

## Guyana National Forest Certification System

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Group Forest Management – Requirements

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## **Foreword**

The Guyana National Forest Certification System (GNFCS) has been developed to support sustainable forest management through forest certification and labelling of forest-based products. Products with a GNFCS claim and/or label offer assurances that the raw materials that have been used in their manufacture originate from sustainably managed forests and legal or controlled sources.

This Standard has been developed using an open, transparent, consultative and consensus-based process involving a broad range of stakeholders. The procedures in this Standard follow the requirements of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

The GNFCS supports gender equality; thus, every term in this Standard referring to a specific person (e.g., manager, owner, participant) embraces women and men likewise, without further accentuation.

## **1. Introduction**

Guyana's forestry sector is characterised by large concession holders, small concession holders, community forestry associations, Amerindian Villages who operate individually or under a Village Council and private forest owners.

Each of these entities differs in their capacities and resources (financial and human), which could be a barrier to attaining forest certification. Other factors that individually and/or in combination, can limit access and participation of small holdings and ownerships in forest management certification may include:

- periodicity of their management activities and revenues;
- the low intensity, small scale and low frequency of operations; and
- limited access to information, technical support and knowledge.

Group certification is an alternative approach to individual certification, which allows forest owners and managers to become voluntarily certified under one certificate and share the financial obligations arising from forest certification as well as the common responsibility for forest management. Group certification can improve information sharing and dissemination and co-operation in forest management among individual forest owners and managers.

The Guyana Forestry Commission as the Standardising Body for the GNFC has developed this Standard to enable forest owners/managers of different forest management units to participate in certification.

## **2. Scope**

This Standard defines the requirements for regional, national or sub-national forest certification systems, which include group forest management certification and allows for the certification of a number of forest owners/managers under one certificate.

Group forest management certification under this Standard requires establishing a specific management structure that includes the individual forest owners/managers. The requirements in this Standard are based on the PEFC's international benchmark for group forest certification (PEFC ST 1002:2018-Group Certification). This document is used jointly with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management. The entity (acting on behalf of the forest owners/managers) represents the individual owners/managers in forest certification in order to ensure the correct implementation of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and provide confidence in sampling-based certification activities.

## **3. Normative references**

- PEFC ST 1003:2018-Sustainable Forest Management – Requirements
- PEFC ST 1002:2018-Group Certification
- Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management.

## **4. Terms and Definitions**

For the purposes of this Standard the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC Guide 2 apply together with the following definitions.

#### **4.1. Audit**

Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled.

#### **4.2. Certified area**

The forest area covered by a sustainable forest management system according to the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (GSSFM).

In the group certification context, the certified area is the sum of forest areas of the participants and covered by a group forest certificate.

#### **4.3. Documented information**

Information required to be controlled and maintained by an organisation using any format and media, from any source. It is issued to a participant that refers to the group forest certificate and that confirms the participant as being covered by the scope of the group forest certification (both forest management certification and chain of custody certification).

**Note:** This document may be for instance a sub-certificate or a confirmation of participation.

#### **4.4. Forest Sector Operator**

A Forest Sector Operator is natural person or body corporate registered with and approved by the Guyana Forestry Commission to conduct forestry operation(s). Note 1: An organisation applies for certification under the Guyana Certification Scheme and is responsible for complying with the sustainable forest management requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and can be responsible for several defined forest areas.

A manager or owner can also take the role of an organisation.

#### **4.5. Group entity**

A legal entity that represents the participants, with overall responsibility for ensuring conformity of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in the certified area and other applicable requirements of the Guyana National Forest Certification System (GNFCS). For this purpose, the group entity is using a group management system.

**Note:** The structure of the group entity should follow the operations, number of participants and other basic conditions for the group organisation. It may be represented by one person.

#### **4.6. Group forest certificate**

A document confirming that the group organisation complies with the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and other applicable requirements of the GNFCS.

#### **4.7. Group forest certification**

Certification of the group organisation under one group forest certificate.

#### **4.8. Group forest certification manager**

A person, a group of people or legal entity having the legal right to manage a group certification system on behalf of FSOs who have agreed to be a part of group certification system under the GNFCS.

#### **4.9. Group management plan**

Documented information specifying objectives, actions and control arrangements. It covers planned changes of the group management system and requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management which are covered at the group level.

#### **4.10. Group management system**

Set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organisation to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management.

#### **4.11. Group organisation**

A group of participants represented by the group entity for the purposes of implementation of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and its certification. A binding written agreement shall be established between a participant and the group entity. In this Standard, Group Entity (ies) also imply Group organisation (s).

The term “group organisation” is equivalent to the term “regional organisation” if the group is defined by in-country regional boundaries.

#### **4.12. Internal Audit**

Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled and undertaken by the group organisation itself (first party audit).

#### **4.13. Monitoring**

Determining the status of a system, a process or an activity.

#### **4.14. Organisation**

Person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives.

#### **4.15. Participant**

A forest owner/manager covered by the group forest certificate, who has the ability to implement the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in a certified area.

**Note:** The term “ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard” requires the entity to have a long-term legal right, tenure right to manage the forest.

In Guyana the forests laws allow contractors without long term management rights for a specific forest area to undertake forestry operations on behalf of a concession holder.

In such situations, such contractors would be allowed to participate in group forest certification provided any claims made for material benefits shall originate only from certified areas of participants or individually certified forest owners/managers with long term legal or tenure management rights.

One-off contractors shall not be allowed to become participants in group forest management certification.

#### **4.16. Policy**

Intentions and direction of an organisation, as formally expressed by its manager/owner or the group entity.

#### **4.17. Stakeholder**

A person, group, community or organisation with an interest in the subject of the Guyana Certification Scheme. A stakeholder may include:

##### **a) Affected stakeholder**

A stakeholder who might experience a direct change in living and/or working conditions caused by implementation of a standard, or a stakeholder who might be a user of a standard and therefore is subject to the requirements of the standard.

Note 1: Affected stakeholders include neighbouring communities, Indigenous Peoples, workers, etc. However, having an interest in the subject matter of the standard (e.g., NGOs, scientific community, and civil society) is not equal to being affected.

Note 2: A stakeholder who might be a user of the standard is likely to become a certified entity, e.g., a forest sector operator in the case of a forest management standard, or a wood processing enterprise in the case of a chain of custody standard.

The following are examples of affected stakeholders, and may include -

Local communities, forest dwellers and indigenous communities. Workers, Forest dwellers, Neighbours, Downstream landowners, Local processors, Local businesses, Tenure and use rights holders, including landowners, Organizations authorized or known to act on behalf of affected stakeholders, for example social and environmental NGOs, labour unions.

##### **b) Interested stakeholder**

It is an individual, group of individuals or an organisation; that has shown an interest or is known to have an interest in the activities of the organisation.

## 5. Context of the group organisation

Group certification shall be available for individuals, groups and/or entities which come together voluntarily for this purpose. Group certification shall be available for:

- regional groups: i.e., group of forest owners/managers defined by in-country regional borders;
- large and small concession holders, either as individuals or as groups;
- community forestry associations;
- individual Indigenous forest owners/managers;
- Indigenous Village Councils; and
- private forest owners/managers.

As a condition for group certification, all applicants (individuals or group forest managers/owners) shall define and document:

- their motivation and objectives for the certification;
- any other specific circumstances which influence/impact the implementation of the group management system; and
- the needs and expectations of affected stakeholders.

In addition, the group organisation shall identify and document:

- the affected stakeholders that are relevant for the group management system;
- the relevant expectations of these affected stakeholders.
- the scope of the group management system.

All group certification applicants shall:

- define the group organisation and its elements (legal status and name of the group entity and names and details of each participant);
- define the certified area;
- document evidence from participants confirming their participation in the group certification system;
- define the scope for the group management system; and
- define the boundaries and applicability of the group management system.

All group certification systems shall meet the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management, and associated Chain of Custody Standard, including logo use requirements.

All participants in group certification shall be subject to the internal monitoring and the internal audit programme established for the group certification system.

## 5.1. Scope of group certification

Group certification shall be available for:

- forest managers/owners;
- processors and manufacturers;
- traders including exporters;
- wood-based forest products; and
- non-wood forest products (excluding fauna).

For participants that do not have certification under the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management, they shall be required to have a certified PEFC chain of custody system before they can participate in a group certification system.

## 6: Leadership

All group certification entities (groups and individuals) shall document:

- their roles, responsibilities and authorities; and
- the functions of the group entity.

All group certification entities shall document their commitment to:

- implement and maintain an effective management system covering all participants of the group;
- represent the group organisation in the certification process, including in communications and relationships with the certification body, submission of an application for certification, and contractual relationship with the certification body;
- develop written procedures for the management of the group organisation;
- develop written procedures for the acceptance of new participants of the group organisation;
  - these acceptance procedures shall cover at least the verification of the applicant's information about contact details, clear identification of their forest property and its/their size(s);
- develop written procedures for the suspension and exclusion of participants who do not correct/close nonconformities,
  - group participants excluded from any certification group based on nonconformities cannot be accepted within 12 months after exclusion;
- keep documented information of:
  - the group entity and participants' conformity with the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management, and other applicable requirements of the GNFCs;
  - all participants, including their contact details, identification of their forest property and its/ their size(s);
  - the certified area; and

- the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its review and any preventive and/or corrective actions taken.
- establish connections with all participants based on a binding written agreement which shall include the participants' commitment to comply with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and the GNFCFS.

The group entity shall have a written contract or other written agreement with all participants covering the right of the group entity to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive measures, and to initiate the exclusion of any participant from the scope of certification in the event of nonconformity with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management.

**Note:** The requirements for “participant’s commitment” and “written contract or other written agreement with all participants” may also be satisfied by the commitment through a written agreement of a pre-existing organisation or group or the members participation, such as a forest owners’/managers’ association, where the organisation can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

The group entity shall:

- provide all participants with a document confirming their participation in the group forest certification scheme;
- provide all participants with information and guidance required for the effective implementation and maintenance of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and other applicable requirements of the GNFCFS;
- address nonconformities reported from group members which are identified under other PEFC certifications other than the particular group certification and to ensure implementation with all group members; to operate an internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the participants' conformity with the certification requirements;
- implement an annual internal audit programme covering both group members and group entity;
- undertake a management review of the group forest certification and act on the results from the review; and
- provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or the Guyana Forestry Commission as the National Governing Body, for relevant data, documentation or other information; allowing access to the forest area covered by the group organisation and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the management system.

## **Function and responsibilities of participants**

Each participant in a group certification system shall provide the group entity with:

- a binding written agreement, including a commitment to conform with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and other applicable requirements of the GNFCFS;
- information about any previous participation in a group certification scheme;
- a written commitment to comply with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and other applicable requirements of the GNFCFS as well as with the requirements of the group management system;
- a written commitment to provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the group entity, or certification body for relevant data, documentation or other information, and allow access to the forest and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the group management system;
- written commitment to inform the group entity about nonconformities identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification; and
- a written commitment to implement relevant corrective and preventive actions established by the group entity.

## **5.2. Commitment and policy**

All entities applying for group certification under Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and GNFCFS shall commit to:

- comply with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management and GNFCFS;
- integrate the group certification requirements in the group management system;
- continuously improve the group management system;
- continuously support the improvement of the sustainable management of the land/forests by all the participants; and
- document and make publicly available a copy of the entity's policy and other documented information upon request.

All participants in a group certification system shall commit to:

- follow the rules of the management system; and
- implement the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in their operations in their area.

## **6. Planning**

All group certification entities shall develop a group management plan that meets the requirements of the GSSF, and which shall be updated continually in line with any changes in the group's management system.

## **7. Support**

All group certification entities shall commit to provide the resources needed for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of the group management system. In addition, entities shall include in their group management system documentation, the necessary skills and competences required for doing work in the group management system.

### **7.1. Group communication strategy**

Group entities shall develop and implement communication processes/strategies to raise the awareness of the participants concerning:

- the group's management policy;
- the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management;
- their contribution to the effectiveness of the group management system and sustainable forest management, including the benefits of improved group performance; and
- the implications of not conforming with the group's management system requirements.

The group's communication strategy shall include a description of:

- the issues/matter that the organisation shall communicate on;
- when to undertake such communication;
- whom it will communicate with; and
- how communication shall be done.

### **7.2. Complaints and dispute resolution**

Group entities shall develop and implement appropriate mechanisms for resolving complaints and disputes relating to group management and sustainable forest management operations.

### **7.3. Updated information**

Group entities shall ensure that all documented information relevant to the group's management system and the conformance with the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management is:

- kept up to date; archived chronologically; in written form and computerized where possible;
- available and suitable for use, where and when it is needed; and
- adequately protected against loss of confidentiality, improper use, or loss of integrity.

## **8. Operation**

Group entities shall plan, implement and control processes required to meet the requirements of this group certification Standard and the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management, and implement the actions determined in Clause 6 above.

To ensure the group entity meets this objective, it shall define the necessary processes and establish criteria for their implementation and keep documented information to demonstrate that the processes have been carried out as planned.

## **9. Performance evaluation**

Group entities shall continually monitor, measure, analyse and evaluate the group's certification system to ensure that it is conforming with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management. The evaluation shall include the group's management performance and the effectiveness of the group's management system. In particular, group entities shall define:

- what shall be monitored and measured;
- the methods for monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation, as applicable, to ensure valid results;
- when the monitoring and measuring shall be performed;
- when the results from monitoring and measurement shall be analysed and evaluated; and
- what documented information shall be available as evidence of the results.

### **9.1. Internal audit**

Group entities shall undertake annual internal audits to determine whether the group management system:

- conforms to the group organisation's own requirements for its group management system;
- complies with the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management; and
- assess whether the implementation of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management at the participant level is effective and maintained.

The group's annual internal audit programme shall cover the group entity and all group participants. The group entity shall be audited annually but the participants may be selected on a sample basis.

At a minimum, the internal audit programme shall cover:

- how the audit programme is planned, implemented and maintained, including the frequency, methods, responsibilities, planning requirements and reporting, which shall take into consideration the importance of the processes concerned, and the results of previous audits;
- definition of the audit criteria and scope for each audit;
- competence of the internal auditor (e.g., forest knowledge and knowledge of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management);
- criteria for the selection of auditors and the methods for conducting of audits to ensure objectivity and the impartiality of the audit process (if the internal audit is to be conducted by someone outside of the group entity);

- ensuring that the results of the audits are reported to relevant group management; and
- retention of documented information as evidence of implementation of the audit programme and the audit results.

## 9.2. Selection of participants in the internal audit programme (Sampling)

The sample size for internal audits shall be calculated for the participants of the group organisation using the following formula:

$$(y=\sqrt{x})$$

Where y=Sample size

x= number of participants.

The size of the sample generally should be the square root of the number of participants rounded to the upper whole number.

If the results of internal audits or previous audits of certification bodies have not revealed any major nonconformities, the sample size for future audits may be further reduced by a factor of 0.8: ( $y = 0.8 \sqrt{x}$ ), rounded to the upper whole number.

The size of the sample may be adapted to take into considerations one or more of the following factors:

- results of a risk assessment, where the sample sizes in case of low or high risk for individual categories can be defined;
- results of internal audits or previous certification audits;
- quality/level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme; and
- use of appropriate and relevant technologies that allow the gathering of information concerning specified requirements and any other relevant information about the participants' activities gathered on the ground.

**Note:** Technologies such as the use of satellite data or drones where available can be used to gather information which can contribute to the assessment of compliance for specific requirements of Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management or support the risk-based sampling.

Group entities shall establish sample categories based on the results of a risk assessment. The indicators to be used in the risk assessment shall reflect the geographical scope of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management including the following:

- ownership type (e.g., state forest, communal forest, private forest);
- size of management units (different size classes);
- biogeographic region (e.g., lowlands, low mountain range, high mountain range);
- operations, processes and products of potential group participants;
- deforestation and forest conversion rates;
- rotation period(s);
- richness of biological diversity;

- recreation and other socio-economic functions of the forest;
- dependence of and interaction with local communities and indigenous people;
- available resources for administration, operations, training and research; and
- the governance and law enforcement regime in Guyana.

Group entities shall define the conditions which may constitute risk for each indicator based on low, medium and high rating, and their respective consequences/impacts for the sampling. The sample shall be distributed to the categories according to the result of the risk assessment.

Using a risk-based procedure, at least 25% of the sample shall be selected at random for the annual internal audit. For the remaining 75%, selection of participants in an annual internal audit can be based on the following categories:

- 10% of participants falling in a low-risk category;
- 25% of participants falling in a medium-risk category; and
- 40% of participants falling in a high-risk category.

Where participants fall in only two risk categories:

- 25% of participants falling in a lower risk category; and
- 50% of participants falling in a higher risk category.

All selection of participants in each risk category for an internal audit sample shall be done randomly.

### **9.3. Management review**

Group entities shall undertake annual management reviews, which shall, at a minimum include:

- the status of actions from previous management reviews;
- changes in external and internal issues that are relevant to the group's management system;
- the status of conformity with the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management, that includes reviewing the results of the internal monitoring programme, the internal audit and the certification body's evaluations and surveillance reports;
- information on the group's performance, including trends in:
  - nonconformities and corrective actions; and
  - monitoring and audit results, and
- opportunities for continual improvement.

Group entities shall discuss the results of annual internal audits including any decision taken on improvements and any changes to the group management system and document such information as evidence of the results of the management reviews.

## 10. Improvement

Where a nonconformity occurs, group entities shall:

- take action to control and correct it;
- deal with the consequences;
- evaluate the need for action to eliminate the causes of the nonconformity, in order that it does not recur or occur elsewhere, by:
  - reviewing the nonconformity;
  - determining the causes of the nonconformity; and
  - determining if similar nonconformities exist, or could potentially occur;
- implement any action needed;
- periodically review the effectiveness of any corrective action taken; and
- make changes to the group's management system, if necessary.

Group entities shall retain documented information as evidence of:

- the nature of the nonconformities and any subsequent actions taken; and
- the results/impacts of any corrective action.

Group entities shall conduct an internal audit on participants who have been excluded from the group certification scheme before re-admitting into the scheme. The internal audit shall not take place sooner than 12 months after the exclusion.

Group entities and participants shall commit to continuously improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the group's management system and the sustainable management of the certified forests.

## **Appendix A: Assessment criteria for audits**

For annual audits, minor nonconformities are those that:

- are temporary;
- are rare and non-systemic;
- are time- and space-limited; and
- do not lead to a fundamental failure to achieve the objective of the relevant standard requirement.

An auditor of the group entity shall, depending on the nature of a nonconformity, set a deadline for corrective actions, which shall be no later than the next audit date. A minor nonconformity shall change to a major nonconformity if corrective action is not implemented and verified by the certification body by the communicated deadline.

For annual audits, major nonconformities are those that:

- last for a long time;
- are systemic;
- affect a significant part of the group's process;
- are not corrected or not adequately responded to by the process managers after they have been identified;
- are likely to lead to a fundamental failure to comply with the standard requirements; and
- affect the integrity of the forest management certification system.

The auditor for the group entity shall set a deadline for major nonconformities to be corrected, which shall be no later than six months from the date on which the nonconformity (ies) is communicated in writing to the participant. If corrective actions are not implemented within the communicated deadline, the group entity shall decide on the continuation or otherwise of the participant in the group organisation, taking into account the potential risk of non-compliance by the entire group organisation with the requirements of this Standard.

### **Observations**

These are minor omissions or lapses which if not corrected may develop into a nonconformity.

Reported "observations" shall be corrected before the next scheduled internal audit. If "observations" are not corrected by the next scheduled audit, they could become "minor nonconformities."

**Appendix B: Guidance for assessing participants for risk levels for internal audit sampling.**

<b>Index of risk identification</b>	<b>Low Risk (0)</b>	<b>Medium Risk (1)</b>	<b>High Risk (2)</b>
Type of incorporation/legal entity	Publicly listed company	Community organisation	Private owner
Biogeographic region	Lowland	Low to medium elevation	High/steep elevation
Wood tracking (WTS) system in place to capture all stages of the supply chain from the forest to market	Fully covered by WTS	Partially covered by WTS	Persistent breaches of the WTS
Intensity of forest operations.	Forest operations lead to, on average, less than 50% change in pre-harvest stock	Forest operations lead to, on average, between 50 - 100% change pre-harvesting stock	Clear felling.
Forest conversion	None or less than 5%	Discontinued	Presently occurring.
Type of workforce.	Full-time/permanent organisation's staff	Combination of full-time/permanent organisation's staff and some contractors.	Contractors only.
Biological diversity	The area of ecologically important sites is less than 10%.	The area of ecologically important sites is 10-50%.	The area of ecologically important sites is over 50%
Socio-economic functions of the forest	The area for commercial harvesting is over 50%	The area for commercial harvesting is 10-50%	The area for commercial harvesting is less than 10%.
Interaction with local/indigenous communities	No evidence/reports of on-going disputes.	Disputes existed but resolved satisfactorily.	Pending unresolved disputes.
Level of resourcing (human and financial) to support the operations.	High level of resourcing.	Medium level of resourcing.	Inadequate level of resourcing.
Management and law enforcement	No evidence/reports of breaches, mal-administrative	Breaches have occurred but resolved satisfactorily.	Evidence/reports of systemic breaches and non-compliance with forest laws and

	and criminal offenses.		governance/regulatory requirements.
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