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Certification and Accreditation Procedures

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1. Introduction

In the process of sustainable forest management certification and group forest management certification, the certification body must conduct the procedure in accordance with internationally recognized procedures. Therefore, the certification body shall possess accreditation issued by The Institute for Accreditation of the Republic of Macedonia or another accreditation body that is a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and/or European co-operation for Accreditation (EA).

The certification procedure is conducted by an independent and impartial body which has taken no participation whatsoever in the process of establishing standards, certification or accreditation procedures.

2. Scope

This document describes the certification and accreditation procedures that the certification body shall fulfil in order to conduct sustainable forest management certification and group forest management certification.

The requirements specified in this document may be supplemented in case of changes in the "Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes" or other changes within the PEFC Council.

The requirements which refer to the certification bodies certifying the fulfilment of requirements with reference to the chain of custody are specified in "Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against the PEFC International Chain of Custody Standard (PEFC ST 2003:2012)".

3. Referential documents

PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia – PEFC MK 03:2016;

Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC MK 06:2016

PEFC Logo Usage Rules – Requirements – PEFC ST 2001:2008

Notification of certification bodies – PEFC MK 05:2016

ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015, "Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems"

ISO 19011:2011, "Guidelines for auditing management systems"

ISO/IEC 17011:2004, "Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies"

4. Certification Body Accreditation

4.1. Accreditation procedures

The bodies conducting sustainable forest management certification in accordance with the SFM Council requirements, including the group certification shall be accredited. The accreditation shall be obtained from The Institute for Accreditation of the Republic of Macedonia or another accreditation body that is a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and/or European co-operation for Accreditation (EA).

The Accreditation body conducting accreditation of certification body shall implement the procedures according to the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011:2004 "Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies". Accreditation shall be conducted in accordance with the legislation.

4.2. PEFC Notification

According to the Macedonian certification system, Certifying bodies for individual and group sustainable forest management certification shall be nominated by the SFM Council in accordance with the "Notification of certification bodies, PEFC MK 05:2017".

4.3. Sustainable forest management certification, including group certification

Certifying bodies conducting requirement conformity assessment for sustainable forest management (SFM) and group certification shall fulfil the requirements of ISO/IEC 17021:2011 1:2015, "Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems" supplemented by the specific requirements of the SFM Council for the needed sector expertise.

The certification body shall:

1. Fulfill the general requirements for certification bodies defined in the standard ISO/IEC 17021:2011
2. Conduct documented method according to which forest management can be checked and certified (certification procedure)
3. Understand the Macedonian system for sustainable forest management
4. Possess competency for forest management and its economic, social and environmental influence.

4.4. Additional requirements

The additional requirements of the SFM Council for the certification bodies conducting conformity assessment for sustainable forest management and group certification with reference to the standard ISO/IEC 17021:2011 are:

4.4.1. Registration and Information

The certification body shall provide the SFM Council with information for all certificates issued according to the Macedonian system and all the changes which refer to the importance and contents of the certificates. In that sense, the certification bodies shall keep and update data for all issued certificates for individual and group certificates according to the Macedonian certification system.

The Information Register which is submitted to the SFM Council shall contain the following information:

For certified forest according to the individual certification:

- data for the owner (user) of the forest (name of individual, owners or legal entity)
- data for certified area (location, area in ha)
- address
- contact number, electronic address
- name and surname of contact person
- certificate number
- date on which the certificate comes into force
- expiry date of the certificate

For certified forest according to group certification:

- name of the organization
- total area and location of the certified forest
- name and surname of contact person
- address of contact person

- contact number, electronic address
- certificate number
- date on which the certificate comes into force
- expiry date of the certificate

4.4.2. Certificates Cancellation

The certificate owner can cancel the certificate at any time.

The cancellation comes into force when the certification body accepts a written request by the certificate owner.

4.4.3. Certificates Termination and Withdrawal

The certification body is obliged to inform the SFM Council within 14 days for each terminated or withdrawn individual or group sustainable forest management certificate.

4.5. Individual or group SFM Certification and Revision Procedures

The certification body shall establish internal revision and certification procedures for sustainable forest management in accordance with the Macedonian certification system.

The process consists of the following stages:

1. Certification Consent
2. Documentation inspection and revision preparation
3. Revision
4. Certification Report
5. Certification Decision
6. Informing the SFM Council
7. Supervision
8. Recertification

4.5.1. Certification Consent

Prior to the activities, an agreement for certification between the certification body and the applicant shall be signed. After the agreement is signed, the necessary documentation shall be sent to the certification body.

4.5.2. Documentation inspection and revision preparation

The certification body shall inspect the documents submitted and determine if the applicant submitted all the necessary documents. In case of a positive documents evaluation, the certification body prepares a plan of further activities which is submitted to the applicant who decides whether to continue with the process. After a positive response, the certification body nominates a qualified examiner to conduct an assessment of compliance to the certification criteria.

4.5.3. Certification Revision- main revision

The main revision is concluded once in a period of five years. The maximum period for main revision audit not exceed period of five years. The Certification Revision consists of the following stages:

Public Consultation

Prior to the assessment for compliance with the requirements of the SFM Standard PEFC MK 03:2017, a consultation with relevant interested parties from the area where assessment takes place is required. The time period for this consultation is not shorter than 14 days and is announced on the SFM Council and certification body website. When assessing compliance, the relevant remarks and comments from other persons shall be take into consideration.

Initial meeting

Providing assessment data

The sustainability of the forest management by the applicant is assessed according to the requirements specified in the SFM Standard - PEFC MK 03:2017. The auditor shall provide the basic data needed for assessing whether the applicant fulfills the requirements of the afore mentioned Standard. In case of a group certification, the Audit is performed on a sample not smaller than the square root of the number of participants in the group.

Evaluation of the assessment data

The certification body evaluates the fulfilment of certification requirements by the applicant and determines if there is any discrepancy that shall be resolved in order to provide certification requirements fulfilment. The Document "Guidelines for dealing with remarks and deviations from the SFM Standard" listed as Annex to the Group Certification Rules and Procedures PEFC MK 06:2017 gives guidelines for dealing with possible discrepancies with the certification requirements.

Final meeting

The certification body presents the revision results to the applicant verbally and in writing.

Report on the revision conducted

The report on the revision conducted is prepared according to the certification body procedures.

4.5.4. Certification report

The Certification Report shall include the following elements:

- Data about the persons involved in the revision by the certification body
- Certification Scope
- Compliance with the certification requirements. The remarks and possible deviations shall always be included in the report.
- Summary of the public consultation
- Final summary of the entire report which will be open to the public and provided by the certification body.

4.5.5. Certification Decision

The certification body brings a decision for issuing a certificate or not based on the audit findings.

4.5.6. Information which refer to the SFM Council

The certification body informs the SFM Council for all individual or group certificates issued as well as for all current changes in their scope and validity.

4.5.7. Supervision

The certification body shall conduct supervision of certified forests and group representatives at least once a year while the certificate is valid in order to verify the continuity of compliance with the requirements of the Macedonian certification system. Supervision can exclude the public consultation.

The certificate owners shall immediately inform the certification body about every change in the management or procedures which refer to the data already registered by the certification body, in order to create a plan for implementing correction activities.

4.5.8. Recertification

The recertification procedure is conducted after the expiry of the certificate which is valid for 5 years. The recertification procedure is identical to the initial certification.

4.6. Information for the certificates

The certificate shall contain at least the following information:

- Name and address of the forest owner or the group representative
- The standard it refers to
- Location and area of the forest the certificate refers to
- Date of issue and validity
- Certificate number
- Name of accreditation body and number of accreditation of the certification body

4.6.1. Relation to standard

Upon certification the compliance to the following standard shall be assessed:

PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia – PEFC MK 03:2016;
Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC MK 06:2016.

Annex 1

The qualification criteria for external auditors and certification bodies, and certification procedures

1. Aim of the document

This document defines the qualification criteria for external auditors and certification bodies, and certification procedures for forest management. PEFC Council recognized certifications for forest management and chain of custody rely on international certification and accreditation procedures as defined in the documentation of the International Standardization Body (ISO) and European co-operation for Accreditation (EA) as well as in the International Accreditation Forum (IAF). This document belongs to the series of standards of the Macedonian Certification System.

2. Scope and Field of Application

This document defines the qualification criteria for external auditors and certification bodies, and certification procedures.

This document is applied in accordance with the Macedonian Certification System covering:

* Certification of forest management, and

3. Qualification Criteria for Auditors

3.1 Certification of Forest Management

The qualification criteria for auditors used in certification audits are based on the general auditing guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems, or the general criteria for certification bodies operating management system certification, and complemented with sectoral expertise.

The auditors must:

1. Fulfil general criteria for quality and environmental management systems as defined in ISO 19011.
2. Fulfil general criteria for certification bodies operating management system certification.
3. Have a good knowledge on the Macedonian Certification System with regard to forest management.

4. Have a good knowledge on forest management sector, practice and legislation in Republic of Macedonia and its environmental, social and economic impacts.
Professional expertise in forest management and its environmental impacts is proved on the basis of appropriate education and/or professional experience.

4. Qualification Criteria for Certification Bodies

4.1 Accreditation

Certification bodies carrying out forest management certification shall be accredited by a national or another international accreditation body.

The accreditation shall be issued by an accreditation body which is a part of the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA) and/or the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) umbrella and which implement procedures described in ISO 17011 and other documents recognized by the above mentioned organizations.

Accreditation symbol of the relevant accreditation body shall accompany any issued forest certificate and chain of custody certificate.

4.2 Certification of Forest Management

The qualification criteria for the certification bodies used in certification audits are based on general criteria for certification bodies operating quality and environmental system certification and/or product certification, complemented with sectorial expertise and applied to forest management.

The certification body must:

1. Fulfil the criteria for certification bodies defined in latest version of ISO 17021.
2. Use a documented method, according to which forest management may be audited and certified.
3. Undertake forest management certification as “accredited certification” based on latest version of ISO 17021 and have the relevant forest management standard(s) covered by the accreditation scope.
4. Have general knowledge on forest management and its environmental impacts.
5. Be impartial, independent third party that cannot be involved in the standard setting process as governing or decision making body, or in the forest management and is independent of the certified entity.

Professional expertise in forest management and its environmental impacts is proved on the basis of certification experience in the field and/or appropriate education and professional experience of the staff.

Annex 2

Guidelines for Certification Bodies and Auditors to conduct Forest Management certification

1. Aim of the document

This document defines the requirements for Certification Bodies and Auditors to perform PEFC Forest Management and Chain of Custody certification in Macedonia.

2. Scope of the document

This document specifies the minimum requirements for Certification Bodies to perform the certification procedures in accordance with:

- PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia – PEFC MK 03:2016;
- Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC MK 06:2016

3. Normative references

This document is established and approved by The Macedonian Forest Certification Council based on:

- PEFC Council Technical Document Annex 1 “Terms and Definitions”;
- PEFC Council Technical Document Annex 6 “Certification and Accreditation Procedures”;
- ISO 19011:2011, “Guidelines for auditing management systems”
- ISO/IEC 17021:2011-1:2015, “Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems”

4. Terms and definitions

For the characterizing of the PEFC Macedonia Scheme, the relevant definitions are given in PEFC Council Technical Document Annex 1 “Terms and Definitions”.

5. Certification Procedure

The Certification body shall have documented procedures for determining audit time, the time needed to plan and accomplish complete and effective audit of the clients operation. The procedures applied are based on the ISO 19011:2011, “Guidelines for auditing management systems”.

5.1 Phases of Certifying Process

The certification process consists of temporally and functionally consecutive actions:

1. Application by the auditee to the certification body,
2. Review of the application and present material by the certification body,
3. Voluntary pre-audit,
4. Certification audit,
5. Assessment/decision by the certification body, and
6. Surveillance audits.

Before sending the application to the certification body, the auditee must comply in its operations with appropriate sections of the PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia – PEFC MK 03:2017, Group Certification Rules and Procedures – PEFC MK 06:2017.

The purpose of the pre-sent material and voluntary pre-audit is to ensure that the requirements of above mentioned documents are adequately taken into account and appropriately applied by the auditee or its units.

5.2 Auditing

5.2.1 General Principles

The definition of the objective of the audit is always the responsibility of the auditee. The scope and limits are defined so that the objective of the audit is achieved. The scope of the audit is defined by the lead auditor nominated by the certification body. The purpose of the audit is to evaluate whether the evidence collected from the auditee or its units conform to the auditing criteria.

The auditing criteria are primarily the requirements of the PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia – PEFC MK 03:2017, Group Certification Rules and Procedures – PEFC MK 06:2017. In addition, the auditee may define other auditing criteria, e.g., policy, legislation, guidelines, practices and procedures.

The objective, scope and auditing criteria are documented in the auditing plan, which guides the execution of the audit. The auditing plan must also indicate the timetables, places, persons and other information, for which preparations are required in advance by the auditee or its units.

The audit is carried out by an audit team. In addition to the lead auditor, the audit team has an adequate number of auditors. The sectoral competence of auditors may be complemented, if necessary, with technical experts who are not auditors. The audit team is set up by the certification body, which ensures competence and independence and other appropriateness to the task of the team members.

Auditing includes the following phases:

1. An initial meeting,
2. Collection of audit evidence,
3. Evaluation of audit evidence,
4. Final meeting and
5. Audit report on the conformance to the audit criteria.

The audit team collects sufficient amount of audit evidence, based on which the conformity of operation to the criteria is evaluated. The evaluation results of the audit evidence (especially those relating to non-conformities) are reviewed with the auditee. In the final meeting, the audit results of all the units audited are collectively presented to the auditee. The audit observations, which are not in conformity with audit criteria are always documented in the audit report.

The audit evidence to determine the conformity with the PEFC national forest management standard shall include relevant information from external parties (e.g. government agencies, community groups, conservation organizations, etc.) as appropriate.

A summary of the certification report, including a summary of findings on the auditee's conformity with the PEFC national forest management standard for Macedonia, written by the certification body, shall be made available to the public by the Macedonian Forest Certification Council. The requirements for public consultation and public availability of the certification report's summary shall be implemented at all operational levels within six months of the official adoption of this document. For certificates, which have been issued before the adoption of these requirements by national forest certification schemes, these requirements shall be implemented by the next surveillance audit.

5.2.2 Forest Management

When auditing forest management, the audit team must include at least one auditor qualified in forest management. Technical experts may complement the forest management and environmental competence of the auditors.

Possible other auditing criteria are agreed upon with the auditee, but their results have no effect on the certification decision conforming to the standard requirements.

5.3 Certification

5.3.1 Audit by Certification Body

The certification decision is made by the certification body on the basis of the audit report. The decision may be positive, conditional or negative. A positive decision leads to immediate certification and issuance of the certificate.

The basis for a conditional or negative certification decision is based on nonconformity against certification criteria. A conditional certification decision requires an implementation plan for corrective action and correction of non-conformities according to a timetable to be separately

agreed upon. The certificate may be conditionally issued when the plan of corrective action is approved.

5.3.2 Non-conformities and Corrective Action

Non-conformities to the certification criteria must always lead to corrective action and possibly to the rejection, postponing or withdrawal of the certificate. Non-conformities are classified as minor and major. Minor non-conformities are not necessarily an obstacle for certification. Major non-conformities always prevent the issuance of the certificate.

5.3.3 Follow-up and Surveillance Audits

If the certification decision has been negative, a follow-up audit can be arranged (within a time period to be agreed upon) in order to verify corrective actions. If corrective action is adequate, the certificate is granted to the applicant. Surveillance audits are carried out at least once a year during the validity of the certificate, provided that the interval between the audits does not exceed one year. The scope of surveillance audits may be more limited than that of certification audits. In the surveillance audits, the completion of corrective actions or the progress in their implementation is always assessed. The surveillance audits may also concentrate on certain elements of certification criteria only.

5.3.4 Amendments

If the content of the certification standards is revised, the criteria valid during the audit are applied. The auditee has a transition period of maximum one year to adapt its operations to the new criteria.

5.3.5 Validity of Certificate

The certificate is valid for a maximum of five years. The certification body may withdraw a granted certificate permanently or suspend it for a specified time period. The withdrawal, or suspension, decision and its justification are communicated to the auditee in writing.

The auditee may denounce the certificate any time during its validity. The denouncement takes effect immediately after the certification body has received a notice in writing.

6. Information of Certificate

Certification body shall provide the Council for SFM with information about all issued forest management and chain of custody certificates and changes concerning the validity and scope of these certificates.

7. Appeals and complaints

This procedure (hereinafter as Procedure) establishes the rules for the appeals and challenges (hereinafter as appeal) to the certification of forest management and chain of custody according to the Macedonian PEFC forest certification scheme.

The application of this procedure is compulsory for the members the Council for SFM (hereinafter as CSFM).

The appointed members of the commission for appeals of the CSFM (hereinafter as commission) is responsible for the appeal related organizational and technical measures. Additionally it will organize retaining of the appeal procurement related documents according to the valid operations procedure.

7.1 Registration of appeal and challenge

Any natural or legal body (or by its official representative), whose forest management or chain of custody has been audited (certified), has the right to file an appeal. Appeal shall be filed to the board of CSFM in written, within thirty days as of the official decision of the certification organisation was made.

The commission is responsible for immediate registration of the appeal to the corresponding register and for delivery it to the commission for settlement of appeals (hereinafter as Commission).

Personal data and contact information of the person filing the appeal, date of filing the appeal and the content of the protest as well as notification about added documents shall be entered into the register.

Appeal won't be registered and proceeded, if:

1. The appeal is filed anonymously;
2. The person does not have the right to file the appeal;
3. The person filing the appeal has failed to eliminate the deficiencies in the appeal within the designated term;
4. Judicial or liquidation proceedings are being conducted concerning the person filing the appeal;
5. Review of an appeal is not within the competence of CSFM.

7.2 Commission for settlement of appeal

Commission has three members:

- Representative of CSFM;
- The person filing the appeal or his/her authorised representative
- The person or his/her authorised representative against whom the appeal has been filed (certification body).

The representative of CSFM (hereinafter as chairman of the Commission) to the Commission will be nominated and recalled back by the Assembly of CSFM. In the case of reassignment or recalling back, the Assembly of CSFM will appoint a new chairman of the Commission. The Assembly of the Commission has to be independent of the deliberation of the appeal.

7.3 Proceeding of appeal in the commission

The chairman of the Commission shall chair the meeting of the Commission. All participants shall have an opportunity to explain and reason his/her positions. The chairman of the Commission shall determine the date, time and place of the session taking into consideration the opinions of the members of the Commission.

Commission examines the circumstances of the appeal and adopts decision on the reasoning of appeal and measures to be applied on the basis of that, within 10 workdays after registration of the appeal. All members of the Commission shall take part in the session. Hearing of the appeal is organized as a closed session. The statements and decisions made in the session will be recorded in the minutes. The chairman of the Commission determines the keeper of the minutes.

The decision of the Commission (hereinafter decision) will be adopted as a simple majority of the votes. If the votes distribute equally the casting vote belongs to the chairman of the Commission. The chairman of the Commission shall deliver a copy of the decisions to the board of CSFM as well as to the parties involved with the appeal within two working days after the meeting of the Commission.

Decision of the Commission (an extract from the minutes) shall be delivered to the person filing of the appeal by registered letter.

The decision is final. The Commission shall not handle repeated appeal on the same matter. Difference of opinions related to the decision shall be settled according to the Macedonian legislation.

