PEFC LV 06:2022

Group Forest Management Certification – Requirements
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The original version of the document is in Latvian. When there is doubt in regard to language interpretation, the English version is the reference.
Introduction

Group certification is an alternative to individual certification, which allows forest owners/managers to become voluntarily certified under one certificate and share the financial obligations arising from forest certification as well as the common responsibility for forest management. This approach aims at improving co-operation in forest management among individual forest owners/managers.

PEFC forest management requirements for a group certification are not lower than those for individual certification.

This document is designed to enable forest owners/managers with different forest management units to participate in joint certification.

1. Scope

This document defines requirements for forest management group certification and allows multiple forest owners/managers to be certified under one certificate.

Group entity shall establish a specific management structure to ensure the correct implementation of the Standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system.

This document clarifies and in separate chapters supplements the requirements of the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard PEFC FMS:2022 regarding group certification. In all cases, the requirements of the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard PEFC FMS:2022 shall be followed for group certification, with the exception of chapters 4, 5, 7, 9 and 10 of the Standard, which are set out in this document and adapted for group certification. In the group level the following requirements of the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard PEFC FMS:2022 can be achieved: 6.1, 6.2, i3.4.1, i3.4.2, i4.2.3, i1.2.1, i1.2.2, i1.2.3, i1.2.9, i1.2.10, i6.1.1, i6.1.3, i6.2.3, i6.2.4, i6.2.5, i6.3.2, i6.4.1.

2. Normative references

PEFC ST 1002:2018 Group forest management – requirements.


3. Terms and Definitions

Explanations of the most important terms whose definitions are not included in this document are available in Chapter 3 of the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard.

For the purposes of this document the following terms and definitions given:

3.1 Accreditation body. A body that assesses, accredits and supervises certification bodies.

3.2 Audit – a systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining and evaluating objective evidence to determine the extent to which audit criteria are met (ISO 19011: 2018).

3.3 Documented information. Information required to be controlled and maintained by an organisation using any format and media, from any source.
3.4 **Document confirming participation in group forest certification.** A document issued to a group member that refers to the group certificate and that confirms the member as being covered by the scope of the group certification.

3.5 **Group.** A group of members represented by the group entity for the purposes of implementation of the Standard and its certification. A binding written agreement shall be established between a group members and the group entity.

3.6 **Group member.** A forest owner/manager covered by the group certificate, who has the ability to implement the requirements of this document and the Standard in a certified area.

*Note 1: Group member -* forest owner/manager can be any natural person, legal person or a group of forest owners (association) who apply for group certification and who is bound by the requirements of this document and the Standard.

*Note 2: The requirements set for the group member -* forest owner/manager apply equally to the owner/manager of plantation forest unless specified otherwise.

3.7 **Group forest management plan.** A set of documents, tools, information systems specifying objectives, actions and control measures. It covers planned changes of the group forest management system and requirements of the Standard which are covered on group level.

3.8 **Group certification.** Certification of the group under one PEFC forest management certificate.

3.9 **Group entity.** A legal entity that represents the group members, with overall responsibility for ensuring the conformity of forest management in the certified area to the Standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system. For this purpose the group entity is using a group management system.

*Note: The structure of the group entity should follow the operations, number of members and other basic conditions for the group. It may be represented by one person.*

3.10 **Group management system.** Set of interrelated or interacting elements of the group to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the Standard.

3.11 **Stakeholder.** A person, a group of persons or an organisation interested in the scope of the Standard (e.g. NGOs, scientists or members of the public, etc.).

3.12 **Internal audit.** Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled, undertaken by the group itself (first party audit).

3.13 **Forest management unit.** An area with clearly defined boundaries, which is managed in accordance with clearly defined long-term management objectives set out in a management plan.

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

3.15 **Certified area.** An area of a forest and/or a plantation forest which is certified according to the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard.

*Note: In the group certification context the certified area is the sum of forest areas of the group members and covered by a group forest certificate.*

3.16 **Certification body.** An institution independent of the producer and consumer, which offers certification services under accredited certification programmes, and evaluates, certifies and supervises certificate holders.
3.17 **Group forest management certificate** (also – certificate). A document confirming that the group complies with the requirements of the Standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system.

3.18 **Standard.** In the context of this document, it is the Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard PEFC FMS:2022.

3.19 **Worker.** A worker is any natural person who, on the basis of a contract, performs certain work for an employer, incl. under the guidance of a service provider, guest workers, as well as self-employed persons.

3.20 **Directly affected stakeholder.** A person or a group of persons who could be directly affected by changes in living and/or working conditions as a result of the implementation of the Standard.

*Note.* Directly affected stakeholders include local residents, municipalities, service providers, employees, etc. However, for the purpose of the Standard, e.g. NGOs, scientists or members of the public who are interested in the subject of the Standard, cannot be treated as directly affected stakeholders.

4. **Context of the group organisation**

4.1 **Understanding the needs and expectations of stakeholders**

4.1.1 The **group entity** shall identify:

a) the **stakeholders** and the **directly affected stakeholders** that are relevant for the **group management system** and

b) the relevant needs and expectations of these **stakeholders** and **directly affected stakeholders**.

4.2 **Determining the scope of the group management system**

4.2.1 The **group entity** shall determine the boundaries and applicability of the **group management system** in order to establish the scope for the **group management system**.

4.2.2 The scope shall be made available as **documented information**.

4.3 **Group management system**

4.3.1 The **group entity** shall include in their **group management system** requirement that all **group members** shall be subject to the internal **monitoring** and the **internal audit** programme.

4.3.2 **Group entity** shall ensure that in cases when forest based material not covered by sustainable forest management group **certificate** are traded; certified PEFC chain of custody system shall be in place.

5. **Roles, responsibilities and authorities**

5.1 **Functions and responsibilities of the group entity.**

The following functions and responsibilities of the **group entity** shall be specified:

a) to implement and maintain an effective **group management system** covering all members of the **group**;

b) to represent the **group** in the certification process, including in communications and relationships with the **certification body**, submission of an application for certification, and contractual relationship with the **certification body**;

c) to establish written procedures for the **group entity**;
d) to establish written procedures for the acceptance of new group members. The acceptance procedure shall include at least verification of the following facts: contact details of the applicant, information on forest ownership, location and area of the forest property;

e) to establish written procedures for the suspension and exclusion of group members who do not correct/close nonconformities. Group member excluded from any group certification based on nonconformities cannot be accepted within 12 months after exclusion;

f) to keep documented information of:

- the group entity and group members conformity with the requirements of the Standard, and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system;
- all group members, including their contact details, identification of their forest property and size;
- the certified area;
- the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its review and any preventive and/or corrective actions taken;

g) to establish connections with all group members based on a binding written agreement which shall include the group members commitment to comply with the Standard. The group entity shall have a written contract or other written agreement with all group members covering the right of the group entity to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive measures, and to initiate the exclusion of any group member from the scope of certification in the event of nonconformity with the Standard;

Note: The requirements for “a binding written agreement” and “written contract or other written agreement with all group members” can also be met by a written agreement between forest owner/manager or forest owner association, if the organisation can demonstrate that it has the legal authority to represent the group members and that its obligations and the terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

h) to provide all group members with a document confirming participation in group forest certification;

i) to provide all group members with information and guidance required for the effective implementation and maintenance of the Standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system;

j) to address nonconformities reported from group members which were identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification and to ensure implementation with all group members;

k) to operate an internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the group members conformity with the certification requirements;

l) to operate an annual internal audit programme covering both group members and group entity;

m) to operate a management review of the group certification and acting on the results from the review;

n) to provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or the PEFC Latvia for relevant data, documentation or other information; allowing access to the forest area covered by the group and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the group management system.

5.2 Function and responsibilities of group members

5.2.1 The following functions and responsibilities of the group members shall be specified:

a) to provide the group entity with a binding written agreement, including a commitment on conformity with the Standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system;
Note: The requirement for “written agreement” and “commitment” by group members is also met by the commitment and written agreement by an existing organisation or group or by the members participation, such as a forest owner/manager association, if the organisation can demonstrate that it has a legal authority to represent its members.

b) group members excluded from any group certification cannot apply for group membership within 12 months after exclusion;

c) to provide the group entity with information about previous group membership;

d) to comply with the Standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system as well as with the requirements of the group management system;

e) to provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the group entity, or certification body for relevant data, documentation or other information; allowing access to the forest and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the group management system;

f) to inform the group entity about nonconformities identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification;

g) to implement relevant corrective and preventive actions established by the group entity.

5.2.2 The group member shall carry out forest inventory in accordance with national laws and regulations.

5.3 Commitment and policy

5.3.1 The group entity shall provide a commitment:

a) to comply with the Standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system;

b) to integrate the group certification requirements in the group management system;

c) to continuously improve the group management system;

d) to continuously support the improvement of the sustainable management of the land/forests by the group members.

5.3.2 The commitment of the group entity referred to in clause 5.3.1. may be part of a group management policy and shall be publicly available as documented information upon request.

5.3.3 The group members shall provide a commitment:

a) to follow the rules of the group management system;

b) to implement the requirements of the Standard in their operations in their area.

6. Planning

Group entity shall comply with all requirements included in the Standard Chapter 6. Requirements of clauses 6.1 and 6.2 can be achieved in the group level. Additionally:

6.1 If a group plans any changes in the group management system, these changes shall be included in a group forest management plan.
6.2 If a group decides to fulfil some of the requirements of the Standard on the group level, these requirements shall be reflected in a group forest management plan.

7. Resources, competence, communication, complaints, documented information and use of certification claims

7.1 Resources
**Group entity** shall determine and provide resources (e.g. the number of workers, technical means) necessary for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continuous improvement of group management system.

7.2 Competence
7.2.1 Person/-s managing the group shall have necessary competences and knowledge to implement the requirements of the Standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system.
7.2.2 **Group entity** shall ensure that workers have received training relevant to their job and/or sufficient information on sustainable forest management (including training on the enhancement of forest biodiversity and/or specially protected species and habitats, forest regeneration, tending, etc.).

7.3 Communication
7.3.1 The internal and external communications relevant to the group management system shall be determined in the group (on what, when, with whom and how to communicate).
7.3.2 **Group entity** shall ensure communication with stakeholders and directly affected stakeholders about sustainable forest management, respond to their questions and keep documented information.

*Note: Documented information* includes minutes of meetings, if such are taken, as well as mutual correspondence.

7.3.3 Internal communication shall address at least the following issues:

a) the group management policy;
b) the requirements of the Standard;
c) group member contribution to the effectiveness of the group management system and the sustainable forest management, including the benefits of improved group performance;
d) the implications of not conforming with the group management system requirements.

7.3.4 Written information exchange shall be kept for at least 5 years.

7.4 Complaints
7.4.1 The **group entity** shall establish appropriate mechanisms for resolving complaints and disputes relating to group management and sustainable forest management operations.
7.4.2 Written complaints about group management and forest management shall be reviewed and responded to. The resolution of complaints and/or disputes shall be resolved in accordance with the requirements of the laws and regulations.

7.5 Documented information
7.5.1 The documented information relevant to the group management system and the conformance with the requirements of the Standard and this document shall be developed to meet the requirements of the Standard and this document. This documented information shall be available and suitable for use, where and when it is needed and adequately protected against loss of confidentiality, improper use, or loss of integrity.

7.5.2 The documentation shall include at least the following documented procedures according to the scale and intensity of operations:

a) use of plant protection agents and/or fertilizers, record keeping (areas where plant protection agents and/or fertilizers have been used, name of products, name of active ingredient and the amount used);

b) preventive actions to avoid spills of oil, fuel and other chemical substances, as well as emergency actions in case of spills, ensuring the collection of these substances;

c) health and safety requirements and control according to the type of work to be performed;

d) monitoring programme, including the frequency/periodicity of monitoring and indicators.

Note: The documented procedures defined in this clause may be developed at the group level.

7.5.3 Group entity shall implement, periodically review and/or update the documented information referred to in clauses 7.5.1 and 7.5.2.

7.6 Use of certification claims

7.6.1 The claim “100% PEFC certified” can be included in sales documents to inform clients who have a valid PEFC chain of custody certificate that the products come from certified forests and/or other sources approved by the PEFC International as suitable for PEFC certification, e.g. raw material originating from plantation forests to which the requirements of the Standard apply.

Note 1: Translations into Latvian of all claims used in the PEFC system are available on the PEFC website: www.pefc.org.

Note 2: Certification claims regarding to the origin of products from certified forest management units shall be used only by group who have a PEFC-acknowledged certificate issued in accordance with this Standard.

7.6.2 Group entity or member can sell with the claim “100% PEFC certified” or with another claim of the system only those products that are obtained in certified areas. In cases where the group entity or member sells other products that are outside the scope of certification, they shall be sold as non-certified.

7.6.3 Group entity shall collect and keep records about all products sold.

7.6.4 Group entity and/or member shall keep all relevant sales documents for at least five years for all products sold as PEFC certified, including at least the following information: name and address of seller and purchaser, the date of sale, product name or description (e.g. “coniferous”, “broadleaves”, “firewood”), the volume (or quantity) sold, certificate code and the claim “100% PEFC certified”.

7.6.5 Group entity and/or member includes information about the certification status of the products sold as certified in communication with clients who have a PEFC chain of custody certificate.

8. Management operations

8.1 The group entity shall plan, implement and control necessary processes needed:

a) to meet the requirements of this document and the Standard;

b) to implement the actions specified in paragraph 6 from this document.

Note: All operational requirements are included in Latvian National PEFC Forest Management Standard PEFC FMS:2022.
8.2 Planning, implementing and controlling shall be done by:
a) defining the necessary processes and establishing criteria for those;
b) implementing control of the processes in accordance with the criteria;
c) keeping documented information to the extent necessary to have confidence that the processes have been carried out as planned.

9. Assessment of the management operations

9.1 Internal monitoring (monitoring and evaluation)
9.1.1 An ongoing internal monitoring programme, that may be developed at the group level, shall provide confidence in the conformity of the group with the requirements of this document and Standard. In particular, it shall be determined:

a) what shall be monitored and measured;
b) the methods for monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation to ensure valid results;
c) when the monitoring and measuring shall be performed;
d) when the results from monitoring and measurement shall be analysed and evaluated;
e) what documented information shall be available as evidence of the results.

9.1.2 The group entity shall evaluate the group management system performance and effectiveness concerning the implementation of requirements of this document and the Standard.

9.1.3 The group entity shall regularly conduct monitoring of forest resources and evaluation of their management, including assessment of the ecological, social and economic impacts, and monitoring results shall be reflected in the planning process. Ecological, social and economic impacts can be assessed at the group level.

Note. Monitoring can be carried out by the group entity, or by using the results of monitoring carried out by other competent authorities. For example, if monitoring of forest health is carried out at the national/regional level, and its results are available to the group entity, the objective of the requirement is met without the necessity to carry out the individual monitoring in each forest management unit.

9.1.4 The group entity shall conduct monitoring and control of non-wood forest products that are sold for commercial purposes.

9.1.5 The group entity shall carry out regular monitoring of the working conditions (working environment) and, if necessary, plan measures to improve the conditions.

9.2 Internal audit

An ongoing internal monitoring programme provides confidence in the conformity of the group entity with the Standard.

9.2.1 The group entity shall determine and implement an annual internal audit programme, appropriate to the scale and intensity of operations, to ensure that the management system is effectively implemented and maintained in accordance with the requirements set by the Standard, the group itself, as well as the requirements of this document, which are set for the group management system.
9.2.2 The **group entity** shall establish the **group management system** that ensures the implementation of the **Standard** on the **group member** level.

9.2.3 The **internal audit** programme shall cover the **group entity** and all the **group members**. The **group entity** shall be audited annually. The **group members** for **internal audit** may be selected on a sample basis.

9.2.4 An **internal audit** programme shall, according to the scale and intensity of the operations, include at least:

a) planning, establishment, implementation and maintenance of the audit programme(s) specifying the frequency, methods, responsibilities, audit planning and reporting requirements, taking into consideration the importance of the processes concerned and the results of previous audits;

b) defining of the audit criteria and scope for each audit;

c) competence of internal auditor (forest knowledge, knowledge of binding PEFC documents)

d) selection of internal auditors and conduct of **internal audits**, ensuring objective and impartial audit process (the internal auditor can also be **group member** who performs the functions of an auditor and can ensure an impartial and objective audit process, even if the specifics and qualifications of the designated person’s work do not correspond to the auditor’s profession);

e) selection of auditors and conducting of **internal audits** to ensure objectivity and the impartiality of the audit process;

f) requirement that the results of the **internal audits** are reported to **group entity**;

g) requirement to retain documented information as evidence of the implementation of the **internal audit** programme and the internal audit results.

### 9.3 Selection of participants in the internal audit programme

9.3.1 The **internal audit** programme regarding to the selection of members shall include the following procedures for:

a) determination of the sample size (9.3.2, 9.3.3);

b) determination and distribution of sample categories(9.3.5);

c) risk-based procedure for the selection of the **group members** (9.3.6).

9.3.2 The sample size shall be calculated for the **group members**. The size of the sample generally should be the square root of the number of **group members**: \( y = \sqrt{x} \), rounded to the upper whole number.

9.3.3 If the **group** includes organizations or subgroups, for example, a cooperative or forest manager that has its own participants, then an **internal audit** in this subgroup shall be carried out annually, and the size of the sample within the subgroup should calculated in the same way as in the **group** - as the square root of the number of the subgroup participants \( y = \sqrt{x} \).

9.3.4 The size of the sample calculated in clause 9.3.2 and 9.3.3 can be adapted, based on:

a) results of a risk assessment (9.3.5);

b) results of **internal audits** or previous certification **audits**;

c) quality / level of confidence of the internal **monitoring** programme;

d) use of technologies allowing the gathering of information concerning specified requirements;
Note: Technologies can help to demonstrate compliance for specific requirements of the **Standard** or support the risk-based sampling. Such technologies can be e.g. satellite data or drones.

e) use of other means of gathering information.

**Note:** One way could be a **group member** survey which provides sufficient information about relevant activities.

9.3.5 The sample categories shall be established and distributed based on the results of a risk assessment. The indicators used in the risk assessment shall reflect the scope of the standard and divide the risk for each indicator on low, medium and high level, as well as determine the number of score for calculating the risk level. The risk shall be assessed according to the risk indicators listed in Table 1, and as a result of the assessment, each **group member** is assigned a risk level (category):

- Low 0 – 3 score
- Medium 4 – 8 score
- High 9 or more score

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<th>Risk indicator</th>
<th>Risk level</th>
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<td>Low (0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Total forest management area, ha</td>
<td>0 - 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Experience in forest management</td>
<td>8 years or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Number of identified health and safety non-compliances during the past 3 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Number of negative comments received from stakeholders during the past 2 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Legal violations identified by the competent state institutions during the past 2 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Forest management operations are performed by PEFC certified contractors</td>
<td>All contractors are certified according to the PEFC Standard for Forestry Contractors PEFC LV MDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Experience in PEFC Forest Management certification</td>
<td>Certified more than 5 years</td>
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9.3.6 The **group entity** shall establish a risk-based procedure for the selection of the sample for **internal audits** including requirement that at least 25% of the sample of **group members** are selected at random, and other internal audit participants shall be selected based on the risk assessment results: 10% of participants shall be selected from the low-risk category, 20% from the medium and 45% from the high-risk category. All numbers selected shall be rounded to the upper whole number.
9.4 Management system review

9.4.1 An annual management system review shall at least include:

a) the status of actions described in previous management system reviews;
b) changes in external and internal issues that are relevant to the management system;
c) information on the group performance results, including non-compliances and corrective actions, monitoring and evaluation results and audit results;
d) opportunities for continual improvement of the system, foreseeing the necessary improvements.

9.4.2 The outputs of the management system review shall include decisions related to continual improvement opportunities and any need for changes to the group management system.

9.4.3 The group entity shall retain documented information as evidence of the results of management system reviews.

10. Improvement of the management system

10.1 Nonconformities and corrective actions

10.1.1 When a non-conformity occurs, the group entity shall:

a) act accordingly:
   - to plan actions to control and correct non-conformities;
   - to deal with the consequences caused by the non-conformities as far as possible;
b) assess the need for corrective actions in order to eliminate the risks of recurrence of non-conformities elsewhere by:
   - reviewing the non-conformity;
   - determining the causes of the non-conformity;
   - determining if a similar non-conformity could reoccur or occur anywhere else;
c) plan and implement the necessary actions;
d) review the effectiveness of the corrective actions taken;
e) make changes to the group management system, if necessary.

10.1.2 Corrective actions shall be appropriate so that to eliminate the effect of the identified non-conformities as far as possible.

10.1.3 The group entity shall retain documented information about the non-conformity and the measures taken to eliminate the non-conformity, as well as the results of any corrective actions.

10.1.4 The group member who was excluded from the group certification shall be internally audited by the group entity before it is allowed to re-enter the group certification. The internal audit shall not take place sooner than 12 months after the exclusion.
10.2 Continual improvement of the management system

The group entity shall continuously improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the group management system, sustainable forest management system and the sustainable forest management practice.

11. Standard requirements binding for the group certification

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