

5. Have special places, including sensitive ecosystems, been protected?

Sourcing and legality aspects

Origin

Where do the products come from?

Information accuracy

Is information about the products credible?

Legality

Have the products been legally produced?

Environmental aspects

Sustainability

Have forests been sustainably managed?

Special places

Have special places, including sensitive ecosystems, been protected?

Climate change

Have climate issues been addressed?

Environmental protection

Have appropriate environmental controls been applied?

Recycled fiber

Has recycled fiber been used appropriately?

Other resources

Have other resources been used appropriately?

Social aspects

Local communities and indigenous peoples

Have the needs of local communities or indigenous peoples been addressed?

5. Have special places, including sensitive ecosystems, been protected?

For the purposes of this guide, the term “special places” is used as a generic term for areas with unique qualities within the forest landscape (Box 7). They typically need special attention and treatment. Depending on their features and significance, these places can be identified at different scales (e.g., global, regional, local scale). Some global, course-scale maps of special places exist, and they can be used to identify areas where a site-specific evaluation should be performed.

Some special places are legally protected, but this is not always the case. There can be several reasons for the lack of legal protection:

- The uniqueness of a site may not have been identified, either because of insufficient inventory efforts or because the science of conservation biology has improved since the last inventory was made.
- The political and administrative process to secure protection can be cumbersome and slow. Another possibility is that the law does not contain provisions for protecting special places of this particular type.
- The site may be private property or otherwise of important economic value to a community. Incentives to gain support for special designation may be lacking.
- An assessment process may have concluded that the area is not sufficiently special to warrant protection.
- Stakeholders may differ in their opinion of what qualifies as a special place.

While there is general agreement that forest management should respect legally protected areas, the situation can be unclear and complex when a legally unprotected area is claimed as a special place. There are several possibilities:

- The area may have been identified as special and an official government-led initiative is underway to protect it. In this case voluntary protection efforts are needed to maintain the special values of the area until it gets official protection. These can include protection measures by land managers. There may also be marketplace pressures to reject wood products harvested from the area, regardless of its legal status. This may or may not contribute to protection,

depending on community reaction, and its effect on government decision-makers.

- The area may not be slated for official protection. A stakeholder conflict may then ensue, with some environmental and/or indigenous groups trying to enforce “market protection” of the site pending a change of minds by the authorities. In some cases, such conflict has led land managers to agree to a logging moratorium, pending government consideration. In others it has had no effect or led to disinvestment or land sales.



In either case land ownership or tenure is significant. A public or large owner may have a greater capacity to absorb a reduction of the productive land base than a small private landowner, but also may be more affected by perceived instability. Cooperation among small private landowners such as pursuing group certification may effectively take care of the special place. Boycott campaigns do not always have local support and can create a political backlash against the customer and other stakeholders.

Different stakeholders, including mainstream certification standards, have coined different definitions of special places (Table 5). With few exceptions, the areas that correspond to these definitions have not been mapped, making it difficult to analyze the extent to which they overlap. Along with the definition, stakeholders have recommended management regimes for these special places, including:

- **Precautionary management** – ensuring that special values are identified and protected before management plans are developed.
- **Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)** – integrating and balancing environmental, social and economic aspects across the landscape. Small-scale adaptations of management to promote conservation that do not significantly reduce the economic potential of the land, e.g., through protection of so-called key woodland habitats, are usually considered an inherent part of good forest management.

- **Conservation management** – managing to retain or enhance the ecological and biological values, which may or may not include limited timber harvesting.
- **No management** at all (i.e., leaving the forest by itself).
- **A combination of all of these across the larger landscape.**

The diversity of definitions of special places and definitions of forest in general is a major concern. International organizations such as FAO, International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and UNEP have compiled forest definitions (FAO, 2002A) but do not offer any generally accepted definition for special places. The lack of a universally agreed upon definition of special places is a major concern, and the stakeholder support for each definition varies.



Factors to consider regarding special places

- Some special places are yet to be located. Investment in time and resources is needed to identify them across the landscape.
- An initial inventory and analysis of the landscape as a whole will generally make it easier to find solutions that satisfy the needs and ambitions of all stakeholders. However, some aspects require special consideration:
 - There might be many small players involved (e.g., small landowners) who need to be considered and consulted because they may be affected out of proportion to their size
 - If the demand for forest products is removed from an area, the landowner is likely to find other ways to generate revenue from the land, e.g., through land-use change to development (urban sprawl) or for production of agricultural crops.

Some forestry companies have used the following steps to overcome potential issues around special places:

- Engagement with stakeholders to develop a common platform of definitions and a common process for mapping of conservation values and/or field inventory.
- Reference to, or engagement with, third-parties to define and map special places.
- Pursuit of legal opportunities to protect special places by encouraging land transfers to conservation organizations or establishing conservation easements.

Box 7. What constitutes a special place?

There is no universally agreed upon definition of special places. Existing definitions combine scientific and political dimensions through different features, but they often do not prioritize the features that take precedence. In general, stakeholders deem a forest “special” if it includes one or more of the following characteristics:

- Biological, ecological and landscape features
 - Species richness: number of species within a given area
 - Species endemism: number of species found exclusively in that location
 - Rarity: species and/or ecosystems that are naturally rare
 - Representation: a site that represents all of the different ecosystems in the area of concern
 - Significant or outstanding ecological or evolutionary processes, such as key breeding areas, migration routes, unique species assemblages, and so on
 - Special species or taxa: presence of an umbrella, keystone, indicator, or flagship species. Site is habitat of a taxa of interest; for instance, wide-ranging species of waterfowl
- Conservation features
 - Threatened species: species that have been identified as threatened or endangered
 - Species decline: species whose populations have undergone significant decline in recent years
 - Habitat loss: areas that have lost a significant percentage of their primary habitat or vegetation
 - Fragmentation: areas that have lost connectivity and have been fragmented into smaller pieces
 - Large intact areas: areas within a certain minimum size with no or minimal human influence
 - Level of threat: areas facing high or low pressure from human populations or development
 - Places considered to have rare and exceptional scenic and aesthetic features
- Ecosystem services
 - Ability to supply basic and/or critical services such as watershed protection, erosion control, and fire/flood control among others
- Cultural, livelihood, historical and spiritual features
 - High value to the people who live within or around the site (e.g., for reasons of religion, history, cultural identity, or dependency for livelihoods); these include religious, historical and archaeological sites
 - Critical significance to the traditional cultural identity of a local community
 - Critical to maintaining local peoples’ livelihoods

The most critical and controversial issues around identifying special places have been:

- What process is used to define, identify and map special places?
- What, and how fair and effective, is the process to make and implement the decision?
- Who bears the cost?
- What is the effectiveness of existing special places protection?
- The criteria, or, how special is special enough?

Governmental action to identify special places (through zoning and land-use planning processes) provides due process for those affected and may provide compensation or spread the costs equitably. If government actions are perceived as insufficient, however, this can give way to individual and private actions.

Sources: IUCN, 2006; UNEP/WCMC’s *Tree Conservation Information Service* (www.unep-wcmc.org/trees/trade/40_species_in_trade.htm); Gordon et al., 2005.



Table 5. Definitions related to special places

A variety of definitions for special places have been proposed by different stakeholders in different places.

Developed by	Definition	Characteristics
Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE)	AZE sites (AZE, 2007)	Focus on sites in most urgent need of conservation to prevent species extinctions. Priority sites must meet the three following requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endangerment – at least one endangered or critically endangered species listed by IUCN. • Irreplaceability – the area contains the overwhelmingly significant known resident population of the endangered or critically endangered species, or it contains the overwhelmingly significant known population for one life history segment of the species. • Discreteness – the area has a definable boundary within which the habitats, biological communities, and/or management issues have more in common with each other than they do with those adjacent areas.
American Tree Farm System (ATFS)	Special sites (AFF, 2004)	Sites of special interest because of their recreational, historical, biological, archaeological and geological features.
Conservation International	Biodiversity hotspots (Conservation International, 2007)	Hotspots are priority global areas for conservation. Hotspots are characterized by exceptional levels of plant endemism (at least 1,500 species of vascular plants) and by serious levels of habitat loss (lost at least 70% of its original habitat). Worldwide, 34 biodiversity hotspots have been identified. Collectively, these hotspots are estimated to house high levels of biodiversity, including at least 150,000 plant species as endemics and 77% of the world's total terrestrial vertebrate species.
Conservation International	Major tropical wilderness areas (Mittermeier et al., 2001)	A complementary concept to the biodiversity hotspots, the major tropical wilderness areas have high diversity and endemism, low human population density, and remain largely intact.
Birdlife International, Conservation International, and Plantlife International	Key biodiversity areas (Eken et al., 2004)	Building on the concept of hotspots, Conservation International is leading an effort to map and identify key biodiversity areas. These are globally important sites that are large enough or sufficiently interconnected to support viable populations of the species for which they are important. The definition is based on four criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally threatened species • Restricted-range species • Congregations of species that concentrate at particular sites during some stage in their life cycle • Biome-restricted species assemblages The first criterion addresses vulnerability of species, while the other three cover different aspects of irreplaceability. Key biodiversity areas can be within biodiversity hotspots.
Finnish Forest Certification System	Key biotopes (Mikkela et al., 2001; FFCS, 1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites designed for protection under the Finnish Nature Conservation Act such as wild woods rich in broad-leaved deciduous species, hazel woods, Juniper and wooded meadows. • Habitats recognized as especially valuable under the Finnish Forest Act, such as the surroundings of springs and streams, hardwood spruce swamps, and heath land forest islets on undrained wetlands. • Additional habitats such as old-growth conifer forests, mixed forests and broad-leaved forests, and forest meadows in traditional landscapes. • Small water biotopes listed in the Finnish Water Act.
ForestEthics, Natural Resources Defense Council, Rainforest Action Network, Greenpeace	Endangered forests (Forest Ethics et al., 2006)	Forests that require protection from intensive industrial use in order to maintain their outstanding ecological values. Endangered forests include: forests that maintain landscape integrity; rare forest types; forests with high species richness; forests with a high concentration of rare, endangered and endemic species; forests that provide core habitat for focal species; and forests that exhibit rare ecological and evolutionary phenomena. Endangered forests are identified as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilderness forests and intact forest landscapes • Remnant forests and forests with restoration values • Forests ecologically critical for the protection of biological diversity, such as naturally rare forest types, high endemism, or the habitat of focal conservation species
FSC	High conservation value forests (HCVF) (FSC, 1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forests that contain globally, regionally, or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values • Globally, regionally, or nationally significant large landscape-level forests • Rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems • Forest areas providing basic services of nature in critical situations • Forest areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities • Forest areas critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity
Greenpeace/WRI	Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) (Greenpeace, 2006)	Intact Forest Landscapes are landscapes larger than 500 km ² that are not fragmented by infrastructure, such as roads, settlements, waterways, pipelines, power lines, etc. These tracts are located within the forest vegetation zone and are mostly forested but also contain swamps and other non-forested ecosystems that are without significant visible signs of human impact such as logging, burning or other forms of forest clearing.
Natura Networking Programme	Natura 2000 Sites (Natura Networking Programme, 2007; European Commission, 2003)	A network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in the European Union. SPAs are for the protection and management of areas important for rare and vulnerable birds as specified by the EU Parliament Birds Directive while SACs are areas established for the protection and management of rare and vulnerable animal and plant species, and habitats, as specified by the EU Parliament Habitats Directive. Among other things, the Birds Directive seeks to conserve, maintain or restore the biotopes and habitats of all bird species naturally living in the wild in the European Union (European Union, 2006). The Habitats Directive includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural habitats in danger of disappearance in their natural range • Those having small natural range following their regression or by reason of their intrinsically restricted area • Those presenting outstanding examples of typical characteristics of more of the following biogeographical regions: Alpine, Atlantic, Continental, Macronesian and Mediterranean (European Union, 2007)
SFI	Forests with exceptional conservation value (FECV) (SFB, 2004)	Globally threatened or rare forests, with high levels of endemism, or that have little human intervention; forests containing high biodiversity value, unique or rare forest communities, viable populations of rare individual plant and animal species.
Wildlife Conservation Society	Last of the wild (Sanderson et al., 2002)	The largest, least influenced areas around the world where the full range of nature may still exist with a minimum of conflict with existing human structures. The last of the wild were identified based on an assessment of the human footprint, which compiles the following types of data as proxies for human influence: population density, land transformation, accessibility, and electrical power infrastructure.
World Bank	Critical forests (World Bank, 2002B)	Critical forest areas are the subset of natural forest lands that cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing protected areas and areas officially proposed by governments as protected areas, areas initially recognized as protected by traditional local communities, and sites that maintain conditions vital for the viability of these protected areas. • Sites identified as recognized by traditional local communities; areas with known high suitability for biodiversity conservation; and sites that are critical for rare, vulnerable, migratory, or endangered species.
WRI	Frontier forests (Bryant et al., 1997)	Relatively undisturbed large tracts of forests are capable of sustaining viable populations of all native species.
WWF	Global 200 (WWF, 2007)	Outstanding and representative eco-regions of each major habitat type in the world based on their biodiversity patterns and degree of threat. Global 200 harbor globally important biodiversity and ecological processes and represent the world's most outstanding examples within each major habitat type.

	Management preferences outlined	Notes
	Management for conservation.	A global joint initiative of 52 biodiversity conservation organizations. Alliance members include BirdLife International, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Wildlife Fund US. 595 sites around the world have been identified to protect 794 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and conifers.
	To the extent practicable, management practices should protect these sites.	Special sites can be identified directly on the ground by landowner and an ATFS inspection forester.
	Conservation can be carried out through a variety of approaches including the establishment of protected areas and the implementation of economic alternatives.	Conservation outcomes identified for individual hotspots are defined through regional-scale planning processes; maps of biodiversity hotspots and species databases are available at www.biodiversityhotspots.org .
	Conservation can be carried out through large-scale conservation set-asides.	Include the Guyana Shield region (Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana, Venezuela and adjacent parts of Brazil), the upper Amazonian (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia); a substantial portion of the Congolese forests block/Congo River Basin in Central Africa; and most of the island of New Guinea and adjacent smaller Melanesian islands (Solomon Islands, New Britain, New Ireland and Vanuatu).
	Conservation of the sites to reduce global biodiversity loss.	Groups identifying these areas include: Birdlife International (Europe, Middle East, Africa); Plantlife International and Dutch Dragonfly Conservation (Europe); IUCN and Alliance for Zero Extinction (global); and Conservation International (Andes and Africa). More details at www.plantlife.org.uk
	Key biotopes are to be left in their natural state and only subject to gentle management operations.	Guidelines for assessing and protecting key biotopes have been produced (Korpela, 2004); key biotopes have been identified by different stakeholders.
	No intensive industrial activities or extraction. "No-go" zones. Endangered forests are defined as a subset of HCVFs due to their outstanding ecological values.	ForestEthics and its partners are working to define and map endangered forests of the world. The definition is meant to compliment certification of logging operations under FSC (www.forestethics.org).
	Management to maintain or enhance features of these forests.	A variety of tools have been developed to assist identifying these sites including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a toolkit (www.proforest.net) • a resource network (www.hcvf.org) • a sourcebook (www.proforest.net) There are various efforts to identify HCVFs in Indonesia, Russia, Romania and other countries.
	Management for conservation of biological diversity.	Maps of Intact Forest Landscapes for northern forests are available (globalforestwatch.org), as well as draft maps for other forest biomes (intactforests.org).
	Appropriate economic activity to maintain or improve the conservation status of Natura 2000 Sites is allowed. Member states identify and propose a list of sites for their territory and are in charge of managing these sites. Management can include strictly protection and sustainable management.	Natura 2000 Sites are identified and proposed by countries. For each site, national governments submit standard information describing the site and its ecology, this information is to be validated by the European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation. A complete GIS database of Nature 2000 Sites will be built after compilation and validation. Detailed information and maps can be obtained directly from the national governments. Links to governmental institutions with information can be found at www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature
	Managed in a way that protects their unique qualities and promotes conservation of biodiversity.	FECVs are identified with assistance from information provided by NatureServe in the US and Canada. Outside North America, these areas can be identified in base of biodiversity hotspots and other important areas in the tropics.
	These areas are a guide to opportunities for effective conservation.	569 places have been identified. Maps are available at www.ciesin.columbia.edu/wild_areas/
	Definition is for internal purposes. The Bank would not finance projects that would involve significant conversion or degradation of critical forest areas.	Critical forests are identified by the Bank or an authoritative source determined by the regional environment sector unit.
	No management preferences outlined.	Maps available at www.globalforestwatch.org
	Primary objective is to promote their conservation.	Maps available at www.worldwildlife.org . WWF also uses the HCVF concept to define special places at a more local scale.

SELECTED RESOURCES: SPECIAL PLACES

Procurement requirements

Danish Government Procurement Policy for Tropical Forests (under review)	Draft criteria includes seven thematic elements against which SFM should be addressed; one of these elements is the protection and maintenance of biodiversity, conservation/set aside of key ecosystems or habitats and protection of features and species of outstanding or exceptional value.
Timber Trade Federation Responsible Purchasing Policy	Members must not trade wood from forests where high conservation value is threatened by management activities.
FSC Controlled-Wood Standard	Requires that wood harvesting not threaten high conservation value forests. Evidence of compliance is required.
PEFC Guide for the avoidance of controversial timber	Requires that wood harvesting not occur in forest areas protected by law. Wood harvesting is also prohibited in forest areas designated by government authorities for future legal protection.
SFI Procurement Objective	For the US and Canada, requires that participants' procurement policies promote conservation of biological diversity, critical wildlife habitat, threatened, endangered, imperiled, and critically imperiled species. Outside North America, procurement policies are expected to promote the conservation of biodiversity hotspots and major tropical wilderness areas.

Resources to assess requirements

CPET	Addresses issues of special places to the degree they are incorporated in requirements of certification standards for sustainability.
FCAG	Includes provisions regarding the establishment of plantations, the conversion or loss of critical natural habitats, the mitigation of environmental impacts to conserve biological diversity and other ecosystem services, and the maintenance of critical forest areas and other critical natural habitats.
Good Wood. Good Business guide	Provides an overview of unwanted wood, includes wood from high conservation value forests, endangered forests, and others.
EPAT®	Includes special places to the degree they are addressed by FSC, SFI, Canadian Standard Association for SFM, PEFC, and other national and international certification systems. Upcoming EPAT upgrade adds a scale to assess the extent to which suppliers are identifying and managing sensitive forest fiber. Sensitive forest fiber takes into account ecological and cultural values such as biodiversity aspects, ecosystem services, subsistence and cultural values.
WWF GFTN	Provides overview information about high conservation value forests, and advice on options to address sourcing from these areas.
WWF Tissue Scoring	Rates whether companies have a policy to eliminate all raw materials from controversial sources including forests of high biodiversity value.
WWF Paper Scorecard	Provides safeguards to avoid potential inclusion of unwanted sources of fiber, in line with FSC Controlled-Wood Standard.
WWF Guide to buying paper	Promotes the avoidance of illegal and other unacceptable sources. Promotes forest certification as a means to avoid sourcing raw materials harvested from high conservation value forests.