

Mission

The mission of the HCV Resource Network is to maintain and enhance 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 and individuals using the HCV approach;
- Promote cooperation between the HCV approach and other conservation approaches and processes;
- Promote best practice in the use of the HCV approach to maintain the credibility of the concept;
- Support local level and pluralistic approaches to the implementation of the HCV approach;
- Ensure comparability between different types of HCV assessments;
- Catalyse initiatives to further develop and improve the HCV approach.

Structure

The HCV Resource Network is a group of people and organisations who share a broad vision and accept certain 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 abide by this Charter.

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 Regional Partners, Working Groups and the Steering Group.

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 and organisations 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, but now increasingly expanded to apply to assessments of other 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 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 needs to be developed (also see box) which considers issues identified during, but not dealt with as part of, the core HCV assessment. Examples may include: legality; protection of local communities' and indigenous peoples' customary and legal rights and respect for their right to control what happens in their areas; protection of areas from unjustified conversion; and, provision of further environmental safeguards.

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

Safeguard Framework: A number of safeguards need to be developed to support the use of the HCV approach outside the certification context for which it was originally developed. The main issues which have been identified are:

- **Legality:** Legal compliance should be a baseline management requirement for all HCV assessments.
- **Tenure, customary rights and consent procedures:** The issue of tenure, rights and consent is important and delicate and there should be an acceptable degree of commonality in the manner in which HCV assessments address these sensitive issues.
- **Conversion:** Guidance should be developed specifically on the use of the HCV approach within the context of ecosystem conversion.