

Copy of: Motion 61/2021 Compile a digital map of FSC-certified forests worldwide
Passed Policy Motion

Within a year after this motion passes, Forest Management Certificate Holders (CHs) shall be required to provide FSC International with digital shapefiles of their certified lands, so that FSC International may maintain an **internal** map of all FSC-certified forests. The only data required will be the name of the Certificate Holder, the certificate code, the name of the Certifying Body, and the boundaries of the certified area.

When Certificate Holders provide this information, FSC International will ask whether they consent for the boundaries of their certified forests to appear on a **public** map of certified lands. This consent is entirely voluntary, at the discretion of the Certificate Holder. A public certificate search will indicate whether the certified Forest Management Unit can be found on the public map.

Certificate Holders are exempt from providing these shapefiles if disclosing the location of property or management boundaries to FSC is prohibited by law.

FSC staff will provide accommodations for smallholders and CHs with limited technical capacity, including:

- providing a mechanism to accept shapefiles created in Google Earth and other freely available mapping platforms;
- allowing additional time for compliance; and
- in the case of group certificates covering many smallholders, setting a maximum area below which members of a group certificate can be represented by a point on the map instead of their forest's complete boundaries.

Background / rationale:

This motion balances Forest Management Certificate Holders' desire for confidentiality with the need to bring FSC in step with contemporary expectations about transparency in certification -- expectations that have grown in recent years now that satellite imagery is at the fingertips of anyone with an internet connection.

Although the act of certification is delegated to accredited organizations, the Forest Stewardship Council is ultimately responsible for the lands certified under its name. Thus it is essential that FSC International should know where those lands are located. At the same time, some Certificate Holders are reluctant to reveal any more information than necessary. Thus, this motion allows them to keep their forest boundaries from appearing on a public map if they prefer, and limits the kinds of data they are required to deliver to FSC International.

This initiative can dovetail with the use of remote sensing as part of the audit process, to help focus audit effort in the most significant areas, thereby reducing costs and improving effectiveness. Some Certifying Bodies already take advantage of the FSC GIS Portal -- this motion would make it easy to expand its use.

In recognition of the diverse legal restrictions that Certificate Holders face in the many countries where FSC operates, the motion exempts Certificate Holders who are prohibited by law from sharing this information with FSC International.

To accommodate the different levels of technological capacity that are available to large timber firms compared with smallholders, the motion calls on FSC to shape the implementation of the motion so that it does not become a hardship. In particular, FSC staff can make available a tool that accepts digital shapefiles created in freely available mapping platforms such as Google Earth, which would not require Certificate Holders to purchase any software. Such a tool is already functioning as part of the FSC GIS Portal.

For smallholders and so-called “mega certificates” with hundreds of members, the motion proposing setting a threshold below which it makes sense to give Certificate Holders the option of recording a single point to represent their Forest Management Unit, rather than tracing their forest boundaries.

But enough about the possible obstacles and ways to overcome them. Instead, we encourage members to consider the great potential that this motion holds:

Last year, through the **FSC Open Knowledge Repository**, FSC launched a pilot project through which the boundaries of certified forests are shown as an overlay to satellite imagery. **FSC On the Map** portrays certified forests in a planetary and landscape context -- transforming the way we think of certified forests just as the image of Earth from lunar orbit did in the famous 1968 photo taken by the astronauts of Apollo 8.

So far, FSC On the Map includes certified forests from Russia, Canada, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, and the Baltic region. By expanding this coverage to any consenting certificate holder, FSC can enhance the transparency and credibility of certification, bolstering public trust in FSC, and advancing Goal 1.3 of the FSC Global Strategy, “Enhance verification and integrity.”

Geospatial data has become more widely available over the past decade, and public expectations of transparency and access to geographic information have increased as a result. It will be better for us to undertake this project proactively than to see it carried out selectively by critics of FSC, or through platforms such as Global Forest Watch. FSC should keep pace with the public’s expectations in order to retain its social license.