

UNIQUE FOREST VALUES

Have unique forest values been protected?

Excerpts from the report: *Sustainable Procurement of Wood and Paper-based Products: Guide and Resource Kit*

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

What is a unique forest value?

There is no universally agreed upon definition of a unique forest value. Existing definitions combine scientific and political dimensions through different features. Some unique forest values include:

Biological, ecological and landscape features

- Species richness and endemism: number of species within a given area, species found exclusively in the location
- Rarity: species and/or ecosystems that are naturally rare
- Significant ecological or evolutionary processes such as key breeding areas, migration routes, etc.

Conservation features

- Threatened species and species decline: species that have been identified as threatened or endangered, or species whose populations have undergone significant decline recently
- 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

Ecosystem services

- Forests that supply basic and/or critical services such as watershed protection, erosion control, and fire/flood control among others

Cultural, livelihood, historical and spiritual features

- Religious, historical and archaeological sites
- Forests significant to the traditional cultural identity of a local community, or forests critical to maintaining local peoples’ livelihoods



Sources: IUCN, 2006; UNEP/WCMC's Tree Conservation Information Service; Gordon et al., 2005.

The most critical and controversial issues around identifying forests with unique values have been:

- What process is used to define, identify and map forests with unique values?
- What, and how fair and effective, is the process to make and implement the decision?
- Who bears the cost?
- What is the effectiveness protection of forests with unique values?

Different stakeholders have developed different definitions of unique forest values (e.g. Biodiversity Hotspots, Endangered Forests, Forests of Exceptional Conservation Value, High Conservation Value Forests, Intact Forest Landscapes, etc.). 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 unique forests which include:

- Precautionary management – ensuring that unique forest 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.
- Conservation management – managing to retain or enhance the ecological and biological values, which may or may not include timber harvesting.

The diversity of definitions 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 unique forest values.

Factors to Consider Regarding Unique Forest Values

- There might be many small players involved (e.g., small landowners) who need to be considered and consulted in the identification of unique forest values because they may be affected out of proportion to their size
- If demand for forest products is removed from an area, landowners are likely to find other sources of revenue from the land, including converting forests to other uses.

Some companies have used the following steps to overcome potential issues around unique forest values:

- 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 forests with unique values.
- Pursuit of legal opportunities to protect forests with unique values by encouraging land transfers to conservation organizations or establishing conservation easements.

For more information on these issues and to download a copy of the guide, Sustainable Procurement of Wood and Paper-based Products: Guide and Resource Kit, visit www.sustainableforestproducts.org.

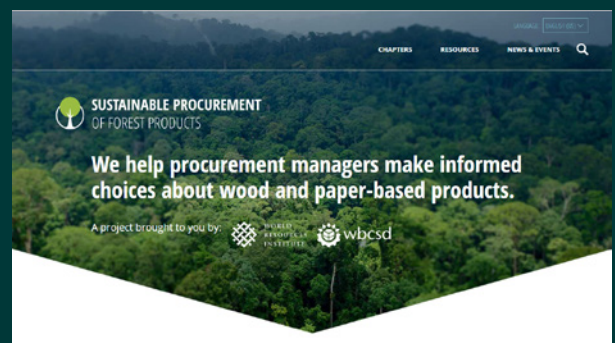
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