

FSC® US FSS EXPLAINERS SERIES – FAMILY FORESTS EXPLAINED



Defining “Family Forests” in the FSC Framework:

To ensure equity of access to certification, FSC has a policy to allow small, non-industrial private landowners the ability to be evaluated for FSC certification using modified certification procedures, and in some cases, alternate or adapted forest management indicators, taking into account lower risks typically associated with small and low intensity managed forests (i.e., SLIMF). In the U.S. context, the term family forests or FF, replaces the term SLIMF.

The eligibility requirements for a management unit to be categorized as FF are: if it is small – no greater than 2471 acres in size; OR if it is managed at a low intensity – the rate of harvesting is less than 20% of the mean annual increment within the total production area, and either the annual harvest from the total production area is less than 5000 cubic meters or the average annual timber harvest from the production area is less than 5000 cubic meters per year during the period of validity of the certificate.

All FSC-certified management units are expected to maintain conformance with the FSC Principles and Criteria but due to the lower risk to environmental and social values from management activities that occur in family forests versus those that occur in traditional management units, family forests management units at times are held to a different level of scrutiny or rigor when it comes to demonstrating conformance with the requirements of the FSC US Forest Stewardship Standard. Because of this, there are some indicators that do not apply to family forest management units, and some alternate indicators that apply only to family forest management units. However, overall, the majority of requirements laid out in the Standard are applicable to all management units, including FF, unless otherwise explicitly stated. There are also several instances of FF-specific guidance provided within the Standard, aligned with certain indicators, that detail how FF management units might provide alternative evidence of conformance versus other management unit types. Federal land management units are not eligible to use the Family Forest Indicators.

FF and Group Certification:

Almost all FSC-certified FF management units in the U.S. are certified as part of a Forest Management Group Certificate. There are a couple of instances when family forest management units that are part of a group certificate are able to pool conformance requirements across members of the group. For example, if it is not possible for a family forest management unit to meet the 10% threshold of the Conservation Areas Network (CAN) requirement individually, and they are part of a Forest Management Group Certificate, the group members may “share the load” for FF members across all management units within the group. This means that so long as the total area devoted to conservation objectives across all management units within the group makes up 10% or more of the total group area, all FF group members will be in conformance with the CAN requirement.

For More Information:

Additional details and guidance regarding Family Forest Indicators is provided in the Preamble section of the FSC US Forest Stewardship Standard.