



High Conservation Value Resource Network Charter

Version 3 – May 2010

Mission

The mission of the HCV Resource Network is to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of critical social and environmental values of forests and other ecosystems as part of responsible land management, and to advance locally adaptable management strategies through the development and use of the high conservation value (HCV) approach (as defined below in the Network's guiding principles).

To achieve its mission the Network will seek to promote:

- cooperation between organisations, individuals and institutions using the HCV approach;
- cooperation between the HCV approach and other conservation approaches and processes;
- best practice in the use of the HCV approach to maintain the credibility of the concept;
- local level and pluralistic approaches to the implementation of the HCV approach;
- comparability between different types of HCV assessments;
- initiatives to further develop and improve the HCV approach.

Structure

The HCV Resource Network is a voluntary association of individuals, organisations and institutions who share a broad vision and the principles set out in this Charter, relating to the definition, identification and management of high conservation value forests and other ecosystems within the matrix of conservation and sustainable land use.

Anyone is welcome to use the information and resources of the Network and participate in activities such as training and capacity building or discussion groups. Direct participation in Network-development activities such as membership of the Steering Group or Working Groups, development of the HCV approach, and resolution of conflicts is open to those who agree to this Charter.¹

The Network structure involves the following:

Steering Group: The Resource Network will be overseen by a Steering Group made up of representatives of the users of the Network. The Steering Group will be responsible for determining its own membership in the spirit of maintaining a balance of regional and stakeholder perspectives.

Secretariat: Management of the day-to-day activities of the Network will be undertaken by a Secretariat which will be overseen by the Steering Group. Where appropriate, the Secretariat will provide support to Technical Panel Regional Partners, Working Groups and the Steering Group.

¹ Implementation of the Charter is made on a voluntary basis, in line with companies' obligations under anti-trust laws.

Technical Panel: A panel of HCV experts and practitioners will be maintained, whose role is to provide an element of quality control and governance for the use of the HCV concept, e.g. by undertaking peer reviews of specific HCV assessments or uses, providing recommendations on the use of the HCV concept, playing a leading role in the development of the HCV concept, and informing the Steering Group of important developments in the use of the HCV concept as these arise.

Regional Partner: A series of regional partners will be identified in different areas to provide the local representation of the Network and undertake activities such as local networking and co-ordination, provision of information in local languages and development of local interpretations of the HCV approach.

Participants: Participants are individuals, organisations and institutions that have agreed to support the Network's charter.

Discussion Groups: Where there is a need to discuss issues Discussion Groups open to anyone will be used.

Working Groups: Where issues need to be addressed, Working Groups will be convened made up of technical experts who are Network participants.

Charter: The Charter sets out the mission, structure and guiding principles of the Network and is subject to periodic review by the Steering Group in consultation with participants.

Website, information line and mailing list: Virtual electronic tools will be the main means of delivery of the core activities of the Network, including the provision, exchange and dissemination of information, training and technical assistance in the development and use of the HCV approach.

Guiding Principles

All participants of the Network agree to the following:

High Conservation Value areas are critical areas in a landscape which need to be appropriately managed in order to maintain or enhance High Conservation Values (HCVs). There are six main types of HCV area, based on the definition originally developed by the Forest Stewardship Council for certification of forest ecosystems.

HCV1. Areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values (e.g. endemism, endangered species, refugia).

HCV2. Globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape-level areas where viable populations of most if not all naturally occurring species exist in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.

HCV3. Areas that are in or contain rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems.

HCV4. Areas that provide basic ecosystem services in critical situations (e.g. watershed protection, erosion control).

HCV5. Areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities (e.g. subsistence, health).

HCV6. Areas critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity (areas of cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance identified in cooperation with such local communities).

The HCV approach, which is now being expanded to other ecosystems and applied by other certification systems, should always involve:

- Assessment of the presence or absence of all six HCVs (where studies only address some HCVs, it should be explicitly stated which HCVs were analysed and made clear that it was a partial HCV analysis)
- Analysis of the context including existing protection of, and threats to, the identified HCVs.
- Identification of the location and relevant management regimes for the HCV areas required to maintain or enhance the identified HCVs.
- Development and implementation of a monitoring programme to assess how well the values are being maintained or enhanced.

The assessment process to be followed should be:

- Knowledge-based, incorporating and using all relevant scientific data and local knowledge. Where significant gaps in existing information are identified, data should be collected or the precautionary approach, commensurate with the degree of risk, should be followed.
- Participatory and inclusive, ensuring that relevant stakeholders are consulted and their views or the information they provide is incorporated into the process and that appropriate existing initiatives are engaged wherever possible.
- Open and transparent including peer reviews of findings and public reporting of outcomes.

Additionally a framework should be applied (see Annex 1) to address issues identified during, but not dealt with as part of, the core HCV assessment, and also to support the use of the HCV approach outside the certification context for which it was originally developed.

The Resource Network recognizes that all natural ecosystems, including those not identified as HCV areas, have environmental and social values, such as carbon storage and sequestration, water supply stabilization, biodiversity conservation, etc. The focus of the Resource Network on High Conservation Values and HCV areas must not lead to the devaluation of other areas, nor undermine the goal of substantially reducing and eventually reversing rates of degradation and conversion of natural ecosystems.

Participants will seek and support continuous improvement in the application of HCV approach.

Annex 1: Principles of Application for the use of the HCV approach within responsible land management

In addition to its guiding principles, the HCV Resource Network recommends that:

- The following Principles of Application are integrated into land use planning and management plans² and activities, in order to contribute to responsible land use and to maintain and enhance HCVs.
- Wherever practicable, there should be meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders and rights-holders.
- Peer reviews of HCV assessments should check that credible efforts have been made to apply these Principles of Application.
- Where relevant, certification systems should take into account these Principles of Application.
- These Principles of Application should be applied to the full range of the HCV Resource Network's advisory and review functions.

Principles of Application for the HCV approach:

Legality

- There is compliance with all applicable international, national and local laws.

Secure tenure, customary rights and consent

- The right to use the land can be demonstrated, and is not legitimately contested by local communities with demonstrable rights.
- Use or management of the land does not diminish the legal rights, or customary rights, of indigenous peoples, local communities or other users, without their free, prior and informed consent.

Conversion

- Areas necessary at the site and landscape scale to maintain or enhance HCVs shall not be converted.
- The absence of HCVs, and the application of the HCV approach, shall not be used as sufficient justification for conversion of natural ecosystems.
- Conversion of non-HCV natural ecosystems must result in net gain³ identified and documented through a rigorous, fair and balanced multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Other Environmental and Biodiversity Values

- Biodiversity and environmental values which do not meet HCV criteria should be taken into account through responsible land use management.

² Management plans may vary according to scale and intensity of operation, e.g. the written plans of large organisations or the customary norms and informal rules of local communities and indigenous peoples.

³ Net Gain: the balance of benefits resulting from proposed land use development outweighs the combined economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts of converting non-HCV areas.