FSC Certification Keeps Trees Standing and Forests Intact

Responsible Forestry Reduces Emissions

After forests are subjected to years of unsustainable, mismanaged or illegal logging, they are often then cleared to raise crops, ranch cattle or cultivate palm oil. In other words, forest degradation often paves the way for deforestation. But the responsible management of forests and harvesting of timber and non-timber forest products can prevent forest loss by providing communities with an economic incentive to keep their forests standing. The world's most rigorous standard for responsible forestry is Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, a system built on internationally respected principles and criteria. FSC-certified tropical forests conserve and maintain greater carbon stocks than conventional logging operations, resulting in fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

Although strict forest protection is one tool for reducing emissions from tropical forests, it is not enough. The economic pressures on forests are staggering. Despite increasing and necessary efforts to move toward more sustainable patterns of consumption and renewable supply streams, the demand for forest products continues to keep pace with the steady growth in average national incomes (FAO, 2005). How we address this demand for forest products is critical, as countries look for ways to reduce their emissions while continuing to develop economically. Given that approximately 864 million acres (350 million hectares) of tropical forest are considered production forests, we must act immediately to ensure that current harvests are legal and sustainable if we are to reduce emissions from degradation and close the door on deforestation.

Sustainably Managed Productive Forests Are Part of the Solution

Forests cover 30 percent of Earth's landmass, but less than one tenth are formally protected (FAO, 2005). Production forests, defined as those from which forest products are harvested, make up a large part of the balance. Increasingly, production forests — especially those in the tropics — are managed by communities, indigenous groups and private landowners (Rights and Resources Institute, 2009). Tools such as third-party FSC certification are crucial for ensuring that forests are managed responsibly, thereby avoiding overexploitation and the associated negative impacts on climate and long-term livelihoods. Government- and industry-managed forests have the potential to be well regulated, but the natural resources and environmental services these forests provide must be highly valued and managed sustainably in order to compete with alternate land uses, such as agriculture or industrial development.

Community-managed, FSC-certified logging concessions in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve have deforestation rates 20 times lower than the reserve's core protected areas.

Some forest harvesting is not sustainable or even well-regulated. Illegal forest activities account for more than 10 percent of global trade and a significant portion of total harvest — especially in carbon-rich tropical forests (Environmental Investigation Agency, 2005). Third-party verification that establishes the legality of forest products is a powerful way to reduce emissions from illegal deforestation, particularly when combined with enhanced law enforcement. Legislation that discourages the trade of illegal forest products — such as the US' 2008 Lacey Act amendment and the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, now being implemented in various countries (including deforestation hot spots Ghana, Cameroon and Indonesia) — brings greater transparency to forest management activities, which is necessary for the effective functioning of the UN's Programme for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD).

OUR MISSION

The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior.

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Sustainable Forest Management Can Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Each year, roughly 32 million acres (13 million hectares) are lost to deforestation.

Verification that forest management complies with all pertinent laws is a first step toward achieving the benefits of FSC certification standards. FSC certification assures consumers that the wood products they purchase come from forests where degradation is low, biodiversity is conserved, rights are respected and local communities are supported. Many of the forestry practices implemented on FSC-certified forestland lead to reduced carbon emissions compared with non-certified operations where "business as usual" is the norm (TNC et al., 2009). Here are a few of the most significant areas of contrast:

1. **Reduction in the volume of harvest –** Compared with conventionally logged forests, FSC-certified tropical forests generally harvest lower mean volumes per unit area of logged forest. A common scenario in non-certified forests is the practice of re-entry logging on 10- to 15-year cycles, resulting in a decrease in living biomass, lack of seed source for regeneration of timber species and a decline in carbon storage through conventional commercial logging (Applegate, 2001). In contrast, FSC-certified forests are required to practice sustainable harvesting over the long term, and assess sustainable harvest levels by conducting systematic inventories and monitoring growth (FSC P&C, 2000 - P5.6).

2. **Increased forest area under conservation and restoration –** FSC-certified forests retain more biomass through a greater provision of conservation zones, protected areas along rivers and streams, areas of protected High Conservation Value Forests, and areas for forest restoration (FSC P&C, 2000 - P6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 9, 10.5).

3. **Reduction of impacts from harvesting –** FSC-certified forests follow Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) as the operational harvesting method rather than conventional logging practices. RIL is an established set of timber harvesting practices designed to reduce the collateral damage resulting from timber extraction. Such practices have been estimated to represent possible emissions reductions of at least 10 percent (Putz et. al., 2008).

4. **Tenure resolution –** FSC-certified forests strive to address social conflicts that often may lead to degradation, such as tenure disputes and land claims. Forest managers of FSC-certified land must put in place mechanisms to resolve disputes among those who have a stake in maintaining forests (FSC P&C, 2000 - P2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3).

5. **Measures to prevent unauthorized activities and fire –** FSC-certified forests implement preventative management systems, personnel training programs and monitoring and mitigation measures that reduce the impacts of unauthorized encroachment and extraction, illegal logging, wildfires and pest and disease outbreaks (FSC P&C, 2000 - P7.1, 7.3, 8.1, 8.2).

An Existing Certification System That Complements REDD

In order to avoid destructive logging practices and the conversion of forests, we must confer value on sustainably harvested forest products. FSC certification fosters and recognizes those companies, indigenous groups and communities that demonstrate a long-term commitment to local forest stewardship and creates an economic incentive to maintain and restore forests through greater market access and premium pricing of certified forest products.

Reduced impact logging methods help avoid deforestation and represent possible emissions reductions of at least 10 percent.

No single initiative is a panacea for addressing climate change, but we don't need to wait until climate change legislation is developed, negotiated and enacted to take important steps to conserve and restore forests. FSC certification of responsible forest management is an existing system that monitors, reports and verifies forest management practices that lead to little or no forest degradation when compared to conventional forestry operations. FSC certification must be recognized for its ability to complement REDD with respect to monitoring and reporting, for promoting measures that reduce degradation and as a benchmark for balancing the diverse environmental, social and economic pressures placed on forests today.

One of the founders of the FSC, the Rainforest Alliance is the world's largest FSC certifier and has certified the largest number of community and indigenous operations under FSC standards.

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To learn more about the Rainforest Alliance's climate initiative, please visit www.rainforest-alliance.org/climate

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