Group Forest Certification - Requirements
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When there is inconsistency between versions, the English version of the standard as endorsed by the PEFC Council is the reference.

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Group Forest Certification - Requirements

1. **Scope**

This document sets out the general requirements for forest certification schemes, including group forest management certification, which allows multiple forest owners/managers to be certified under a single certificate.

Group forest management certification requires the establishment of a specific governance structure that takes into account individual forest owners/managers. This entity is the representative of the individual owners/managers in the forest certification process and ensures that the sustainable forest management standard is properly implemented and provides an appropriate level of certainty during random sampling for certification activities.

*Note:* The term "group certification" is equivalent to "regional certification" or any other term used in a given forest certification scheme, where multiple forest owners are certified under a single certificate.

These requirements replace the document "Group forest certification - Requirements". (PEFC Poland, Warsaw, 9.12.2012).

The main objectives of the current revision of the PEFC system standards and documents in Poland were:

- adjustment to the revised requirements of PEFC International;
- taking into account the comments arising from the national review;
- improving the clarity and transparency of documents in order to facilitate their practical use.

2. **Normative references**

The documents listed below are essential for the application of this document. For dated and undated references, the latest edition (including all amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC Guide No 2:1996 *Standardization and related subjects - General terminology*


PEFC PL 1003:2022 *Sustainable forest management - Requirements*

3. **Terms and definitions**

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996 and the definitions listed below shall be regarded as valid.
3.1 Stakeholder affected by the standard

A stakeholder who may experience a direct change in living or working conditions because of the implementation of the standard, or a stakeholder who may be a user of the standard and therefore may be subject to its requirements.

*Note 1: Stakeholders influenced by the standard* include local communities, local people, workers, etc. However, being a stakeholder in the subject of the standard (e.g. NGOs, the scientific community and civil society) does not equate to being influenced by the standard.

*Note 2: A stakeholder who may be a user of the standard is likely to be a certified entity, such as a forest owner in the case of a forest management standard, or a wood processing company in the case of a forest product chain of custody standard.*

3.2 Audit

A systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact and other relevant information and evaluating them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are met.

3.3 Certified area

Forest area under *group forest certification*, representing the sum of forest areas submitted for certification, belonging to the participants.

3.4 Documented information

Information that an organisation shall control and store in any format, in any medium, from any source.

3.5 Document confirming participation in the group forestry certification

A document issued to the participant, relating to the group forestry certification, confirming that the participant is within the scope of the group forestry certification.

*Note:* Such a document may be, for example, a sub-certificate or a confirmation of participation.

3.6 Forest owner/manager

A person, group of persons, legal entity or organisation with a long-term right to manage forest in a clearly defined certified area and the ability to implement the requirements of the SFM standard in that area.

3.7 Group entity

The entity that represents the participants and has overall responsibility for ensuring that forest management in the certified area complies with the SFM standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme. The group entity uses a group management system for this purpose.

*Note:* The structure of a group entity shall comply with the activity, number of participants and other basic conditions required of a group organisation. The representative of a group entity may be one person.

3.8 Group forest certificate

A document confirming that the *group organisation* complies with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and other relevant requirements of the forest certification scheme.

3.9 Group forest certification

Certification of a *group organisation* under a single *group forest certificate*. 
3.10 Group management plan
Documented information setting out objectives, actions and control arrangements. Includes planned changes to the group management system and the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard applicable at group level.

3.11 Group management system
A set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organisation to deliver the objectives and outcomes of a sustainable forest management standard.

3.12 Group organisation
A group of participants represented by a group entity for the purposes of implementing and certifying the SFM standard. There shall be a binding written agreement between the participant and the group entity.

The term "group organisation" is equivalent to "regional" if the group falls within the boundaries of a region, or to other terms used in the forest certification scheme in question, provided it is consistent with the definition set out above.

3.13 Internal audit
A systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact and other relevant information and evaluating them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are met, carried out by the group organisation itself (first party audit).

3.14 Monitoring
Determining the status of a system, process or activity.

3.15 Organisation
A person or group of persons with their own functions, responsibilities, authorities and links to achieve their objectives.

3.16 Participant
Forest owner/manager or other entity covered by a group forest certificate, with rights to manage the forest in a clearly defined area, and the ability to implement the requirements of the SFM standard in the area.

Note: The term "ability to implement the requirements of the Sustainable Forest Management Standard" requires the entity to have long-term forest management rights, which prevents temporary owners from participating in group certification.

3.17 Policy
The intentions and direction of an organisation, formally expressed by its manager/owner or group entity.

3.18 Stakeholder
A person, group, community or organisation with an interest in the subject matter of the standard's requirements.
4. Eligibility criteria for group certification

4.1. General requirements

4.1.1. The group shall establish a group representative to represent its members.

The group organisation shall identify:

a) the affected stakeholders\(^1\) that are relevant for the group management system and
b) the relevant expectations of these affected stakeholders.

4.1.2. Based on the regulations of PEFC Poland and in particular the forest management standards, the group will develop common guiding principles within the group management plan.

4.1.3. Elements of the group management plan shall be known to all group members and form part of the contractual arrangements for group membership, and be documented and publicly available.

4.1.4. Group organisation shall determine the boundaries and applicability of the management system to establish its scope.

The group management system shall ensure and facilitate the implementation of PEFC standards for sustainable forest management at the group level. Resources shall be provided to establish, implement, maintain and continually improve group governance.

4.1.5. Persons carrying out work under the management system shall have appropriate training and knowledge of the sustainable forest management standard, group certification requirements and other standards, laws and technological issues, if required to perform the work.

4.1.6. Communication processes shall be used to raise awareness among group participants of:

a) group management policies
b) requirements of the standard for sustainable forest management;
c) their contribution to the effectiveness of the group's governance system and sustainable forest management, including the benefits of improving the group's performance;
d) the consequences of failure to comply with the requirements of the group management system.

4.1.7. Internal and external communication regarding the group management system shall be defined. This includes: what, when, to whom and how to communicate.

\(^1\) stakeholder in this context are entities and organisations beyond the group and its participants
4.2. General requirements for a group entity

4.2.1. The group entity shall provide a commitment to:

a) comply to the standard of sustainable forest management and other applicable requirements of the certification scheme;

b) integrate the requirements of group certification into the group management system;

c) continuous improvement of the group management system;

d) the continuous promotion of improvements in sustainable land/forest management by the participants;

The commitment of the group entity may be part of a group management policy and shall be publicly available as documented information upon request.

4.2.2. A group entity commitment may form part of the group management policy and shall be publicly available on request as documented information.

A group entity with a group forest certificate shall have:

a) legal personality or a legal delegation to carry out forest management;

b) board and chairman;

Note: by management it is also meant the management of the entity appointed to supervise participants in group certification.

c) an approved statute or an appropriate document, with a defined profile;

d) an agreement with an accredited and notified certification body for forestry certification;

e) management system in accordance with the Polish PEFC forest management standard

4.2.3. At the time of joining the group organisation, participants shall undergo an initial assessment for compliance with the sustainable forest management standard by the group entity.

4.2.4. If the group delegation acts as a trader of forest material not covered by group certification, it shall implement a PEFC-certified supply chain system.

4.2.5. The group organization shall establish a mechanism for handling complaints and appeals related to the implementation of the requirements of the Group Forest Certification Standard (PEFC PL 1004) and the Sustainable Forest Management Standard (PEFC PL 1003), which shall include:

a) acknowledgement to the complainant;

b) collect and verify all necessary information, validate and impartially assess the complaint/appeal and take a decision;

c) keeping the complainant informed of the ongoing complaint/appeal process;

d) formally inform the complainant/appellant and the parties concerned of the decision on the complaint(s) and of the process for dealing with the complaint(s);

e) appropriate corrective and preventive measures;

f) provision of a contact point for complaints and appeals

4.3. Role and responsibilities of the group entity

Requirements for the functions and responsibilities of the group entity shall include:
a) implementing and maintaining an effective management system involving all the participants in the group;

b) Represent the group organisation during the certification process, also in terms of communication and relations with the certification body, submission of the certification application and conclusion of the agreement with the certification body;

c) Commitment on behalf of the entire group organisation to comply with the requirements of the Sustainable Forest Management Standard and other relevant requirements of the Polish PEFC forest certification scheme;

d) Definition which requirements of the sustainable forest management standard may be fulfilled on group level.

e) Establish written procedures for the management of the group organisation;

f) Establishing written procedures for the admission of new members to the group organisation. These procedures shall include at least verification of the contact details given by the applicant and clear identification of the forest area claimed for certification and its size;

g) the establishment of written procedures for the suspension and debarment of participants who do not rectify/remove non-conformities. Participants excluded from a group organisation due to non-compliance may not apply for admission to the group organisation for a period of 12 months following the exclusion.

h) Documentation:
   - compliance of the group entity and participants with the standard of sustainable forest management and other requirements of the Polish forestry certification scheme PEFC,
   - the scope of the group management system shall be made available as documented information,
   - all participants, including their contact details, their forest areas and their surface,
   - certified area,
   - the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its reviews and any preventive and/or corrective action taken.
   - Implementation of corrective actions.

Documented information relevant to the management of the group or compliance with the forest management standard shall be kept up to date, available for use when needed and protected against loss of confidentiality, misuse or loss of integrity.

i) Establish a relationship with all participants based on a written agreement that includes a commitment by participants to comply with the requirements of the SFM standard. The group entity shall enter into a written agreement or contract with all participants. The document shall record the right of the group entity to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive actions and to initiate the procedure for exclusion of a participant from the scope of the certificate in the event of non-compliance with the sustainable forest management standard.

*Note:* The requirements for "commitment of participants" and "written agreement or contract with all participants" can be met in the form of a commitment recorded in a written agreement with an association of forest owners/managers, as long as the association demonstrates that it can legally represent the participants and the terms of the agreement are enforceable by law.

j) Sending participants the documents confirming their participation in the group forestry certification. The validity of the confirmation of participation issued to the group
members begins with the signature of the voluntary commitment and continues until the end of the validity of the group certificate.

k) Provide all participants with the information and guidance necessary to successfully implement the Sustainable Forest Management Standard and other requirements of the Polish PEFC forestry certification scheme;

l) Management of an internal monitoring programme to assess compliance of participants’ activities with certification requirements;

m) Addressing non-conformities reported by group members identified in PEFC certifications other than a specific group certification and ensuring that they are addressed by all group members;

n) the introduction of an annual internal audit programme involving both group participants and the group entity;

o) conducting management reviews as part of the group forestry certification and acting on the results of these reviews;

p) conducting a review of compliance with the SFM standard, taking into account the results of the internal monitoring programme and assessment and supervision by the certifying body, implementing the necessary corrective and preventive actions, and evaluating the effectiveness of corrective actions taken;

q) ensuring full cooperation and assistance in responding effectively to any requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or the national management unit for access to relevant data, documents and other information; allowing access to the forest area and facilities of the group organisation, whether for formal audits or reviews or for other management system-related matters.

4.4. **Role and responsibilities of participants**

The requirements for participants in the group certification are as follows:

a) Entering into a written agreement with the group entity that includes a commitment to comply with the management system, Sustainable Forest Management Standard and other relevant requirements of the Polish PEFC forest certification scheme; Participants excluded from the group organization due to non-compliance may not apply for admission to the group organization for a period of 12 months following exclusion.

*Note:* The 'written agreement' and 'commitment' requirement can also be met by a commitment and written agreement from a pre-existing organisation or group or participating body, such as a forest owners/managers association, a sustainable forest management programme, if the organisation can demonstrate that it has the right to represent its members and can enforce its commitment and the terms of the agreement.

b) providing the group entity with information on participation in previous groups;

c) compliance to the sustainable forest management standard and other requirements of the Polish forest management certification scheme PEFC;

d) full cooperation and assistance with any request from a group entity or control body for data, documentation or other information,

e) allowing access to the forest area and other facilities, as part of a formal audit, review or other management system matter;

f) informing the group entity of any non-compliance identified in PEFC certifications other than the group certification in question;

g) implementation of corrective and preventive actions determined by the group entity.
h) declaring products sold from a certified forest area as PEFC certified, with the statement "100% certified by PEFC", "100% PEFC" or "100% PEFC origin".

i) claims on the origin of products in an area covered by the standard shall only be made by forest owners/managers covered by a PEFC recognised certificate issued against the standard;

j) where owners/managers of forests are selling products from areas other than covered by the standard, only products from areas covered by the standard are sold with the claim "100% PEFC-certified" or a system specific claim;

k) specify requirements concerning the information which need to be provided to a PEFC chain of custody certified customer described in the standard PEFC ST 2002:2020 Chain of Custody of Forest and Tree Based Products – Requirements; according to the requirements of this standard, the organization shall provide the customer with documentation providing the following information for each delivery:
   a. PEFC customer\(^2\) identification
   b. the organisation’s name as the supplier of the material
   c. product identification
   d. quantity of product(s)
   e. date of delivery / delivery period / accounting period
   f. the applicable PEFC claim specifically for each claimed product covered by the documentation
   g. the certificate number of the organisation’s PEFC recognised certificate

l) compliance with the requirements concerning the use of the PEFC trademark (PEFC ST 2001PL)

4.5. Planning

Based on the PEFC Poland regulations, in particular the forest management standard, the group organisation shall develop a group management plan.

The elements of the group management plan shall be known to all participants and form part of the contractual arrangements for membership of the group organisation and be documented and publicly available.

If the group organisation plans to make changes to the group management system, these changes shall be made to the group management plan.

Where a group organisation decides to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Forest Management Standard at group level, these requirements shall be incorporated into the group management plan.

4.6. Action

4.6.1. The group organisation shall plan, implement and control the processes necessary to:

   a) compliance with the requirements of the Group Forest Certification standard and the Sustainable Forest Management standard; and

   b) implementation of the actions listed in Chapter 4.5.

4.6.2. Planning, implementation and control are carried out through:

\(^2\) PEFC customer - Entity receiving from an organisation a PEFC claim for products, of which it obtains legal ownership and/or physical possession. (3.29, PEFC ST 2002:2020)
a) defining the necessary processes and establishing criteria for them;
b) implementing process controls in accordance with the criteria;
c) maintaining the documented information necessary to obtain assurance that the processes have been performed according to plan.

4.7. Evaluation of activities

Three types of assessment shall be carried out:
- internal monitoring programme
- an annual internal audit programme.
- annual management review.

4.7.1. Monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation

4.7.1.1. An ongoing internal monitoring program shall provide assurance that the group organization's activities comply with the SFM standard. In particular, it shall establish:
- a) what is to be monitored and measured;
- b) monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation methods, as appropriate, to ensure reliable results;
- c) when to monitor and take measurements;
- d) when to analyse and evaluate the results of monitoring and measurement;
- e) what documented information is to be available as evidence of achievement of the objectives.

4.7.1.2. The group entity shall evaluate the effects of group management and the effectiveness of the group management system in implementing the requirements of sustainable forest management.

The group entity shall consider risks and opportunities concerning compliance with the requirements for sustainable forest management. Size and scale of the operations of the organisation shall be considered.

4.7.2. Internal audit

4.7.2.1. Objectives

4.7.2.1.1. The annual internal audit programme developed by the group entity shall provide information on whether the group management system:
- a) complies with the group organisation's own requirements for the group management system and with the requirements of the national group certification standard;
- b) ensure implementation of the SFM standard at the participant level;
- c) conforms the requirements of the national sustainable forest management standard;
- d) has been effectively implemented and is effectively maintained.

4.7.2.1.2. The internal audit programme shall cover the group entity and all group participants. The group entity shall be audited on an annual basis. Participants for the audit may be selected on a sample basis.

4.7.2.2. Organisation of internal audit

The internal audit programme shall include at least:
a) planning, establishing, implementing and maintaining the audit programme, including frequency, methods, responsibilities, planning and reporting requirements, taking into account the importance of these processes and the results of previous audits;

b) definition of criteria and scope of each audit;

c) definition of the competence of the internal auditor (knowledge of the forest, knowledge of the standard);

d) selection of auditors and conduct of audits so as to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the audit process;

e) ensuring that the results of audits are communicated to the management of the group;

f) keeping documented information as evidence of the implementation of the audit programme and its results.

4.7.3. Selection of participants in the internal audit programme

4.7.3.1. General provisions

Requirements shall be established for the selection of participants in the internal audit programme. These requirements shall include the following procedures:

a) the determination of sample size;

b) the determination of sample categories;

c) distribution of samples to categories;

d) selection of participants.

4.7.3.2. Determination of sample size

4.7.3.2.1. The sample size shall be calculated for participants in a group organisation.

4.7.3.2.2. The sample size shall be the square root of the number of participants \( \sqrt{x} \), rounded up to a whole number.

4.7.3.3. Determination of sample categories

4.7.3.3.1. The test categories shall be established on the basis of the results of the risk assessment. The indicators used for risk assessment shall relate to the area to be certified. The following list of indicators can be adapted/used for risk assessment:

   a) form of ownership (e.g. state, communal, private forest);

   b) the size of the units managed (by size class);

   c) biogeographical region (e.g. lowland, low mountain range, high mountain range);

   d) activities, processes and products of potential participants in the group;

   e) deforestation and conversion of forests;

   f) the adopted felling ages and the applied felling techniques;

   g) rich biodiversity;

   h) recreational and other socioeconomic functions of forests;

   i) dependence on and interaction with local communities;

   j) available resources for administration, operation, training and research;

   k) order and enforcement.

   l) number of external stakeholders involved in forest management.
4.7.3.3.2. The conditions that constitute the risk for each indicator at low, medium and high levels and the corresponding consequences for sampling shall be identified.

4.7.3.4. **Distribution of the sample**

The sample shall be categorised according to the outcome of the risk assessment.

4.7.3.5. **Selection of participants**

At least 25% of the sample shall be selected randomly. For the remaining participants, a risk-based selection procedure shall be defined.

4.7.3.6. **Auditors and reporting**

4.7.3.6.1 The appointed auditors shall be qualified to assess the relevant issues (forestry knowledge and knowledge of standards). This may be adapted to the requirements for auditors of certification bodies.

4.7.3.6.2 The audit report shall include a brief description of the results and of improvement measures and corrective actions.

4.7.4. **Management overview**

4.7.4.1. The annual management review shall include as a minimum:

   a) the status of activities since the previous reviews;
   
   b) developments in internal and external matters relevant to the group management system;
   
   c) compliance of management with the sustainable forest management standard, which shall include a review of the results of the internal monitoring programme, internal audit and assessments and supervision by the certification body;
   
   d) information on the performance of the group organisation, including trends:
      
      i. non-compliance and corrective action;
      
      ii. the results of monitoring and measurement;
      
      iii. the results of the audit;
   
   e) opportunities for continuous improvement.

4.7.4.2. The results of the management system assessment shall include decisions on opportunities for continuous improvement and the need for any changes to the group management system.

4.7.4.3. The group organisation shall keep documented information as evidence of the results of management reviews.

5. **Improvement**

5.1 **Non-conformities and corrective actions**

5.1.1. In the event of non-compliance, the group organisation shall:

   a) respond to non-compliance and as appropriate:
      
      i. take steps to control and correct it;
      
      ii. deal with the consequences;
   
   (b) assess the need for action to eliminate the causes of the non-compliance so that it does not recur or occur elsewhere, by:
i. overview of non-compliance;
ii. identifying its causes;
iii. determining whether similar non-compliances exist or are likely to occur;
(c) implement the necessary actions;
(d) review the effectiveness of corrective action taken;
(e) if necessary, make the necessary changes to the group management system.

5.1.2. The corrective action taken shall be appropriate to the consequences of the non-compliance encountered.

5.1.3. The group organisation shall keep documented information as evidence:
   a) the nature of the non-compliance and the action taken as a result;
   b) the results of corrective actions.

5.1.4. A participant excluded from group certification shall undergo an internal audit by the group entity before being allowed to rejoin the group organisation. The internal audit shall take place no earlier than 12 months after exclusion.

5.2 Continuous improvement

The certified organisation shall provide a commitment to continuously improve the sustainable forest management system. That this commitment shall be publicly available.