



FSC® certification of forestry operations

Are you interested in an FSC® forest certification and you want to find out more about the backgrounds and processes? Here you will find a first overview! If you have any questions, please contact us.

By the way: Many companies opt for a combined certification according to FSC® and PEFC™ in order to be able to react flexibly to customer requests. Advantage: Both systems can be introduced and tested relatively easily together. We offer this form of certification.

WHY FSC® CERTIFICATION?



Wood and paper products are trendy and are indispensable in everyday life. The increased environmental awareness of consumers leads to a high demand for FSC certified products. Not only private end users, but also large commercial enterprises and public institutions have been designated to procurement guidelines on certified wood and paper products. With the certification of your forestry company, you are able to meet these requirements. Cer-

tified forestry companies are allowed to sell FSC-certified products and label them with the FSC label. The most frequently cited reasons for FSC certification are

- Opening up new markets and maintaining and expanding existing markets
- Fulfillment of customer requirements concerning FSC certified products
- Increasing the acceptance of forest management
- High transparency and credibility through audits by independent auditors
- FSC certification as a complementary component of forestry management
- Higher achievable prices for certified products

The FSC certification is recognized by the major environmental organizations.

BACKGROUND FSC® FM CERTIFICATION



The FSC (Forest Stewardship Council®) is an independent member-based organisation with the aim of promoting responsible forest management worldwide. The FSC relies on the principle of sustainability through an ecological, social and economic consensus in forest management.

Annual inspections by independent certification bodies such as the GFA ensure compliance with these forest management requirements. The basis are nationally adapted forest standards and their requirements. The National FSC standards are adapted to the respective local conditions. However, all forest standards follow the internationally uniform FSC 10 principles and 70 criteria. All FSC forest standards are elaborated and continuously revised with intensive participation of economic, nature conservation and social associations in the so-called three-chamber system.

THE WAY TO FSC® CERTIFICATION



Depending on the organisation of your forestry business, different certification options are available. Fill in our questionnaire under "Request offer" and you will receive a non-binding and free offer of a certification tailored to your needs.

In principle, forest certification is open to any forestry company. You can choose between individual certification or participation in a group certification in conjunction with other forestry companies.

1. Individual certification

If a certification includes a single forestry company with one or more parts of the company, it is called a single certification with an individual certificate number. Independent individual certification is open to all forestry companies, but is generally used mainly in larger private or municipal forests or by state forestry companies.

2. Group certification

Group certification is of great importance in private and municipal forests, as well as in state forestry enterprises with relatively independent management units. This form of certification is joined by several forest owners. The grouping is often already given by existing forms of organisation (forest management associations, municipal and city associations or forestry relations), but can also be formed specifically for the certification process. Within the group, the group leadership performs essential tasks, such as initial examination of members, training and tracking of corrective actions in the event of deviations. In addition, some groups also take over the tasks of forest management and timber marketing centrally through the group management.

Group certification is not tied to existing structures, nor is it limited to a specific type of forest ownership or size. Community certification can significantly reduce the cost and effort of forest certification. The exchange of experience between the group members facilitates the adaptation to the FSC system, especially for new members.

If you have chosen the right form of certification, the preparation of your forestry company for the audit begins. The basis for the requirements to be met are the relevant FSC standards, which we will be happy to send to you free of charge on request. The most important points in brief:

Application:

The application / invitation to tender is usually made via our easy-to-fill online questionnaire under "Request offer" on www.gfa-cert.com. It collects important framework data from your forestry company that is relevant for the preparation of quotations, i.e. farm size, location and structure, number of group members (if applicable) and management information. You will then immediately receive an offer and further information on the procedure and the relevant standard requirements.

Pre-audit/pre-evaluation:

The pre-audit is used to get to know the company through the auditor and to conduct an initial gap analysis. You will get to know the auditor and the process of forest certification and you can clarify open questions about the standard at an early stage.

The auditor examines important documents such as maps, established procedures and other relevant information. The recorded data can be taken into account in the following main audit. Key stakeholders are also identified and contacted as needed.

After the pre-audit, which usually lasts between 1 and 3 days, you will receive a detailed report which is the basis for further preparation for the main audit. A pre-audit is advisable for all initial certifications, even mandatory for large forestry holdings (>10,000 ha) and for special requirements of particularly protected forests (HCVF). If desired, a voluntary pre-audit can also be carried out in individual cases, purely document-based and without a visit to the site.

Preparing for the main audit:

After the pre-audit, the actual preparation for forest certification begins. Where necessary, the management system, i.e. internal procedures, economic planning and practical operations in the forest must be adapted to the requirements of the FSC standard. For group certifications, group members are internally audited and prepared for certification by the group's leadership.

At the same time, GFA sends you checklists for the standards to be applied. The management fills in these checklists and explains in a short form how the individual requirements are to be met by the operation. The test lists are then evaluated by the GFA auditor and the main audit is planned together with the company.

At least 6 weeks before a main audit, GFA interviews the stakeholders of the forestry company. A selection of local, regional and national stakeholders is contacted, usually by means of an online questionnaire, but also by telephone or in person on site.

GFA will provide a detailed audit plan some weeks before the date of the main audit for your orientation.

Main audit:

In the main audit, all relevant documents and procedures of the company are examined. In the case of group certifications, the audit of the group management is usually carried out before a representative sample of the member companies is then visited by our auditor. The main audit then covers the entire forest standard.

After the document inspection, the actual forest audit is carried out on-site, in which the actual forest management is evaluated. Depending on the size, structure and complexity of the forestry operation, the main audit takes 1-5 days, but also longer for very large operations.

The GFA auditor systematically collects evidence of compliance with the standard requirements in the audit. In the case of identified weaknesses or non-compliances, these are included in the audit report and discussed with the forestry company.

Depending on the nature of the deviation, a time limit for closing the non-conformity is determined. Serious or repeated deviations must be corrected before issuing the FSC certificate. Minor non-conformities must be corrected by the next audit and at the latest within one year.

All audit results are recorded in the audit report. In addition to a description of the forestry company or the group members, it also contains an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the operations, possible non-compliances and comments of the auditor regarding potential comments of the contacted stakeholders.

Review and certification decision by GFA

If the auditor's report has been reviewed and confirmed by the headquarters of GFA Certification in Hamburg as well as by independent experts, we will send you the report for comment and acceptance. As soon as the report is finalized and there are no serious deviations, the decision-making body of GFA Certification will immediately make the certification decision and we will send you your FSC FM/COC certificate.

From this moment on, you will be listed as a certified company in the publicly accessible FSC database (www.fsc-info.org) and you will be allowed to use the FSC trademarks and market your products as FSC certified. A summary of all audit reports will be publicly available via the FSC database.

Annual monitoring audits / follow-up audits

After the main audit, annual monitoring audits ensure continuous compliance with FSC forest standards. In contrast to the main audit, the GFA Auditor evaluates only selected elements of the standard.

The monitoring audits focus on the correct application of internal procedures, the implementation of the management plan, but also on the effectiveness of corrective measures taken in the event of previously identified non-conformities. If information or complaints have been received from stakeholders since the last audit, the GFA auditor evaluates the comments objectively and makes comments in the audit report.

In case of group certifications the GFA auditor also examines the communication and cooperation between group management and member companies. The auditor should confirm that the annual internal audits have been carried out and weaknesses have been identified and effectively addressed.

The results of the annual audits are also summarized in an audit report.

GFA Certification auditor network

Through our regionally distributed network of auditors, we are able to keep travel costs low and ensure flexible scheduling. The duration of an FSC certification process depends on the size and complexity of the company and its products to be certified. As a rule, an initial certification can be carried out within 2 - 4 months with appropriate preparation of your forestry operation.

Please contact us by phone or via the contact form to clarify your questions.

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