
[The FSC must stop certifying large-scale tree monocultures](#)

The Forest Stewardship Council will be holding its general assembly this month in Oaxaca, Mexico and we wish to share our concerns regarding the certification of plantations with FSC members, particularly from environmental and social organizations.

The WRM has been campaigning for many years against the spread of monoculture tree plantations and has documented both the interests behind their promotion and the widespread social and environmental impacts they entail.

Within that context, FSC certification of plantations has added to the problem by providing those same negative plantations --and their corporate owners-- with a "green" label which strengthens plantation promoters and weakens local communities and NGOs campaigning against them.

Although the FSC formally separates plantations from forests by establishing a specific principle (number 10) to deal with plantations, in fact it contributes to obscuring the difference, in the first place because it includes them within the mandate of the FOREST Stewardship Council, thus implying that they are forests. Second, it assumes (in principle 10), that plantations play a similar role as forests, which is clearly not the case. Third, by stating that plantations need to comply with principles 1 to 9 --which are aimed at certifying true forests-- the FSC again obscures the difference between forests and plantations. Finally, it includes plantations in the "certified forest list" section of its own web page. When entering that section, one finds a table titled "Forests Certified by FSC-Accredited Certification Bodies" and a column under the heading "Forest Type" which includes both forests and plantations. All this proves that the FSC --in spite of what many of its members believe-- still considers plantations as being a (type of) forest.

The WRM has disseminated abundant information and analysis on the impacts of plantations and has linked them to the issue of certification with the aim of raising awareness within the FSC itself about this contradiction. The WRM produced an entire bulletin focused on FSC certification of plantations (*), including a detailed critical analysis of Principle 10 (**). We have also disseminated a publication including relevant material on this issue (***). More recently, we have carried out two case studies on certified plantations, one in Thailand and another in Brazil (see relevant articles in this bulletin) and we have consistently highlighted the impacts of plantations on grassland ecosystems, such as in the cases of South Africa and Uruguay (see relevant articles in this bulletin).

In spite of all the evidence against them, plantations continue to be certified. To date --according to information posted in the FSC web page-- more than 12 million hectares of plantations have received the FSC label (20% of all certified "forests"), which compares very favourably with the 22 million hectares of certified "natural" forests (38% of total). However, the figure of certified plantations is even higher, because a third and undefined category ("Semi-Natural and Mixed Plantation & Natural Forest") includes almost 25 million hectares with no indication of respective forest and plantation areas.

We are aware that there are discussions taking place within the FSC about some of these problems

and that at least one certification firm has raised the issue of the need for clear and standardized guidelines to ensure consistency in the application of FSC principles and criteria regarding plantations. Although a positive step, this is clearly not enough for addressing an issue such as this, which is quickly eroding the FSC's main asset: its credibility.

We therefore urge FSC members to open up the discussion on the certification of plantations in general and of principle 10 in particular. The FSC was created with the aim of protecting forests and not for promoting large-scale tree monocultures. The issue itself is in fact very simple: plantations are not forests and should not be certified as such. Although the solution is not as simple as the issue, we sincerely hope that the FSC will be able to change course in this respect and that this general assembly will be the starting point in that direction.