

FSC statement regarding the Protect the Forest campaign and open letter

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is aware of the current campaign by Protect the Forest and the open letter that they have distributed to stakeholders and companies.

In all cases referred to in the campaign, action has been taken by the company and a dialog between parties is ongoing. The outcome will be brought up in the annual audit by their certification body. If any wrongdoings are concluded, these will be duly detected by the certification body and corrective actions will be requested to the company.

FSC national offices must remain neutral in ongoing processes involving a company, stakeholders and certification bodies. FSC Sweden has been in contact with all parties to get a balanced view of the situation. FSC Sweden has equally been offering support to concerned stakeholders over this matter with information on how the FSC system works.

Protect the Forest states in their press release that: *According to the FSC standard, high conservation value forests should be exempt from forestry. This is incorrect.* In Sweden **all** Woodland Key Habitats are exempt from forestry. However, in the FSC Forest Management Standard for Sweden High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF), include areas for protection, as well as managed forest with lower conservation values where management can take place if the identified values are protected.

There are three specific FSC certified areas mentioned by Protect the Forest:

1. In the Ore forest in central Sweden complaints have been filed to the forest company regarding harvest planning of areas with conservation value. The forest company has revisited the site together with the Forest Agency and the Certification Body. They will follow up with meetings with the interested stakeholders to discuss their concerns.

2. In Rävdaalen, in Gällivare in the far north of Sweden, an area of **17 hectares** has been planned for harvesting (**not 1300 ha as Protect the Forest claims**). The County Administrative Board and The Forest Agency have confirmed that this forest has no specific nature conservation values. However, stakeholders living nearby want to keep the forest for recreation. A consultation between the forest company and the local stakeholders is planned, following the requirements in the FSC Forest Management Standard for Sweden.

3. In Melakträskliden a forest of 6,8 hectares in Northern Sweden has been planned for harvesting. Here 2,2 hectares have already been set aside for protection. The company will revisit the site before harvesting, and do a second conservation survey during the snow-free season.

FSC offers stakeholders the possibility to submit complaints through its Dispute Resolution System. Complaints should first be filed to the certificate holder and/or the certification body. FSC is available to offer support in formulating any formal complaints or in obtaining further information about the standard requirements. Complaints can be filed through the dispute form available through the following link: <https://ic.fsc.org/en/submit-a-dispute>.

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Questions and answers on the campaign from Protect the Forest

How does FSC ensure responsible forest management?

FSC certification is about ensuring sustainable forest management practices so that forest companies obtain forest products in a responsible manner.

The major concept in Sweden for identifying areas for conservation is Woodland Key Habitats (WKH). These are identified by the Swedish Forest Agency or the companies. Although there is no formal legal protection, **the FSC Forest Management Standard for Sweden requires all Woodland Key Habitats to be excluded from commercial forestry.** The Swedish Forest Agency's decision to pause the inventory and registration of Woodland Key Habitats in northwestern Sweden **does not change the requirements for FSC certified forests.** Thus, the FSC certified forest manager is obliged to protect all Woodland Key Habitats. Furthermore, if the area of woodland key habitats and buffer zones exceeds 5 %, the exceeding land area should be set aside as well.

All FSC certified forests in Sweden must be surveyed for conservation values prior to harvesting, to make the right conservation considerations and to detect Woodland Key Habitats. The survey must take place during snow-free conditions, not to risk missing conservation values covered by snow.

A study released by FSC Sweden show specific examples of how certification contributes to biodiversity in Swedish forests. This document is available here: <https://se.fsc.org/preview.the-contribution-of-fsc-certification-to-biodiversity-in-swedish-forests.a-661.pdf>

How does FSC further enhance HCVF protection in the Swedish context?

Since the Woodland Key Habitats are protected, the major contribution of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) in Sweden are related to landscapes in order to keep the values on a landscape level in areas with concentration of Woodland Key Habitats or in sub-alpine forests.

The purpose of the HCVF concept is to identify areas of significant value (national or international) and to ensure that the management activities protect or enhance these values. **The focus is to protect the values** and HCVF areas can be managed if the values are not threatened.

What is High Value Forest Landscapes?

Protect the Forest campaign refers to High Value Forest Landscapes. There is a risk of confusion between High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF) and high-value forest landscape (HVFL). A HVFL is a forest landscape with particularly high ecological values and is a concept used by the EPA (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency) for strategic planning to implement the **national strategy** for formal forest protection and development of green infrastructure action plans. HVFL can be a tool for certified forest managers to identify HCVF.

The EPA issued a statement that declared that *"In large parts of these landscapes [HVFL], land use can normally continue but with extra consideration of the natural environment. The idea is not to protect all the high-value landscapes, but to prioritize these areas for different biodiversity initiatives."* (<http://www.swe-dishepa.se/News-and-press/High-value-landscape--A-tool-for-planning-and-cooperation-in-forest-land/>).



What do FSC-certified resources stand for?

FSC certified resources mean that they are coming from a responsibly managed forest. The rules of how this should be implemented (National FSC Forest Management Standards) are developed through a broad social consensus process with all relevant stakeholders who are keen on ensuring responsible management of the world's forestry resources.

Furthermore, important environmental organizations are active members of FSC Sweden. Based on this mutual benefit and trust dynamic, these participate in the Swedish FSC forest management standard development process to ensure that forests are managed in a responsible way.

What happens to forest owners who do not follow FSC's rules?

FSC certified forest owners that fail to comply with the standard requirements need to do a corrective action. This request is issued by the certification body that carry out annual audits. If the certificate holder fails to address the issues, the certificate can get suspended or even terminated. FSC equally offers stakeholders the possibility to submit complaints through the Dispute Resolution System. <https://ic.fsc.org/en/submit-a-dispute>

How does FSC ensure responsible forest management?

FSC develops standards that specify how forest practices are to be more responsible, including in countries such as Sweden, where forest management has traditionally included clearcutting. Through its standards, FSC ensures that enough environmental safeguards are prescribed to mitigate damages. FSC certification also enables stakeholders to address issues concerning environmental or social values and to take specific steps to address the claims put forward by Protect the Forest.

Why is it smart to purchase FSC-certified products?

FSC certification is today the only responsible forest management scheme that guarantees that rigorous social and environmental standards are considered by forest managers.

By purchasing FSC-certified wood and paper products you are contributing to a high level of ethical compromise with safeguarding the health of the world's forests. This is why the world's most renowned environmental NGOs consider FSC as the trusted standard of forest management and also why FSC is the first choice of multinationals and consumers alike.

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