicator 5.4.a Guidance: In addition to the guidance in the National FSC-US Forest Management Standard, add, “This indicator can be assessed during the interview process with the CB.”

Indicator 5.5.a guidance: Compliance with this Indicator is scale-dependent. Large groups of family forests might have a greater impact in impacting and affecting these issues.

Indicator 5.6.a “On family forests, a sustained yield harvest level analysis shall be completed. Data used in the analysis may include but is not limited to:

- regional growth data;
- age-class and species distributions;
- stocking rates required to meet management objectives;
- ecological and legal constraints;
- empirical growth and regeneration data; and,
- validated forest productivity models.”

Applicability: this analysis is completed at the FMU level.

Guidance: Compliance with this Indicator is scale-dependent. For instance, a 1,600-acre FMU would typically need to provide more information in terms of stocking and growth rates than a 40-acre

FMU. Likewise, a demonstrably well-stocked forest utilizing single-tree selection silviculture might require a lower burden of proof of sustainability than an FMU utilizing even-aged silviculture in a timber type where competing vegetation predictably poses difficulties for establishment of regeneration.

Large family forest FMUs and groups may calculate discrete sustained yield harvest levels using conventional area and/or volume control methods if the acreage and forest cover types lend themselves to those techniques. In situations where the calculation of a sustained yield harvest level is impractical due to size or scale of operations, harvest levels may be based on maintaining or attaining desired forest conditions, such as stocking, species composition, and age and /or development classes of stands, and wildlife habitat.

5.6.b. “On family forests, harvest levels and rates do not exceed growth rates over successive harvests, contribute directly to achieving desired future conditions as defined in the forest management plans, and do not diminish the long term ecological integrity and productivity of the site.”

Applicability: This applies to the FSC-level.

Guidance: “In cases where owners or managers harvest timber at intervals longer than ten years, the allowable harvest is determined by the target stocking levels and the volume of re-growth since the previous harvest. In large groups that can have significant cumulative effects, harvest levels and spatial distribution of harvests are designed to take into consideration potential cumulative effects on social and environmental values (e.g., water quality, wildlife habitat, road use, etc.). Overstocked stands and stands that have been depleted or rendered to be below productive potential due to natural events, past management, or lack of management, are returned to desired stocking levels and composition at the earliest practicable time as justified in management objectives.”

Guidance: “In cases where owners or managers harvest timber at intervals longer than ten years, the allowable harvest is determined by the target stocking levels and the volume of re-growth since the previous harvest. In large groups that can have significant cumulative effects, harvest levels and spatial distribution of harvests are designed to take into consideration potential cumulative effects on social and environmental values (e.g., water quality, wildlife habitat, road use, etc.).”

If the intent is to change the species balance in a stand or planning unit, or to achieve a desired age class structure, or to manage a catastrophic or natural event such as fire or pest outbreak, the family forest utilizes the same approach as defined in C5.6 of the National FSC-US FM Standard.

Principle 6: Environmental Impact

Criterion 6.1 Guidance (applicable to all Indicators): “The expectations for meeting this Criterion are scale-dependent and the rigor of the assessment is commensurate to the level of disturbance. Less-extensive and less-technical assessments (e.g., a summary of findings from a consultation with a forestry or natural resource professional and/or available databases) may be adequate for individual and small group family forests to demonstrate compliance.”

Indicator 6.1.a Guidance: Supplementing the Intent and Guidance in the National Standard, for family forests: “At minimum, an informal evaluation is conducted that includes: (1) consultation of available natural heritage databases and (2) an evaluation of unique, vulnerable, rare, and threatened communities; (3) all state and federally listed sensitive, rare, threatened, and endangered species and their habitats; (4) water resources and riparian habitats; and (5) soil resources. (see also 7.1.a and b). The forest owner or manager of private land is encouraged to report the location of new element occurrences of sensitive, rare, threatened, and endangered species to natural heritage database manager or appropriate public agency; public forest managers are required to report such occurrences.”

Indicator 6.1.b Guidance: “For family forests, assessment and documentation of long-term impacts are not always necessary or appropriate. Harvest prescriptions, techniques, site preparation, timing, and equipment used should be included in considerations, as well as the size and configuration of the group certificate as per the group’s risk assessment, of the necessity to assess for long-term impacts.”

Indicator 6.1.d: Inapplicable

Indicator 6.2.a: Supplementing the Guidance: “For family forests, a secondary review of the survey does not need to be included in the process.”

Indicator 6.2.c: Inapplicable

Indicator 6.3.a.1 Applicability: “The ability to address the intent of this Indicator is based on size of ownership. The landowner or manager shall assess whether or not under-representative successional stages can be maintained, enhanced and/or restored.”

Indicator 6.3.b. Supplementary Applicability: “The ability to address the intent of this Indicator is based on size of ownership. The landowner or manager shall assess whether or not these habitat conditions can be maintained, enhanced and/or restored.”

Indicator 6.3.h Supplementary Guidance: “Monitoring of control measures can be brief yet sufficient to inform management.”

Indicator 6.4a: Guidance: “The forest owner or manager may comply with this Indicator through more informal consultation with the information sources listed in the Indicator. However, on all FMUs, outstanding examples of common community types (e.g., common types with Natural Heritage viability rankings of A and B) should be identified in the assessment to be protected or managed to maintain their conservation value.”

Indicator 6.4.b: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. However, on all FMUs where outstanding examples of common community types exist (see Guidance for 6.4.a.), they should be protected or managed to maintain their conservation value.

Indicator 6.4.e Inapplicable.

Indicator 6.6.b Applicability: “Family forest owners/managers may use brief and less technical written procedures for applying common over-the-counter products. Any observed misuse of these chemicals may be considered as violation of requirements in this Indicator.”

Indicator 6.6.d: Applicability: Use of ‘Restricted Use Pesticides’ as listed by the US Environmental Protection Agency, must follow all the precautions in the Indicator. Consistent with Indicator 6.6.b, family forest owners/managers may follow brief and less technical procedures with respect to written prescriptions for application and monitoring for common over-the-counter products. Any observed misuse of these chemicals may be considered a violation of the requirements of this Indicator.

Guidance: Restricted Use Pesticides may only be purchased and applied by licensed applicators with current safety and training certificates. In respect to US EPA rated General Use pesticides, training may be informal but application procedures must otherwise be consistent with pesticide label requirements. Regardless of US EPA hazard ratings, pesticide use must be consistent with Indicator 6.6.a.

Indicator 6.6.e Guidance: “Monitoring and recordkeeping may be brief and less technical for family forests, such as keeping a log or list of chemical use and application dates, rates, methods of application, the application area and effectiveness.”

Principle 7: Management Plan

Criterion 7.1 Guidance: “The management plan needs only to be as complex as the forest and activities to which it applies. It must include all components (a-i) listed in the Criterion, but some components may be addressed briefly and without reference to technical documents. It should be the judgment of the certifying body if the management plan is sufficient to capture decisions and activities in a manner consistent with FSC certification. A group of independent documents (multi-part plans) that addresses components listed In the Criterion (a-i) can serve as the management plan.”

Indicator 7.1.a. “A written management plan exists for the property or properties for which certification is being sought. The management plan includes the following components:

- i. Management objectives (ecological, silvicultural, social, and economic) and duration of the plan.

Guidance: Objectives relate to the goals expressed by the landowner within the constraints of site capability and the best available data on ecological, silvicultural, social and economic conditions

- ii. Quantitative and qualitative description of the forest resources to be managed, including at minimum stand-level descriptions of the land cover, including species and size/age class and referencing inventory information.

Guidance: In addition to stand-level descriptions of the land cover, information in site-level plans may include: landscape within which the forest is located; landscape-level considerations; past land uses of the forest; legal history and current status; socio-economic conditions; cultural, tribal and customary use issues and other relevant details that explain or justify management prescriptions.

iii. Description of silvicultural and/or other management system, prescriptions, rationale, and typical harvest systems (if applicable) that will be used.

iv. Description of harvest limits (consistent with Criterion 5.6) and species selection. Also, description of the documentation considered from the options listed in Criterion 5.6 if the FMU does not have a calculated annual harvest rate.

v. Description of environmental assessment and safeguards based on the assessment, including approaches to: (1) pest and weed management, (2) fire management, and (3) protection of riparian management zones; (4) protection of representative samples of existing ecosystems (see Criterion 6.4) and management of High Conservation Value Forests (see Principle 9).

Guidance: Regional environmental assessments and safeguards or strategies to address pest and weed management, fire management, protection of rare species and plant community types, protection of riparian management zones, and protecting representative samples of ecosystems and High Conservation Value Forests may be developed by state conservation agencies. Site specific plans for family forests should be consistent with such guidance and may reference those works for clarity.

vi. Description of location and protection of rare species and plant community types.

vii. Description of procedures to monitor the forest, including forest growth and dynamics, and other components as outlined in Principle 8.

viii. Maps represent property boundaries, use rights, land cover types, significant hydrologic features, roads, adjoining land use, and protected areas in a manner that clearly relates to the forest description and management prescriptions.

Guidance: Property level maps for family forests may be simple and efficient to produce, and may cover only the necessary information needed for management to the FSC-US Family Forest Standard. At the group level, if GIS is used coverage should include protected areas, planned management activities, land ownership, property boundaries, roads, timber production areas, forest types by age class, topography, soils, cultural and customary use areas, locations of natural communities, habitats of species referred to in Criterion 6.2, riparian zones and analysis capabilities to help identify High Conservation Value Forests. Group managers may rely on state conservation agencies for complex GIS services.”

FM Indicators 7.1.b – 7.1.r: Inapplicable. All requirements have been incorporated into Family Forest Indicator 7.1.a.

Indicator 7.1.b. “Actions undertaken on the FMU are consistent with the management plan and help to achieve the stated goals and objectives of the plan.”

Criterion 7.2 Guidance: “The rigor of the review and update is contingent on the level of activity on the property.”

Principle 8: Monitoring and Assessment

Principle 8 Guidance: “On family forests, for certain elements of the monitoring plan, a brief, non-technical and qualitative monitoring approach might be adequate to ensure compliance. Attributes such as harvest volume, and stand stocking, will require quantitative monitoring. Any approach pursued must assure that regular monitoring of the condition of the forest is occurring.”

Criterion 8.1 Guidance: “Monitoring may be scaled to the size and intensity of the management operations that affect the resources identified in C8.2.”

Criterion 8.2 Applicability: “The requirements of the Indicators associated with this Criterion are FMU-specific and might not all be applicable for all family forests. The certifying body and landowner/manager shall determine which components are applicable based on the management plan and operations. For example, Indicators 8.2.d.3, 8.2.d.4, and 8.2.d.5 are generally not applicable to family forests. An inventory system (Indicator 8.2.a.1) must be maintained.”

Indicator 8.5.a Applicability: Only those elements determined to be applicable to Criterion 8.2 need to be included in the monitoring results and/or summary.

Principle 9: Maintenance of High Conservation Value Forest

Criterion 9.1 Guidance: “the complexity of the assessment is to be based on the scale and intensity of the operation as well as the likelihood of HCV presence and the potential of risk to HCVs. For example, operations located in areas known for a higher likelihood of occurrence of HCVs are expected to undergo a more thorough assessment.”

Indicator 9.1.b. Supplementary Guidance: “Consulting databases, experts, and/or best available research and literature may be sufficient in developing the assessment.”

Indicator 9.2.a. Guidance: “For family forests, consultation generally does not need to include stakeholders and experts, but a summary of the results of Criterion 9.1 must be included in the management plan summary that is available to the public. The need for and level of consultation is based on the scale and intensity of operation, and size and impact of the group, as well as the likelihood of HCV presence and the potential of risk to HCVs; if the family forest is part of a group certificate, this information should be gathered during the risk assessment. Large ownerships that harvest at a low intensity will more likely require that stakeholder and expert consultation be done.”

Indicator 9.2.b: Inapplicable.

Indicator 9.4.a Low risk of negative social or environmental impact for non-public lands. *[Justification: The requirements of this indicator are adequately covered by Indicator 9.4.b.]*
Applicability: public lands need to follow the requirements of the National FSC-US FM Standard.

Principle 10: Plantation Management

Indicator 10.5.c: Low risk of negative social or environmental impact. *[Justification: family forests are at a lower risk for having these landscape-level impact and effects.]*