

ADVICE-20-007-23 **Maximum hectare threshold for ‘very limited portion’**

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Normative reference FSC-STD-01-001 *FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship*, Criteria 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11.
 FSC-STD-60-004 *International Generic Indicators*.
 FSC-POL-01-007 V1-0 *Policy to Address Conversion*.

Scope This Advice Note applies to Standard Developers and to organizations applying for or holding FSC Forest Management certification.

In this context, FSC Forest Management certification refers to certification against a Forest Stewardship Standard or <FSC-STD-30-010 Controlled Wood Standard for FM enterprises>.

This Advice Note does not apply to any forms of conversion that took place prior to 1 December 1994.

This Advice Note does not apply retroactively to conversion between 1 December 1994 and the effective date of this Advice Note, if it was conducted in a management unit under FSC Forest Management certification and in conformity with Criteria 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11. However, the hectares converted during this period count towards the calculation of the ‘very limited portion’ threshold of the management unit that can be converted for conservation and social benefits after the effective date of this Advice Note (see Guide Table below).

Approval FSC Director General, 13 July 2023

Effective date 1 October 2023

Terms & Definitions **Conversion:** A lasting change of natural forest cover or High Conservation Value areas, induced by human activity. This may be characterized by significant loss of species diversity, habitat diversity, structural complexity, ecosystem functionality or livelihoods and cultural values. The definition of conversion covers gradual forest degradation as well as rapid forest transformation.

- **Induced by human activity:** In contrast to drastic changes caused by natural calamities like hurricanes or volcanic eruptions. It also applies in cases of naturally ignited fires where human activities (e.g. draining of peatlands) have significantly increased the risk of fire.
- **Lasting change of natural forest cover:** Permanent or long-term change of natural forest cover. Temporary changes of forest cover or structure (e.g. harvesting followed by regeneration in accordance with the FSC normative framework) is not considered conversion.
- **Lasting change of High Conservation Value (HCV) area:** Permanent or long-term change of any of the High Conservation Values. Temporary changes of HCV areas that do not negatively and permanently impact the values (e.g. harvesting followed by regeneration in accordance with Principle 9) is not considered a lasting change.

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- **Significant loss of species diversity:** Loss of species is considered significant where rare species and threatened species or other locally important, keystone and/or flagship species are lost, whether in terms of numbers of individuals or in terms of number of species. This refers to both displacement and extinction.

NOTE: The establishment of ancillary infrastructure necessary to implement the objectives of responsible forest management (e.g., forest roads, skid trails, log landings, fire protection, etc.) is not considered conversion. (Source: FSC-POL-01-007 V1).

NOTE: This definition applies in the context of Criteria 6.9 and 6.11, i.e., after 31 December 2020 (see definition of conversion in <FSC-POL-01-007 V1-0 Policy to Address Conversion>).

Very limited portion: The affected area shall not exceed 5% of the management unit, irrespective of whether the conversion activities have taken place prior to or after the organization is awarded with FSC forest management certification. (Source: FSC-STD-01-001 V5-3).

Background FSC does not accept the conversion of natural forests and the transformation of plantations on sites directly converted from natural forest except in cases where it affects a ‘very limited portion’ of the management unit, produces conservation benefits and does not damage or threaten High Conservation Values (HCVs).

Areas converted between 1 December 1994 and 31 December 2020 that do not meet these conditions are only eligible for certification if remedy for the environmental and social harms caused by the conversion is provided, while areas converted after 31 December 2020 that do not meet these conditions, in addition to the production of social benefits, are not eligible for certification.

The definition of ‘very limited portion’ in the FSC Principles and Criteria specifies that to be considered a ‘very limited portion’, the area shall not exceed 5% of the management unit, irrespective of whether the conversion activities have taken place prior to or after the organization has obtained FSC Forest Management certification.

This Advice Note has been developed in response to the Implementation Note to Motion 37/2021: *Required changes to the FSC Principles and Criteria to implement the Policy to Address Conversion*, approved by FSC members at the 9th FSC General Assembly, which called for the establishment of a maximum limit in hectares for the concept of ‘very limited portion’.

Version history V1-0: Approved 13 July 2023

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1. The ‘very limited portion’ of a management unit referred to in Criteria 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 shall not exceed 1,000 hectares.
 2. Standard Developers may set a lower or higher hectare threshold than the one laid out in Advice 1 (above) following FSC requirements for standard setting processes.

Explanatory Table

The table below shows how the hectare threshold applies to an organization (provided that relevant requirements in Criteria 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 are met, including that the 5% has not been reached) depending on whether the organization has FSC Forest Management certification or not and when the conversion took place.

No	Period when conversion has occurred	Type of organization	Application
1	Before 1 December 1994	Existing certificate holders (CH) or applicants for certification	No impact. Principles and Criteria, Policy to Address Conversion and this Advice Note do not apply to conversion in this period.
2	1 December 1994 - 31 December 2020	Existing CHs with conversion above 1,000 ha	No impact on certification or remedy required. However, converted areas contribute to the calculation of the area that can be converted for conservation and social benefits in the future.
		Applicants with conversion above 1,000 ha	Remedy is required to become eligible for certification.
3	1 January 2021 – effective date of this Advice Note	Existing CHs with conversion above 1,000 ha	No impact on certification nor remedy required. However, converted areas contribute to the calculation of the area that can be converted for conservation and social benefits in the future.
		Applicants with conversion above 1,000 ha	Not eligible for certification. Remedy for certification purposes is not possible.
4	From effective date of this Advice Note on	Existing CHs and applicants with conversion above 1,000 ha	Not eligible for certification. Remedy for certification purposes is not possible.