



SmartWood

Practical conservation through certified forestry

FOREST MANAGEMENT GROUP CERTIFICATION MODEL

Purpose

The purpose of the Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood Program is to recognize good forest management through credible independent verification of forestry practices. As a non-profit program oriented towards forest conservation and the well-being of local communities, SmartWood developed the Group Certification model as a means to reduce the costs of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification.

Since individual certification of every small landowner is not always feasible or desirable, Group Certification offers the possibility of certification access to groupings of small landowners. The SmartWood Group Certification model lends itself to certification of consulting foresters, resource managers, landowner associations, cooperatives, land trusts and other woodland owner or management groups who have a crucial role to play in sustainable forest management. The SmartWood Group Certification model, which is approved by the FSC, provides an cost effective means for small landowners to participate participating in certification.

Background and terminology

The SmartWood Group Certification model was initially designed and pioneered by the SmartWood Program in 1995, under the name Resource Manager Certification, as an alternative to the traditional forest management certification, which has been offered by SmartWood since its start in 1990. The principal difference between the Group Certification model and traditional forest management operation certification is that the Group Manager has no legal right (title, concession, etc.) to the forest resource that they manage, but rather are experts contracted by landowners to manage their forests. Under the Group Certification model, SmartWood certifies a Group's forest management model and philosophy as it is implemented on selected landholdings. As in other forest management operation certifications, the Group Manager must meet all SmartWood technical and procedural requirements. The following terms are used in SmartWood's Group Certification:

- The **group manager** is the entity that applies for group certification, and holds any group certificate that is issued. The group manager is responsible to SmartWood for ensuring that the requirements of the FSC Principles and Criteria (P&C) are met in the forest lands covered by the certificate. The group manager must be a legal entity but may be an individual, a cooperative body, an owner association, a forest management company, a forest products company, or other similar legal entity.
- **Group members** are the forest owners /clients are responsible for implementing any requirements of group membership. Members of a group do not hold individual certificates, but so long as they comply with all the requirements of group membership,

their forestlands are certified by a single forest management certificate under the group certification model. Forest products from these lands may be covered by a chain of custody certificate, and thus may carry the FSC Logo and sold as certified products.

- The **certified pool** is the defined set of group members or forest landowners that are to be covered by the Group Certificate. It is common for the candidate group manager to include only a portion of their total landowner base in the certified pool due to landowner interest and/or potential non-conformances with the FSC P&C.

Group Certification Assessment Procedures

Smart Wood Group Certification assessments follow the standard forest management assessment procedures as described in the SmartWood Generic or Regional Standards which have been approved by the FSC. Two to three member multi-disciplinary teams will conduct assessments. SmartWood will always involve assessors familiar with the particular region and type of operation under evaluation. As defined in the certification standards, all assessments must consider applicable local, state and national laws, regulations and administrative requirements. In addition to interviewing the candidate group manager and group members, the assessment team will solicit and incorporate input (confidential or open) from all directly affected or knowledgeable parties, be they local people, environmental organizations, government agencies, scientific researchers, or forest industry.

Assessment Process Steps

Group Certification assessments involve the following steps:

- **Application:** SmartWood application submitted by candidate group manager.
- **Preliminary screening:** Face to face or telephone interview with candidate to assess preparedness for meeting certification standards.
- **Pre-assessment (required for large scale or high conservation value forest):** On-site visit to the candidate operation to assess in greater detail their preparedness.
- **Stakeholder consultation:** 30 days prior to fieldwork stakeholders are notified of evaluation and comments are solicited.
- **Field assessment:** Formal evaluation of candidate group by SmartWood assessment team. Review of group at the group and individual member or property level.
- **Draft report preparation:** The evaluation findings are documented in an assessment report which is reviewed by the client.
- **Independent peer review:** A minimum of one independent confidential peer reviewers will review the SmartWood assessment report
- **Certification decision:** SmartWood conducts a final review of assessment report, peer review and client comments resulting in a positive or negative certification decision.
- **Certification contract preparation and certificate issuance:** SmartWood contracts are five year, renewable certification agreements.

Field Assessment Sampling Strategy

The goal of the field assessment is for the SmartWood team, through site visits, interviews and review of documents, to evaluate a candidate operation's compliance with forest stewardship standards. This is often a challenging task given the wide range of management conditions possible within the group's portfolio. Careful planning of assessment activities is critical in order that the on-site sampling maximize coverage of management variables under reasonable, but tight, time constraints. As a starting point for organizing a group certification assessment is a stratification of properties under evaluation in terms of:

- geographic similarity (e.g. forest type); and/or,
- management similarity (e.g. silvicultural system, management system, personnel involved in aspects of management).

Within each group or stratum, samples of properties are selected for site visits evaluation (for groups with less than 100 members a least 1/3 of properties should be visited). Each group member in the sample chosen is evaluated to ensure compliance with all the requirements of the FSC P&C. Some members may not be selected for evaluation, but the members that are selected for evaluation must fully meet the FSC P&C.

Time Requirements

The length of time required to go through a group assessment varies according to the size and complexity of the candidate operation, but barring unforeseen obstacles, the entire process should take approximately 3-6 months.

SmartWood Group Certification Requirements

To achieve FSC certification, the candidate group must meet the regional certification standards based on the FSC Principles and Criteria. In addition, there are specific requirements for group management that will be evaluated during initial assessment and annual audits (see group certification criteria below).

GC 1: The group manager is an independent legal entity or an individual acting as a legal entity.

GC 2: The group manager has made a full disclosure of all forest areas over which the GM has some responsibility, whether as owner (including share or partial ownership), manager, consultant or other responsibility. Justification for exclusion of forestlands from certified pool has been provided.

GC 3: The group manager has sufficient legal and management authority and technical and human resources (e.g. qualified staff, equipment..) to implement their responsibilities

GC 4: The responsibilities of the group manager and group members are clearly defined and documented, e.g., with respect to management planning, monitoring, harvesting, quality control, marketing, processing, etc

GC 5: Group membership requirements are documented and include:

- Procedures and rules of entry and exit from the certified pool; and,
- Procedures for the notification of SW of changes in membership within 30 days of changes.

GC 6: A 'consent form' or its equivalent has been signed by each group member

The consent form at a minimum:

- acknowledges and agrees to the obligations and responsibilities of group membership;
- agrees to group membership for the full period of validity of the group certificate;
- authorizes the group manager to apply for certification on the member's behalf; and,
- acknowledges SmartWood and FSC's right to access their forest for evaluation and monitoring.

GC 7: Group manager has provided each group member with documentation including:

- The applicable forest stewardship standard;
- An explanation of the certification process; and,
- An explanation of group membership requirements

GC 8: Group manager has a policy and practice for monitoring of the properties in the certified pool to ensure that they are meeting the FSC P&C and group membership requirement

GC 9: The group manager has a system for maintaining the following records up to date at all times:

- i List of names and addresses of group members, together with date of entry into group certification scheme;
- ii Maps of all forest areas included in the group certification;
- iii Records demonstrating tenure of group members;
- iv Evidence of consent of all group members, preferably in the form of a signed 'consent form';
- v Relevant documentation and records regarding forest management of each group member (e.g. management plans, summary information regarding silvicultural system, management operations, volume production);
- vi Records demonstrating the implementation of any internal control or monitoring systems. Such records shall include records of internal inspections, non-compliance identified in such inspections, actions taken to correct any such non-compliance; and,
- vii Relevant documentation regarding production and sales

For more information on Smart Wood or Group Certification, please contact a SmartWood Regional Manager (contact information available on www.smartwood.org) or Jon Jickling (jjickling@ra.org) at:

**SmartWood Headquarters –
65 Millet St. Suite 201, Richmond, Vermont (VT), USA 05477.
TEL (802) 434-5491 FAX (802) 434-3116.**