

American Forest Foundation
Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification
Standard Setting Procedures

Acknowledgment

The American Forest Foundation, a 501c.3, not-for-profit, organization located at 2000 M Street NW, Washington, DC is the sole proprietor and has sole responsibility for setting its “Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification.” It is acknowledged that the standard setting process will be in compliance with [PEFC ST 1001:2017](#).

These procedures were approved by the AFF Board of Trustees on November 11, 2019 with the Board approved definition of consensus. The Standard Setting Procedures are publicly available at the AFF website and upon request.

1. Standard Setting Principles

- 1.1) AFF will engage meaningful participation in the standards revision process that is open to all stakeholders through participation in working groups and public consultation.
- 1.2) AFF will make an effort to ensure that all relevant stakeholder groups are represented and will consider appropriate gender balance.
- 1.3) AFF will see continual improvement of the standard and undergo periodic review.
- 1.4) AFF will make all relevant documents publicly available for interested parties to follow the developments during and after the process.

2. Convening the Standard Setting/Review Forum

- 2.1) The AFF Board of Directors (Board of Trustees), will, at its discretion, but not exceeding a five-year period from the approval of the last standard revision, initiate a standard review process. The Board of Trustees will convene an Independent Standard Review Panel (ISRP). This panel will be constituted until it has presented its findings to the AFF Trustees, and upon Trustees receiving the final report, will be adjourned.
- 2.2) The Board of Trustees will invite a representative cross-section of forestry community leaders with a stake in AFF’s American Tree Farm System (ATFS) Program, or a sincere interest in forest sustainability on small private forest ownerships in the US to participate on the ISRP. The Board of Trustees will have the discretion to limit the ISRP to a size respective of AFF’s financial and staffing resources.
- 2.3) Interested parties which cannot participate in the ISRP due to their own or AFF financial or staffing resources can present their views and comments through ISRP members or through public consultation.
- 2.4) The Board of Trustees will publicly announce through various mediums the convening of the ISRP and the start of the Standard revision process.
- 2.5) Following its constitution, ISRP members will be publicly announced.

3. Balanced Representation and Decision Making

- 3.1) The ISRP will have a balance of appropriate interests and be constituted in such a

manner that no single category of the interest representation can dominate decision making procedures of the group.

- 3.2) Interest categories shall include, but not necessarily be limited to: scientific and technical community, environmental non- government organizations (ENGOS), forest industry, forest owners, indigenous peoples, workers/trade unions, and public forestry agencies serving family forest owners. A stakeholder analysis will identify key groups, including disadvantaged stakeholder groups, and will be considered for the ISRP process.
- 3.3) The ISRP agree to operate under the following parameters.
 - 2.3.1) Panel members are representing their respective organizations.
 - 2.3.2) Panelists are to review the current standard and determine if it adequately reflects the seven criteria set forth in the Montreal Process.
 - 2.3.3) Panelists are encouraged to share the document with their colleagues
 - 2.3.4) Any modifications to the standard must be reached by panel consensus.
 - 2.3.5) Panelists are to keep in mind at all times that any proposed modifications to the standard are both adequate and appropriate for small private forest owners in the US. (Small ownerships are defined as not exceeding 20,000 contiguous acres with the panel working under the premise that the majority of forest properties certified by ATFS are under 1000 contiguous acres.)
- 3.4) The ISRP will make all decisions using a consensus-based approach.
 - 3.4.1) The definition of the term consensus is identical with definition of ISO Guide 2: ***“Consensus: general agreement, characterized by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important part of the concerned interests and by a process that involves seeking to take into account the views of all parties concerned and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. Note: Consensus need not imply unanimity.”***

ISRP shall provide evidence on consensus having been reached before the formal approval of the standard. In order to reach consensus ISRP can utilize the following alternative processes to establish whether there is opposition to the standard:

- (a) A face-to face meeting where there is a verbal yes/no vote;
- (b) A face-to face meeting where there is a show of hands for a yes/no vote;
- (c) A face-to face meeting where there is a “secret ballot” of members on ayes/no vote;
- (d) A statement on consensus from the Chair at a face-to face meeting where there are no dissenting voices or hands (votes);
- (e) An e-mail meeting where a request for agreement is provided to members and the members providing written response (a proxy for a vote); or
- (f) A formal balloting process where votes are collated for the collective consensus decision.

No single concerned interest shall be allowed to dominate the process.

In any case of sustained opposition of any important part of the concerned interests to a substantive issue, the issue shall be resolved using the following mechanism:

- (a) Discussion and negotiation on the disputed issue within ISRP in order to find a compromise,
- (b) Direct negotiation between the ISRP member submitting the objection and member(s) with different view on the disputed issue in order to find a compromise,
- (c) Dispute resolution process.

The dispute resolution process is governed by AFF Dispute and Appeals Procedures.

- 3.5) Upon completion and consensus of the ISRP, the recommended standard revisions/modifications will be presented to the AFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES for approval and adoption.
- 3.6) The AFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES has the discretion to accept and adopt none, any or all of the ISRP recommended Standard revisions/modifications. Should the AFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES not accept the Standard as presented by the ISRP, it will return the Standard to the ISRP for further work. All material resubmitted to the AFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES by the ISRP will have been reached through consensus.
- 3.7) Upon presentation of the Standard from the ISRP, AFF will have the option of pilot testing any revisions or modifications to the Standard. Pilot testing will be used to ensure that the modification or revision is auditable, efficient and implementable.
- 3.8) Upon acceptance and adoption of the Standard by the AFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES, AFF will make the Standard publicly available.

4. Meetings, Comments and Consultation

- 4.1) All meetings will be convened under the auspices of AFF, its agents or others as assigned by AFF.
- 4.2) There will be a minimum of two face-to-face meetings (beginning and ending). Conference calls and other electronic media will be used when deemed appropriate.
- 4.3) The ISRP is encouraged to circulate any draft documents within its representative organization.
- 4.4) Information on the standard setting process and document development is made available to interested parties upon request or through AFF's website.
- 4.5) Any presented comments or views of the ISRP members as well as their representative organization or other interested parties shall be reviewed and considered in an open and transparent manner. The comments, responses and respective modifications to the Standard shall be recorded and made available to all members of the ISRP and the Commenter's respective organization(s).

5) Public Review and Comment on Proposed Standard

- 5.1) Upon consensus of the ISRP, the Standard shall be made available for public review and comment.
- 5.2) The public shall have no less than 60 days from the release of the proposed Standard to review and respond with comments.
- 5.3) All Commenters will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of comments from the ISRP.
- 5.4) All comments received will be made openly available to the ISRP.
- 5.5) The ISRP will review all comments and upon consensus, adopt any modifications from the public comments that it may find appropriate.
- 5.6) The comments, responses to received comments and relevant modifications shall be made available to Commenters and public upon request of from AFF's website.

6. Maintenance of The Standard and Interim Modifications

- 6.1) The AFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES will seat a National Standards Interpretation Committee (NSIC). The NSIC is charged with making interpretations of the Standard which will be considered enforceable until the ISRP is again seated. Decisions rendered by the NSIC will be achieved through consensus.
- 6.2) All interpretations rendered by the NSIC will be made publicly available and all appropriate accredited certification Board of Trustees will be notified of the interpretations.

7. Records and Documentation

- 7.1) All records, minutes, communications and other pertinent and tangible evidence of the Standard revision/modification process will be maintained by AFF or its agents or assignees until the completion of the next review or revision of the standard or a minimum of 5 years after publication of the standard.

8. Openness, Transparency and Public Availability

- 8.1) All records, minutes, communications and other pertinent and tangible evidence of the process will be made available to the public at its request.
- 8.2) All enquiries, complaints, and appeals related to the standard setting process should be directed to Director of ATFS or the VP of Finance and Administration.

9. Dispute Resolution and Appeals Processes

- 9.1) All complaints, disputes or appeals relating to AFF Standard Setting can be submitted and shall be resolved according to AFF *Disputes and Appeals Procedures*.