



FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL®
UNITED STATES

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National Forest Stewardship Standard (NFSS) Questions & Answers

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Following below is a summary of questions received by FSC US along with responses.

PROCESS QUESTIONS

What is the goal of the NFSS revision?

The goal of the revision process is to maintain consistency and continuity with the existing standard, while also aligning with the FSC Principles and Criteria Version 5 and the International Generic Indicators. Additionally, the Standards Development Group worked to address high priority issues identified by stakeholders, and to incorporate guidance that has been in use but not formally adopted. The process also focused on making the intent of each indicator clear and on ensuring that the indicators would be feasible for certificate holders.

What is the timing for the new standard to be implemented?

Based on our current schedule, the new standard will most likely be approved in the first half of 2024. There will then be a short delay (typically three months) to provide certification bodies and certificate holders time to prepare before a 12-month transition period begins. By the end of the transition period, all certificate holders will need to be audited under the new standard.

Three months is not a lot of time to prepare, especially if the regularly scheduled audit is early in the transition period – is there any chance this could be extended?

FSC US is investigating this possibility.

If FSC International approves the standard with conditions, does the “clock start ticking” for its use to be required before or after the conditions are met?

Full approval does not occur until after all conditions are met. The clock does not start ticking until the standard is fully approved.

What process will FSC US follow if FSC International returns the standard to with conditions? Will FSC US solicit input from stakeholders before finalizing its response?

There is no plan for any additional requests for input from stakeholders during the remainder of the revision process. It will be the Standard Development Group’s responsibility to decide how to address any conditions received from FSC International. It will be up to them to decide if they wish to request any input from anyone during this time.

What support will FSC provide to certificate holders who are implementing the new standard?

FSC is preparing to support certificate holders during the transition period and beyond. Support could include guidance materials (such as have been developed related to pesticides), decision-support tools, other online applications, identification of best-available information sources, or other resources. FSC is working on a national-level risk assessment for the standard, as part of the shift to a risk-based approach to compliance. We are also expecting to work with certification bodies and consultants to promote consistency and clarity around the new standard. FSC US will be doing outreach to certificate holders, certification bodies, consultants

and others to solicit input about the types of support that should be prioritized. Please contact Amy Clark Eagle (a.eagle@us.fsc.org) if you have suggestions.

Will there be a crosswalk between the old standard and new one?

Yes, FSC US will create a summary of how indicators in the old standard are related to the indicators in the new one to help certificate holders understand what's the same and what's different.

Can you make the crosswalk an editable document instead of a PDF, so that stakeholders are able to adapt the document for their own needs?

Yes, it will most likely be an Excel document.

Will there be a public consultation about the NFSS risk assessment?

Yes, FSC US will follow the FSC normative procedure ([FSC-PRO-60-010 V3-1](#)), which includes having its board of directors establish a scope, form a technical working group, and host a public consultation. The risk assessment work cannot be finalized until after the NFSS is approved, although work to develop it will get underway later this year.

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

It is critical to understand that while the following responses provide intent related to Draft 3, the final approved standard may be different from Draft 3. As a result, the following responses may not be applicable or accurate when the standard is final and approved.

Why does Draft 3 include exceptions to the supplementary regional requirements associated with Indicator 6.6.5 and Indicator 6.7.5?

The Draft 3 supplementary regional requirements are derived from the pre-2010 FSC US regional standards. Therefore, they may not reflect best-available information that has become available since those regional standards were developed. There was not adequate time or capacity during this NFSS revision process to complete a full assessment of current best-available information associated with the supplementary regional requirements. Therefore, the intent is to provide certificate holders with the flexibility to use current best-available information as rationale for deviations to the supplementary regional requirements that will still achieve the intended outcomes associated with Indicator 6.6.5 and Indicator 6.7.5. The FSC US Board of Directors has committed to completing a comprehensive assessment of current best-available information associated with the supplementary regional requirements to confirm the need for, and adjust as appropriate, these requirements prior to the next formal standard revision process.

What happens if hyperlinks provided in the NFSS are not functional?

FSC US will publish and maintain links to important resources through its website.

Draft 3 does not provide the best guidance on Representative Sample Areas (e.g., how big they need to be) – will there be any further guidance on what FSC is expecting?

Yes, this is one of the areas that FSC US has already identified as a priority for development of resources and tools.

The Draft 3 Annex G is not clear on whether Representative Sample Areas may be designated outside of the management unit – what is intended?

The intent of Draft 3 is for Representative Sample Areas (RSA) to be established within the Management Unit, except in a limited number of situations specific to Family Forest management units and scenarios where the certificate holder was responsible for permanent protection of conservation areas that are now outside of the management unit. In all other situations, the designation of RSA is intended to be within the management unit. However, the level of representation and protection of native ecosystems within the broader landscape is also intended to influence which native ecosystems are the focus of RSAs within the management unit.

Draft 3 does not appear to have an explicit requirement to complete a forest inventory – is this intentional?

Yes, the intent is not to define the specific process by which monitoring occurs (e.g., a forest inventory), but instead to focus on having a protocol through which the defined monitoring outcomes can be achieved.