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HCVF High Conservation Value Forests

The benefits of the HCVF approach

What are High Conservation Value Forests?

HCVF forests contain environmental and social values, such as unique biodiversity, watershed protection, soil stabilization or an archaeological site. Where these values are considered to be of high significance or critical importance, the forest can be defined as a High Conservation Value Forest. But when we talk about HCVF we also mean a process for long term decision making in the forest. This leaflet explains what this means.



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What is the aim of the HCVF concept promoted by WWF?

The HCVF concept developed by FSC and advocated by WWF aims to help balance sustainable economic growth and the preservation of the most important forest values through a guided multi-stakeholder forest planning process.

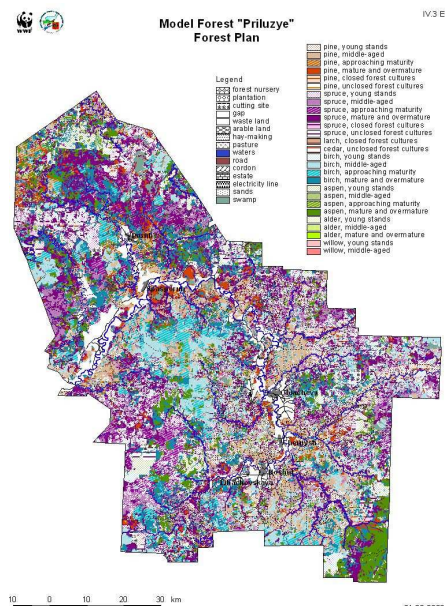
The use of the HCVF concept is an important step towards better forest management and protection and complements other tools for forest conservation such as forest certification and the designation of protected areas.

HCVF is a multi-stakeholder planning framework which facilitates informed, long-term decision-making. The HCVF process can be seen as complementary to political planning processes such as National Forest Programmes and Natura 2000. It can also be a useful platform for private forest owners to lobby for payments to manage forests to sustain and enhance environmental services.

How does HCVF work in practice?

The HCVF process has 4 steps and involves governments, forest owners, industry, scientists, communities, and NGOs at a regional or country level on

1. The identification of what the most important critical values in the forest are and where they are located on a regional/ country basis
2. The identification of thresholds for each value which stimulates the need for a management response.
3. Development of management guidelines for the identified HCVFs in order to maintain or enhance the identified value.
4. Mapping of the values



After these steps it is important that the outcomes of the process are implemented e.g. adopted through legislation or consensus on the rule of the game by government, industry, communities and other stakeholders.

Fictitious examples:

1) *Avalanche protection/Soil erosion could be identified as a critical high conservation value for a certain country/region. The threshold for this could be: all slopes over 30 degrees are relevant for this value; the key management principle could be to achieve constant forest cover over 30 degree slopes to maintain or enhance this value and then to identify on a planning map all slopes over 30 degrees.*

2) *Fuel wood consumption could be identified as basic need for local communities. The threshold for the need for a management response could be all forests surrounding communities in walking distance; the management could be the development of a planning instrument to secure a sustainable and secure use of fuel wood.*

3) *Ecosystem values can be identified for certain areas as critical – for different levels importance of the biodiversity values and different scales of intact areas (serving as thresholds) a mix of management activities can be agreed, from fully setting aside these areas to adapted silvicultural activities.*

The benefits of the HCVF planning process

1. better and more accepted forest planning decisions
2. management and purchasing decisions based on a precautionary principle

3. better governance - higher acceptance via an open and transparent and stakeholder based process
4. effective use of local knowledge
5. better understanding by all stakeholders on the range of forest values and the costs and benefits of protecting them
6. reduction of conflict between competing aims of resource use

The HCVF approach assists a use of forests which provides benefits for all and is supported and accepted by civil society. This helps to preserve the range of forest values in a long term perspective.



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What conservation values are considered in the identification of a HCVF?

The global toolkit, which facilitates the process for identifying HCVFs, indicates 6 key values. Their single or combined presence in a forest area can lead to the identification of a High Conservation Value Forest and to the shaping of the forest management in order to protect those values:

- **HCV1:** Forest areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values (e.g. endemism, endangered species, refuges).
- **HCV2:** Forest areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape level forests,

contained within, or containing the management unit, where *viable populations of most if not all naturally occurring species exist in natural patterns of distribution and abundance*

- **HCV3:** Forest areas that are in or contain *rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems*.
- **HCV4:** Forest areas that provide *basic services of nature in critical situations* (e.g. watershed protection, erosion control)
- **HCV5:** Forest areas *fundamental to meeting the basic needs of local communities* (e.g. subsistence, health).
- **HCV6:** Forest areas *critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity* (areas of cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance identified in cooperation with such local communities).



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How was the HCVF concept developed and who supports it?

The HCVF concept was first developed by the Forest Stewardship Council and used in Principle 9 of the FSC certification standard. This states that the management of a certified forest unit must include measures to maintain and enhance the identified values of the High Conservation Value Forests from that area. The HCVF concept was refined more recently in consultation with WWF and the World

Bank. Since then many countries/regions have started to apply the HCVF approach such as Russia, the Caucasus, Bulgaria and Romania.

The international “Global Toolkit for Identification and Management of HCVF” which assists regional/ national multi-stakeholder processes was developed by the consultancy company Proforest.



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HCVF inside and outside of FSC

Whilst HCFV was developed by FSC and is applied best when integrated within an FSC process, there are working examples around the world where HCVF is working well outside FSC.

Political dimensions of the HCVF approach...

FOR GOVERNMENTS

- It aims for consensus from society about the most critical and outstanding forest values for the range of stakeholders
- It can assist decision making for Natura 2000 identification, management and funding
- It assists landscape planning, resource allocation for the protection of environmental services and the protection of other critical values
- It generates a better understanding of forest values by all stakeholders and a higher level of acceptance of decisions

- It assists and should be part of National Forest Programmes



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FOR FOREST BASED INDUSTRY

- It is a fundamental part of responsible purchasing policies
- It provides a rational basis for use and protection of forests of high conservation value
- It facilitates decisions on responsible purchasing to reduce environmental and social risks
- HCVFs are an important basis for discussion with pressure groups
- It helps avoid wood from controversial sources



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FOR FOREST OWNERS AND COMMUNITIES

- It provides an assurance that forests will provide essential goods and services for the community over the long term
- It provides a platform to share experiences and to demonstrate challenges in forest management

- It allows a debate on managing forests for providing environmental services (watershed protection, soil erosion), including the question of compensation
- It generates better knowledge to base management decisions on

FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

- It is a source of transparent information exchange for relevant forest management activities and forest decisions

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Access the global HCVF toolkit on www.proforest.net

