

# FSC-US Forest Management Standards Revision: Summary of Process and Working Group Terms of Reference

## Introduction

Forest Stewardship Council certification has grown dramatically in the U.S. It is now firmly established as a means to recognize good forest management and reaches into all sectors of the forest products industry. This growth has been supported by FSC-US regional standards that for the last five years have offered a stable platform on which forest owners and managers could pursue certification. Stakeholders in the U.S. have championed FSC certification in part because they see that the U.S. regional standards are compatible with the FSC's Principles and Criteria, are suited to local circumstances, and were developed with a high level of local participation.

FSC policy requires that national and sub-national standards be reviewed and, if necessary revised, every five years. FSC-US has an opportunity to build on the foundation set by the current standards as well as learn from the results of a thorough review of the standards that was completed on how to better address scientific and social validity, implementability, and auditability of the standards.

This FSC-US Forest Management standards revision process meets the requirements set by FSC International Center (FSC-IC), Accreditation Services International (ASI), the goals of FSC-US, and recognizes the desires of diverse stakeholders.

It should be noted that FSC does not consider the process to revise standards as equivalent to drafting new standards.

## Goal of the Standards Revision Process

The Goal of the Standards Revision Process is *to ensure that FSC-US standards effectively implement on the ground the Principles and Criteria of the FSC*. Our success will be based on the ability to meet the following core elements:

- **Useful** - Standards that allows a landowner, forest manager or Certification Body to evaluate compliance with a particular Indicator.
- **Practical** - Clear, auditable standards that can be used to objectively assess the compliance of forest management operations. Indicators should not: require special skills to measure; need complicated analysis; or, be expensive to measure.
- **Merit** – The standard must have scientific merit and socially validity.
- **Consistent** - Provisions of logical, coherent rationalization for regional variation and the ability for Certification Bodies to uniformly apply the standard.
- **Understandable** – The intent and performance of the standards should be easily communicable to diverse audiences.
- **Comprehensive** – The standards must address the significant issues and demands required to ensure exemplary forest ecosystem management.
- **Relevant** – The standards and indicators must be linked to stakeholder values.

## The Independent Review of the Standards

A major step in the revision process was met with the completion of the March 2007 review of the nine regional standards. The *Standards Review Process* included Indicator-level analyses of the regional standards as well as an assessment of cross-regional issues (meta-issues). Indicators are the actual prescriptive or performance requirements set forth in a standard. Indicator-level analyses focused on four themes that capture Indicator efficacy: 1) social and scientific validity; 2) implementability; 3) auditability; and 4)

completeness. The review exclusively assessed the intent of the Indicators measured against the intent of the Criterion and did not explore effects of changes in regards to the intent of the standards.

Cross-regional assessment addressed internal policies, including the current regional configurations, the preservation of a complete standard for each region (as opposed to the development of a national standard), and the use of guidance materials such as Intent statements to interpret goals of the standards.

## **Key Issues**

As a result of the review, a number of issues were identified that have been addressed in the Standards Revision Process. Issues include:

1. Unification of the regional standards into a national standard with regional variation for key Indicators.
2. The development of Family Forest relevant indicators to address scale issues.
3. The development of a High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF) Framework that supports the implementation of Principle 9.
4. Inclusion of extensive guidance and intent notes to better communicate Criteria and Indicators intent.
5. Revision of indicators to adapt the standards for the requirement that operations must comply at the Indicator level instead of the Criterion level.
6. Inclusion of new issues identified by stakeholders that the FSC-US Board agrees are necessary to include in the revision.

## **Standards Revision Process**

The revision process is separated into three areas:

- ***The Decision-making branch – The Standards Committee.***  
This group represents the FSC-US membership through the elected FSC-US Board and non-Board experts.
- ***The Crafting branch – The Standards Working Group.***  
This group is responsible for crafting the language of the standards, and is represented by individuals with technical expertise such as experienced auditors, certificate holders, or recognized subject matter experts. The FSC-US Board appoints the Standards Working Group.
- ***The Consultation branch – Stakeholder reviewers and input-providers.***  
With the aim of obtaining input from any and all possible stakeholders, there is a robust process of stakeholder input that recognizes the crucial role stakeholders play in the development of FSC standards. The revision methodology has both a consultation process and an appeal process.

## **The U.S. Standards Working Group – Terms of Reference**

1. Working Group description:
  - The Working Group is comprised of up to 20 individuals.
  - Sub-groups were formed around key issues and interests. Each sub-group draws its members from the Working Group, as identified by the Working Group.
  - Individuals or small groups were assigned editing and crafting duties based on expertise and experience.

- Expert advisors can be appointed when needed and approved by the Standards Committee.
- Family forest indicators were developed by a Family Forest Working Group. The family forest Working Group membership includes individuals outside of the U.S. Standard Working Group, The U.S. Standard Working Group will review the work of the family forest Working Group.

## 2. Power and Duties of the Working Group

- Work as guided by the FSC-US Standards Committee.
- Review and revise the existing regional standards; review and comment on the full standard to assure consistency and avoid redundancies.
- Build from the work of the Standards Review and other work developed to date.
- Preserve the intent of the standards; avoid rewriting Indicators and only edit Indicators to better express intent unless the Standard Review expressly identified issues with particular Indicators that demand redrafting.
- Preserve regional variation for appropriate Indicators and where past FSC regional working groups meant the intent to differ.
- Incorporate new issues where appropriate.

## 3. Criteria and qualifications for the Working Group

- Chamber-balanced
- Regional representation
- Knowledge of issues and indicators; prior experience in the use of the standards
- Transparency
- Commitment to advancing the objectives of FSC and the intent of the standards
- Willingness to participate virtually and attend a minimum of one 2-3 day meeting
- Active engagement during virtual and in-person meetings.

## 4. Working Group Rules

- Formal membership, invited and approved by FSC-US Board Standards Committee.
- Working Group members represent themselves and not the organization with which they are affiliated.
- Staffed by FSC whose responsibilities include: coordination, facilitation, formatting drafts, developing agendas, communication within Working Group, review committees and outside to stakeholders.
- Removal: Working Group members can be removed by the U.S. Standards Committee if they fail to participate adequately or follow the terms of reference.
- Non-Working Group members are able to attend meetings of the Working Group if they request attendance prior to the meeting and agree to act only as an observer.

## 5. Decision-making structure of the Working Group

- Decisions made by the Working Group are taken as recommendations by the FSC-US Board.
- Decision making at all levels will strive for full consensus, with modified consensus if full consensus cannot be reached.

### **Information-sharing, Communication and Transparency**

All information that results from meetings will be open to the public and shared with the review committees. Information will be stored on the FSC-US website: [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org)

### **Stakeholder Consultation**

Stakeholder input and participation is a crucial component of the standard revision process; stakeholder participation in the development of the current standards was critical to their success. One of the most important charges to the Standard Committee and its members is to get full participation from potential and actual FSC stakeholders. In addition to the Working Group, stakeholder consultation is sought through:

- Review Committees open to any interested party that will work with sub-groups of the Working Group to provide ongoing and extensive comments on the revision process;
- A robust consultation process that allows adequate review from stakeholders;
- A process to appeal to the FSC-US board any major concerns on the process or output of the process.

Comments must be lodged in writing and received within the public comment and appeals period. All comments received will be reviewed by the FSC-US Standards Committee, and the actions taken will be recorded. The comments and actions taken will be provided to FSC-US Board to consider when the revised standards undergo full FSC-US Board review. The comments will also be included when the revised standards are submitted to ASI and FSC-IC for final endorsement.

**Timeline:** The timeline for the revision process is to submit the standards to ASI and FSC-IC around September 2009.