

FSC® US FSS EXPLAINERS SERIES – PLANTATIONS EXPLAINED



Defining “Plantations” in the FSC Framework:

There is an *important distinction between what U.S. land managers typically consider to be a plantation versus the FSC definition and use of the term*. A plantation, as defined by FSC, is a planted forest stand that perpetuates a stand-level *absence of principle characteristics and key elements of native forest ecosystems*. Except under very extenuating circumstances, the following three situations will always be considered a plantation by FSC: a) cultivation of non-native species; b) block plantings of cloned trees resulting in a major reduction of within-stand genetic diversity compared to what would be found in a natural stand of the same species; and c) cultivation of trees in areas that were naturally non-forested ecosystems.

This does not mean that all planted stands are considered plantations. In fact, *planted stands in the U.S. context are often considered to be “semi-natural forests” (a sub-category of natural forests) by FSC*, due to the continued presence of species and genetic diversity, the presence of structural elements and attributes that are important for habitat provided by these forests, and the presence of natural ecological succession both within individual stands and in a varied manner across the landscape (in other words, the presence of many of the principle characteristics and key elements of native forest ecosystems endemic to that area).

The determination between natural forest (including semi-natural forest) and plantation within the FSC framework is made by evaluating the degree to which the forest provides the principal characteristics and key elements (PCKE) of native forest ecosystems of similar forest type and successional stage, and if these PCKE are missing, also considering what is causing their absence.

Annex I in the revised FSC US Forest Stewardship Standard includes a detailed framework to determine which PCKE of a native forest ecosystem are present within a stand, based on an evaluation of the attributes and practices that are associated with each of the primary PCKE. If not all five are determined to be present, then it also must be clear that their absence is a direct result of silvicultural treatments (such as those provided in Annex I) in order for the stand to be considered a plantation. The absence of PCKE could alternatively be due to pest/diseases, catastrophic natural disturbances, or other situations outside of the control of the land manager. In these cases, the stand would most likely not be considered a plantation.

In summary, a plantation is identified when a stand does not meet the definition of natural forest (including semi-natural forest) in that it cannot be demonstrated to have many of the principal characteristics and key elements of native forest ecosystems AND it is clear that the absence of these attributes is a direct result of silvicultural treatments.

Plantation Indicators:

FSC supports the responsible management of existing plantations and the products derived from harvesting activities in these areas as a strategy to complement conservation and the sustainable use of native forests. As global consumption of forest products continues to grow, responsibly managed plantations certified by FSC can play a crucial role in ensuring their supply is sustainably sourced. While plantations cannot replace the richness, stability, and beauty of native forests or the complexity of the services they provide, applying the FSC standards to them ensures their management is defined by transparency and fairness, and minimizes negative environmental and social effects.

However, due to the intensity of management that occurs within plantations, there can be higher risks for negative impacts on environmental and social values. This is why the FSC US Forest Stewardship Standard has a set of indicators that are applicable only to management units with plantation lands, including some indicators that replace the regular indicators that are applicable to other management units and also some extra indicators that are only for plantations. Importantly, there is a change in the Standard regarding plantation indicators - Principle 10, which previously only applied to management units containing plantations, now includes indicators that are applicable to all management units, and the *plantation-specific indicators are dispersed across multiple Criteria in Principle 6 and Principle 10*.

For More Information:

For more information regarding determining forest classification as plantation or natural forest, see Annex I in the revised Standard. For more information regarding the application of Plantation Indicators, see the Preamble of the revised Standard.