The *EverCover* Global Forest Standard

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Contact	**info@aeforest.org**

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PART A: FOREST MANAGEMENT

1. LEGAL COMPLIANCE AND LAND TENURE

Forest management under this standard is to respect all applicable laws of the country in which they occur, all relevant international treaties and agreements to which the country is a signatory and comply with all the regulations set out in this standard.

1.1. Demonstrating the legal status and land tenure of *the forest owner**

*The forest owner** must be a person or legal entity with undisputed legal ownership or custodial documentation.

Clear evidence of legal ownership rights and use rights to the land (e.g. land title, *customary rights**, or lease agreements) put forward for certification must be shown. The area to be certified is to be clearly and accurately delineated using digital techniques whenever possible.

The certified unit is a legally registered forest property unit. Individual units must be certified in their entirety. *Forest owners** are not required to certify all their properties.

1.2. Tenure dispute resolution

Appropriate mechanisms must be employed to resolve disputes over tenure claims and land use rights. The circumstances and status of any outstanding disputes must bey considered when evaluating the granting of AEFC certificates. Disputes of substantial magnitude or those involving a significant number of interests will normally disqualify an operation from being certified.

*The forest owner** must document conflict situations related to *forest operations** and the status of their resolution, as well as actively contribute to obtaining resolutions.

1.3. Legal compliance by *the forest owner**

*The forest owner** must comply with all relevant national legal requirements (e.g. Forestry Laws, Nature Protection Laws, Environmental Impact Assessment Laws) as well as relevant international agreements (such as CITES, ILO, ITTA, The CBD) in forest management. Compliance with such agreements is required even if the forest(s) to be certified are located in a country that is not signatory to them.

1.4. Legal compliance by *service providers**

*The forest owner** is to require that their forest *service providers** comply with this Standard as

well all national laws relevant to its implementation.

1.5. Conflicts of law and this Standard

Conflicts between national laws and regulations, and the requirements of this standard, will be evaluated for the purposes of certification, on a case-by-case basis, by *The AEFC**.

1.6. Illegal activities

*The forest owner** is to take reasonable measures to prevent illegal or unauthorised activities by third parties taking place in the certified forest holdings. If such activities are present or suspected, *the forest owner** is to take the necessary action to stop them, including notifying the appropriate authorities.

The lessee of the area or holder of usage rights must notify the landowner of any detected unauthorized, illegal, or non-compliant activities.

1.7. Anti-corruption

By signing up to this Standard, *the forest owner** commits to not offer or receive bribes in any form. *The forest owner** must comply with anti-corruption legislation where this exists. Where no anti-corruption legislation exists, other adequate anti-corruption measures must be implemented by *the forest owner**.

Note: If *the forest owner** is an organisation, it is to publicly commit to anti-corruption activities.

1.8. Debts and taxes

*The forest owner** should not have outstanding forest-related unpaid fees, royalties, taxes or comparable debts.

Examples: Income tax on timber sales; Value-added taxes related to *forest management**; Employer tax levies.

1.9. Commitment to the standard

The Forest Owner* may resign from certification in accordance with the termination procedure of AEFC.

2. WORKERS' RIGHTS AND *CONTRACTING**

2.1. Complying with the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

*The forest owner** must comply with the principles outlined in the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. These principles must also be followed in countries that have not ratified the conventions underlying the declaration.

2.2. Complying with labour laws and wage requirements

*The forest owner** must comply with national labour legislation and possible forest industry labour and wage agreements.

If there is no applicable wage agreement or statutory minimum wage, the employer must demonstrate negotiations on working together with the employees to agree on a fair living wage for the region.

2.3. Safety standards and requirements for adequate training and supervision

If *the forest owner** employs forest workers directly, the owner must ensure that all working health and safety standards for the industry are met. These standards must comply with the recommendations of the ILO Code of Practice on safety and health in forestry work.

*The forest owner** must ensure that employees have adequate training and supervision for performing their tasks properly and safely.

2.4. Gender equality

*The forest owner** must respect and promote gender equality throughout its forest management.

2.5. *Outsourcing*

Where a certified forest owner* uses a subcontractor for forestry operations* that fall within the scope of certification or may affect compliance with the requirements of the AEFC standard, the outsourced activity shall be covered by a written agreement.

The certified forest owner* shall retain ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the outsourced activity complies with all applicable requirements of the AEFC standard. The use of subcontracting shall not transfer or reduce the certified forest owner's* responsibility for conformity.

The agreement shall specify, at minimum, that the subcontractor shall:

a) comply with all AEFC standard requirements applicable to the outsourced activity, as well as the procedures and instructions provided by the certified forest owner*
b) not use AEFC trademarks, claims or any other communication referring to certification without separate authorisation
c) not further outsource or transfer outsourced certification-related activities to a third party
d) accept that AEFC, the certification body or another authorised evaluator may inspect the outsourced activity, related documentation and conformity of the activity
e) maintain and provide, upon request, records and documents relating to the outsourced activity for the purposes of auditing and conformity assessment.

The certified forest owner* shall ensure that the subcontractor is provided with the current AEFC requirements and procedures applicable to the outsourced activity, and that the subcontractor's personnel have sufficient knowledge of these requirements in relation to their tasks.

The certified forest owner* shall also ensure that contracts, instructions and documents relevant to auditing related to subcontracting are maintained and retained in accordance with the documentation requirements of this standard.

Note: If it is unclear whether a specific outsourced activity falls within the scope of this clause, guidance shall be requested from AEFC.

3. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES'* RIGHTS

3.1. *Indigenous Peoples** and their legal and *customary rights** to own, use and manage lands, territories, and resources affected by forest management activities is to be recognized and respected by *the forest owner**.

3.2. All *forest owner's** decisions and actions regarding forest management activities and land-use affecting *Indigenous Peoples** or their rights must be approved by the *Indigenous Peoples'** designated governing bodies. Such approval requires Free, Prior and Informed Consent*.

3.3. Forest management planning and its implementation is to avoid negative social, environmental and economic impacts on affected *Indigenous Peoples** and their Communities.

3.4. *Sites** of special cultural, ecological, economic, religious or spiritual significance to *Indigenous Peoples** are to be clearly identified in cooperation with such peoples and recognized and protected by *the forest owner**. (See also 6.1. Note 1). *The forest owner** is to follow the following IUCN guidelines about sacred natural *sites**: Wild, R. and McLeod, C. (Editors) (2008). Sacred Natural *Sites**: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

3.5. *The forest owner** is to realise and sustain the legal and *customary rights** of *Indigenous Peoples** to maintain control over forestry *operations** to the extent needed to protect their rights, resources, lands and territories.

3.6. Any sale of state or municipal land within *Indigenous Peoples'** homeland regions is to only go ahead if approved by the *Indigenous Peoples'** designated governing bodies. Such approval requires Free, Prior and Informed Consent*.

3.7. In joining this Standard, *the forest owner** acknowledges and respects the rights, traditions, and cultural heritage of *Indigenous Peoples**, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and ILO Convention 169 (1989).

3.8. Management plans and their implementation must not cause harm to *Indigenous Peoples'** traditional ways of life, such as animal husbandry, traditional agriculture or fishing, hunting, gathering berries and mushrooms, hiking or spiritual practices.

4. LOCAL COMMUNITIES*

4.1. *Local Communities** and their legal and *customary rights** to own, use and manage lands, territories, and resources affected by forest management activities are to be recognized and respected by *the forest owner**.

4.2. *The forest owner** must respect the legal and customary rights* of *Local Communities** during forestry *operations**, protecting their rights, resources, lands and territories.

4.3. Forest management planning and implementation is to avoid negative social, environmental and economic impacts on affected *Local Communities**.

4.4. In case where *Local Communities** could be affected by management activities, the certificate holder is to consult about the intended management with designated representatives of *Local Communities**. Special attention should be paid when the forest is used as a recreational area, is situated inside or in the vicinity of settlements or has other special importance for *Local Communities**. The views of *Local Communities**, as well as the way how they have been considered in the plans, is to be documented.

4.5. *Sites** of special cultural, ecological, economic, religious or spiritual significance to *Local Communities** are to be clearly identified in cooperation with *Local Communities** and recognized by *the forest owner**, and appropriately taken into account in forest management planning and implementation. Consultation with representatives of *Local Communities** must be carried out if needed or requested. The views of *Local Communities**, if given, are to be documented. (See also 6.1. Note 1).

4.6. Management plans and their implementation must not cause harm to *Local Communities'** traditional ways of life, such as animal husbandry, traditional agriculture or fishing, hunting, gathering berries and mushrooms, hiking or spiritual practices.

5. FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES*

Forest management under this standard is based on *Continuous Cover Forestry** (*CCF**).

In *CCF**, the forest is kept continuously covered by trees, applying flexibly the principles of natural forest dynamics in accordance with the *stand** structure, the quality and location of the site, and the objectives of *the forest owner**. In a *forest stand**, all *native tree species** present are nurtured so that their genetic, age and size-related diversity is promoted. As a main method, selected mature large trees are removed by thinning from above in order to facilitate space for smaller and younger trees to grow and for *regeneration**. Where necessary, smaller trees are also felled. The forest is generally r*egenerated** through *stand density** regulation without *soil surface scarification**.

The Intention of this standard is that forest management planning and treatments are carried out in a way that negative impacts to the forest ecosystem are minimized.

5.1. Extent of felling

5.1.1. No *clearcuts** are allowed.

Note 1: "*Clearcut**" does not here imply only removal of every single tree but also thinning below the nationally set *legal thinning limit**. If no *legal thinning limit** exists, it is to be determined by the *National Working Group** for The *National Standard** or, if the *National Working Group** does not yet exist, by the *AEFC** overseeing development and generic application of this Standard.

Each and every *National Standard** must be set on a level that safeguards healthy rich ecosystems.

5.1.2. Creation of *gaps** (small *clearings**) up to 0.1 ha in size can be made if it is deemed essential in order to:

a) *regenerate** *pioneer tree species** successfully or speed up *regeneration** in mature *stands** with *even-sized stand** structure.
b) minimise windfalls in transition from *even-sized stands** to *CCF**
c) eradicate severe cases of *Heterobasidion** or correspondent *fungal pathogens**, bark beetle infestations or comparable pests.
d) facilitate the transition phase to *CCF**.
e) mimic natural disturbances.

The maximum size of a *clearing** may be enlarged because of serious pest outbreaks or other reasons if required by law or agreed by *the* national *AEFC representative**.

5.1.3. The maximum area of an individual man-made *canopy gap** is 0.1 ha. The minimum distance from maximum size *gap** to any other *gap** is 20 m. An *edge of a gap** is defined by the *crown projections** of the surrounding trees. Removals of three or more (*dominant top/upper canopy layer trees**) adjacent trees larger than the *average dbh** of the *stand** are interpreted as *gaps**.

5.1.4. The maximum total *canopy gap** sum, outside the *strip roads**, separately for every hectare is 0.3 ha (i.e., 30% of the area).

Note 1: If national legislation (e.g., cases of an exceptionally high *legal basal area limit**)

or local conditions (e.g species requiring larger *gaps** to *regenerate**) require changes to these criteria, they can be prescribed in the *National Standard**.

5.1.5. Natural *gaps** such as *non-productive areas** and *gaps* where* fallen trees are left in the forest are not included in the combined man-made *gap** size.

5.1.6. The *gaps** are no longer included in the 0.3-ha total area when they have established *regeneration**.

Established *regeneration**: At least 500 *saplings**/ha and average height at least 5 m.

5.1.7. A new *gap** can be created next to a previous *gap** when the *dominant height** of the trees in the previous *gap** is more than half of the surrounding *dominant height** but at least 5 meters.

5.1.8. The maximum width of *strip roads** from which trees may be cleared is 5 m (from trunk surface to trunk surface, tree to tree) or less if set by national legislation.

*Strip roads** are to be designed so that damage to the soil caused by timber harvesting and forest transportation is minimized. More accurate requirements are to be defined in the *National Standards**.

5.1.9. *Undergrowth** may be cleared only to the extent necessary to carry out *silvicultural measures** in the forest (e.g., *strip road** creation, trees felled to enhance *regeneration**).

5.1.10. Timber harvesting is to be carried out in a way that avoids causing damage to remaining living trees, *deadwood**, *seedlings** and soil.

5.2. *Regeneration**

5.2.1. *Natural regeneration** is to be used whenever possible.

5.2.2. *Soil surface scarification** is only allowed if necessary for facilitating *regeneration**. In exposing the mineral soil surface only *careful methods of scarification** appropriate to the region are to be used.

Note 1: *Careful methods of scarification** are to be defined in the *National Standards**.

5.2.3. Whenever *artificial regeneration** is needed (e.g. in the transition phase to *CCF** or in preparing for climate change) seeds or *seedlings** of *native species** and suitable origin must be used. The *native species** and the origin of seeds and *seedlings** suitable for the site is to be defined in *the National Standards**.

5.2.4. *Genetically manipulated regeneration material** is not allowed.

5.2.5. Fencing for regeneration protection is permitted if agreed by the *AEFC** *representative**. Fencing must be removed when protection is no longer needed.

5.3 Pre-commercial thinning

Pre-commercial thinning is only allowed if it is well-reasoned and supports the aims of this standard:

5.3.1 Possible pre-commercial thinning of young *stands**, patches of young trees, and *undergrowth** is to aim at maintaining or creating an *uneven-sized** and spatially diverse *stand** structure; for improving or maintaining growing conditions of commercially viable saw-timber and creating or maintaining biodiversity values. Pre-commercial thinning that reduces the number of canopy layers and/or number of *native tree species** present (See 6.6.) in the *stand** or creates *even-structured stands**, is not allowed.

Note 1: The aim and the rational of the pre-commercial thinning of each specific *stand** according to 5.3.1. must be documented in the *FMP**.

Note 2: Acceptable cases of thinning for creating or maintaining biodiversity values are to be listed in the *National Standards**.

5.3.2 Pre-commercial thinning of young *stands** is not allowed below possible national legal limits (stems per hectare). Higher minimum limits can be set in the *National Standards**.

Note 1: The minimum area for assessing *tree density** is a circular sample plot with a radius of 3.99 meters. Only trees with a height of more than 1,3 meters are taken into account.

5.3.3 Pre-commercial thinning of *undergrowth** is not to be carried out to below a density that may weaken the *uneven-sized** and diverse structure of the *stand**.

5.3.4 Pre-commercial thinning must be carried out so that a large mixture *of native tree species** is favoured. All native tree and shrub species* present in the *stand** before pre-commercial thinning are to be present also afterwards.

5.3.5 Tree species and shrubs desirable for pollinating insects and other animals are to be largely preserved, especially where the *stand** borders other types of land.

5.3.6 In the pre-commercial thinning, *shelter thickets** left unthinned must cover at least 3 % of the *stand** area. The minimum size of a single *shelter thicket** is 100 m^2.

5.3.7 Trees growing under the crowns of *retention trees** are also to be preserved unless biodiversity reasons demand otherwise.

5.4. *Ditches**

5.4.1. *Ditching** or maintenance of an existing *ditch** network draining forest, mires, bogs, swamps or open water is not allowed, with the exception of *ditches** necessary for draining other types of land, infrastructure or constructions, as well as other landowners' land who wish to continue draining.

5.5. *Fertilisers**

5.5.1. *Fertilisation** is not permitted, with the following exceptions:

a) Wood ash *fertilisation** in *ditched** peatland forests once every 30 years.
b) Boron *fertilisation** for growth disturbances on former agricultural lands if necessary.

*Forest owners** must comply with national legislation or recommendations and *management plans of protected areas** in matters concerning *fertilisation**.

Note 1: *Fertilisers** may only be used based on a verified and documented need.

5.5.2. **Protection of waters**

*The forest owner** is not to apply *fertilisation** in *important groundwater areas** as defined by regional and national authorities. *The forest owner** is to minimise the impacts of *fertilisation** on water resources by leaving unfertilised buffer zones with the following minimum widths between the fertilised area and the water:

a) Rivers, seas, lakes and *ponds**: 50 m
b) *brooks**, *springs**: 20 m
c) *ditches**: 5 m

5.6. Chemicals

5.6.1. Management systems under this Standard are to use only *biological and mechanical pest*, weed and fungal control**, except

a) if required by the authorities in exceptional circumstances. If chemicals are used in exceptional circumstances, proper equipment and training is to be provided to minimize health and environmental risks.
b) for reducing bark beetle or other damaging pest populations (e.g. *Ips typographus, Pityogenes chalcographus* and *Lymantria monacha)* with pheromone traps equipped with a water container for pest collection.
c) Using urea for treatment of stumps to prevent spreading of *Heterobasidion root rot** or other *fungal pathogens**.

Treatment of stumps to prevent spreading of *Heterobasidion root rot** or other *harmful decaying fungi** must be used during felling whenever there is no snow cover and the air temperature is expected to exceed zero degrees centigrade during the next 24 hours. Areas where this rule applies are defined in the *National Standards**. *Antagonistic fungal preparations** are recommended, if possible, rather than urea solutions (see 5.6.1.c.).

Note 1. Urea is strongly alkaline. Its use must comply with the prescribed occupational safety regulations. When used near *water bodies** a protective buffer zone of at least 10 meters is required. In groundwater areas urea use is prohibited.

Note 1. (referring to 5.6.1) Seedlings used for planting can be treated in nurseries with pesticides against *Hylobius abietis*.

5.6.2. Use of *chemical pesticides**

*Chemical pesticides** may not be used under this Standard unless required by national or regional authorities in exceptional circumstances (e.g. prevention of dangerous pests or *invasive species** accidentally introduced).

5.7. Biological control/fungicides

In treatment of stumps to prevent spreading of *Heterobasidion root rot** or other harmful *decaying fungi** it is recommended to use *antagonistic fungal preparations** instead of urea.

Treatment of stumps must be carried out during felling whenever there is no snow cover and the air temperature is expected to reach above zero degrees centigrade during the following 24 hours. Areas where this rule applies are defined in the *National Standards**. *Antagonistic fungal preparations** are recommended rather than urea solutions (see 5.6.1.c.).

6. ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Forest management is to take all the measures described below to conserve biological diversity and its associated values, as well as water resources, soils, carbon sinks, forest ecosystems and associated landscapes.

6.1. Assessing and preserving Forests' *High Conservation Values**

F*orest owners** are required to assess all the conservation values (listed below) of their certified holdings in accordance with the categories listed below as *High Conservation Value** (*HCV**) *areas** and *objects**, and to note all such identified values in their *Forest Management Plan**. No logging or other habitat transforming activities may take place under this Standard before *HCV areas** and *objects** have been mapped and taken into account in writing.

*High Conservation Value** areas and objects include:

a) *High Conservation Value (HCV)** Forests: Forests with significant value in terms of their biodiversity, ecosystem services, social or cultural significance.
b) Other *High Conservation Value** areas and objects: *Water bodies**, wetlands, other treeless areas, buildings, sacred trees and stones etc.

*The AEFC** standard uses the six thematic categories of *HCV** forests, areas and objects defined by *the Forestry Stewardship Council**, (*FSC**, FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship, FSC-STD-01-001 V5-3 EN, page 21):

a) *HCV 1** – Species diversity: Concentrations of biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered species, that are significant at global, regional or national levels.
b) *HCV 2** – Landscape-level ecosystems and mosaics: Intact Forest Landscapes and large landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics that are significant at global, regional or national levels, and that contain viable populations of the great majority of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.
c) *HCV 3** – Ecosystems and habitats: Rare, threatened, or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia.
d) *HCV 4** – Critical ecosystem services: Basic ecosystem services in critical situations, including protection of water catchments and control of erosion of vulnerable soils and slopes.
e) *HCV 5** – Community needs: *Sites** and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of *Local Communities** or Indigenous Peoples* (for livelihoods, health, nutrition, water, etc.), identified through engagement with these communities or Indigenous Peoples*.
f) *HCV 6** – Cultural values: *Sites**, resources, habitats and landscapes of global or national cultural, archaeological or historical significance, and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of *Local Communities** or *Indigenous Peoples**,

identified through engagement with these *Local Communities** or *Indigenous Peoples**.

These categories are to be further defined to the appropriate national or regional levels in the *National Standards**.

Environmental impacts is to be especially considered in the planning, instruction and implementation of possible operations in all types of *HCV** forests as well as *sites** known and documented to be of local or regional ecological, social or cultural value. In cases where the Standard allows it, for such *sites** the construction of new forest roads and *forest operations** must be reported in advance to major national (and local, if asked to be notified) NGOs dealing with forest social and/or conservation issues, if such NGOs exist.

Note 1: Assessing *High Conservation Values* (*HCV**) implies compulsory consultation on (1) Authorities' and NGO databases of rare habitat types and species (see also "Species protection"). Relevant NGOs and NGO databases, if they exist, are listed in the *National Standards**; (2) Authorities' and NGO databases of Cultural Values (*HCV 6**) and Community needs (*HCV 5**) and antiquities experts at historic *sites**; (3) With *Indigenous Peoples'** representatives where relevant; (4) With *Local Communities'* representatives where relevant. Other sources of information such as consulting national and local environmental NGOs are recommended; relevant information volunteered by NGOs or experts must be taken into account even if not solicited.

Note 2: Where relevant, in assessing environmental and conservation values, whether of habitat types or species, recognised local expertise of high quality must be used. Such experts must be approved by the AEFC's* *National Working Group** or, if one does not yet exist, by *the AEFC** or the *AEFC's accredited local representative**.

Note 3: *The forest owner** is not to change the land-use class of *high conservation value* (*HCV*)* areas or habitats to be always preserved (see 6.1.1.-6.1.3.) in ways that endaner their conservation or other values, unless obliged to do so through an official planning process (statutory land-use planning) initiated by national or regional authorities.

6.1.1. **Protecting pristine and key habitats and their buffer zones (*set-asides** for biodiversity)**

For certification to take place under this Standard, the owner is required to assess and submit to *the auditor** a list and a map of all areas and objects on their holdings fulfilling the criteria listed in 6.1.1. After initial audit, all such *sites** must be marked in the owner's *Forest Management Plan* (FMP*)*.

The following habitats must always be fully preserved (with their necessary buffer zones), i.e. are to not be logged or otherwise transformed at all (see exception in note 2), regardless of *stand** size:

a) Habitats representing habitat types protected by regional, national or international law;

b) Habitats representing rare habitat types;
c) Forests fulfilling the FAO criteria for *pristine forests**.
d) Other forest with little or no signs of human intervention having taken place for a long period of time ("long period of time" to be defined in the *National Standards**)*
e) *Forest stands** with significant amounts of *dead wood**;
f) Areas subjected to a forest fire and meeting the following conditions: 1) No significant management evident for at least 20 years since the fire (Low-impact post-fire selective logging does not count as significant treatment). 2) The area must contain fire stumps and/or trees damaged by the fire. Burned saw-stumps do not count as fire stumps.
g) Forests on steep slopes (escarpments and their vicinity, slopes so steep that logging would cause a significant risk of erosion or windthrows etc.) ;
h) *High-altitude forests** (to be defined in the *National Standards**);
i) *Forest stands** containing species 1) protected by regional, national or international law and 2) not tolerant of any form of logging ;
j) *Forest stands** whose values, e.g. significant biodiversity (=high importance for nationally or regionally endangered species), are not tolerant of any form of logging.
k) *Unditched** peatlands such as mires, swamps and other wetlands with or without tree cover.
l) *Low-productive** and *non-productive forest land**

The *set-asides** are permanent.

Note 1: The listing is not exhaustive. *National Standards** may need to add more habitat types on the list, and in any case compose more detailed definitions of specific habitats as well as their required characteristics and quality.

Note 2: Well-reasoned management activities for maintaining or increasing the biodiversity values of habitats including continuing traditional close-to nature management by local people, are allowed if approved by the *AEFC** or the AEFC's accredited local representative*. Other than these, logging or *ditch** digging (including *ditch** maintenance) in areas and objects of this category automatically disqualifies an already certified *forest owner** from further certification for a minimum of 5 years.

6.1.2. ***Set-asides** for recreational or spiritual reasons and special economic reasons

Forests of very high local or regional recreational, spiritual or non-timber economic value must always be fully preserved, i.e. no logging that would threaten these values is allowed. Such *set-asides** are permanent.

Note 1: Well-reasoned exceptions can be defined in the *National Standards**.

6.1.3. ***Set-aside** network

The *set-asides** are permanent. It is not allowed to alter the locations of *set-asides** later, but the area and number of them can be increased. Permanent *set-asides** are to represent a minimum 10 % of the certified forest holding's *productive forest land**. Any *set-asides** representing *low-productive forest land** or *non-productive land** do not contribute to fulfilling the 10 % minimum threshold. If *productive forest land** compulsorily set aside according to indicators 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 equals or exceeds 10% of the forest holding's *productive forest land**, no additional *productive forest land set-asides** on top of the compulsory *set-asides** are required. In cases where *productive forest land** under indicators 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 together does not cover at least 10% of the forest holding's total *productive forest land**, additional permanent, *productive forest land** *set-asides** are required to fulfil the 10% minimum requirement. The additional *set-asides** are to be selected from the objects of highest conservation value based on their characteristics and/or location (e.g. next to a *HCV** area or object). Regulations according to indicator 6.1.1 apply also to these additional *set-asides**.

Note 1: Delineation of all *set-asides** must be carried out by a person with sufficient skills, and taking into account national conditions.

Note 2: If *productive forest land** *set-asides** fulfilling *the criteria** of this Standard already exist on the owner's holdings prior to certification by this Standard, they will count towards the 10% total.

Note 3: The *set-asides** may be eligible for government purchase for voluntary protection in countries where such policies exist. If government purchase is realised, the area still counts towards the 10% *set-aside threshold**. *Productive forest land** areas sold for permanent conservation up to ten years before certification can also be included in the 10% *set-aside threshold**, but *sites** sold before that will not do so. The purchase must be clearly documented.

Note 4: While efforts will be made to raise *financial compensation** to the landowner for conserving *set-asides** covering more than 10% of their forest land, *the AEFC** cannot guarantee success in securing such funds. All compulsory *set-asides** must nonetheless be guaranteed full protection for certification to take place.

6.1.4. **Documentation of *set-asides****

All *set-asides** are to be marked (including on maps) in *the forest owner*'s** *Forest Management Plan** (*FMP**), in a manner that tells *productive forest land** *set-asides** apart from the *set-asides** on *low-productive** and *non-productive land**.

6.1.5. **Preservation of *High Conservation Values**** **outside of *set-asides****

Management activities in *HCV forests** outside of *set-asides** is to maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests, and decisions regarding their management are to always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach.

Forests of *HCV** for biodiversity may only be managed if it is established that management will not harm the populations and characteristics for which the forest has been designated of *HCV**.

Forests defined as of *HCV** for other reasons than biodiversity must be managed in a manner that maintains or enhances the attributes which define them.

Note 1: Consultation on all *HCV** management under 6.1.5. must be sought from acknowledged experts, whose recommendations are noted in the *Forest Management Plan** for further implementation.

Note 2: The effects of eventual management on *HCV** forests under 6.1.5. are to be monitored; negative effects must lead to modification of the management procedures without delay, at the latest within six months of notification by the *auditor** or outside parties.

6.2. Species protection

Safeguards must exist which protect nationally and regionally rare, threatened and endangered species and their habitats (e.g., breeding, feeding and flowering *sites**). All hunting, fishing, trapping and collecting of such species is to be prohibited unless specifically allowed by law.

6.2.1. Data sources

*The forest owner** is to request from authoritative data sources, insofar as such exist, the data on the occurrence of nationally and regionally endangered and rare species (categories NT, RT, VU, EN, CR and DD) and nationally or regionally protected species.

Species occurrence data is to be requested from both the certified area and its vicinity at relevant distance. The information is to be recorded in the *Forest Management Plan**. The obligation to obtain information applies to observations made after 1995 that have been reported with sufficient accuracy (coordinate point with ten-meter accuracy).

Note 1: If the *forest owner** has demonstrably requested but not received species occurrence data, this is not considered a deviation from the requirements of the indicator.

Note 2: Additional consultation with species-oriented NGOs such as *BirdLife** and *PlantLife** is required; relevant and accurate information furnished by expert NGOs or experts is to be taken into account even if unsolicited.

Note 3: Requirements for species protection will vary, and require consultation with expert ecologists. Such experts must be approved by *the AEFC's* National Working Group** or, if one does not yet exist, by *the AEFC** or *the AEFC's accredited local*

*representative**.

Note 4: Information on species' occurrence is to be updated when
a) creating or updating the *Forest Management Plan* (FMP**),
b) always before any *forest management activities**, and
c) immediately whenever new information is received.

6.2.2. No logging may be carried out during the core part of *birds' breeding season**. Additionally, no logging is to take place in the vicinity of known inhabited nests of rare large birds such as eagles, owls, storks, larger hornbills etc. The off limits area, i.e. "the vicinity", for each species or species group is to be determined at the national level through expert consultation.

Note 1: Additional consultation with species-oriented NGOs such as *BirdLife** is required; relevant and accurate information furnished by such expert NGOs or acknowledged individual experts is to be taken into account even if unsolicited.

6.2.3. There is to be no logging in the vicinity (less than 50 m) of internationally, nationally and regionally significant wetlands (e.g. shallow lakes, *ponds**, shallow sea bays, flooded swamps).

Note 1: Well-reasoned management activities for maintaining or increasing the biodiversity values of habitats including continuing traditional close-to nature management by local people, are allowed if approved by the *AEFC** or the AEFC's accredited local representative*.

6.3. *Retention trees**

6.3.1. In *stands** with a mature canopy layer, at least 20 living trees/ha of 20 cm *dbh** minimum (if no 20 cm *dbh** trees are present then the next largest ones) or amount equivalent to at least 20 cubic meters per hectare are to be left as permanent *retention trees**. *Retention trees** must include individuals of the *dominant** and other *natural tree species** of the *stand** including trees of the largest dimensions and trees that have grown only slowly.

In *stands** with a canopy layer younger than mature, *retention trees** from previous loggings (if such exist) are to be retained.

In continuous cutting areas *retention trees* that do not represent trees to be always retained (indicator 6.3.2) may be grouped with these trees or with themselves within maximum 5 ha areas.

6.3.2. The following trees are always protected regardless of species, size or number:
a) Tree species protected by law or otherwise listed as threatened.
b) Trees of rare native species, defined in *National Standards** by regions.
c) Individual or small groups of trees of exceptional size for the region (*dbh's** to be defined in *National Standards**).

d) Cavity trees.
e) Nesting trees of raptors and other large birds or animals (see also 6.2.).
f) Fire-scarred trees, up to 50 trees/ha.

Note 1: The listed trees do not refer to commercially grown special trees.

Note 2: *Retention trees** are to not be left in the immediate vicinity of power lines or roads, if it is clear that they pose a risk to them.

6.4. *Dead wood**

6.4.1. *Dead wood** removal is generally not allowed.

6.4.2. If a large amount of fresh *dead wood** is simultaneously created by a natural disturbance, harvesting is allowed but so that a minimum of 30 m^3/ha is left, unless legislation requires that more fresh *dead wood** than this must be harvested).

Exceptions to the above are coniferous trees:
Spruce: leave at least 10 m3/ha
Thick barked pine: leave at least 20 m3/ha

6.4.3. If the existing amount of *dead wood** on a plot undergoing timber harvesting is less than 5 m3/ha, new *dead wood** (*dbh** at least 10 cm, including the main *natural tree species**), must be created to meet the 5 m^3/ha minimum. This applies to a *stand** where more than 30 m3 wood/ha is being harvested.

6.5. Removal of logging residues

6.5.1. Removal of logging residues (branches, treetops and needles) is not allowed, except on paths, *brooks**, *springs** or other *sites** where the residues would hinder recreational use or traditional animal husbandry by *Indigenous Peoples**, or where the maintenance or enhancing the biodiversity values require their removal.

Note 1: Limited additional exceptions can be defined in *National Standards**.

6.5.2. Stumps are not allowed to be harvested.

Note 1: When transforming a *site** severely infected by *Heterobasidion root rot** into *continuous cover forest**, stump harvesting is allowed if approved by the *AEFC** or the AEFC's *accredited local representative**.

6.6. Maintaining mixed *stands**

6.6.1. No *native tree species** may be removed if their basal area is less than 5 % of the overall *stand** basal area, or whose number is less than 5% of the total number of trees. (Exceptions may be defined in *National Standards**).

6.6.2. Where ecologically appropriate, *the forest owner** is to preserve or take measures to generate a mix of at least 20% deciduous trees in conifer-dominated forests.

6.7. Buffer zones adjacent to *water bodies**

6.7.1. *The forest owner** is to leave a buffer zone determined by topography and soil type adjacent to naturally occurring *water bodies**. Zones adjacent to *non-natural-** *and*/or *non - permanent water bodies** are not mandatory.

Criteria regarding seasonal *water bodies** are to be defined in *National Standards**.

6.7.2. The minimum width of the buffer zone is to be as follows, unless the law or authority instructions / regulations require more:

a) 10 m for all *ponds** and lakes.
b) 20 m for *springs**, *brooks**, rivers and seashores.

Within these buffer zones felling of trees is allowed only under the following circumstances:

a) Non-native species.
b) Trees that are considered to possess an elevated risk to people, domestic animals, infrastructure or constructions.
c) Trees that need to be removed in order to maintain the quality and function of infrastructure or constructions.
d) Trees that hinder permitted maintenance of *ditches** entering the *water body**.
e) Trees that are felled specifically for nature conservation purposes.

Note 1: The buffer zones concerning *fertilisation** are listed in indicator 5.5.2.

Note 2: Exceptions for maintaining recreational values or views on limited *sites** can be set in the *National Standards**. Such *sites** must have a previous history of this kind of management, the management must not harm existing biodiversity values, and the *sites** must be approved by the *AEFC's National Working Group** or, if one does not yet exist, by the *AEFC** or the *AEFC's accredited local representative**.

6.7.3. Soil preparation is not permitted in the buffer zone. Forest machines are not to be operated in the buffer zone, with the exception of necessary access to crossings of a *water body** using an appropriate movable bridge structure.

6.8. Waste disposal

6.8.1. **Non-organic waste**

*The forest owner** is to ensure that non-organic waste originating from *forestry operations** is not left at the *site** and is disposed of appropriately.

6.9. On-site storage of chemicals

*The forest owner** is to ensure that fuel and oil containers, other chemicals and hazardous wastes are not stored in groundwater areas or on *sites** with an imminent risk of contamination to surface water in case of an accident.

Note 1: Exceptions to indicator 6.9. are allowed in cases where regular moving of such chemicals or hazardous wastes constitutes a greater contamination risk than storing them on *site**. In such cases the substances are to be either guarded or otherwise safeguarded in a manner that they cannot leak nor be accessed by unauthorised persons.

7. *PLANTATIONS*, ALIEN TREE SPECIES** AND FOREST RECONSTITUTION

7.1. ***Plantations****

For the purposes of this Standard, a "*plantation**" refers to any monoculture of planted or directly seeded *seedlings** established on a *clearcut** or other barren land, whether of *native* or other tree *species**.

7.1.1. The *forest owners** using this Standard undertake not to convert any of their current forests to *plantations**. As a basic principle, the *forest owners'** existing *plantations** cannot be certified under this Standard. The following exception applies:

a) **Conversion of *plantations** to forests**

*Existing plantations** can be certified if there is a *Transition Management Plan** approved by *the AEFC* or the AEFC's accredited local representative** to convert them to mixed *stands**.

Note 1: If the soil type supports only - in the main - one commercial tree species (natural monocultures, e.g. Scots pine on very dry/barren soils), then this is to not count as a *plantation**.

7.1.2. *Stands** managed for exceptional uses, e.g. for Christmas tree production, for biofuel willows or arboretums will be excluded from the certified forest area but they do not prevent the certification of the *forest owner*'s* other *stands**.

7.2. ***Alien tree species****

7.2.1. Forests under this certificate must consist only of locally suitable *native tree species**. The use of *alien tree species** is permitted only in the following exceptional circumstances:

a) In areas where *natural forests** have been destroyed and reforestation is not possible or extremely hard with *native tree species**, *alien tree species** may be used (see note 1). This should only be a temporary phase in moving towards a natural mixed forest.

Note 1: If the original *native tree species** of the *site** / region are unclear, or the soil too degraded to support them, expert consultation will decide the planting procedure on a case-by-case basis. This procedure must be approved by *the AEFC*/AEFC National representative**.

b) Existing *plantations** with an agreed *Transition Management Plan** (see 7.1.1.a).

7.2.2. Only such *alien tree species** whose invasive impacts can be easily controlled may be used.

7.2.3. *National Standards** are to include a list of tree species interpreted as *native**, as well as a list of *alien tree species** permitted for use in exceptional circumstances.

7.3. Forest reconstitution

7.3.1. Land devoid of tree cover for an extended period of time may be replanted with an initial stock of at least two *native tree species** suited to the soil type, on condition that biodiversity conservation reasons don't require keeping the area treeless.

Note 1: See Note 1 in 7.2.1. a)

8. MANAGEMENT PLANNING, ECONOMICS, MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

8.1. A *Forest Management Plan** (*FMP**) – appropriate to the scale and intensity of the forestry operations* – is to be written, implemented, and kept up to date. The long-term objectives of management, and the means of achieving them, are to be clearly stated. The *FMP** **is to be prepared at latest within one year of officially joining this Standard, or – if an** *FMP** already exists – that it be updated to meet the requirements of this Standard within one year.

8.2. The *Forest Management plan** and its *supporting documents** are to provide:

a) A list of recognized *Indigenous Peoples** and *Local Communities** and their rights (3.1, 4.1)
b) A description of the forest resource base including protected areas, environmental and social limitations, land use and ownership status, and a profile of adjacent lands.
c) A description of safeguards to protect environmental and social values:
    a) Plans for the identification and protection of rare, threatened and endangered species and their habitats, as well as other *High Conservation Value (HCV)** areas and objects as outlined in Regulation 6.
    b) A listing of *set-asides** (by type).
    c) A description of *HCV** areas and their possible management.
    d) Written guidelines on controlling erosion and the protection of water resources as well as minimizing forest damage during harvesting, road construction, and all other mechanical disturbances.
d) Maps in sufficiently detailed scale, showing:
    a) The borders of certified holdings and land ownership.
    b) Estate property register numbers.
    c) Officially established protected areas within the certified holdings and those bordering them
    d) The location of *set-asides** for *productive forest land**.
    e) The location of *set-asides** for *low-productive* and non-productive forest land**.
    f) The known locations of nationally and regionally rare, threatened and endangered species and their habitats (6.2).
    g) *HCV-areas** and objects according to the type (*HCV**-class), including *sites** of special cultural, ecological, economic, religious or spiritual significance to *Indigenous Peoples** and *Local Communities**.
    h) All individual forest *stands**.
    i) Forest *stands** located on water buffer zones, registered as managed *stands** (6.7).
    j) The location of *retention trees** (6.3).
    k) Planned management activities.

e) *Transition management plans** for converting existing *plantations** to mixed *stands** (7.1.1.a).
f) A rationale for projected rates of harvesting.

g) A description and justification of harvesting techniques and equipment to be used. (Only in countries where harvesting techniques vary greatly).
h) A description and justification of additional planned tasks such as *fertilisation** and *ditch** cleaning.
i) Documentation of participatory involvement
    a) Approval of forest management activities by *Indigenous Peoples**, if such is required.
    b) Documentation on consultation and views of *Local Communities** regarding any kind of management activities that could affect *Local Communities**,* if such is required (4.4, 4.5).
j) Documentation of:
    a) Origin of seeds or *seedlings** used in *regeneration**.
    b) Fencing approved by the *AEFC** (5.2.5).
    c) *Ditching** in exceptional cases (5.4.1).
    d) Use of *fertilisers** (5.5) and chemicals (5.6).
k) Documentation of:
    a) Documentation of deviations from standard requirements based on law or approval by *AEFC**.
    b) Documentation of deviations found in internal audits.
l) A description of how the *FMP**s implementation and effects will be monitored and documented

8.3. Updating of the *Forest Management Plan** (*FMP**)

The *Forest Management Plan** is to be periodically revised at least every ten years to incorporate the results of management operations in the forests, the results of monitoring, new environmental, scientific and technical information, as well as to respond to changing environmental, social and economic circumstances.

8.3.1. The *forest owner** is to check annually authorities' and other key sources of data for *High Conservation Value** habitats, occurrences of threatened species, social or historic significance, and significant ecosystem services, and update them annually into the *FMP**.

Note 1: The *FMP** is to contain a list of local, regional and national authorities, including NGOs, that will be annually consulted for updating the *FMP**'s data on *HCVs**. Unsolicited accurate data volunteered to the *FMP** from 3rd parties must also be taken into account.

8.3.2. In the event of a certified forest holding suffering a major natural disturbance, the *FMP** is to be updated in a timely manner, including reassessment of the *set-aside** network and restoration of forestry.

8.4. Worker training / *FMP** implementation

If the *forest owners** hire forest workers directly, they are to ensure the workers receive adequate training and supervision to ensure proper implementation of the *FMP** in all relevant aspects. The owner is to monitor that the work is carried out as directed.

Concerning application of *CCF** to the owner's forest as part of the *FMP**, the owner is to ensure that the forest workers have the necessary skills to carry out such forestry.

8.5. Public information on *Forest Management Plans**

Large *forest owners** (> 10,000 ha) are to ensure that key information on upcoming forest felling operations and their location is publicly available - on request or otherwise. A reasonable fee may be charged for supplying the information in other than electronic form.

8.6. Monitoring

Monitoring is conducted – appropriate to the scale and intensity of forest management – to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, *chain of custody**, management activities and their social and environmental impacts.

The frequency and intensity of monitoring is determined by the scale and intensity of forest management operations as well as the relative complexity and fragility of the affected environment. Monitoring procedures must be consistent and replicable over time to allow comparison of results and assessment of change.

Note 1: *forest owners** must document their monitoring evaluations in a fashion which allows the *AEFC's auditing unit** to assess compliance with these guidelines.

8.6.1. Forest management should include the research and data collection needed to monitor, at a minimum, the following indicators:

a) The yield of timber forest products harvested.
b) Growth rates at least between consecutive *FMPs**.
c) *Regeneration** and condition of the forest according to legal national requirements, and when renewing the *FMP**.
d) Observed considerable changes in the flora and fauna. (e.g. ongoing pest infestations, *invasive species**, visible changes in the amount of game animals)
e) Detected environmental and social impacts of harvesting and other operations.

8.7. Bookkeeping

*The forest owner** is to keep books showing:

a) Sales volumes and revenues for all forest products.
b) Cost levels of forest management and habitat management.

c) Places and times of use of biological control agents and *fertilisers** (wood ash and boron).
d) Harvest *sites**.
e) Names of timber buyers.

8.8. Traceability and *Chain of custody**

Documentation is to be provided by *the forest owner** to enable monitoring and *AEFC's auditing unit** to trace each timber type or other forest product from its origin, a process known as the "*Chain of Custody**".

8.8.1. *The forest owner** is to prove to the buyer in writing documentation that the purchased forest products originate from forest certified by this Standard. The documents are to determine the origin of wood down to the delineated *stand** compartments that were logged.

8.8.2. Forest management (Section A) applies up to the roadside. If *the forest owner** delivers timber beyond this point, they must comply with the *Chain of Custody** requirements described in AEFC CoC standard.

8.9. Participation in scientific projects

All *forest owners** adhering to this Standard are required to co-operate with bona fide national and international scientific projects relevant to the development of economic as well as socially and environmentally benign forestry. Such participation must retain the anonymity of the data and its location and not unduly take up the owners' time or effort. Nor is *the forest owner** to suffer economically from such participation.

8.10. Public information on *HCV** *sites** and *set-asides**

The location of *HCV** *sites** and *set-asides** noted by this Standard is to be made freely available to the general public except in cases where such information may endanger the integrity of an *HCV site**. Productive forest land* set-asides* for biodiversity must be separated from other types of *set-asides**.

PART B - GROUP CERTIFICATION

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of *Group Certification* n* is to allow small scale forestry to get certified at reasonable temporal expenditure and financial cost. This part of the *AEFC** standard stipulates the requirements for the establishment and management of *AEFC* Group Certification**. Several *management units** (from several *forest owners**) are combined in a *Management Group (MG)** and collectively managed by a *Group Certification Manager (GCM)**. *GCMs** are typically experienced forest management enterprises that must meet the criteria here outlined in order to qualify as *AEFC* group certifiers**.

*Group certification** is commonly used by smallholders but is available to any type of *management unit** and ownership worldwide of less than 10 000 hectares. A unit of 10 000 hectares or more must be certified as a separate unit.

9. ESTABLISHMENT OF FOREST MANAGEMENT GROUP

9.1. Requirements for *GCMs**

a) The *GCM** is to be a person or group of persons registered as one independent legal entity with proven and sufficiently wide-ranging experience of forest management as to demonstrate the ability to carry out all parts of the requirements of this Standard.
b) The *GCM's** own business operations must fully comply with all relevant parts of this *AEFC** CoC Standard.
c) When a *GCM** manages more than one group, it must demonstrate enough capacity and resources to manage them all to an equally high standard.
d) The *GCM** is to make sure that all actors in the group demonstrate sufficient knowledge to fulfil their corresponding responsibilities within the group.

10. REQUIREMENTS FOR *GROUP MEMBERS**

10.1. Each *group member** signs a declaration of consent between themselves and their *GCM**, in which both parties:

a) Commit to follow all applicable parts of this Standard, as well as any separately defined *rules** for the *Management Group**;
b) Declare that the Forest *Management units** they are bringing into the group are not included in any other *AEFC** Group or separate certification unit;
c) Agree to allow the *GCM** and the *AEFC** to fulfil in the member's forest holdings all responsibilities set out in this Standard;
d) Agree that the *GCM** will be the main contact for their *AEFC** certification.

10.2. The declaration of consent may be a separate contract, or part of any contract or other legally acceptable document that specifies the agreement between the forest holder and the *GCM** to uphold this Standard.

10.3. Joining a particular Group *Management unit** does not oblige *the forest owner** to use the group's *GCM** as their forest manager for other services.

11. DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

11.1. The *GCM** may divide its responsibilities of Group Management among different actors. In such cases the *GCM** retains overall responsibility for overseeing the Groups' conformity with this Standard, and must demonstrate that:

a) Conformance with this Standard remains for each *management unit**;
b) The division of key responsibilities within the group is documented;
c) All actors are fully aware of their responsibilities under this Standard.

12. GROUP SIZE

12.1. The *GCM** is to determine, based on its human and technical capacities, the maximum group size that it can manage, in terms of:

a) The number of *group members**;
b) The individual forest *management unit** size; and/or
c) The total forest area and distribution.

12.2. The *GCM** is to develop a group management system, and demonstrate its feasibility, that allows the continuous and effective management of all members of the group.

13. MULTINATIONAL GROUPS

13.1. Forest *Management Groups** are to only be established at a national level, except in the cases described in clause 13.2.

13.2. In cases where homogeneous conditions between countries allow for an effective and credible multinational implementation of the group management system, the *GCM** may request approval from the *AEFC** International to allow certification of such a group. In such cases the *GCM** must demonstrate their ability to apply all applicable *national standards**.

14. ADDING NEW MEMBERS TO A GROUP

14.1. The *GCM** is to evaluate every applicant who wishes to join the group and ensure that there are no major non-conformities with the applicable *AEFC** Standards, nor with

membership requirements, before adding the new member to the group. The *GCM** is to conduct a field evaluation to ensure these factors.

15. PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO MEMBERS

15.1. The *GCM** is to provide each member with information, or access to information, about how the *group certification** management is organised. This information is to include:

a) The *group rules** and the applicable *AEFC** National or Adapted Global Standard, and an explanation of how to conform to them;
b) An explanation of the AEFC's* auditing process, including the right of the *GCM** and *AEFC** to access information on the members' forest *management unit(s)** and their management history;
c) That the *AEFC auditing unit** will publish a public summary of their evaluation reports;
d) A list of all costs associated with joining and remaining in the group.

15.2. The *GCM** must at all times make available to *Group Members** all relevant details related to the above issues.

16. *GROUP RULES**

16.1. The *GCM** is responsible for developing, implementing and keeping updated written *rules** on procedures for managing the group. The procedure is to cover all applicable requirements of this Standard, including:

a) Criteria for group membership setting out joining requirements and admission procedures;
b) *Rules** setting out circumstances where members can be suspended or removed from the group, and how this proceeds;
c) An *internal monitoring** system for the group;
d) A process to resolve *corrective action** request issued either internally or by the *AEFC auditing unit**, including timelines and implications if any of the *corrective actions** are not resolved;
e) A procedure to solve *complaints** from *stakeholders** to *group members**;
f) A system for tracking and tracing *EverCover** forest products produced by the *group members**, from forest to the point of delivery of the purchaser;
g) Requirements regarding the use of *trademarks** or other claims for *AEFC**-certified forests;

The management of larger groups may entail the *GCM** enacting more comprehensive procedures to ensure that all parts of this Standard are upheld. Conversely, as long as the Standard's requirements are fulfilled, smaller groups may develop simpler procedures.

17. GROUP RECORDS

17.1. The *GCM** is to maintain up-to-date records covering all applicable requirements of this Standard. In so doing the *GCM** must also fulfil its data protection responsibilities. Records are to include:

a) A list of the members of the group, including for each member:
   a. Name, contact details and legal registration information (such as company tax number etc)
   b. The date of entering the group and, where relevant, the date of leaving the group, and the reason for leaving;
   c. The number and area of *management units** included in the group;
   d. The geographical location (property registration number) of each *management unit** included in the group, supported by a map or documentation;
   e. The type of forest ownership per member (e.g. privately owned; state managed; communal management; etc.);
   f. The main products;
b) Any records of training provided to staff and/or *group members*;*
c) A declaration of consent from all *group members*;*
d) Documentation and records regarding what practices have been recommended for forest management;
e) Records demonstrating the implementation of the *group management system**. These is to include records of internal monitoring, non-conformities identified in such monitoring, actions taken to correct any identified non-conformity, etc.;
f) Records of the actual or estimated annual harvesting volume of the group and the actual annual *AEFC** sales volume of the group.

17.2. The *GCM** is to ensure that the *AEFC Registry** is up to date with regard to records of the *EverCover** timber sales volumes of each *management unit** in the group.

17.3. The *GCM** is to retain group records for at least five (5) years.

17.4. For *management unit*s* in the group where the harvesting and sales are carried out by a *contractor**, the *GCM** is to verify that the volumes sold by the *contractor** correspond to the estimated volumes bought from its group. For this purpose, the contract between *the forest owner** and the *contractor** is to include a requirement for the *contractor** to communicate to *the forest owner** and the *GCM** the actual (measured) volume harvested and sold.

18. INTERNAL MONITORING

18.1. The *GCM** is to implement a documented *internal monitoring** system that includes at least the following:

a) A list of the members of the group, including for each member assessments as to continued conformance with the applicable *AEFC** Standards and *group rules*;*
b) Documents the Groups' overall performance;
c) Regular (at least annual) monitoring visits to a sample of *management units** within the group (see below for sampling rates);
d) Regular (at least annual) analysis of the results of the *internal monitoring** in order to improve the *groups' management system**;

18.2. The *GCM** is to select the requirements from the applicable *AEFC** Standard to be monitored at each internal evaluation according to the scale, intensity and risk of managing the group successfully.

18.3. The *GCM** may vary the focus of their *internal monitoring** on specific elements of the applicable Standard as per the most relevant perceived needs for monitoring, with the provision that all aspects of the *AEFC** Standard are sufficiently assessed for the group through the sampled *management units**.

18.4. The *GCM** is to specify what constitutes an active *management unit** for the group and justify the classification of activities as active or inactive management.

18.5. The minimum sample of *management units** to be visited annually for *internal monitoring** is to be calculated according to Table 2. The number of units calculated (X) using Table 2 is to be rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Table 2. Calculation of minimum annual sample size of *management units

Size class	Internal monitoring
Active *management units** > 1,000 ha	$X = \sqrt{y}$
Active *management units** ≤ 1,000 ha	$X = 0.6 * \sqrt{y}$
*Management units** with no logging carried out that year	$X = 0.1 * \sqrt{y}$

Where: X = number of *management units** to be sampled

y = number of active or inactive *management units** within each category

18.6. The *GCM** is to increase the calculated minimum sample when high risks are identified (e.g. unresolved substantiated land tenure or use rights disputes, *High Conservation Values (HCVs)** are threatened, substantiated *stakeholder* complaints**, etc.).

18.7. The *GCM** should visit different *management units** during the internal monitoring from the ones previously visited by the *AEFC auditing unit** unless there are pending *corrective actions**, *complaints** or risk factors that require a revisit of the same units.

18.8. The *GCM** is entitled to issue internal *corrective action** requests to address *non-conformities** identified during the internal monitoring and follow up on their implementation. *Non-conformities** identified at the level of a *group member** may result in *non-conformities** at the *GCM** level when the *non-conformities** are determined to be the result of the *GCM's** performance.

19. CHAINS OF CUSTODY

19.1. The *GCM** is to apply and implement all relevant parts of the *CoC* Standard to the entire *Management Group**.

20. *GCM** DEFAULTING

20.1. If the *GCM** for whatever reason anticipates it will no longer be able to ensure *AEFC** Standard compliance within its *Management Groups** it must notify the National *AEFC** of a reduction or suspension of operations 12 months in advance. In such a case, the National *AEFC** is obliged to appoint another *group certification** manager for the certification group.

20.2. If the *GCM** does not comply with the timetable of section 20.1, or if the *AEFC** becomes aware that the *GCM** is unable to perform its *Group Management** responsibilities satisfactorily, The National or International *AEFC** is entitled to immediately appoint a contact person or company for the affected *Management Groups** who will temporarily take full responsibility for ensuring compliance with certification requirements. The temporary contact person or company is fully responsible for verifying that it has the resources to meet all *AEFC** requirements.

20.3. A temporary *Group Certification Manager** is not entitled to increase the certification price in the first year; the costs of transferring the certification are to primarily be borne by the previous company. If the said company is insolvent, the costs arising from the transfer of certification are to be paid by the *AEFC**.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AEFC: The Association for Ecological Forestry Certification ry. The organisation responsible for the development, ownership, administration and oversight of the EverCover certification system. AEFC establishes and maintains the applicable standards, certification and audit requirements, trademark rules, registry system and other requirements necessary for the operation and integrity of the EverCover certification scheme.

AEFC's authorized local representative: A national or regional entity who has been authorised by AEFC to represent the AEFC in a certain country or region and to create a national or regional level forestry certification standard applying The Association's global principles.

AEFC National Working Group: See "National Working Group"

AEFC representative: A national or regional entity who has been authorised by the AEFC to represent AEFC in a certain country or region and to create a national or regional level forestry certification standard applying The Association's global principles.

Alien tree species: Trees intentionally or unintentionally introduced by human activity outside their native or historical natural range. These species are not naturally part of the local forest ecosystem and may become invasive, competing with native vegetation, altering habitat structure, and potentially affecting biodiversity, soil chemistry, and water cycles.(Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) (2015). Terms and Definitions. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) (2015). FSC-STD-01-001 V5-2 Richardson, D. M. (Ed.) (2011). Fifty Years of Invasion Ecology: The Legacy of Charles Elton.)

Antagonistic fungal preparation: A formulated product containing beneficial fungi that suppress or inhibit harmful (pathogenic) fungi or other damaging agents through biological mechanisms.

Artificial regeneration: Renewal of the forest by planting or direct seeding; establishing a new stand of trees by planting seeds or seedlings by hand or machine. (Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Silvicultural terminology)

Audit (including its grammatical forms): A systematic, independent and documented process for obtaining and evaluating objective evidence to determine the extent to which an organisation, activity, process, product or management system conforms to applicable EverCover and AEFC requirements. An audit includes the planning and conduct of audit activities, collection and verification of relevant evidence, identification and documentation of findings and nonconformities, and preparation of an audit report that provides a sufficient basis for the certification decision.

Auditor: A person who has the required competence, qualifications and authorisation to conduct EverCover audits in accordance with applicable AEFC requirements. The auditor is responsible for planning and carrying out assigned audit activities, obtaining and evaluating objective evidence, assessing conformity with applicable requirements, documenting audit findings and conclusions, and contributing to or preparing the audit report.

Average tree diameter: The average tree diameter is the mean diameter of trees in a given forest stand, measured at breast height (1.3 meters above root neck (*collum radicis)*, or 1,3 meters above ground level), also known as the average DBH (Diameter at Breast Height).

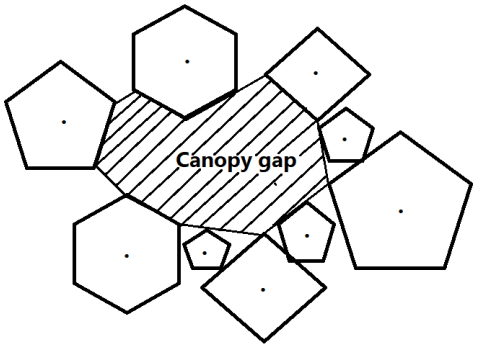
Biological pest and weed control: Involves the use of natural predators, parasites, or pathogens to reduce the population of harmful species. This method limits the need for chemical preparations.

BirdLife: A global non-governmental conservation organisation that plays a role in identifying, protecting, and managing forest ecosystems critical to biodiversity. BirdLife functions as a scientific authority and policy advocate, particularly in identifying Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), many of which are forested habitats. The organisation supports sustainable forest management by providing data, assessments, and conservation frameworks aimed at protecting avian diversity and associated forest ecosystems.

Birds' breeding season: In forestry, the birds' breeding season refers to the period during which bird species engage in mating, nest-building, egg-laying, and rearing of their young. This season typically occurs in spring and early summer, but its timing can vary depending on species, geographical location, and environmental conditions.

Brook: A small, natural stream of flowing water, smaller than a creek or river and bigger than a rivulet.

Canopy gap: Removal of three or more (dominant top/upper canopy layer trees) adjacent trees larger than the average *tree diameter** of the stand. Delineated by the edges of the crown projections of the surrounding trees.



Careful methods of (soil) scarification: Low-intensity soil preparation methods for exposing mineral soil surfaces to enhancer seed germination or planted seedlings, while minimizing ecological disturbance.

Chemical pesticides: Synthetic or naturally derived chemical substances used to control, deter, or eliminate organisms considered harmful, including insects, fungi, rodents, and weeds, that (as regards this Standard) may threaten the health, productivity, or regeneration of forest ecosystems.

Clearcut: A Clearcut (or clearcutting) is a method of harvesting in which all or nearly all the trees in a designated area are uniformly cut down at once, regardless of size or species. Clearcut does not here imply only removal of every single tree but also thinning below the nationally set *legal thinning limit**.

Clearing: An area where all or nearly all trees have been harvested.

Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF): Continuous Cover Forestry is a forest management method that maintains the forest tree cover in all phases of the cutting cycle and avoids clear-cutting. The aim is to let the forest regenerate through natural seeding.

CCF: Abbreviation for Continuous Cover Forestry

Common ownership: Ownership structure where all sites under the scope of the chain of custody certificate are owned by the same organisation. Ownership means at least 51% of ownership interest over the site.

***Contractor*:** An external person or organisation engaged by an organisation to carry out specific activities, processes or services on its behalf under a contractual or equivalent arrangement. A contractor operates outside the organisation's own personnel structure but may perform activities that fall within the scope of the organisation's EverCover certification. The organisation remains responsible for ensuring that relevant activities carried out by the contractor comply with applicable EverCover requirements.

***Contracting*:** The arrangement by which an organisation engages an external person or organisation to carry out specific activities, processes or services on its behalf under a contractual or equivalent agreement. Contracting may include activities that fall within the scope of the organisation's EverCover certification, while the certified organisation retains responsibility for ensuring compliance with all applicable EverCover requirements.

Crown projection: The horizontal area on the ground covered by the outer edges of a tree's crown, corresponding to the crown being projected vertically downward onto the ground.

Customary rights: Traditional entitlements to land, resources, or practices that are recognized through long-standing community customs and usage, rather than formal legal systems.

Dbh: Diameter of a tree's stem measured at breast height (1.3 meters above root neck (*collum radicis)*, or 1,3 meters above ground level).

Dead wood: Standing or fallen trees that have died due to natural disturbances (e.g., windthrow, insects, disease, aging, drought) or forest management activities (e.g., thinning or harvesting).

Ditch: A small or moderately-sized man-made channel dug into the soil to drain excess surface water or lower the water table. Smaller than an actual channel.

Ditching: The process of constructing or rehabilitating drainage ditches in forest areas. This includes new ditch construction, ditch cleaning, and supplementary ditching—the latter referring to extending existing ditch networks.

Dominant height: The mean height of the 100 tallest trees per hectare.

Dominant top/upper canopy layer trees: Trees that occupy the uppermost canopy layer of a stand, with crowns receiving full sunlight from above and partly from the sides.

Dominant tree species: The main tree species in a forest stand. Some mixed stands may not have any particular dominant tree species.

Even-aged stand: A forest stand in which most of the trees are of the same or nearly the same age, typically originating from a single regeneration event such as clear-cutting, planting or large windthrow.

Even-sized stand: An even-sized stand is a forest stand in which most of the trees are more or less of similar size or diameter. It typically results from uniform growth conditions, management practices, or a single regeneration event that produced trees with comparable dimensions.

Even-structured stand: An even-structured stand is an even-sized forest stand in which also the horizontal arrangement (spatial distribution) of the trees is more or less systematic. This structure usually results from uniform growth conditions, management practices, or a single regeneration event.

EverCover: Trademark registered by the AEFC to show that a product or organisation is certified under the EverCover forest management standard.

Fertilisation: Adding mineral or organic substances to soil to promote (tree) growth or correct growth disturbances caused by nutrient deficiencies or imbalances.

Fertiliser: A mineral or organic substance applied to soil to promote growth, restore site productivity, or correct growth disturbances caused by nutrient deficiencies or imbalances.

FMP: Abbreviation for Forest Management Plan

Forest Management Plan: A comprehensive set of documents, maps, policies, and operational guidelines that describe, justify, and regulate all forestry activities within a defined Management Unit (MU). It outlines the objectives, silvicultural systems, environmental safeguards, and monitoring protocols to be followed by forest owners, managers, or operators. (Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). (2011). Forest Management Planning. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). (2015). FSC-STD-01-001 V5-2.)

Forest operations: Planned and practical activities carried out within a forest for the purpose of managing forest resources. These include, but are not limited to, site preparation, planting, thinning, harvesting and road construction. (Source: Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) (2015). FSC-STD-01-001 V5-2. FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2010). Forestry Operations and Engineering. Kellomäki, S. et al. (2008). Forest Ecology and Management.)

Forest owner: The individual, organisation, or legal entity that holds legal rights to a forest area and is responsible for its management and use. The forest owner is the certificate applicant or holder and is accountable for ensuring that forest operations comply with all relevant legal, environmental, and social standards set by the certification scheme. (Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (2015). Voluntary Guidelines on National Forest Monitoring. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe & Food and Agriculture Organisation. (2020). Forest ownership in the UNECE Region.)

Free, Prior and Informed Consent: (FPIC) is the right of Indigenous peoples and local communities to give or withhold voluntary, timely, and well-informed agreement to projects or activities that may affect their lands, resources, or rights.

Fungal pathogens: Fungi that cause diseases in trees and other vegetation by penetrating their tissues—such as roots, stems, or leaves—and disrupting normal physiological processes such as water and nutrient transport, respiration, and photosynthesis. (Source: Forest Research UK. (2021). Tree Pests and Diseases. Forestry Commission.Schwarze, F.W et al. (2000). Fungal Strategies of Wood Decay in Trees)

Gap: In this Standard, removal of three or more (dominant top/upper canopy layer trees) adjacent trees larger than the average *tree diameter** of the stand. Delineated by the edges of the crown projections of the surrounding trees (see “Canopy gap”).

GCM: Abbreviation for Group Certification Manager

Genetically manipulated regeneration material: Genetically manipulated regeneration material refers to planting or reproductive material (such as seeds or seedlings) derived from an organism whose genetic material has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally through mating or

natural recombination. (Source: Based on FSC-POL-30-602 FSC Interpretation on GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms)).

Group certification: A certification scheme that allows multiple small forest owners or organisations to pool their resources and obtain a single, shared certificate. The certification enables cost-effective compliance with responsible forest management principles and the use of the trademark. The group is managed centrally, and participants are required to meet the relevant requirements outlined in this standard.

Group Certification Manager: A person or group, such as a cooperative, association, or company, legally registered, that represents the management units and forestry contractors forming a group for AEFC forest management. The Group Certification Manager (GCM) applies for or holds group certification through an AEFC certification body and represents the group during the certification process and while the certificate is valid. The GCM is responsible for organizing the group internally (the group management system) and ensuring compliance with this Standard.

Group management system: The documented system established and maintained by a Forest Management group organisation to manage, control and monitor compliance with applicable EverCover Forest Management requirements across all group members and certified forest areas. The system includes defined responsibilities, procedures for admitting and removing group members, internal monitoring and inspections, record keeping, management of nonconformities and corrective actions, communication of applicable requirements, and other controls necessary to ensure consistent implementation of the EverCover requirements throughout the group.

Group member: A forest owner, community, community member, or leaseholder that participates in a group for AEFC Forest Certification through their management unit(s). Group members do not hold individual AEFC certificates, but their management units are covered under the group certificate issued to and managed by the Group Certification Manager (GCM).

Group Rules: The documented rules established by a Forest Management group organisation that define the conditions, responsibilities and procedures applicable to participation in the EverCover group certification.

Harmful decaying fungi: In this Standard, fungi that break down wood or other tree tissues in a way that negatively affects tree health, structural stability, or timber quality. These fungi can cause e.g. rot, weakened stems, or branch failure, reducing the vitality and economic value of the forest.

HCV: Abbreviation for High Conservation Value

Heterobasidion root rot is a serious and widespread fungal disease caused primarily by species in the *Heterobasidion* species complex. It affects coniferous trees, especially **pine, spruce, and fir**, by attacking the **roots and lower stem (butt)**, leading to wood decay, reduced growth, instability, and eventual tree death. (Source: Oliva, J., et al. (2014). The effect of fungal pathogens on the water and carbon economy of trees: implications for drought-induced mortality. Schwarze, F.W.M.R., et al. (2000). Fungal Strategies of Wood Decay in Trees. Forest Research UK. (2021). Tree Pests and Diseases.)

High Conservation Values: Biological, ecological, social, or cultural values of significant or critical importance. These values are typically categorized under six internationally recognized HCV-area or -object types (see below) and serve as the basis for precautionary approaches in responsible forest management. (source: Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). (2015). FSC-STD-60-004 V2-0: International Generic Indicators. HCV Network. (2022). Common Guidance for the Identification and Management

of High Conservation Values. ProForest. (2008). Good Practice Guidelines for High Conservation Value Assessments.)

HCV 1 – Species diversity: Concentrations of biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered species, that are significant at global, regional or national levels.
HCV 2 – Landscape-level ecosystems and mosaics: Intact Forest Landscapes and large landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics that are significant at global, regional or national levels, and that contain viable populations of the great majority of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.
HCV 3 – Ecosystems and habitats: Rare, threatened, or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia.
HCV 4 – Critical ecosystem services: Basic ecosystem services in critical situations, including protection of water catchments and control of erosion of vulnerable soils and slopes.
HCV 5 – Community needs: Sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of Local Communities* or Indigenous Peoples* (for livelihoods, health, nutrition, water, etc.), identified through engagement with these communities or Indigenous Peoples*.
HCV 6 – Cultural values: Sites, resources, habitats and landscapes of global or national cultural, archaeological or historical significance, and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of Local Communities* or Indigenous Peoples*, identified through engagement with these Local Communities* or Indigenous Peoples*.

(Source: Forestry Stewardship Council, (FSC) FSC-STD-01-001 V5-3)

High-altitude forests: Forests found at elevated sites, typically characterized by colder temperatures, shorter growing seasons, and often steep slopes. These forests are adapted to more challenging environmental conditions, low temperatures, and varying levels of precipitation. (Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). (2020). Mountain Forests and Sustainable Development. Körner, C. (2003). Alpine Plant Life: Functional Plant Ecology of High Mountain Ecosystems. Price, M. F., et al. (2011) Mountain Forests in a Changing World: Realizing Values, Addressing Challenges.).

Important groundwater areas: An area where groundwater serves as a significant source of drinking or domestic water, and/or where maintaining the quantity and quality of the water is essential for sustainable water supply and/or environmental protection.

Indigenous peoples: Communities or individuals who are either:

1. Recognized as Indigenous by national legislation or

2. self-identify as Indigenous and in the area they currently live have **ancestral descent** and historic presence prior to colonization or formation of the modern state.

Members of an Indigenous People are those whom the Indigenous People in question recognises as their member.

Input: Raw, reclaimed, or semi-finished materials, as well as finished products, that an organisation procures or generates and uses in the production process, or trades under the scope of an AEFC certificate. The materials must belong to AEFC product groups based on their material category.

Internal monitoring: Systematic activities carried out by the group certification manager to verify and monitor the compliance of group members with the applicable certification requirements.

Invasive species: Non-native (alien) plant, animal, fungal, microbial etc. species that have been introduced—intentionally or unintentionally—beyond their natural range, and which proliferate rapidly, often due to the absence of natural predators or controls.

Legal basal area limit: The minimum basal area (m^2/ha) that must be retained in a forest stand in thinning operations, as specified by national or regional forest legislation or regulations.

Legal thinning limit: The minimum stand density (stems/ha) or basal area (m^2/ha) that must be retained in a forest stand in thinning operations, as specified by national or regional forest legislation or regulations.

Local communities: Local communities refer to groups of people living in, adjacent to, or near a forest Management Unit, whose livelihoods, cultural practices, rights, economies, or environments may be significantly affected by forest management activities, or who may in turn influence the environmental or economic conditions of the Management Unit. These communities can range in size and may include both rural and peri-urban populations with strong social, economic, or traditional ties to the forest area. (Source: Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). (2015). FSC-STD-01-001 V5-2. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FSC). (2016). Free, Prior and Informed Consent Manual for Project Practitioners. International Labour Organisation (ILO). (2013). Understanding the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention.)

Low-productive forest land: Forested areas where the land's ability to produce trunk wood biomass of trees is limited due to various environmental factors such as soil quality, topography, climate, or disturbance history. These lands have a low mean annual increment (counted over period of 100 years for conifers, 50 years for leaved trees) of tree trunk biomass. The increment limit is sometimes defined as less than one cubic meter per hectare but greater than 0.1 cubic meters per hectare.

Management group: The group covered by the group certification, comprising the group entity and all group members included within the scope of the group certificate.

Management plan of a protected area: A document that defines the area’s conservation objectives, permitted and restricted activities, as well as practical management and monitoring measures. Its purpose is to safeguard biodiversity, ecosystem functions and cultural values, while providing long-term guidance for the area’s use and administration.

Management unit: A clearly defined geographic area within a forest that is designated for certification. It includes all land legally owned, controlled, or used by the organisation and is managed according to specific long-term objectives and sustainable forestry practices.

Mature stand: A forest stand in which the older trees have reached full or near-full growth, with well-developed crowns and canopy layers.

Mechanical pest, weed and fungal control: Includes physical methods such as manual removal, cutting, mowing, mulching, or soil tilling to control weeds, pests or fungi. These methods can be particularly effective in early stages of infestation or in sensitive environments where chemical treatments are undesirable. (Source: Metsäkeskus. (2020). Integrated Pest Management in Finnish Forestry: Practices and Guidelines. Finnish Forest Centre. Luke (2021). Forest Health and Pest Control: Strategies for Sustainable Management. Thurston, G., et al. (2013). Managing Pests and Pathogens in Forestry: A Manual of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques)

National Working Group: A working group, established by the AEFC for a specific country or region, responsible for composing and developing the National AEFC Forest Standard.

National Standard: A set of requirements and criteria established by a national or regional certification body, to ensure that forest management practices within AEFC forestry in national or regional level meet the requirements set in AEFC Global Standard, national or regional legislation, and those arising from local environmental conditions. The National Standard is tailored to the specific

conditions and priorities of the country or region in which it is applied, but it must align with global AEFC principles for forestry. National Standards must always be approved by the AEFC board.

Native (tree/shrub) species: Plant and tree species that naturally occur and have evolved in a specific geographical region or ecosystem without human introduction. These species are adapted to the local climate, soil types, and ecological conditions of the area. A native species, subspecies, or lower taxon occurs within its natural range (past or present) and dispersal potential (that is, within the range it occupies naturally or could occupy without direct or indirect introduction or care by humans).

Natural forest: Forest composed of native tree species typical to a given area, regardless of whether the site has been influenced by human activity in the past or not. The term does not imply that the forest is pristine or untouched, but rather that its tree composition is naturally occurring and representative of the region's indigenous forest types.

Natural regeneration: Natural regeneration is the establishment and growth of new trees and forest vegetation from natural sources such as seed fall, stump sprouting, or root suckering, occurring after a disturbance or as part of the forest's natural cycle.

Natural tree species: Tree species occurring in a specific region or habitat through natural ecological processes, without being introduced by humans.

Non-natural water bodies: Hydrological structures or formations that have been artificially created by human activity rather than occurring through natural geological or ecological processes. These may include drainage ditches, man-made ponds, irrigation channels, or reservoirs constructed for forestry, agriculture, or infrastructure purposes.

Non-permanent water bodies: Hydrological features that do not maintain water year-round and whose flow or presence of water is seasonal, intermittent, or event-driven (e.g., following rainfall or snowmelt). These include ephemeral streams whose stream bed is visible also when dry, seasonally dry rivulets, temporary ponds, and seasonal wetlands, which lack continuous flow or standing water during dry periods.

Non-productive areas: (See "Non-productive forest land")

Non-productive forest land: Areas within a forest or landscape that are either treeless or almost treeless, where the land's capability to produce trunk wood biomass is extremely limited. These areas have an annual increment (counted over period of 100 years for conifers, 50 years for leaved trees) of less than 0.1 cubic meters per hectare, meaning that tree growth is negligible or virtually absent.

Outsourcing: An activity in which an organisation transfers an internal business process (for example, tasks related to producing a specific product or service) to an external organisation. These activities usually take place outside the organisation's own premises, but the organisation may also establish subcontracting agreements with other companies within its facilities.

Pioneer Tree Species: Tree species that are naturally among the first to colonize disturbed or newly exposed sites, such as areas affected by fire, storms, logging, or soil disturbance. (Sources: Oliver, C.D., & Larson, B.C. (1996). Forest Stand Dynamics. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). (2015). Global Guidelines for the Restoration of Degraded Forests and Landscapes in Drylands.)

Plantation: A plantation in this Standard refers to a monoculture stand of trees that has been intentionally established through planting or direct seeding, typically on clearcut areas.

Plantlife: A conservation organisation dedicated to the protection and sustainable management of wild plants and fungi, particularly within forest and woodland habitats. Plantlife promotes forest practices that maintain or enhance botanical diversity, including managing forest edges, glades, and

rides, which are crucial for many rare and threatened plant species. It contributes scientific data, conservation guidance, and policy advocacy to ensure that forest management supports the ecological needs of plant biodiversity. (Source: Plantlife (2022). Managing woodlands for plants and fungi. Salisbury, UK: Plantlife. Plantlife (2021). About Us – Our Mission. www.plantlife.org.uk (Cite 8.5.2025). Kirby, K., & Goldberg, E. (2006). Ancient Woodland: Management for Wildlife and People.)

Pond: A small shallow body of water, typically with a maximum surface area of 5 hectares and a maximum depth of 5 meters. Ponds can be natural or artificial, and permanent or temporary.

Pristine forest: Natural forest ecosystem that has not been significantly disturbed by human activity and retains its original structure, composition, biodiversity, and ecological processes. These forests are typically primary forests, showing no visible signs of past logging, infrastructure development, or intensive land use. (Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). (2020). Global Forest Resources Assessment. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). (2006). Global Biodiversity Outlook 2.)

Productive forest land: Forested areas where the land's ability to produce trunk wood biomass of trees is equal to or above a mean annual increment of one cubic meter per hectare (counted over period of 100 years for conifers, 50 years for leaved trees).

Regeneration: The process by which tree cover is renewed after disturbance (such as harvesting, fire, or natural mortality), ensuring the continuity of the forest cover and ecosystem functions.

Retail: The activity of selling finished products directly to the public for use or consumption, rather than for resale.

Retention trees: Living trees intentionally left permanently standing during logging or harvesting operations to maintain ecological functions within a forest ecosystem, landscape values, etc.

Rivulet: A small, narrow, and often seasonal watercourse through which water flows over the land or into a larger stream. Rivulets may regularly dry up during part of the year and are generally smaller than permanent brooks.

Sapling: A young tree that has passed the *seedling** stage, tall enough to be measured at breast height (dbh), but not yet mature.

Scope: Refers to the area of an organisation’s operations that falls within the certification. It includes the product groups, sites, and activities evaluated by AEFC’s auditing body, as well as the certification requirements against which the audit is conducted.

Seedling: A young tree grown from seed, usually less than 1.3 m in height and not yet measured at breast height (dbh)

Set-asides: Defined areas or objects that are permanently left outside all management activities for biodiversity conservation reasons or for preserving other values, or are managed only for maintaining or increasing such values.

Set-aside threshold: Refers to the minimum proportion (10 % of the productive forest land) of a forest management unit that must be allocated for conservation under AEFC Regulations. The proportion can, however, be higher due to legal requirements, voluntary conservation actions, or areas sold for permanent protection.

Shelter thickets: Dense groups of shrubs and/or small trees left unmanaged to support biodiversity. Their aim is to reduce the impact of wind and snow, safeguard young trees and vegetation, and provide habitat for animals, and act as a source of seeds or food for forest wildlife.

Silvicultural measures: Actions or treatments applied to a forest stand to influence its establishment, composition, structure, growth, quality and health, in line with specific management objectives.

Small clearing (see also "gap"): A small clearing, or gap, is created by the removal of three or more adjacent dominant (top/upper canopy layer) trees that are larger than the average tree diameter of the stand. The maximum size of a clearing to be counted as "small" in this Standard is 0,1 ha.

Soil surface scarification: A variety of methods for (mechanically) exposing mineral soil surface for seed germination or planting seedlings.

Spring: A point or area where groundwater (including perched groundwater) naturally emerges at the surface, forming a small, often permanent or sometimes temporary water source. Unlike seepage areas, where water rises diffusely over a wide area, a spring discharges at a specific location, forming either an open pool or a very wet, plant-covered surface.

Stakeholder: Refers to individuals, communities, or organisations that are affected by the application or presence of AEFC-oriented management or manufacturing processes, or who can themselves influence either these processes or the involved individuals, organisations and communities. Examples of stakeholders include employees, customers, and business partners.

Stand / Forest stand: A contiguous community of trees that is more or less homogenous in species composition, age structure, and growth conditions, and occupy a specific area of forest land. The term is often used to describe a unit within a forest where the trees share common characteristics due to similar environmental factors such as soil type, moisture, and climate. Forest stands are often categorized based on the dominant tree species, age class, and canopy structure.

Stand/tree density: Refers to the number of trees per unit area in a forest stand. It indicates how closely trees are spaced and affects growth, competition, light availability, and overall stand structure.

Strip road: A narrow, regularly spaced path or lane within a forest stand used for timber extraction and machinery access during harvesting operations.

Subcontractor: A person, group, company, or legal entity that carries out forestry, logging, other forest management activities, or CoC and group certification services under the contract of a main contractor with an AEFC-certified organisation. The subcontractor must comply with AEFC certification requirements in their work, but their activities remain the responsibility of the main contractor and, ultimately, of the AEFC-certified contracting organisation.

Supporting documents: Additional records, maps, forms, or declarations that complement the forest management plan and are required to demonstrate a forest owner's eligibility and readiness to join a forest certification scheme. These documents may include ownership records, consent forms, environmental assessments, maps of conservation areas, documentation of forest use rights, or evidence of compliance with certification criteria. Together with the forest management plan, they form the full documentation package necessary for certification entry. (Source: Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). (2020). FSC-STD-30-005 V1-1 Standard for Group Entities in Forest Management Groups. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). (2011). Forest Management and Planning)

Trademark: Any name, logo, symbol, mark, label, claim or other distinctive sign owned or controlled by AEFC and used to identify, communicate or promote EverCover certification, certified products, materials or services. Use of the EverCover Trademark is subject to applicable AEFC trademark requirements, licensing conditions and other rules governing its use

Undergrowth: The naturally regenerated layer of young trees and shrubs with height less than ½ of the height of the dominant tree layer of the forest.

Uneven-sized stand: A forest stand where trees vary in height and diameter. A continuous cover forest is typically also uneven-aged, meaning that smaller and younger trees are the most numerous, and the number of trees decreases as diameter and age class increase.

Water body: Standing or running water in a permanent pool or channel. The pool/channel can be regularly seasonally dry (seasonal water bodies). The pool/channel may be natural or man-made (artificial). The term covers all waters from oceans, lakes and rivers through e.g. creeks, brooks and ponds to springs, seasonal rivulets and manmade ditches and pools.