

Finnish Forest Certification Council 6.2.2001

FFCS in February 2001

The Finnish Forest Certification System (FFCS) is a professionally designed system based on scientific principles

After five years of development work, technical preparations and capacity for building the FFCS is operational. Nearly 95 % of the Finnish production forests, i.e. 22 mill. hectares of forest, have been certified by independent certification bodies. In total, the number of forest owners involved is more than 311,000. The statistics for each of the 13 forest regions and their certificates can be found at http://www.ffcs-finland.org/eng/esittely/ajankohtaista_e.htm "Regional Statistics - FFCS."

Standard under continuous improvement

The performance standard of the FFCS was agreed in a broad consensus of Finnish stakeholders in 1997. Its set of 37 criteria was balanced between ecological, economic and social aspects. The certification audits were carried out by independent certification bodies in 1999 and 2000. The internationally recognised certification bodies which issued the forest certificates in Finland are briefly introduced at http://www.ffcs-finland.org/eng/esittely/ajankohtaista_e.htm "Certification Bodies - FFCS".

The preconditions for issuance of the certificates were adequate, although minor nonconformities were observed in all 13 forestry regions. Development needs were identified, especially in conjunction with e.g. the preservation of key biotopes in managed forests (Criterion No. 10), the treatment of buffer zones for waterways and small water bodies (Criterion No. 28), and maintaining the conservation values of protected areas (Criterion No. 19).

The FFCS is a learning process for all associated with regional group certification. For example, the key biotopes have not been recognised and physically demarcated in the terrain as well as they should be. Through mutual cooperation, private forest owners, the Forest and Park Service / Metsähallitus, Forest Management Associations, forest industry enterprises, machine operators, loggers, and other organisations committed to forest certification are developing the planning and implementation of their forestry practices. The improvements are followed up by the independent certification companies in their annual monitoring audits.

On the regional level, the aim is to develop forestry practices so that the nonconformities do not remain for long. Single cases of poor forestry practices may, however, occur due to the large number of annual cutting sites (100,000-150,000 wood sales agreements annually over the whole country).

Forest certification is a continuously advancing process through which both information and experience are accumulating. One vital task is to determine the development needs of certification applying to forestry and forest management. This means drawing on both research data and the steadily accumulating practical experience. The latest research results will be applied, the guidelines will be improved, and the education of forest owners and logging workers will be stepped up.

Forest certification alone does not guarantee sustainable forest management

Voluntary forest certification supplements other efforts to promote sustainable forest management in Finland. This was among the first countries in Europe to create a national set of criteria and indicators for forestry based on the so-called Helsinki criteria. As early as 1996 and 1997, 160 indicators were providing the foundations for the certification process and performance standard in Finland. The present improved set of national criteria and indicators was created in 2000 and the change in Finnish forest management as determined with these indicators has been analysed in a recent report published in January 2001.

Finland's present forest and environmental legislation was reformed in the 1990s in line with the principles of sustainable forestry and the requirements of both the EU and international conventions. Finland's ongoing National Forest Programme (NFP) 2010 recognises economic, ecological and social aspects of sustainable management in a broad way. The FFCS has been developed on a voluntary basis to complement the prevailing legislation and silvicultural guidelines and to implement these in practice. Ecological requirements are met partly at the expense of the economic gain. The FFCS's performance standards exceed the requirements of the legislation, despite Finland introducing the close-to-nature silviculture concept in its renewed forest legislation in 1997. The modern, exceptionally strict forest act includes e.g. definitions for the key biotopes which must be left untouched in production forests.

In Finland, forest certification is becoming firmly established as a practical tool for forest management integrating the sustainable development of wood production with forest biodiversity. However, as a voluntary system neither the FFCS nor any other forest certification system alone can resolve the problems regarding, for example, forest conservation areas and the possible compensation requirements for forest owners. Forest certification is one instrument for developing forest management in production forests, but

legislation and other forest policy is needed as a means to establishing a firm basis for a high level of forest sustainability.

Pointless criticism from the eNGOs

Now that the FFCS has reached a stable operational level, the Finnish eNGOs have stepped up their criticism towards Finland's national forest certification system, as well as towards the PEFC (Pan European Forest Certification) system. The eNGOs have heavily criticised the FFCS and also common forestry practices in Finland. An "Anything Goes?" report published last week by Greenpeace and Nature League listed 55 examples of so-called shortcomings in the FFCS. The eNGOs also claimed that the Forest and Park Service / Metsähallitus would not take into consideration the ecological values of forests and the reindeer herding in its forest management. Metsähallitus emphasizes that in its operations it obeys the laws, certification criteria, environmental regulations and also other rules. This is ensured by Metsähallitus' Environmental Management System (EMS), which has been certified in accordance with ISO 14 001 standard since 1998. The limits of operations of Metsähallitus are set in the national decision making system concerning the cases presented in the "Anything goes?" report as well. Furthermore, Metsähallitus applies extensive public participation in all its planning processes, which guarantees widely the rights of the local people as well as various stakeholder groups.

The eNGOs have been proved to use their own definitions and classifications, which differ considerably from the ones used in both Finnish forestry and international forest science. The most commonly made misleading claims include:

- Old, untouched forests are destroyed by forestry in Finland
- The level of forest protection in Finland is inadequate
- Forest management has not enhanced biodiversity in Finnish forests
- There is poor commitment to the FFCS in Finland.

These are commented on in the "Misleading claims - FFCS" fact sheet at http://www.ffcs-finland.org/eng/esittely/ajankohtaista_e.htm.

Use of the PEFC logo is expanding

The FFCS was approved by the PEFC Council in May 2000. The state of forest certification in Europe is reviewed at http://www.ffcs-finland.org/eng/esittely/ajankohtaista_e.htm "Forest Certification in Europe".

Not only is the use of the PEFC logo expanding in the Finnish forest industry, but the PEFC logo has also been introduced in the production of chemical pulp. Information on the 15 Finnish forest industry companies which already have the right to use the PEFC logo on their products can be found at http://www.ffcs-finland.org/eng/esittely/ajankohtaista_e.htm "PEFC Logo Licences - FFCS".