FSC Forest Management

What is forest management certification?

As a forest manager or owner, certification is a way of ensuring that your careful and long term forest management is recognised. Certification is voluntary and involves an inspection of the forest management by an independent organisation to check that it conforms to internationally agreed principles of responsible forest management. The timber can then carry the FSC label, guaranteeing that it comes from a well-managed forest and enabling you to demonstrate to your customers that you meet the highest standards of forest certification.

What standards must be met?

At the international level, FSC has developed its set of Principles and Criteria for responsible forest management. They apply to all forests; temperate, tropical and boreal, natural forests and plantations. Requirements include compliance with national legislation, respect for local use rights, maintenance of the ecological functions of the forest and its biodiversity, economic viability, and the need for an adequate management plan and monitoring of operations.

To take local conditions into account, FSC encourages the development of national standards for forest management in each country or region, which interpret the international Principles and Criteria. FSC’s UK forest management standard is based around the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). UKWAS was developed as a voluntary forestry standard in consultation with major social, environmental and forestry organisations in the UK and FSC. It is a national standard which is consistent with FSC Principles and Criteria whilst at the same time reflecting local ecological, social and economic circumstances. The standard is drafted in such a way as to refer to published best practice as far as possible.

FSC accredited certification bodies are required to use the FSC UK Principles and Criteria ordered version of UKWAS to check compliance. UKWAS certification is only approved by FSC when an FSC accredited certification body carries out the inspection.

What are the benefits?

- Receive the public recognition which responsible forest management deserves
- Meet customer demands: UK retailers and specifiers such as local councils and architects increasingly ask forest managers for independent proof that their forest is well managed
- Gain a competitive edge for your timber
- Meet internal policy: certification helps forest managers to demonstrate to owners, investors and/or themselves that they are meeting their objectives of responsible long-term management
Achieving FSC forest certification

FSC Forest Management certification evaluations are carried out by independent certification bodies. The length of time it takes to become certified can vary, depending on your existing management practices and documentation systems.

To begin the process, we recommend that you obtain quotes from more than one FSC accredited certification body; a full list is available on the FSC UK website.

How much does it cost?

The costs for certification can vary considerably depending on the size and complexity of the woodland. It is very difficult to generalise and you should contact the certification bodies to get an estimate for your woodland. Costs can be considerably reduced if several forests are being assessed together in a group scheme or if the size of your woodland holding or intensity of management fall within certain thresholds, as outlined below. For large forests, costs increase with the size of the holding as the assessment requires more time for the field visit, but costs per hectare will be lower.

Group and Resource Manager Certification

Forest certification requires an inspection team to make a field visit and examine relevant paperwork for each forest. The costs this entails per hectare would be relatively high for small or medium sized properties, but group certificates can offer a more affordable route. For individual certificates, each woodland needs to be inspected annually, but in a Group Scheme only a proportion of the properties need be visited in any one year, thereby reducing the costs of sampling by the certification body. The Group may also be able to share management overheads such as using the same contractors or consultants. The following ‘groups’ can be considered:

1. Single owner (individual, trust or company) with scattered holdings
2. Forest owners association
3. Forest manager or management firm managing woodlands on behalf of different owners
4. Timber marketing association
5. Co-operative of neighbouring owners

Resource Manager Certification is another type of Group Certification in which the manager receives the certification rather than a group of woodlands. The manager of several woodlands can apply to have their systems, policies and a sample of the woodlands inspected by the certification body. A certified resource manager can then allow any of their clients, whose woodlands meet the certification standard, access to the FSC trademarks.

A list of Resource Managers and Forest Management Group Schemes in the UK is available on the FSC UK website.

Small and Low Intensity Managed Woodlands

FSC also offers streamlined certification processes to small and low intensity managed (SLIM) woodlands to try to make certification more affordable. In the UK, a forest is considered to be small if it is less than 500 hectares in size. SLIM woodlands benefit from lower sampling intensities and less onerous levels of documentation or management systems as compared to managers of larger or more intensively managed woodland areas (in order to demonstrate compliance with UKWAS). These benefits are maximised where Group Schemes are made up of SLIM Woodlands.