

Background information on ETFRN 51

Forest certification is advocated as a strategy to conserve the world's forests. Concerns over loss of biodiversity in logged forests were one of the main drivers for the emergence of forest certification. Currently approx. 8% of total forest area has been certified under a variety of schemes and certification remains a template for forest strategy for many organizations.

More than 15 years have passed since the first forest certificate was issued, and it should now be possible to evaluate if certification has had an impact on biodiversity by looking at the performance of certified forests compared to forests which conduct business as usual.

Elements of the overall question "Has it worked" include:

- Is forest certification a good conservation strategy in tropical forest?
- Are certified concessions better off than conventionally managed concessions?
- Do we have the information to provide a reliable answer to such questions?

In 2008, an attempt was made to answer the question when the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Board (PBL) asked TBI to carry out a survey of *published scientific studies* on the effects of certified forest management on biodiversity in tropical, temperate and boreal forests. In parallel with TBI's study, Probos carried out an analysis of actual forest certification practices and the application of biodiversity criteria in certification.

The studies revealed a general lack of scientifically supported information about the effect of forest certification on forest biodiversity. Where relevant studies have been undertaken they focus on different species, use different protocols and do not address the large temporal and spatial scales covered by tropical production forests.

Empirically the study concluded that the effect of certification on forest management practices (such as the increased adoption of reduced impact logging) appeared to be beneficial. However, the supporting data based on the scientific literature appear inconclusive.

Additional observations were that:

- There is a high variation in forest management practices associated with certification
- There is a very high variation in responses to certification between species;
- There is little evidence about long-term effects on conservation from applying sustainable forest management;
- There is little data to warrant conclusions that certified forest management is sustainable in terms of biodiversity conservation at the level of populations and communities – we simply don't know;
- Well-managed (certified) forests are not equivalent to undisturbed forests in terms of conserving (forest) biodiversity;
- Quantitative conclusions, about the degree to which certified forest management contributes to biodiversity levels, are not possible with the published information available.

In spite of this lack of evidence from the literature, there is a wealth of practical experience with certification. It is expected that among practitioners, forest managers, forestry NGOs,

auditors and certifiers there is a lot of information that can enhance, or refute, the evidence reported in the scientific literature. For this reason, an EFRN news is proposed to bring together the views from both academia and practice and to open discussion on some of the key questions that can be asked about the role of forest certification in the conservation of tropical biodiversity.

Objectives and method

General objective:

To contribute to the debate on the effectiveness of forest certification as a tool for biodiversity conservation in tropical forests.

Specific objectives:

- To bring together information based on practical experiences and (ongoing) research on the effects of certification on biodiversity
- To record opinions from a variety of certification stakeholders on a number of issues related to certification and biodiversity conservation. Key questions to be answered include:
 - What kind of answers can be expected from the measurement of certification effects on biodiversity given the complexities of both concepts SFM and biodiversity?
 - Can certification be justified as an instrument for conserving biodiversity in managed forests if measures of impact on biodiversity are not conclusive
 - The value and relative importance of species: what aspects of biodiversity are we actually interested in?
 - How do we deal with the inevitable trade offs between various components of biodiversity and how far should one go in the discussion about relative importance?
 - Given that change in managed forests is unavoidable, what levels of change are 'acceptable' and how to determine and measure that; and
 - What does it all mean in practice, for the forest manager and certifier?
 - What research is critically needed to fill some of the voids?

Some of these issues have been debated in the past, but now there is a decade's worth of practical experience with certification and it might be good to revisit some of them.

In this EFRN news, we are interested to bring together practical experiences and pragmatic solutions addressing these issues, and perspectives grounded in sound information, from researchers, certifiers, forest managers, interest groups and other practitioners.

Scope

The scope of this EFRN news is defined by

- natural forests in the tropics
- forest biodiversity
- all applicable systems for forest management certification

Not considered are:

- Boreal and temperate forests

- Social and economic impacts of certification
- Certification systems for carbon, fair trade etc

Intended audience

The ETFRN News is issued in 3000 paper copies and distributed to over 80 different countries. The audience of this ETFRN news, aside from the regular readers, will be policy makers, donors, conservation NGO's, experts in international/ multilateral processes and organizations, standard setting initiatives and institutions, and interested researchers and academics. Secondly, forest managers, Forest Management certificate holders, certification bodies and auditors will be addressed.

Instructions for authors

Here are our instructions for authors:

Please refer to background information above. Keep in mind that the publication is about clarifying the contribution that certification of production forests can make to biodiversity conservation in the tropics, particularly in relation to 'business as usual' logging.

- We are especially interested in informed, informative and concrete experiences.
 - We ask writers to choose to write either an article or a short note.
 - Full articles should not exceed 2000 words while short notes (simply informing readers of a new or recent initiative, or plan) should not exceed 500 words,
 - ETFRN is not a scientific journal and does not need heavy referencing. Articles should strive to make initiatives and new ideas known to the outside world and suggest conclusions and recommendations where this is justified.
-
- A typical outline for an article would include the following:
 - Description of context, needs and activity.
 - Lessons and insights.
 - Recommendations, including implications for tropical certification and conservation
 - Where interested persons could obtain more information.
 - Please include a 'catch phrase' or quote to be highlighted
 - Please supply good quality picture(s) illustrating your article
-
- All draft articles must be received by May 30, 2010 and will need to be reviewed and edited for publication by mid June.
 - Final acceptance of your contribution will be based on quality, the degree to which it fits in the outline of the issue, and the number of contributions received.

The rough outline of the issue is based on the following headings:

1. *Synthesis (summary, overview of issues, organized around the key questions, next steps) – prepared by the editorial committee*

2. *Recent developments in certification, specifically with regard to biodiversity*

This introductory section will cover recent developments in certification and its implementation in the tropics (including policy issues)

3. *Standards, their development, evolution, and application.*

Standard setting does not happen in a neutral arena. How do standards evolve and who influence that; how does this translate into action, by certificate holders; actions by certification bodies, stakeholders, etc?

4. *Overview and evaluation of current methods of assessment of biodiversity in the context of forest management and auditing*

5. *Certification in practice: what is the evidence in favor or against certification as a conservation strategy (case studies as well as overviews/opinions)?*

6. *What to conserve: the value and importance of biodiversity; acceptable change.*

Not all species are equal and different stakeholders have different perceptions about the relative importance of species. Further, change in biodiversity is inevitable. This raises debate about the aims of biodiversity conservation in the context of certification and what degree of 'change' is acceptable, and on what grounds.