

Understanding the Continuous Improvement Procedure (CIP)

Information related to FSC-PRO-30-011 V1-1

Version: November 2024

What is the CIP?

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A **flexible**, and **stepwise approach** to Forest Management (FM) certification allowing initial certification based **only** on a subset of FM requirements and offering a clear path towards full conformity within a set timeframe.



The CIP allows its users to **progressively conform to FSC's requirements** over the first 5-year certification cycle. The FSC **Principles & Criteria (P&C)** consist of 10 Principles and 72 Criteria, divided by the CIP into **40 Core Criteria (CC)** and **32 Continuous Improvement Criteria (CIC)**.

Users can obtain FSC certification at the initial stage of the process by:

- conforming to the **CC**, and
- presenting an **Action Plan** that outlines when they will meet the CIC progressively within the first certification cycle, thereby maintaining their certification¹.

The CIP adds flexibility by classifying some criteria as **low-risk**, meaning that if a Management Unit (**MU**) is **not active** (i.e. no logging or site-disturbing activities), compliance with these low-risk criteria is not required.

¹ After those 5 years, the users must be in conformity with all the requirements of the **applicable standard** and follow the regular process to keep the FSC certification.

Requirements for CIP users



Application: The SLIMF or CF manager² must request the use of the CIP when applying for FSC Forest Management certification through a Certification Body (CB). **The CB will verify eligibility** based on the SLIMF & CF eligibility criteria and approve the request.

² The eligibility criteria for SLIMF and CF are defined in FSC-STD-01-003 V2-0.

Initial Conformity Self-Check³: CIP users are **recommended** to conduct an **initial self-assessment** to check conformity with FSC standards. This **voluntary step** helps users better understand the requirements, prepare for certification, and may reduce audit costs.



³ Annex 1 provides a template for the Conformity Self-Check, with questions and suggested actions to help develop a work plan and the mandatory Action Plan.

Action Plan: is an **Excel form⁴** that outlines the **timeline** for implementing FSC CIC criteria, over the 5-year certification cycle.

It must **be submitted to the Certification Body** at least 30 days before the main evaluation and is subject to approval.

⁴ The template is provided in Annex 2. For specific details, refer to Clauses 3.2 and 3.3 of FSC-PRO-30-011.

Self-Monitoring: As part of the evaluation process, and to reduce evaluation frequencies, CIP users **must conduct self-monitoring** in year 1, 2 and 4 of the certification cycle. The monitoring **report⁵** along with supporting evidence, must be sent to the CB on agreed dates.



⁵ For specifications on the content of the Report, refer to Clause 5.1 of FSC-PRO-30-011.

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Who can use the CIP?

The CIP can be used by those **managing** small-scale or low-intensity managed forests (**SLIMF**) or **Community Forests (CF)**.



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Benefits of using the Continuous Improvement Procedure



Financial Flexibility: Users can spread their investment over 5 years while accessing the benefits of FSC certification from the start, potentially using those benefits to finance further conformance.



Empowered implementation: Enables users to take control of the certification process, with tools like the Conformity Self-Check for informative guidance and the Action Plan allowing them to chart their own path to full FSC conformance.



Cost-efficient and adapted evaluations: Culturally adapted evaluations ensure relevance to local contexts, and good performance may lead to reduced evaluation intensity and lower certification costs.

CIP integration into Group Certification Settings

The CIP can be used in both individual and group certification.

New group members who want to use the CIP must meet the SLIME and CF eligibility criteria, meaning **groups can** have both **CIP and non-CIP members**. In such cases, the Group Entity must form subgroups accordingly⁶.

Group members using the CIP can apply it for the **first five years** of their **membership**. **After** that period, they must fully comply with the applicable standard and follow the **regular certification** process to keep the FSC certification. The **Group Entity** will also have additional responsibilities, including drafting and overseeing the **Action Plan** and supervising its implementation, among others.

CIP members will **be evaluated** based on their Action Plan, which differs from the evaluation process for non-CIP members⁷.

⁶ For further details on integrating new CIP users into a group, refer to Information Box 5, Clause 6, FSC-PRO-30-011 V1-1.

⁷ For further details on the different types of evaluations, please refer to the Forest Management Evaluation Standard (FSC-STD-20-007 V4-0).

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Application in FSC system

The **CIP users must comply with the requirements** of the applicable FSC standard in their country or region, such as the Forest Stewardship Standards (**FSS**), Interim National Standards (**INS**), or Interim Regional Standards (**IRS**).

The procedure provides flexibility in 'when conformance is required' but does **not change the requirements** themselves.



Evaluation types and frequency for CIP users

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The CIP introduces a **flexible, risk-based evaluation process** designed specifically for CIP users.

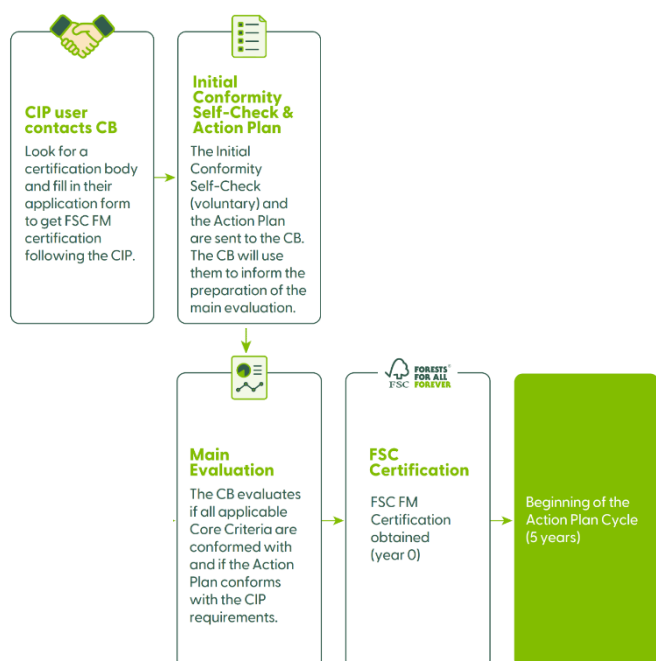
The **evaluation process** for **CIP users rewards performance** by **reducing the frequency of evaluations**. Good performance **lowers the risk** of non-conformance, allowing for more flexibility, with **on-site audits not required every year**.

To obtain FSC certification, **CIP users must first** undergo a **main on-site evaluation**. However, **instead** of an annual surveillance evaluation leading up to the re-assessment in year 5, **only one mandatory on-site evaluation is required in year 3**.

If **performance is strong**, **no evaluations will be conducted** in years⁸ **1, 2, and 4**. Instead, users must **submit a self-monitoring report** during these years.

⁸ If potential issues arise, the Certification Body may choose to conduct an **additional evaluation** in any of those years.

Initial steps of the Continuous Improvement Procedure



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Ready to start using the Continuous Improvement Procedure?

Contact a Certification Body (CB) active in your country or region, reach out to your national or regional FSC office, or email us at **communityfamilyforest@fsc.org**.

We'll guide you through the process and help you take the next steps toward certification!

