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Group Forest Management Certification– Requirements



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Foreword

The document “Group Forest Management Certification – Requirements” had been developed within the standard revision process by the Technical Committee of the PEFC Slovakia with the participation of the main stakeholder groups.

This document was submitted to the national governing body of the Slovak Forest Certification System for formal adoption. The document was adopted as TD SFCS 1002:2021 on 11.11.2021.

PEFC Slovakia is the national governing body of the Slovak Forest Certification System and incorporates representatives of forestry, wood processing industry and other stakeholder groups.

This document applies standards and procedures as developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) as set out in PEFC ST 1002: 2018 *Group Forest Management Certification – Requirements*.

PEFC supports gender equality. Hence, every term in this standard referring to a specific person (e.g. manager, owner, participant) embraces women and men likewise, without further accentuation.

This document replaces technical document TD SFCS 1002:2014, Issue 2, *Rules for Certification of Forest Management*.

Introduction

Group certification is an alternative approach to forest certification, which allows forest owners and 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 information dissemination and co-operation in forest management among individual forest owners and managers.

This document is designed to enable forest owners and managers of different forest management units to participate in certification.

1 Scope

Group forest management certification requires establishing a specific management structure that includes the individual forest owners/managers. This entity represents the individual owners/managers in forest certification in order to ensure the correct implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and provide confidence in sampling-based certification activities.

The requirements laid out in this document represent the minimum requirements of PEFC SK for the group forest management certification. The document describes the organisation and management group forest management certification. It sets out in detail the objectives and describes the group certification scheme, specifies the roles and responsibilities for the group entity and directs procedures and determines the conditions for the participation of forest owners / managers in the group certification.

2 Normative references

For the purposes of this document the normative references given in 1001:2021 *Slovak Forest Certification System - Description and Context* apply.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document the terms and definitions given in 1001:2021 *Slovak Forest Certification System - Description and Context* apply.

4 Context of the group certification

4.1 Description of the group organization and its interrelationships

4.1.1 The group organization is a voluntary association of forest owners and managers, participants in certification (hereinafter participant), created for the purpose of applying the PEFC national standard of sustainable forest management (TD SFCS 1003) and its certification. In the certification process, they are represented by a group entity (hereinafter an entity) who is the holder of the certificate.

4.1.2 The entity is a participant in the group, or another legal entity representing the participants and authorized by them to submit an application for certification of the group.

4.1.3 All participants shall have a legal or contractual relationship with the entity and must follow a common management system in the certification process, which is defined and appointed by the entity, where the entity performs permanent supervision and internal audit.

4.1.4 Forms and limiting factors for creating a group organization:

- a) regional group: a group of forest owners and managers, including local associations regardless of the type of ownership, located (clearly deployed) within clearly defined boundaries of the region not exceeding 1/2 of the forest area of Slovakia
- b) other groups:
 - i. the group consists of organizational units of one forest manager, whose forest areas are located in the territorial district of Slovakia,
 - ii. existing associations of non-state forest owners

4.1.5 Certification is open on a voluntary basis to all managers whose forest land is located in a defined area or who are members of an existing association of non-state forest owners.

4.1.6 Forest managers may request the entity to participate in the certification during the validity of the certificate. The condition for concluding a contract on joining the certification is successful completion of the initial audit.

4.1.7 The participant enters the certification usually with all managed forest property located in the given area. If the participant enters the process of forest certification only with a part of the managed property, he/she is obliged to have a system in place for individual evidence (separation) of wood raw

material, wood sales and controlled movement of wood so that there is no mixing of uncertified wood with certified wood. This process must be controlled.

4.1.8 The application for participation in the certification is submitted by the statutory body in accordance with the defined competencies.

4.1.9 Small forest owners (usually up to 500 ha of forest land) can, for the purposes of certification, set up local associations within the boundaries of historical regions, or on the basis of a common certified forest manager. They act as one participant in the certification. On their behalf acts an authorized representative, who ensures technical and organizational matters related to the management of the certification process in the local association in accordance with the concluded contract with the group organization entity.

Note: As a rule, the total area of forest land does not exceed 10,000 ha.

4.1.10 In the case when participants are structurally divided into territorially integrated organizational units for which a Forest Management Plan is elaborated, they may participate in the group certification process independently.

4.1.11 When applying for participation in the certification, natural and legal persons managing the forests on the contractual basis shall prove that their tenancy relationship is valid and that there is oral or written consent of the owner for certification.

4.1.12 The participant always has the opportunity to terminate his participation, even during the validity of the certificate.

4.1.13 The property of participants, the use of which is restricted by the court, may not be subject to certification.

4.1.14 The costs related to the group forest certification process are shared by the certification participants.

4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of affected stakeholders

4.2.1 The entity shall identify representatives of the affected stakeholders in the certified area to whom implementation of the standard may cause a direct change in living or working conditions or stakeholders that may be users of the standard and are therefore subject to the requirements of the standard. The following, but not exhaustive, list of stakeholders concerned, and their expectations may be relevant to the group management system.

Affected stakeholders	Expectations and needs of affected stakeholders
<i>standard implementation can cause direct change in living or working conditions</i>	
contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility to perform work - Creating standard and safe working conditions - Payment of agreed obligations for work performed
employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job security, wages and social security
forest managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear and compliant SFM standard - Creation of acceptable and suitable conditions and tools for the possibility of ensuring multifunctional forest management
State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forest management corresponding to the nature protection objectives in the certified area
managers of water resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining or improving the quality and quantity of forest water production - Protection of water resources against pollution
local population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The possibility of using forests for recreation without restrictions - Use of forest products (wood and non-wood) - Restriction of logging - Stopping clear-cuts - Restriction of the use of the forest transport network for the needs of forestry – extraction and transport of wood for the benefit of their use by the public

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of milder management methods (selective forests, close-to-nature forest management) - Suppression of illegal activity in forests
local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Payment of duties and taxes, - Beneficial impact of forests on the local population - Use of forests for the needs of the local population - Restriction of the use of local roads by forest technology
<i>stakeholders that may be users of the standard and are therefore subject to the requirements of the standard</i>	
wood industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility of forest products - wood - Declaring the origin of wood from credible sources
hunting organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining a dynamic balance between the state of the forests and game conditions - minimizing damage caused by game - Use of forests for hunting purposes - Building of hunting facilities
forest owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining and improving the condition of forests - Adequate benefits (rent) resulting from forest ownership
scientific and research institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility to carry out research activities in forest stands

4.2.2 The entity shall monitor and review the requirements reflecting the needs and expectations of the concerned stakeholders.

4.3 Subject of the group management system

4.3.1 Definitions

4.3.1.1 The organization, activity and management of the group shall be performed by a legal entity - a group representative - a certificate holder. It can be one of the participants in the group or another legal entity. The representative shall provide the necessary structural, material and personnel conditions to meet the needs of this document. It shall be generally responsible for ensuring the sustainable management of forests in the certified area according to the sustainable forest management standard or other applicable requirements of the certification system. It shall use a group management system for this purpose.

4.3.1.2 The participants in the group are forest managers registered in the register of forest lands at the relevant office of the forestry state administration, who have the ownership or use right to manage forests.

4.3.1.3 The certified area is the sum of the forest areas of the participants in the certification covered by the common certificate.

4.3.1.4 A group certificate is a document issued by a certification body on the basis of an audit confirming the compliance of the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard or other applicable requirements of the certification system with reality. The group entity is the group certificate holder.

4.3.1.5 The document confirming participation in the group forest certification is a confirmation on participation in the group certification issued by the group entity to the group participants.

4.3.2 Establishment, boundaries and applicability of the management system

4.3.2.1 The group management system shall refer to the immediate processes related to forest certification, which are in accordance with the following articles of this document.

4.3.2.2 The management system shall be comprehensible, measurable and feasible for all participants.

4.3.2.3 It shall apply to all participants in a particular group organization.

4.3.3 Requirements of SFM standard fulfilled on group level

4.3.3.1 The standard also includes requirements that require the establishment of specific procedures to meet them. Due to the widespread nature of such procedures, it is not possible to provide for such procedures as a separate requirement. The standard therefore requires a representative to adjust the following processes in the form of a document binding for a whole group:

- The group entity is obliged to specify the requirement for protection of water quality in forest stands and riparian stands
- The group entity is obliged to specify the requirement to minimize damage to stands and soil during forestry activities

4.3.3.2 The entity is also entitled to adopt other binding procedures, especially in areas where there is a significantly different fulfilment of the requirement within the individual participants of the group.

4.3.3.4 The subject of the management system is for the participants in the certification part of the entity's documentation, which is publicly available.

4.4 Group management system

4.4.1 To ensure the harmonized implementation and application of SFM procedures and their certification, the entity shall establish, implement, maintain and continuously improve a management system consisting of standard processes, procedures and responsibilities and their links.

4.4.2 The management of the group and the structure of the entity depend on the working procedures, the number of participants and other basic conditions for the functioning of the group organization. It may be represented by one person.

4.4.3 The management system shall include at least:

- a) Managerial management processes - these are mainly processes that keep the group consolidated and manageable, such as:
 - management of documents and records
 - SFM commitment, group management policy
 - management review
- b) Key, main processes - these are the processes used to fulfil the mission of the group such as:
 - management and coordination of group participants in activities related to the forest certification process
 - deciding on the acceptance, suspension or exclusion of a participant from the group certification
 - monitoring, measurement and internal audit processes (collection of data on the state of the forests and management by group members)
 - development and maintenance of documentation related to group certification
 - development and maintenance of internal group procedures for achieving the objectives of SFCS certification criteria at the group level, which are not regulated by the legal order of the Slovak Republic
 - identification and management of risks and opportunities that may affect SFM and its improvement (assessment of group expansion of identified nonconformities)
- c) Supporting cross-sectional processes - these are processes that significantly support the operation and management of group certification processes such as:
 - selection of the certification body and communication with it
 - issuing confirmations on participation in group certification
 - management of non-conforming product
 - corrective and preventive measures
 - human resource management

Process	Entity's management	Entity	Participant
Managerial processes			
SFM commitment	approves	elaborates	elaborates / implements
group management policy	approves	elaborates / performs	
Management review	performs	prepares	
Key, main processes			
management and coordination		performs	
deciding on the acceptance, suspension or exclusion of a participant from the group certification	performs	prepares	
monitoring, measurement and internal audit processes	approves	performs	
development and maintenance of documentation related to group certification	approves	performs	
development and maintenance of internal group procedures for achieving the objectives of SFCS certification criteria at the group level, which are not regulated by the legal order of the Slovak Republic	approves	performs	implements
identification and management of risks and opportunities that may affect SFM and its improvement	approves	performs/ determines	
Supporting cross-sectional processes			
selection of the certification body	approves	performs	
communication with the certification body		performs	
issuance of confirmations on participation in group certification		performs	uses
management of non-conforming product		performs/ verifies	performs
corrective and preventive measures		assign/ verifies	accepts/ performs
human resources management – staffing	ensures		ensures

4.4.4 The entity shall identify and apply the criteria and methods (including monitoring, measurement and performance indicators) needed to properly establish and implement the process of sustainable forest management and its improvement. The entity performs the internal monitoring and the internal audit program at regular intervals, at least once a year for all participants in the certification.

Note: Monitoring is the acquisition of initial or supplementary information that is further processed and evaluated. The results of the monitoring may point to facts that may have a significant impact on the ensurance of SFM within the group. Their occurrence is taken into account when planning the internal audits. The internal audit systematically verifies the reliability of information, compliance with laws, regulations, rules and compliance of management with the requirements of the SFM standard, efficient and effective functioning of the group organization, use of resources and achievement of operational goals.

4.4.5 The group entity, which acts as a trader and is not covered by the group certificate, shall have in place the certified PEFC chain of custody system.

5 Leadership

5.1 Organisational roles, responsibilities and authorities

5.1.1 Responsibilities and authorities of the group entity

- a) To implement and maintain group management system for all participants of the group.

- b) To represent the group organisation in the certification process, including communications and relationships with the certification body, submission of an application for certification, and contractual relationship with the certification body.
- c) To claim from the group participants the share of costs related to the participation in the group certification.
- d) To establish written procedures for the management of the group organisation.
- e) To establish written procedures for the acceptance of new participants of the group organisation. These acceptance procedures shall cover at least the verification of the applicant's information about contact details, clear identification of their forest property and its size.
- f) To establish written procedures for the suspension and exclusion of participants who do not correct/close nonconformities from the scope of group certification. Group participants excluded from any certification group based on nonconformities cannot be accepted within 12 months after exclusion.
- g) To keep documented information of:
 - i. the group entity and participants' conformity with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard, and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system
 - ii. all participants, including their contact details, identification of their forest property and its size
 - iii. the certified area
 - iv. the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its review and any preventive and/or corrective actions taken
- h) To establish connections with all participants based on a binding written agreement which shall include the participants' commitment to comply with the sustainable forest management standard. The group entity shall have a written contract or other written agreement with all participants covering the right of the group entity to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive measures, and to initiate the exclusion of any participant from the scope of certification in the event of nonconformity with the sustainable forest management standard.

Note: The requirements for "participant" commitment" and "written contract or other written agreement with all participants" may also be satisfied by the commitment of and written agreement of a pre-existing local associations, where the organisation can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

- i) To provide all participants with a document confirming participation in the group forest certification (Annex 1).
- j) To provide all participants with information and guidance required for the effective implementation and maintenance of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system.
- k) 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.
- l) To operate an internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the participants' conformity with the certification requirements.
- m) To operate an annual internal audit programme covering both group members and group entity.
- n) To operate a management review of the group forest certification and acting on the results from the review.
- o) To inform all participants in certification about the audit findings and determined nonconformities and based on the audit results, to implement and enforce corrective and preventive measures.
- p) To monitor and verify the manner and quality of implementation of corrective and preventive measures.

- q) To provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or the NGB for relevant data, documentation or other information; allowing access to the forest area covered by the group organisation and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the management system.
- r) To appoint a member of the management who, irrespective of other responsibilities, shall have overall authority and responsibility for the management of the process of sustainable forest management.
- s) Within 1 month of receipt, make publicly available a summary of the audit report elaborated by the certification body, including a summary of the findings on compliance with forest management standards.

5.1.2 Responsibilities and authorities of the participants

- a) To provide the group entity with a binding written agreement, including a commitment on conformity with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system. Group participants excluded from any certification group cannot apply for group membership within 12 months after exclusion.

Note: The requirements for “participant” commitment” and “written contract or other written agreement with all participants” may also be satisfied by the commitment of and written agreement of a pre-existing local associations, where the organisation can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

- b) To provide the group entity with information about previous group participation.
- c) To comply with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system as well as with the requirements of the management system, including contractors carrying out forestry operations in the forests on the basis of a contract with the owner or manager. This means that the manager shall be directly responsible for ensuring that the contracted service is performed in accordance with the requirements of the scheme.
- d) 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 management system.
- e) To pay the share of costs related to the participation in the group certification.
- 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 following from the certification body audits, internal audits and established by the group entity for all group participants.
- h) To elaborate a self-assessment of compliance of forest management with the sustainable forest management standard and related SFCS requirements.
- i) To adopt preventive and corrective measures and to control their realisation.
- j) To separate raw material originating from non-certified and controversial sources.
- k) To inform the group entity on changes in the area of certified forests or identification data.
- l) To submit an appeal against the decision of the group entity on granting / not granting a confirmation on participation in the group certification or exclusion from the certification process.
- m) To appoint a person responsible for meeting the requirements of the standard of sustainable forest management and related SFCS requirements.
- n) To establish an appropriate organizational structure with a description of competencies and control mechanisms in the implementation of the SFM policy.

5.2 Commitment and policy

5.2.1 The group entity is obligated:

- a) To comply with the SFM standard and other applicable requirements of the Slovak Forest 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 SFM of the forests by the participants.

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

5.2.3 The group participant is obligated:

- a) To follow the rules of the management system.
- b) To implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and related SFCS requirements in the managed forests.

6 Group management system planning

6.1 When planning the management of the group, the entity shall consider issues important for improving the interrelationships within the group, the standard processes, procedures and responsibilities of SFM. It shall also consider meeting the expectations of the stakeholders concerned, legal requirements and other binding requirements.

6.2 In the case, that the group organization plans any changes to the processes and procedures of the group management system and SFM responsibilities, these changes shall be included in the group management plan.

6.3 The requirements of the SFM standard met at the group level (chapter 4) must be included in the group management plan.

7 Support

7.1 The group entity shall create the conditions and provide the resources needed for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of the group management system. These resources shall include:

- human resources (employees)
- infrastructure (office spaces, hardware, software)
- means of transport
- information and communication technologies
- financial resources

7.2 The persons responsible for organizing and carrying out the work of the group management system shall have the necessary competences, knowledge and experience:

- university forestry education of the second degree
- the competence of a professional forest manager, forest management plan elaboration or professional competence for the state administration in forestry, respectively
- five years' experience in forestry activities
- completion of an educational program for the application of the Slovak Forest Certification System
- knowledge of the context of the organization and the management system of the group organization

7.2.1 Information on the achieved qualifications, educational programs and experiences of these persons shall be kept and separately registered.

7.3 The representative shall in a verifiable manner notify the certification participants of:

- a) the group management policy
- b) the requirements of the SFM standard
- c) their 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

7.4 The group entity within the group management system shall define the range of external and internal entities with which he keeps communication to ensure the functioning of the group organization and support the fulfilment of SFM standard. The list of entities is described in chapter 4.2.1.

7.4.1 An efficient and effective communication process shall involve:

- a) With whom to communicate - affected stakeholders as appropriate to the subject of communication (who are affected by communication or are able to react to it)
- b) On what to communicate - the subject of communication (processes, procedures and responsibilities) resulting from the group management system
- c) How to communicate - determining the way of communication (communication channels)
- d) When to communicate - date of communication

Matrix of internal and external communication

Who/partner	On what	How	When
Affected stakeholders to whom the standard implementation can cause direct change in living or working conditions			
contractors (selection)	compliance with the standard	orally	during internal audit, operationally
employees (selection)	compliance with the standard	orally	during internal audit, operationally
forest managers - participants	self-assessment	evaluation questionnaire, written form/ electronically	once a year
	audit plan	written form/ electronically (phone)	2 weeks before audit
	imposed measures	written form/ electronically	operationally
	taken measures	written form/ electronically	1 week after finding a nonconformity
	information on implementation of measures	written form/ electronically	2 weeks after deadline
forest managers - other	compliance with the standard by participants	orally, written form/ electronically	60 days from submission
State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic	compliance with the standard	written form/ electronically	60 days before scheduled internal audit
managers of water resources	taken measures	written form/ electronically	1 week after finding a nonconformity
local population	suggestions and complaints	written form/ electronically	continuously

	notification of the outcome of investigation of suggestions/ complaints	written form	60 days from submission
local population	compliance with the standard	written form/ electronically	60 days before scheduled internal audit
Stakeholders that may be users of the standard and are therefore subject to the requirements of the standard			
forest owners	consent with forest certification	orally, written form/ electronically	before submitting the application
wood industries (selection)	audit plan	written form/ electronically (phone)	2 weeks before audit
hunting organizations (selection)	imposed measures	written form/ electronically	operationally
scientific and research institutions	information on implementation of measures	written form/ electronically	2 weeks after deadline
Other stakeholders			
certification bodies	contract negotiations	meeting/ written form	6 months before the certificate expires
	audit plan	written form/ electronically	3 weeks before audit
	composition of audit team	written form/ electronically	2 weeks before audit
	audit report – discussing the results	meeting	max. 1 month after completion
	information on implementation of measures	written form/ electronically	2 weeks after deadline
stakeholders (selection)	compliance with the standard	orally, written form/ electronically	during internal audit, operationally
forestry and nature conservancy state administration bodies, Fire and Rescue Corps, Monuments Offices	compliance with the standard	written form/ electronically	60 days before scheduled internal audit

7.5 The entity shall have in place documented process place for resolving complaints and disputes relating to group management and sustainable forest management operations, where:

- a complaint is a form of disagreement by a group participant with the actions and procedures of a group entity
- a dispute is a form of disagreement by a group participant with the assessment of compliance with the activities related to the management of the group and SFM standard by the group representative

7.5.1 The entity shall have in place documented process place for resolving complaints and disputes relating to group management and sustainable forest management operations. Upon receipt of a complaint the entity shall:

- a) formally acknowledge the complaint to the complainant within ten workdays
- b) gather and verify all necessary information to evaluate and validate the complaint and make a decision on the complaint

- c) formally communicate the decision on the complaint and of the complaint handling process to the complainant
- d) ensure that appropriate corrective and preventive actions are taken, if necessary

7.6 Group management system documentation:

7.6.1 Documented information is the required information to be managed, maintained and kept by the organisation, including the medium on which it is contained.

7.6.2 The entity shall keep a list of all documents issued and received that relate to the processes of the group management system.

7.6.3 The list contains data on the receipt, creation, handling, media, dispatch and storage and disposal of files.

7.6.4 Documentation shall be kept up to date, easily identifiable, readable, and adequately protected against the loss of confidentiality, improper use, or loss of integrity.

7.6.5 Depending on the character the documented information may be:

- a) document - contains the procedure, rules or process taking place in the organization, within a defined period of validity of the document. It is reviewable – is maintained.
- b) record - describes the achieved results or serves as evidence of performed activities, events. It is not reviewable - is stored.

Mandatory documented information:

Description	Type
organizational structure of the holder - entity, rights and obligations related to the certification process	maintained
policy and objectives for sustainable forest management	maintained
group management system	maintained
identification of risks, opportunities and addressed measures	maintained
procedures for acceptance of new participants to the group organization	maintained
management of documents and records	maintained
information and guidance on the effective implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and related SFCS requirements	maintained
procedures leading to the achievement of the objectives of the SFCS certification criteria at the group level, which are not regulated by the legal order of the Slovak Republic	maintained
procedures for confirming or excluding the owner or manager from the certification process	maintained
procedures for the separation of wood raw material from non-certified and controversial sources	maintained
procedures for resolving nonconformities, implementation of corrective and preventive action	maintained
procedures for resolving appeals, complaints and disputes	maintained
group management plan - communication with group certification participants	stored
selection and communication with the certification body	stored
contract on accession to certification	stored
records of compliance with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and related SFCS requirements: i. on-site assessment records ii. third-parties' statements iii. internal audit reports iv. audit reports of the certification body	stored
management review report	stored
records of imposed corrective and preventive measures	stored
self-assessment of certification participants	stored
reports on compliance with imposed corrective and preventive measures	stored
decisions to suspend or exclude a participant from group certification	stored
registers of certification participants	stored
records of the results of investigations and the handling of complaints	stored
other documents related to the certification process	stored

8 Ensuring the operation of the group organization

8.1 Planning the activities of the group organization

8.1.1 The group entity, in cooperation with the group participants, shall plan, implement and manage the processes required for:

- meeting the process requirements of the group management system and the SFM standard
- the implementation of changes in the processes and procedures of the group management system and SFM responsibilities
- the assessments of the recentness and justification of procedures leading to the achievement of the objectives of the SFCS certification criteria at the group level, which are not regulated by the legal order of the Slovak Republic

8.1.2 The planning, implementation and controlling shall be based on the assessment of risks and opportunities arising from the structure of group participants, the results of monitoring and internal audit of the entity or the certification body audit. These shall be integrated and implemented into the management system. Such knowledge shall be the basis for:

- a) The selection of procedures for assessing the level of compliance of the group certification standard and the SFM standard with the determined evaluation criteria.
- b) Carrying out inspections of procedures using an evaluation questionnaire.
- c) Records keeping ensuring compliance of the processes within the scope of the evaluation questionnaires.

8.2 Acceptance of new participants to the group organization

8.2.1 The entity shall perform an initial audit of each new participant of the group certification.

8.2.2 Forest owner or manager can become a participant in the certification and can be awarded the confirmation on participation in certification under the following conditions:

- a) the owner or manager has submitted a complete application for participation in group certification, including self-assessment
- b) the owner or manager meets the certification criteria at individual level
- c) has a valid certification contract on accession to the certification with the entity

8.2.3 The validity of the confirmation on participation in the certification is limited to the date of validity of the certificate.

8.2.4 When conducting the initial audit, the procedures in chapters 9.1 and 9.2 shall be used accordingly.

8.3 Management of externally provided processes

8.3.1 Another professionally qualified legal or natural person may be authorised for the performance evaluation according to chapters 9.1 and 9.2 on the basis of a contract.

8.3.2 A natural person is professionally qualified if he/she meets the qualification according to 7.2. A legal entity is professionally qualified if its partner, member or its employee, who is employed for an indefinite period of time, performs activities according 9.1 and 9.2 and meets the qualification according to 7.2.

8.3.3 The contracting party shall use the registered documentation in accordance with 7.6.

8.3.4 The management of the legal person shall carry out a proper, regular inspection of the performance of the content of the contract in accordance with this document.

8.3.5 The decision on authorisation of another person to perform the activity shall be made by the statutory body of the entity.

9 Performance evaluation

9.1 Monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation

9.1.1 The internal monitoring program is a systematic, annual activity of the group entity focused on assessing the conformity of forest management with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and related requirements of SFCS documentation. The internal monitoring program shall be used to detect weaknesses and for risk management for all participants in the group forest certification. It is one of the underlying evidence for the certification body when carrying out initial, surveillance and recertification audits. In order to obtain and examine information concerning the group organization's compliance with the requirements of the SFM standard, at least the following shall be monitored and measured:

Subject of monitoring	Methods of monitoring, measurement and analyses	Time schedule of monitoring and measurement	Time schedule of analysing and evaluation of results	Documented proof of results
compliance of the management with the standard of sustainable forest management provided by the participants in certification	self-assessment	once a year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - when applying for group certification - before carrying out an internal audit 	evaluation of the reliability of self-assessment, imposing measures, report on the fulfilment of measures
the results of supervision and information of the state administration concerning the content of SFM	requesting statements (findings), evaluation of the impact of findings on the SFM standard	once a year	before carrying out an internal audit	statements of the state administration and analysis of the resulting nonconformities, imposing measures, report on the fulfilment of measures
information from stakeholders	filing registry, evaluation of the impact of information of the stakeholders on the SFM standard, communication with the affected group participants	after becoming aware of information	after collection of evidence	information from stakeholders, imposing measures, report on the fulfilment of measures
information from citizens and media	filing registry, monitoring of media outputs, evaluation of the impact of civic comments and information from the media on the SFM standard, communication with the affected group participants	after becoming aware of information	after collection of evidence	civic comments, information from the media, imposing measures, report on the fulfilment of measures
implementation of corrective measures	communication with the group participant concerned, on-site verification	after the implementation period	after collection of evidence	imposing measures, report on the fulfilment of measures, on-site verification
legislative process	evaluation of the impact of the legislative process on the SFM standard	after becoming aware of changes on legislation	after collection of evidence	revisions of group management system

9.1.2 At least annually, the entity shall at regular intervals evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the group management system regarding the implementation of the SFM requirements. The subject of the evaluation is the analysis of compliance and applicability of the group management system documentation.

9.2 Internal audit

9.2.1 Objectives

9.2.1.1 The annual internal audit programme shall provide information on whether the group management system:

- a) Conforms to
 - i. the group organisation's own requirements for its group management system
 - ii. the requirements of the national group certification standard
- b) Ensures the implementation of the SFM standard on the participant level
- c) Is effective, implemented and maintained

9.2.2 Organisation

9.2.2.1 The internal audit programme shall cover at least:

- a) Planning, establishing, implementing and maintaining an audit programme(s) including the frequency, methods, responsibilities, planning requirements and reporting, which shall take into consideration the importance of the processes concerned and the results of previous audits.
- b) Definition of the audit criteria and scope for each audit.
- c) Competences of internal auditors according to the requirements in 7.2.
- d) Selection of auditors and conducting of audits to ensure objectivity and the impartiality of the audit process.
- e) Ensuring that the results of the on-site inspection shall be communicated to the certification participant before the end of the verification, so that the participant can comment on the findings, or to eliminate the identified nonconformities without delay.
- f) The results and process of the verification shall be recorded in the on-site verification report. The report shall include:
 - i) identification of the inspected site (owner/manager)
 - ii) date of the inspection
 - iii) names of the persons who carried out the verification
 - iv) names of the other persons involved
 - v) results of the verification
 - vi) comments on identified nonconformities in management
 - vii) measures taken to eliminate nonconformities
- g) Ensuring that the participant in certification shall have an opportunity to comment on the report and indicate the specific taken or intended actions to address any nonconformities identified during the verification.
- h) Ensuring that the results of the audits are reported to relevant group management
- i) Retaining of the documented information as evidence of the implementation of the audit programme and the audit results (7.6).

9.3 Selection of participants in the internal audit programme

9.3.1 General

9.3.1.1 The criteria for the selection of participants in the internal audit programme shall include the following procedures for:

- a) determination of the sample size (9.3.2)
- b) determination of sample categories (9.3.3)
- c) distribution of the sample to the categories (9.3.4)
- d) selection of the participants (9.3.5)
- e) requirements for the sampling of the pre-existing local associations (9.3.6)

9.3.1.2 The entity may define additional requirements for the group.

9.3.2 Determination of the sample size

9.3.2.1 The entity shall determine the sample size from the number of participants of the group organisation.

9.3.2.2 The size of the sample generally should be the square root of the number of participants ($y = \sqrt{x}$), rounded to the upper whole number.

9.3.2.3 The size of the sample may be adapted on the basis of:

- a) results of a risk assessment of sample categories (9.3.4)
 - in the case of low risk: by a coefficient of 0.7
 - in the case of high risk: by a coefficient of 1.2
- b) results of internal audits or previous certification audits
 - in the case of non-conformity at the group level (10.1.c): by a coefficient of 2
- c) quality/level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme
 - in the case of reliably identified favourable results of the internal monitoring program (9.1.1): by a coefficient of 0.7
- d) survey with participants in the certification process:
 - in the case of substantiated concerns by the stakeholders concerned and citizens: by a coefficient of 1.2
 - in the case of provision of reliable information (self-assessment) by participants confirmed by the state authorities: by a coefficient of 0.7

9.3.3 Determination of sample categories

9.3.3.1 The matrix of preconditions for determining the risk of group organisation according to indicators

Indicator	Risk level		
	Low	Medium	High
a) Forest ownership type (state, community, municipal, private)	Risk: relation to the property, degree of involvement of the owner and control mechanisms on the organization and management of SFM		
	More than 50% of participants directly ensure management (community forests, private, internal control is performed continuously by all owners)	More than 50% of the participants ensure the management through the governance organization of the forest owner (state, community, private)	

		forests, internal control is performed by supervisory bodies according to the decision of the management)	
b) Size of management units (different size classes)	Risk: the ability to guide forest management by a professional forest manager in dependence on the area of managed property is directly proportional to the number of forest managers		
	Forest area of participants does not exceed 10000 ha	Forest area of participants does not exceed 20000 ha	Forest area of participants exceeds 20 000 ha.
c) Biogeographic of area (e.g. lowlands, middle mountains, alpine localities)	Risk: the use of correct and realistically available harvesting and transport technologies (level of transport accessibility of stands, technological preparation of workplaces, use of harvesting and transport technologies corresponds to the terrain conditions and subsoil)		
	For more than 50% of the certified area, the slope of the terrain (slope accessibility) is up to 25%	For more than 50% of the certified area, the slope of the terrain (slope accessibility) is up to 50% or forest stands are on flysch areas	For more than 50% of the certified area, the slope of the terrain (slope accessibility) is over 50%
d) Operations, processes and products of group participants	Risk: prevailing approach and procedures (concept) of SFM		
	Close-to-nature forest management concept (use of ecological principles)	The principle of cost-effectiveness and economic efficiency (thorough fulfilment of planned tasks, preferably with a positive return and at the lowest cost)	Prioritizing an entrepreneurial approach (profit maximization)
e) Richness of biological diversity	Risk: the established network of protected areas (3rd - 5th degree of nature protection) and the degree of restrictions eliminate the application of the principles of common management and the use of the SFM potential for the preservation or restoration of favourable condition and protection of natural habitats		
	The area of protected areas does not exceed 30% of the certified area	The area of protected areas is in the range of 30% - 70% of the certified area	The area of protected areas exceeds 70% of the certified area
f) Recreation and other socio-economic functions of the forests	Risk: the use of forests by the public for recreation, rest, regeneration and the provision of other socio-economic services is accessible to all citizens, affects the forest environment, rights and legitimate interests of the forest owner/manager and certification participants		
	When staying in the forest, the public uses the built facilities and does not disturb the forest environment	The public moves freely through the forests according to the instructions and guidelines of the owner; it affects the forest environment	When staying in the forest, the public does not respect the protection of forests, instructions and guidelines of the owner
g) Dependence of and interaction with local communities	Risk: forestry works affecting the quality of life of the local population and the interests of local communities and NGOs		
	Forestry works affecting the quality of life are carried out in accordance with the requirements of local communities, local	Forestry works affecting the quality of life are carried out after the announcement of their start and do not	Forestry works affecting the quality of life are carried out without the announcement of their start and have

	population, affected stakeholder groups and NGOs operating in the certified area	have a significant negative impact on the quality of living and working conditions of local population, affected stakeholder groups and NGOs operating in the certified area	a significant negative impact on the quality of living and working conditions of local population, affected stakeholder groups and NGOs operating in the certified area
h) Available resources for administration, operations, training and research	Risk: lack of available resources threatens the level of SFM		
	Revenues from the SFM production are appropriate to the SFM needs	Revenues from the SFM production are insufficient to support training and research activities	Revenues from the SFM production are insufficient to create appropriate organizational structure and resources needed for SFM
i) Forest governance and law enforcement	Risk: restriction of common management and compensation for restrictions of common management		
		Extension of the period of approval procedures on the conditions of common management by stakeholder groups and state authorities	Late or insufficient financial compensation for management restrictions
j) Climate change	Risk: low adaptation of the forests to the changing climate conditions		
	Forests with the rich diversity of tree species of natural composition, common volume of accidental felling	Forests with the poor diversity of tree species of natural composition, high volume of accidental felling	Monocultures growing out of their optimal natural distribution, massive full-area decomposition of stands

9.3.4 Distribution of the sample to the categories

9.3.4.1 The sample shall be distributed to the categories based on the results of a risk assessment as follows:

- When redistributing a sample into categories, the representation of participants by type of ownership shall be generally respected
- An evaluation of the potential possibility of the existence of risk shall be performed according to the results of the risk assessment in the matrix for the evaluation of the necessary preconditions for determining the risk for individual forms of ownership in a group organization (9.3.3.1.)
- The risk category of the type of ownership for SFM shall be determined; all conditions must apply simultaneously to determine the risk category of the sample

Integrated risk categories	Proportion of the risk level of indicators		
	Low	Medium	High
Low	More than 60%*		Less than 10%
Medium	Less than 60%		Less than 30%
High	Less than 10%	Less than 40%	

* / - rounded up to the nearest whole number

- d) The number of participants in the sample shall be divided into the risk category of the form of ownership in a ratio of 3: 2: 1 in favour of the category with the highest risk, taking into account the number of certification participants within the category

9.3.5 Selection of the participants

9.3.5.1 At least 25% of the sample should be selected at random.

9.3.5.2 The remainder should be selected so that the differences among the selected participants should be as large as possible.

9.3.5.3 The following factors shall be taken into account when selecting other participants according to the risk categories (9.3.4):

- fulfilment of conditions for a high level of risk for individual indicators
- records of complaints and other relevant aspects of corrective and preventive action
- results of internal audits, management reviews or previous certification audits
- results of monitoring and measurements
- significant variations in the size of area of participants
- modifications since the last certification audit
- geographical dispersion

9.3.6 Requirements for sampling of participants from pre-existing local associations

9.3.6.1 Determination of the sample size

The sample size usually represents 10% of the number of participants in a local association, rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Note: It shall be taken into account that the audit program includes mainly forest managers with an area of more than 50 ha.

9.3.6.2 Determination of sample categories

Adequately according to 9.3.3.

9.3.6.3 Distribution of the sample to the categories

Adequately according to 9.3.4.

9.3.6.4 Selection of the participants

Depending on the number of members of the local association, as appropriate, in accordance with 9.3.5.

9.4 Management review

9.4.1 The group entity is obliged to review the group management system at the planned annual intervals to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and efficiency and compliance with the needs of SFM. The annual management review shall include at least:

- a) The status of actions from previous management reviews.
- b) changes in external and internal issues that are relevant to the group management system (number of participants, legislative changes).
- c) The status of conformity with the SFM standard, that includes reviewing the results of the internal monitoring programme, the internal audit and the certification body's evaluations and surveillance.
- d) Information on the group performance, including trends in:
 - i) nonconformities and corrective actions
 - ii) monitoring and measurement results
 - iii) audit results

- e) Opportunities for continual improvement.

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

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

10 Improvement

The entity shall identify and use opportunities for improvement and implement the necessary measures to eliminate nonconformities.

10.1 Nonconformity and corrective action

10.1.1 When a nonconformity occurs, the group entity shall:

- a) React to the nonconformity and, as applicable:
 - i) take action to control and correct it
 - ii) deal with the consequences
- b) Evaluate the need for action to eliminate the causes of the nonconformity, in order that it does not recur or occur elsewhere, by:
 - i) reviewing the nonconformity
 - ii) determining the causes of the nonconformity
 - iii) determining if similar nonconformities exist, or could potentially occur
- c) Implement any action needed. When nonconformities are found at any individual participant of group certification, either through the entity's internal auditing or from auditing by the certification body, the group entity shall review the nonconformities to determine whether they indicate an overall forest management deficiency applicable to all participants in group certification or not (group nonconformity). If they are found to do so, corrective action shall be performed both at the group entity and at the individual forest owners/managers. If they are found not to do so, the group entity shall be able to demonstrate to the certification body the justification for limiting its corrective actions to certain forest owners/managers.
- d) Review the effectiveness of any corrective action taken
- e) Make changes to the group management system, if necessary

10.1.2 The entity shall retain documented information as evidence of:

- a) the nature of the nonconformities and any subsequent actions taken
- b) the results of any corrective action

10.1.3 Exclusion or suspension of participation in certification:

- a) In the case of a serious noncompliance with the standard of sustainable forest management, the entity shall initiate the exclusion of any participant from the certification process or the suspension of participation in the certification until the correction is carried out.
- b) The entity shall have an advisory body in place to decide on the suspension or exclusion of the owner/manager from participation in forest certification.
- c) In the case of non-inclusion, suspension or exclusion of the owner/manager from participation in forest certification, the representative shall justify this decision in writing.
- d) The owner/manager may appeal to the SFCS national governing body against the entity's decision not to include, suspend or exclude the owner/manager from certification.
- e) The participant who was excluded from a 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

10.2.1 The suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the group management system and the SFM shall be continuously improved.

Annex 1: Confirmation on participation in group forest certification



CONFIRMATION ON THE PARTICIPATION IN GROUP CERTIFICATION BASED ON THE SLOVAK FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION IN FOREST CERTIFICATION

THIS CONFIRMATION No. **XXXX** (CERTIFICATE REGISTRATION NO.)/**YYY** (GROUP IDENTIFIER NO.) CONFIRMS THAT

Group participant name

ID number:

street, number

ZIP, city

HAS AGREED TO MANAGE HIS/HER FOREST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN THE CERTIFICATION CRITERIA AS DEFINED IN THE DOCUMENT OF THE "SLOVAK FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEM" (TD SFCS XXXX:YYYY), WHICH HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY THE PEFC COUNCIL AS MEETING THE PEFC REQUIREMENTS ON dd.mm.yyyy.

CERTIFICATE OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT CONFIRMS THAT FORESTS IN THE GROUP "NAME OF THE GROUP" REPRESENTED BY "NAME OF THE GROUP ENTITY" ARE SUSTAINABLY MANAGED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE CRITERIA DEFINED BY THE SLOVAK FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEM ENDORSED BY THE PEFC COUNCIL (PROGRAMME FOR THE ENDORSEMENT OF FOREST CERTIFICATION) ON DD.MM.YYYY

CERTIFICATE REGISTRATION NUMBER: **XXXXXXXX**

CERTIFICATE HOLDER: **Name**
Address
Address

CERTIFICATION BODY: **Name**
Address
Address

VALID UNTIL: **DD.MM.RRRR**

THIS CONFIRMATION IS ISSUED BY

NAME
Address

AND IS VALID UNTIL **DD.MM.RRRR** (UNLESS THE VALIDITY OF THE GROUP CERTIFICATE IS NOT SUSPENDED).

signature of the group entity representative

.....
name of group entity representative

In, on DD.MM.RRR

To obtain further details on the certificate referred to in this confirmation, please, contact the certification body or a representative of the group entity mentioned above. Please note that this document is not a certificate. It is only a confirmation that the forest holding of the above-mentioned forest owner belongs to the certified group. This confirmation does not give the holder any rights to use the PEFC trademarks. Each participant in group certification shall apply for PEFC trademarks licence individually at the PEFC national governing body in SR.