



FORESTS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND FSC

Forests and Climate Change

Forests play a critical role in regulating the earth's climate. By removing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, they form the world's largest terrestrial store of atmospheric carbon. Conversely, when forests are cleared, large amounts of carbon are released into the atmosphere.

The destruction and degradation of forests worldwide accounts for a higher share of global CO₂ emissions than the entire transport sector. These emissions contribute to the greenhouse effect, increasing the risk of catastrophic climate change. It is therefore imperative for mankind to manage the world's remaining forests in a responsible manner.

Protecting forests from conversion to other land uses, introducing management practices that maintain the integrity of the forest, as well as restoring degraded forests, all contribute to reducing the impacts of climate change. These activities should be in addition to, and not a substitute for, necessary reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from other sectors.

The Greenhouse Effect

Carbon dioxide is one of the main 'greenhouse gases' responsible for trapping heat from the sun. Many greenhouse gases occur naturally in the atmosphere and ensure that the earth is warm enough to support life. This phenomenon is known as the 'greenhouse effect'. However, most scientists agree that the world's climate is changing because the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is increasing due to human activities.

The Benefits of FSC Certification

FSC certification is internationally recognised as the benchmark for responsible forestry. Well-managed forests provide a wide range of social and economic benefits and environmental services, such as livelihoods for people and habitats for animals and plants. FSC standards ensure that these benefits and services are realised and are not disregarded in favour of other management objectives, such as carbon storage.

Research indicates that FSC certified operations deliver direct and indirect climate benefits. Direct benefits are generated from the environmental impact of FSC certification in the forest such as:

- Minimisation of waste and damages from harvesting
- Increase in size and number of protected forest areas
- Retention of old trees and fallen wood for habitat so that carbon is kept longer in the forest

The social and economic impacts of FSC certification generate indirect climate benefits by providing a solution to some of the causes of forest degradation, for example:

- Resolution of conflicts with local communities
- Prevention of unauthorised harvesting and other activities
- Diversification of product range and encouragement of local processing

FSC uses certification and product labelling to engage the market, providing economic incentives to keep forests standing and ensure that they are well-managed.



The Impact of FSC Certification

FSC was founded to provide effective tools to help protect forests against deforestation and degradation. FSC has a dedicated monitoring and evaluation program that measures the impacts of FSC certification. In 2008, a review of more than 300 research papers and independent reports revealed strong evidence that FSC has a positive impact on forest management in numerous social, environmental and economic aspects. Results of this review are available at www.fsc.org/publicationsseries.html

FSC and Carbon

A number of forest carbon projects and standards already use or require FSC certification as a guarantee of social and environmental safeguards. FSC is looking into the potential opportunities and risks associated with recently developed methodologies, standards, programmes and markets that allow claims on the management of forest carbon and related projects or products.

FSC is also participating in international discussions and negotiations on forests and climate change, promoting FSC certification as an effective tool against deforestation and forest degradation.



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The Forest Carbon Working Group (FCWG)

In 2009, FSC established the Forest Carbon Working Group (FCWG) to research and advise on all matters related to the formal engagement of FSC in climate change mitigation. The FCWG is supported by an Advisory Group of experts who provide technical, scientific and strategic input on issues under examination by the FCWG.

The FCWG has proposed several amendments to the FSC Principles & Criteria for responsible forest management. The recommendations aim at explicitly monitoring and managing forest carbon stocks to ensure their maintenance or restoration.

What Can Consumers Do?

- Purchase FSC certified timber products



By selecting FSC certified products, you can ensure that your purchases are not the products of widespread deforestation and unsustainable forestry practices.

- Reuse and Recycle

All paper and timber products contain carbon. When they rot or are burnt, they release the carbon they contain. By reusing and recycling products we can ensure that carbon is locked up for as long as possible. When buying recycled timber and paper products, look for the FSC Recycled label to ensure that they have been independently verified as being made from recycled materials. FSC UK's factsheet on the FSC Recycled label provides more information.

Further Resources

For updates and more information on FSC and Climate Change, please go to www.fsc.org/climatechange or write to carbon.wg@fsc.org.