

Guyana National Forest Certification System

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Group Forest Management – Requirements



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1. Foreword

The Guyana National Forest Certification Scheme (GNFCS) has been developed to support sustainable forest management through forest management certification, chain of custody 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.

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2. The Group Certification Standard Requirements

2.1. 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.

2.2. 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.

Though the PEFC Benchmark Requirements refer to Forest Management, in the Guyana context the Standard also applies to PEFC CoC Group Certification.

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 GSSF and the PEFC CoC Standards.

The Group Entity (which manages the group acting on behalf of the Group Organisation comprising forest owners/managers and the Group Entity) represents the individual owners/managers in forest certification to ensure conformance with the GSSF and/or CoC Standard.

2.3. Normative references

- PEFC ST 1003:2018 - Sustainable Forest Management – Requirements
- PEFC ST 1002:2018 - Group Forest Management Certification
- PEFC ST 2002:2020 – CoC of Forest and Tree-based Products - Requirements
- Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management.

2.4. 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.

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.

Certified area: The forest area covered by a sustainable forest management system according to the GSSFM and/or CoC Standard and duly certified by a recognised Certification Body. In the group certification context, the certified area is the sum of forest areas of the participants and covered by a Group Certificate.

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). This document may be, for instance, a sub-certificate or a confirmation of participation.

Forest Sector Operator: An FSO is natural person or body corporate registered with and approved by the GFC to conduct forestry operation(s).¹

Group Entity: A legal entity that represents the participants, with overall responsibility for ensuring conformity with the GSSFM and/or CoC Standard in the certified area, and other applicable requirements of the GNFCs. The Group Entity is responsible for establishing and managing the Group system, ensuring implementation of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management, and ensuring that all requirements of this Group standard are met.²

Group Certificate: A document confirming that the group organisation complies with the requirements of the Guyana Standard for Sustainable Forest Management or the CoC Standard and other applicable requirements of the GNFCs.

Group Forest/CoC Certification: Certification of the group organisation under one group certificate.

Group 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.

Group management plan: Documented information specifying objectives, actions, and control arrangements. It covers planned changes to the group management system and requirements of the GSSFM and/or CoC Standard which are covered at the group level.

Group management system: Set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organisation to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the GSSFM and/or CoC Standard.

Group organisation: A group of participants represented by the Group Entity for the purposes of attaining and maintaining certification. A binding written agreement shall be established between a participant and the Group Entity. The term “group organisation” is equivalent to the term “regional organisation” if the group is defined by in-country regional boundaries.

¹ An organisation applies for certification under the Guyana Certification Scheme and is responsible for conforming 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.

² 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.

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).

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

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

Participant: A forest owner/manager covered by the group forest certificate, who has the ability to implement the requirements of the appropriate standard in a certified area.³

Policy: Intentions and direction of an organisation, as formally expressed by its manager/owner or the Group Entity.

Stakeholder: A person, group, community, or organisation with an interest in the subject of the Guyana Certification Scheme. A stakeholder is someone 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 or an individual, group of individuals or an organisation. Or it could be someone who has an interest or is known to have an interest in the activities of the organisation.⁴

2.5. Context of the group organisation

Group certification shall be available for individuals, existing community logging groups and/or entities which come together voluntarily for this purpose. 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 proposed certified area.

The Group Entity shall identify and document:

- the group organisation and its elements (legal status and name of the Group Entity and names and details of each participant);
- the scope for the group management system;
- the affected stakeholders that are relevant for the group management system and the relevant expectations of these affected stakeholders; and
- evidence from participants confirming their participation in the group certification system.

³ 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 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. 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. Affected stakeholders includes 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.

All group certification systems shall meet the requirements of this Standard, and individual participants are responsible for conformity with the appropriate 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.

2.6. 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).

Participating members within groups can opt for forest certification and/or CoC certification under the GNFCs according to the appropriate standard.

2.7. Leadership

All group entities shall:

- document group roles, responsibilities, and authorities;
- document the functions of the Group Entity;
- document its 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)⁵;
- 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)⁶
 - keep documented information on the group 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; and

⁵ 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);

⁶ group participants excluded from any certification group based on nonconformities cannot be accepted within 12 months after exclusion;

- establish connections with all participants based on a binding written agreement which shall include the participants' commitment to comply with the appropriate standards 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 GSSFMS and/or CoC Standard.⁷

The Group Entity shall further:

- 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 appropriate standard and other applicable requirements of the GNFCFS;
- address nonconformities identified for group members which are identified following audits;
- 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 GFC 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.

2.8. 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 appropriate standard and other applicable requirements of the GNFCFS;
- information about any previous participation in a group certification scheme;
- a written commitment to comply with the GSSFMS and/or CoC Standard 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

⁷The 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.

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.

2.9. Commitment and policy

All candidate entities applying for group certification under GNFCFS shall commit in writing to:

- conform with the GSSF and/or CoC Standard 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;
- document and make publicly available a copy of the entity's policy and other documented information upon request;
- follow the rules of the management system; and
- implement the requirements of the GSSF and/or CoC Standard in their operations.

2.10. Planning

All group entities shall develop a group management plan that meets the requirements of this Standard and the GSSF and/or CoC Standard and which shall be updated periodically in line with any changes in the group's management system or feedback from monitoring.

2.11. Support

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

2.11.1. 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.

2.11.2. 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.

2.11.3. 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 GSSFM and/or CoC Standard 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.

2.12. Operation

Group entities shall plan, implement, and control processes required to meet the requirements of this group certification standard and the GSSFM and/or CoC Standard, and implement the actions determined in Clause 6 (of the Standard).

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.

2.13. 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 and this Standard. 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.

2.13.1. 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 this Standard, 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.

2.14. 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.⁸

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 GSSFM and/or CoC Standard, 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);

⁸ 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.

- 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.

2.15. 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 with group participants 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.

2.16. 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 improving the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the group's management system and the sustainable management of the certified forests.

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