FSC US CONTROLLED WOOD REGIONAL MEETINGS OLD **GROWTH FORESTS**

FSC REGIONS Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain

HCVS IN FSC A High Conservation Value (HCV) is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance. FSC is working to ensure that our system helps to maintain and enhance the special places that support these values. For more information on HCVs, see the Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values.1

WHY ARE OLD GROWTH FORESTS CONSIDERED AN HCV? Their rarity – old growth forest ecosystems have been greatly reduced by human activities compared to the historic extent. Old growth includes both Type 1 (stands that have never been logged and that display late successional/old growth characteristics) and Type 2 (stands that have been logged, but that retain significant latesuccessional/old growth structure and functions). Primary forests (a forest ecosystem with the principal characteristic and key elements of native ecosystems that is relatively undisturbed by human activity) are generally synonymous with old growth forests. This forest type was identified as an HCV using guidance associated with the FSC US Forest Management Standard.



populations for ecological, social and economic reasons. They are important in maintaining biodiversity, values for society (recreational and spiritual), and ecological services such as carbon sequestration and soil quality. In addition, they also harbor highly valued timber resources.

There is no single, widely accepted definition, but this assessment uses the definitions of Type 1 and Type 2 Old Growth in the FSC US Forest Management Standard. As with most old growth definitions, the Type 1 and Type 2 definitions focus on old trees and structural complexity. These habitat

¹ Brown, E., N. Dudley, A. Lindhe, D.R. Muhtaman, C. Stewart, and T. Synnott (eds.). 2013 (October). Common guidance for the identification of High Conservation Values. HCV Resource Network.

characteristics are important to a number of rare species that depend upon western U.S. old growth forests, including Northern Spotted Owls, Marbled Murrelet, and American marten, along with much lesser known species of land snails, mollusks, and amphibians.

Old growth forest is generally considered to be rare, but how rare depends on the part of the country being considered: in the Pacific Northwest (including Northern California), the estimate is that old growth constitutes approximately 6% of the existing forest, in the northeast, it's less than 1%, while in the southeast it's closer to 0.5% and even less in the southwest and Great Lakes. A comprehensive spatial inventory of old growth forests across the entire US does not exist, although a few localized inventories have been completed.

IDENTIFIED THREATS TO OLD GROWTH FORESTS Threats include a lack of managing younger forests with a goal of creating old growth forests, **timber harvest**, invasive species, pests, pathogens, forest fragmentation, fire suppression, catastrophic wildfires and climate change. In frequent-fire forests of the western US, logging is no longer the primary threat to old growth, threats also include land management policies that suppress fire and do not mimic its effects through active management. While the Northwest Forest Plan has significantly reduced the loss of Old Growth to timber harvest on federal lands, losses continue at lower rates. Losses on non-federal lands, particularly private lands, have continued at much higher rates than on federal lands. Supporting evidence for these conclusions and generally that Old Growth is still being lost to timber harvest was drawn from status assessments for late successional forest dependent species.

MAPPING METHODOLOGY FSC US used a step-wise filtering process, developed in consultation with experts, to identify areas in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain regions with a higher likelihood of containing old growth forests. The process began with an above ground forest biomass data layer developed by the US Forest Service₂ to which FSC US applied ecoregion-specific thresholders (based upon a literature search). Next, FSC US removed areas within perimeters of fires recorded since 2000 (US Geological Survey₃), and then removed areas with recent forest gain or loss (Global Forest Watch₄) as indicators of recent forest management activity. The final step removed areas with GAP Status 1 or 2 protections (PAD-US dataset₅), Inventoried Roadless Areas (US Forest Service₆)

6 https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/roadless/2001roadlessrule/maps/?cid=stelprdb5382437

² https://data.fs.usda.gov/geodata/rastergateway/biomass/index.php

³ https://rmgsc.cr.usgs.gov/outgoing/GeoMAC/historic_fire_data/

⁴ https://data.globalforestwatch.org/datasets/63f9425c45404c36a23495ed7bef1314

⁵ https://gapanalysis.usgs.gov/padus/data/download/

and/or conservation easements with an environmental purpose (Natural Resources Conservation Service7).

MITIGATION ACTIONS AND WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO ACHIEVE Companies that mix FSC-certified forest materials and non-certified materials to make products with an 'FSC Mix' claim/logo are required to address certain risks before using the non-certified forest materials. One of these is the risk that their forest materials come from areas where HCVs are threatened by forest management activities. FSC has completed a US National Risk Assessment to identify where this risk is greater than 'low' and old growth forests are one of these places - specifically, the lands in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain regions that were identified using the mapping methodology described above. Companies that wish to use non-certified materials from the identified places are required to either avoid sourcing from specific sites where the threats are occurring, or to implement mitigation actions that reduce the risk of sourcing from those sites. For this rare ecosystem, any mitigation actions will need to address the threats identified above in **bold**.

The FSC US National Risk Assessment also introduces the concept of holding regional meetings to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively identify effective and practical mitigation actions. We are asking participants to consider landscape-scale mitigation actions, that will help to reduce risks across the landscape in which the companies source forest materials. An effective way to do this may be to build on existing programs and projects that are already tackling these issues. The companies implementing mitigation actions are required to select one or more from the options identified at the regional meetings.

Please help us to determine what these mitigation actions should be, by visiting engage.fsc.us.org and joining the virtual discussion, or attending a regional meeting.

SOME SOURCES THAT CAN HELP GENERATE MITIGATION OPTION IDEAS

- National Commission on Science for Sustainable Forestry
- Ecology and Society

⁷ https://www.conservationeasement.us/downloads/?created=true