

FSC® US FSS EXPLAINERS SERIES – CONSERVATION AREAS NETWORK EXPLAINED



Purpose and Role Conservation Areas Network (CAN)

The Conservation Areas Network (CAN) is a new concept that has been introduced into the revised Forest Stewardship Standard in response to a global conversation, supported by FSC and its members, that more forests and natural areas need to be conserved to avoid irreversible biodiversity losses. Many parts of the world do not have the comprehensive set of conservation laws that the United States has, and the new requirement should have a significant positive impact within FSC-certified forests in these regions.

Generally, the CAN includes areas within the management unit that are intended primarily to conserve environmental or cultural values, such as rare native ecosystems and forest resources that fulfill fundamental needs for Indigenous Peoples. The CAN requirements in Indicator 6.5.7 do not necessarily mean that new and additional conservation outcomes will need to be achieved, but rather the CAN will provide a complete picture of conservation-oriented areas that already exist. However, if the total of conservation areas is below the required 10% of the management unit threshold, new conservation areas will need to be established. While termed a “network,” the areas that make up the CAN do not need to be spatially connected.

It is likely that by meeting the various conservation requirements of this Standard, the majority of U.S. certificate holders will find that they are already managing conservation areas at or above the 10% threshold, but analysis will need to be conducted to confirm this. In most situations, management within these conservation areas will not need to change, as activities are allowed that support or do not detract from conservation of the value(s) for which an area has been identified

There are many types of areas that may fall into the Conservation Areas Network. All areas within the management unit that are intended primarily to conserve environmental or cultural values for the long-term will qualify (i.e., they are specifically designated for achieving objectives other than timber production). The obvious inclusions are representative sample areas (RSAs) and high conservation value areas (HCVAs), but there are many other kinds of areas that may qualify as part of the CAN – see the figure below for a graphic representation of this. Examples could include riparian management zones when they are managed to protect aquatic or riparian habitats, areas where the intent is to provide for or support culturally-oriented recreational activities, areas managed primarily to conserve sites of special significance to local communities, or buffer zones around nest sites of rare, threatened and endangered bird species. Additionally, areas associated with conservation easements, Habitat Conservation Plans, and/or Cooperative Management Areas with federal or state agencies or conservation organizations may also be included in the CAN if intent and purpose are aligned.

Family Forest & CAN:

If it is not possible for family forest management units (i.e., small or low intensity managed forests) to meet the 10% threshold individually, and they are part of a FSC-certified Forest Management Group, the group members may “share the load” across 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 management units’ total area, all FF group members will be in conformance with the CAN requirements. For example, there could be one or two management units that have large portions of their certified acres under conservation management objectives, and their conservation areas could conform with the CAN requirement on behalf of FF management units who have smaller amounts of conservation land. While non-FF management units in a group may help to share the load and support FF group members, they must each individually meet the 10% threshold (i.e., areas in excess of 10% can be used to offset the requirement for FF group members).

For more information:

For a detailed list of areas that may be eligible to be included in the Conservation Areas Network and their associated Indicators in the Standard, see Annex H in the revised Standard. Annex H also includes further guidance and clarification regarding the CAN.

