

Certification

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Background

The environmental and social impacts of forest management, especially logging operations, in primary forests has been a major concern for many years and continues to be so today. During the 1980's, **WWF** and other environmental organisations highlighted that many of the claims that were being made about the sustainable management of these forests and their products were misleading.

In response to these concerns and together with a number of responsible retailers, The Forest Stewardship Council (**FSC**) was set up as an international non-governmental organisation with the aim of developing an independent system for the certification of timber and timber products from both tropical and temperate forests. This provides a market mechanism to reward responsible forest management and differentiates timber and wood derived products by means of a label, the FSC tick-tree logo. This effectively allows consumers of wood products to make a choice and influence the management of forests.



The FSC logo

WWF also established the "WWF 1995 Plus Group" now renamed the "**WWF-UK Forest and Trade Network**", which consists of UK organizations which trade in or use large quantities of paper or wood products. These include well-known high street retailers, manufacturers, construction companies and publishers. The aim of the WWF-UK FTN is to provide a framework for members to adopt a stepwise monitored approach that enables them to identify and move away from materials coming from unknown or unacceptable sources, towards products from credibly certified forests.



The FSC Principles

The FSC has drawn up ten principles that cover the management of the woodland from which timber is produced and a "chain of custody" which regulates the subsequent processing of the timber through to the final product. Under each principle, there are a number of criteria that set out the requirements in more detail.

The principles can be summarised as follows:

- Forest management shall respect all laws of the originating country and all international agreements and treaties
- Long term tenure and rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established
- The rights of indigenous peoples to use and manage their land shall be respected
- Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long term social and economic well being of forest workers and communities
- Forest management operations shall encourage efficient use of forests to ensure economic viability and a range of environmental and social benefits
- Forest management shall conserve biological diversity, ecosystems and landscapes

- A management plan shall be written and kept up to date
- Monitoring shall be conducted to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, chain of custody and ecological and social impacts
- Primary forests, well developed secondary forests and sites of major environmental, social or cultural significance shall be conserved and not replaced by tree plantations
- Plantations should complement the management and promote conservation of natural forests.



FSC UK Forestry Standards and the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)

The FSC intends that each country should seek to convert their internationally applicable principles and criteria into national forestry standards. In 1998 the United Kingdom was among the first to successfully have a UK-wide forestry standard endorsed by the FSC. It was recognized that this initial Standard was not as inclusive of all UK stakeholders as it could have been and so it was developed further through a process that was facilitated by the Forestry Commission that ensured a broader consensus of UK stakeholders. This culminated in the publication of the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (**UKWAS**), which is derived from both the Government's UK Forestry Standard and the FSC Standard. Since the year 2000, the UKWAS has been endorsed by the FSC and accepted by the UK forest industry and stakeholders as the benchmark document against which sustainable forestry is assessed. The UKWAS is undergoing review in 2005 to incorporate policy changes, new research findings and experience of applying the Standard.

The Woodland Trust was a founding member of UKWAS and has been involved with the standard setting process right from the start and it continues to be an active environmental sector representative.



Certification under the FSC

At the end of 2004, FSC had 604 members from 78 countries. The total area of certified forest was in excess of 50 million hectares, being found in 64 countries worldwide. In the UK over 1.6 million hectares were certified including approximately 15,000 hectares owned by the Woodland Trust.

The FSC accredits bodies in each country to certify woods and forests against the endorsed standard and for those that pass the test, they award the FSC trademark which can then be used on the timber they produce. These bodies also certify chain of custody operations; this tracks timber through any production process allowing the FSC logo to appear on final products. In the UK for example, the Soil Association is an FSC accredited certification body and it is engaged by the Woodland Trust to conduct annual forest management audits of our estate.



Certification and other woodland owners

The Government, through Forest Enterprise, the agency that manages the extensive woodland estates of the Forestry Commission (now devolved), initially rejected the idea

that it should seek certification of its woodland. However, as a result of the increasing demands from their customers for the FSC label and the development of the UKWAS, this position changed. The Forest Enterprise estate has now been certified for over five years and other major landowners such as the National Trust, the RSPB and English Nature as well as many forest management companies have also successfully achieved FSC certification. Approximately 40% of UK forest cover including over 70% of commercial forests have now been certified to enable them to deliver the FSC label.



The Woodland Trust's view

The Woodland Trust was the first major landowner to achieve FSC certification in the UK with England and Wales certified in 1998 and Scotland and Northern Ireland being added to its certificate in 1999. The Trust underwent a successful re-assessment in 2003 and it is committed to gaining and maintaining a new certificate to cover its entire UK woodland estate for a further five years.

Although our primary aim is management of native broadleaved woods for public access and conservation, we do generate a significant volume of timber each year, largely as a result of safety work, thinning, coppicing and removal of conifers. It has always been our policy to practice sustainable forestry and we seek to maintain good relations with local communities and involve them in the management of our woods. Our FSC certification provides independent assurance that we are operating to the high standards we have set ourselves.

Some concern has been expressed that certification may be too expensive for small-scale timber producers. To combat this problem, methods to simplify group and individual certification for small woods have been developed. The Trust is encouraged by this development, and looks forward to this initiative being developed further in the form of a small wood standard, as we are keen to see that small woodland owners are not disadvantaged by certification.

In 2005, as well as the FSC, there were seven other forest certification systems available internationally, each with its own logo and the list is growing. The Woodland Trust, together with other ENGO's, consider the FSC still to be the only credible forest certification system available that truly balances the economic, social and environmental aspects of woods and forests internationally.

