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Successful test of new concept to FSC certify family forests

Small forest operations in Estonia now have easier access to become FSC certified: Pilot testing by the project “Smallholder Certification in Estonia” has proven the viability of a new model for FSC certification of European family forests. This model combines group certification of forest owners with independent certification of forestry contractors that ensures the contractors’ compliance with the FSC requirements.

Two certificates have now resulted from the project: 1) As the first forestry services company in Europe, AS Stora Enso Eesti has received a SmartLogging certificate, verifying that the company performs according to the global SmartLogging standard for responsible logging developed by the Rainforest Alliance; and 2) an FSC group forest management certificate covering a group of small family owned forests in Estonia. Stora Enso is the appointed manager of both the forest owners’ group and thus holder of the FSC group certificate as well.

Both certificates were issued by the Rainforest Alliance, based on third-party evaluations carried out by NEPCon.

Stora Enso supports family forest certification

As holder of both certificates and sponsor of the project, Stora Enso Eesti AS is facilitating FSC certification of small private forest operations in Estonia as well as pioneering independent certification of forest contractors.

Margus Kuusk, Sustainability Manager of Stora Enso Wood Supply Baltic, says: “We encourage certification of small-scale forestry operations as part of our general support to forest management certification. Small family forests are an important source for increasing certified wood supply in many countries such as Estonia, where a large part of the forest is on private hands, and the average property size is very small. Involving professionals like contractors to ensure compliance with the FSC rules should help to increase the volume of certified wood on the market. The situation is much the same in Latvia and Lithuania, and we consider using the concept there as well”.

First SmartLogging certificate in Europe

The SmartLogging certificate held by Stora Enso is the first one ever issued to a logging company in Europe. Stora Enso has thus committed to independent verification that its forestry services are environmentally and socially sensitive and also employ best-practices with respect to conserving the value of forest products and the long-term productivity of the forest. The SmartLogging certification standard for Estonia is based on the FSC requirements relevant for forest contractors in the country.

NEPCon's director Peter Feilberg congratulates Stora Enso on this pioneering achievement: "Such a serious commitment from a well-known actor on the marketplace helps to grow the market for certified forestry services in Europe. According to Stora Enso's wish, the certificate even covers all forestry activities that the company carries out in Estonia – whether the forest itself is FSC-certified or not. Stora Enso simply will not perform forestry activities that are not in compliance with the SmartLogging standard for responsible forestry developed for Estonia. This is a clear signal from one of the world's largest forest product companies".

Certification made more accessible for family forests

However, SmartLogging certification was not the end goal in itself. It is a key part of a new concept to facilitate certification of small family forest properties. Simply put, the concept involves group certification of forest owners combined with the use of independently certified forest contractors for the forestry activities conducted in the certified forests.

"This concept allows the forest owner to ensure compliance with a major part of the FSC rules based on his relationship with the group manager and with the certified contractors", explains Peter Feilberg, project manager and director of NEPCon.

"While the forest owner remains formally responsible for ensuring full compliance with all applicable FSC rules, many of the FSC requirements related to 'paper work' are in practice taken care of by the group manager. And if the forest owner uses forest contractors for all forestry operations, then he can ensure compliance with forestry field performance indicators by using a certified contractor. Thus the forest owner only needs to deal directly with a small number of remaining requirements to ensure full compliance with the FSC standard". At the same time, group certification allows the group members to share the direct cost of certification.

The project in Estonia took one further step to reduce the complexity of certification for the forest owners: it developed a new interim FSC/Rainforest Alliance standard for small forest properties in Estonia, applicable only to holdings of less than 30 hectares. Based on an analysis of the current FSC/Rainforest Alliance interim standard, requirements that are not

relevant for very small properties were identified. The special 'smallholder' interim standard thus specifies only those requirements that are relevant for such small properties.

Forest owner: "Certification helps us to take good care of the forest"

And the owners – what do they have to say about the approach? Anne Põrm-Põdra and her husband own about 12 hectares of forest in the North-Eastern part of Estonia. They have joined the FSC group scheme managed by Stora Enso, and rely on certified contractors for forestry operations in their forest. She says: "The certification process was a positive experience. The requirements were reasonable and I learned something about forestry! The forest has a deep meaning for me – I have always lived close by the forest and that is where I go to be alone with my thoughts. The certification will help us to take good care of the forest. I also believe that it may even increase the economic value of our forest property".

Expanding the concept to other countries

NEPCon is currently involved in two other projects that seek to enhance certification of small European family forests, building on the experience gained by the project in Estonia.

Certification of forest contractors - a shortcut to certification of small forest operations is jointly implemented by the Danish Association of Forest Contractors, Danish Forest Owners' Association (Skovdyrkerne), and NEPCon. It is financed by the Danish Forest and Nature Agency. In addition to the national FSC standards, the local PEFC standards are also included.

Certification of Forestry Contractors (CeFCo) is jointly implemented by European Network of Forest Entrepreneurs (ENFE), FSC, and NEPCon. It covers 4-6 European countries and is supported by the EU Eco-Innovation Initiative. This project seeks to achieve certification of contractors and forest operations in additional countries such as Portugal, Sweden and Bulgaria until 2012. Please refer to www.cefcoproject.org for more details and project updates.

BACKGROUND

About the project

The project *Smallholder Certification in Estonia* was initiated in 2008 by Stora Enso, WWF and NEPCon in order to address the needs of smallholders in order for them to benefit from forest certification. The project was approved as an FSC pilot project and the first field test of the new approach based on a combination of FSC group certification and SmartLogging certification of a group of contractors has been undertaken in collaboration between FSC, Stora Enso and NEPCon. The project is financed by Stora Enso.

About SmartLogging

SmartLogging is a global certification scheme for responsible forestry contractors developed by the Rainforest Alliance. The scheme provides recognition of best-practice forestry carried out by contractors, based on independent third-party certification. The concept is adapted to the individual country and the applicable forest certification standards. Read more about SmartLogging at www.nepcon.net or www.rainforest-alliance.org.

About the project partners

Stora Enso is a major European forest products company. Stora Enso Eesti AS procurement department Stora Enso Mets is a part of Stora Enso Wood Supply Baltic. In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania about 60% of the purchased wood comes from private forests. Wood Supply Baltic's wood procurement volume totaled 2.5 million cubic meters in 2008. Read more at www.storaenso.com

FSC - Forest Stewardship Council – is a globally leading certification scheme for responsible forest management, and the only such scheme that holds broad support from social and environmental organizations as well as from the forest industry. Learn more about FSC at www.fsc.org

NEPCon is a non-profit organization working to foster responsible management of natural resources. NEPCon is a partner of the FSC-accredited certification body Rainforest Alliance and manager of the Rainforest Alliance's forestry program SmartWood in Europe and Russia. Learn more about NEPCon at www.nepcon.net and more about the Rainforest Alliance at www.rainforest-alliance.org.