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PEFC-RO ST 8010:2024 – v3

Group forest management certification – Requirements

National Standard for Forest Management

PEFC Romania
Email: office@pefc.ro
www.pefc.ro

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Foreword

PEFC, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, is a global organization that promotes sustainable forest management through forest certification and labeling of forest products. Products bearing a PEFC claim and/or label indication shall ensure that the raw materials used in their manufacture come from sustainably managed forests and areas with trees outside forests (TOFs), from recycled and controlled sources.

The PEFC Council approves national and regional forest certification schemes that comply with the requirements of the PEFC Council. The systems shall be subject to periodic assessments.

This document has been prepared using an open, transparent, consultative and consensus-based process and involving a wide range of stakeholders.

PEFC is committed to compliance with standards and procedures developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

The PEFC supports gender equality. Therefore, every term in this standard that refers to a specific person (e.g., manager, owner, participant) includes women and men similarly, without additional emphasis.

This document supersedes and replaces the 2017 version of the PEFC Romania requirements for certification of a group's forest management (PEFC DST 8010:2017).

Introduction

Group certification provides an incentive for forest properties, depending on their existing structure, to set up forestry associations to strengthen their capacity. The group, originally designed for certification, can develop further joint activities (e.g. promotion and education) presenting itself as a productive organization.

Group certification is an alternative approach to individual certification, which allows forest owners and managers to become voluntarily certified under a single certificate and share the financial obligations arising from forest certification as well as shared responsibility for forest management. This approach aims to improve the dissemination of information and cooperation in forest management between individual forest owners and managers.

The limitations on individual forestry certification and the resulting procedures for group certification shall not lead to a lower level of compliance with PEFC requirements for sustainable forest management.

1. Application

This document defines forest certification requirements, which include group certification of forest management and allow certification of a number of forest owners/managers under a single certificate.

Group forest management certification requires the establishment of a specific management structure that includes individual forest owners/managers. This entity represents individual owners/managers in forest certification to ensure the correct implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and to provide confidence in sampling-based certification activities.
Forest owners, organizations of forest owners (e.g. forest associations) or forest managers with the forest area under their management may form a group.
The forest area of such persons or organizations forming a group shall be clearly and definitively demarcated.
In principle, the entire forest area, which is managed by an individual or organization that is part of the group, will be included in the forest area of the group.

2. Normative references

PEFC-RO ST 8000:2024, PEFC Romania Sustainable Forest Management Certification Scheme

PEFC-RO ST 8012:2024 Requirements for Certification Bodies operating certification for forest management

PEFC-RO ST 8001:2024 Criteria and Indicators

3. Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given by ISO/IEC Guide 2 as well as by PEFC-RO ST 8000:2024 shall apply together with the following definitions.

3.1 Certified area

Forest area covered by a sustainable forest management system according to the PEFC Sustainable Forest Management standard (PEFC-RO ST 8000).
In the context of group certification, the certified area is the sum of the forest areas of the participants and covered by a group forest certificate.

3.2 Documented information

Information to be controlled and maintained by an organization using any format and media, from any source.

3.3 Document confirming participation in group forest certification

A document issued to a participant that refers to the group forest certificate and that confirms the participant as being covered by the scope of the group forest certification.

Note: This document may be for instance a sub-certificate or a confirmation of participation.

3.4 Participant

A forest owner/manager or other entity covered by the group certificate, who has the legal right to manage forest in a well-defined forest area and the ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard in that area.
Note 1: The term " ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management " requires the entity to have a long-term legal right to manage the forest and disqualifies occasional contractors from participating in group certification.
Note 2: The relationship between the terms 'group organization', 'group entity' and 'participant' is shown in Figure 1.

3.5 Group administrator

A legal entity that represents the participants, with overall responsibility for ensuring the

conformity of forest management in the certified area to the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system. For this purpose, the group entity is using a group management system.

Note: The structure of the group entity should follow the operations, number of participants and other basic conditions for the group organization. It may be represented by one person.

3.6 Group forest certificate

A document confirming that the group organization complies with the requirements of a sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system.

3.7 Group forest certification

Certification of the group organization under one group forest certificate.

3.8 Group management plan

Documented information specifying objectives, actions and control arrangements. It covers planned changes of the group management system and requirements of the sustainable forest management standard which are covered on group level.

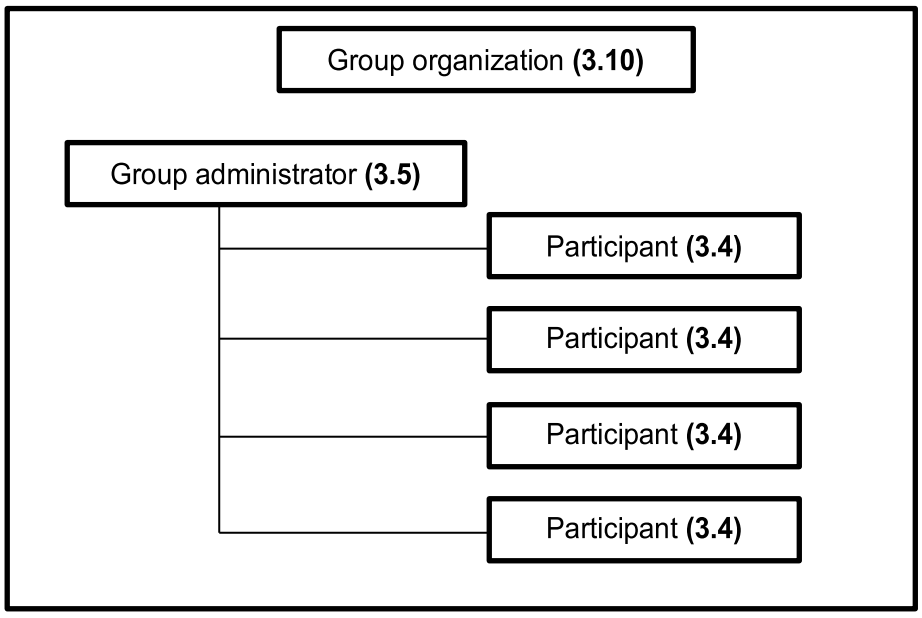
3.9 Group management system

Set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organization to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the sustainable forest management standard.

3.10 Group organization

A group of participants represented by the group entity for the purposes of implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and its certification. A binding written agreement shall be established between a participant and the group entity.

Figure 1: Defining the group entity



3.11 Internal audit

Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled, undertaken by the group organization itself (first party audit).

3.12 Monitoring

Determining the state of a system, process, or activity.

3.13 Organization

Person or group of people who have their own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve their goals.

3.14 Participant

A forest owner/manager or other entity covered by the forest group certificate, who has the legal right to manage forest in a well-defined forest area and the ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard in that area.
Note: The term 'ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard' requires the entity to hold a long-term legal right, land right or traditional or customary land rights for forest management and would disqualify sole contractors from becoming participants in group forest management certification.

3.15 Policy

The intentions and direction of an organization, as formally expressed by its manager/owner or the group administrator.

3.16 Organization with multiple locations

An organization with a single management system comprising an identified central function (hereinafter referred to as “Central Office”) where certification-related processes/activities are planned and controlled and a number of offices or branches where such processes/activities are carried out fully or partially.
An organization with multiple locations needs to be a single legal entity, and all locations shall have a legal or contractual link with the organization's Central Office and be subject to a single management system that is subject to ongoing oversight and internal audits by the Central Office. This means that the Central Office has the right to require locations to implement corrective actions when necessary.
Note 1: Operational control and authority from the organization's top management over each location is exercised through the Central Office.
Note 2: An example of an organization with multiple locations in Romania is the National Forestry Administrator – ROMSILVA – Central Office in Bucharest and Forest Directorates as local branches.
Note 3: organizations with multiple locations are not group organizations, the certificate being an individual one issued for the organization.

4. Context of the group organization

4.1 Understanding the group's organization and its context

Regional or Group Forest Certification is a type of forest certification requested by a group organization, which provides for the voluntary participation of individual forest owners. Given the number of forest owners, their needs and expectations, the dispersion of forest operations, and in order to ensure profitability and non-discrimination, as well as due to the method of collecting and processing data regarding the state of the forests, a group or regional certification system is the preferred choice.
Considering the specified factors, a certification region can be defined, but it can also be divided into several regions or groups of forest owners from different administrative units if this is more suitable for reasons of data collection, non-discrimination rules, or profitability according to a single forest management standard.

4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of affected stakeholders

4.2.1 The organization of the group shall identify:
a) affected stakeholders who are relevant to the group management system, and
b) the relevant expectations of these affected stakeholders.

4.2.2 Based on PEFC Romania regulations and forest management standards in particular, the Group will develop common guiding principles within the Group's management plan.

4.2.3 The elements of the group management plan shall be known to all group members and form part of the contractual arrangements for group membership and be documented and publicly available.

4.2.4 The organization of the group shall establish the limits and applicability of the management system to determine its scope.

4.3 Determining the scope of the group management system

Main goal of forest owners is cost effectiveness of forest certification. Romania has a large number of small-scale forest owners. Group certification provides small forest owners with equal position of selling certified timber at competitive prices. An individual certification may result in discrimination of small forest owners, particularly in higher cost per unit of area compared to large forest owners.
Group organization shall provide written justification for decision of establishment of group certification, scope of the group management system the geographical boundaries and applicability of the group management system.
The scope shall be made available as documented information.

4.4 Group Management System

4.4.1 All participants shall be subject to internal monitoring, and internal audit program.

4.4.2 If a group entity acts as a forest material dealer not covered by the group's certificate, it shall implement the PEFC chain of custody certification.

5. Direction

5.1 Organizational roles, responsibilities and authorities

5.1.1 Functions and responsibilities of the group administrator

The group administrator has the following functions and responsibilities:

a) to implement and maintain an effective management system covering all participants in the group;

b) to represent the group organization in the certification process, including communications and relations with the certification body, submission of an application for certification and contractual relationship with the certification body;

c) to establish written procedures for managing the organization of the group;

d) to establish written procedures for the acceptance of new participants to the group's organization. These acceptance procedures shall include at least verification of the applicant's contact information on contact details, clear identification of the forest property and its size;

e) to establish written procedures for suspending and excluding participants who fail to correct/close non-compliances. Group participants excluded from any certification group on the basis of non-compliances cannot be accepted within 12 months of exclusion;

f) to keep documented information about:

   i. compliance of the group administrator and participants with the requirements of the forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system;

   ii. all participants, including their contact details, identification of the forest property and its size;

   iii. the certified area;

   iv. the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its revision and any preventive and/or corrective actions taken;

g) to establish links with all participants on the basis of a binding written agreement including participants' commitment to comply with the forest management standard. The group administrator shall have a written contract or other written agreement with all participants covering the right of the group administrator to implement and enforce compliance with any corrective or preventive measures and to initiate exclusion of any participant from the scope of certification in case of non-compliance with the sustainable forest management standard;

   Note: The requirement for participants' 'written consent' and 'commitment' is also satisfied by the written commitment and consent of a pre-existing organization or group, such as a forest owner/manager association, if the organization can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent participants and if its commitment and terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

h) to provide all participants with a document confirming their participation in the group's forest certification;

i) to provide all participants with the necessary information and support for the effective implementation and maintenance of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system;

j) address nonconformities reported by group members that have been identified during PEFC certifications other than group specific certification and ensure implementation with all group members;

k) operate an internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the participants

conformity with the certification requirements;

l) to operate an annual internal audit programme covering both group members and group administrator;

m) to operate a management review of the group forest certification and acting on the results from the review;

n) to provide full cooperation and assistance to respond effectively to all requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or PEFC Romania for data, documentation or other relevant information; allowing access to the forest area covered by the group organization and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews, or otherwise related to or with implications for the management system.

5.1.2 Function and responsibilities of participants

Participants have the following functions and responsibilities:

a) to provide the group entity with a binding written agreement, including a commitment on conformity with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system; group participants excluded from any certification group cannot apply for group membership within 12 months after exclusion;

Note: The requirement for participants' 'written consent' and 'commitment' is also satisfied by the written commitment and consent of a pre-existing organization or group, such as a forest owner/manager association, if the organization can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent participants and if its commitment and terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

b) to provide the group manager with information about previous group participation;

c) to comply with the forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system as well as with the requirements of the management system;

d) to provide full cooperation and assistance to respond effectively to all requests from the group administrator or certification body for data, documentation or other relevant information; allowing access to the forest and other facilities, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews, or otherwise related to or with implications for the management system;

e) to inform the group administrator about nonconformities identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification;

f) implement relevant corrective and preventive actions set out by the group administrator.

5.2 Commitment and policy

5.2.1 The group administrator shall provide a commitment to:

a) comply with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system;

b) integrate group certification requirements into the group management system;

c) continuously improve the group management system;

d) continuously support the improvement of forest management management by participants.

5.2.2 The group administrator commitment may form part of a group management policy and, upon request, shall be made publicly available in the form of documented information.

5.2.3 Participants shall provide a commitment to:

a) follow the rules of the management system;

b) implement the requirements of the sustainability standard in operations in their area.

6. Planning

6.1 Where a group organization plans any changes to the group management system, those changes shall be included in the group management plan.

6.2 Where a group organization decides to meet the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard at group level, these requirements shall be considered in a group management plan.

7. Support

7.1 The group administrator shall determine, and participants shall provide, the necessary resources for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continuous improvement of the group management system.

7.2 Persons working in the group management system shall have the necessary knowledge of forestry as well as sufficient knowledge of the forest management standard and other relevant requirements of sustainable forest management certification of PEFC Romania.

7.3 The group administrator shall ensure that communication processes are in place to raise participants' awareness of:

a) group management policy;

b) requirements of the sustainable forest management standard;

c) their contribution to the effectiveness of the group's management system and to sustainable forest management, including the benefits of improving group performance;

d) the implications of non-compliance with the requirements of the group management system.

7.4 The group administrator shall determine and manage relevant internal and external communication and use appropriate tools for information exchange. These include:

a) What to communicate
b) When to communicate
c) Who they shall communicate with
d) How to communicate

7.5 The group administrator shall develop and implement appropriate mechanisms for resolving complaints and disputes related to group management and forest management operations.

7.6 The documented information relevant to the group management system and compliance with the requirements of the forest management standard shall be:

a) up to date;

b) available and suitable for use, where and when it is needed;

c) adequately protected against loss of confidentiality, misuse or loss of integrity.

8. Operation

8.1 The group administrator shall plan, implement, and control the processes necessary to:

a) meet the requirements of the Group Certification Standard and the Sustainable Forest Management Standard, and

b) implement the actions set out in chapter 6.

8.2 Such planning, implementation and control shall be carried out through:

a) defining the necessary processes and establishing criteria for them;

b) implementation of process control in accordance with the criteria;

c) keeping documents so that it can be trusted that processes have been carried out as planned.

9. Performance evaluation

9.1 Monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation

9.1.1 The group administrator shall implement an internal monitoring program to measure and analyze its compliance with this standard and the PEFC-RO ST 8000:2024 sustainable forest management standard.

9.1.2 An internal continuous monitoring program provides confidence in the compliance of the group's organization with the forest management standard. In particular, it shall establish:
a) what is to be monitored and measured;
b) the methods of monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation methods, as appropriate, to ensure valid results;
c) when monitoring and measurement is carried out;
d) when the results from monitoring and measurement shall be analyzed and evaluated;
e) what documented information shall be available as evidence of the results.

9.1.3 The internal monitoring programme shall assess annually the following elements:

a) compliance with the Sustainable Forest Management Standard (PEFC-RO ST 8000) and other relevant requirements of the PEFC Romania certification system.

b) compliance with legal requirements for forest management (in particular the current Forest Code).

c) the activities of the group organization or individual participants with regard to the fulfilment of the requirements of the national group certification standard and their own requirements for the group management system and its actual introduction and maintenance;

9.1.4 The following activities may be elements of an internal monitoring programme:

a) assessment using an internal inspection/review or quality management system or

participant control;

b) internal on-site inspections carried out or commissioned by the group organization;
c) independent third-party evaluations of participants;
d) assessments carried out by forestry associations;
e) other independent assessments of participants' compliance with PEFC requirements.

9.1.5 The group administrator shall assess the performance of the group management and the effectiveness of the group management system in implementing sustainable forest management requirements.

9.2 Internal audit

9.2.1 Objectives

9.2.1.1 The annual internal audit programme shall provide information on whether the group management system:

a) comply

i. the group organization's own requirements for its group management system;

ii. the requirements of the national group certification standard;

b) ensures the implementation of the sustainable forest management standard at participant level;

c) is effectively implemented and maintained.

9.2.1.2 The internal audit programme shall cover the group administrator and all participants in the group. The group administrator shall be audited annually. Participants can be selected on a sample basis.

Note: For group organizations with up to and including 10 participants, all participants shall be verified.

9.2.2 Organization

9.2.2.1 The group administrator shall define and implement the internal monitoring programme. It shall include at least:

a) planning, establishing, implementing and maintaining an audit programme(s) including the frequency, methods, responsibilities, planning requirements and reporting, which shall take into consideration the importance of the processes concerned and the results of previous audits;
b) definition of the audit criteria and scope for each audit;
c) competence of internal auditor (forest knowledge, standard knowledge);
d) selection of auditors and conducting of audits to ensure objectivity and the impartiality of the audit process;
e) ensuring that the results of the audits are reported to relevant group management;
f) retaining of the documented information as evidence of the implementation of the audit programme and the audit results.

9.2.2.2 Persons carrying out an internal monitoring programme should be qualified foresters (minimum secondary education) who have sufficient knowledge of the forest management standard and other relevant forest management certification requirements of PEFC Romania.

9.3 Selection of participants in the internal audit program

9.3.1 Determination of sample size

9.3.1.1 The sample size shall be calculated taking into account all participants in the group's organization.

9.3.1.2 The sample size shall be:

a) square root of number of participants: ($y = \sqrt{x}$), rounded to the upper whole number in case of first assessment

b) If previous inspections have proven effective in meeting the targets, the sample size may be reduced to $y=0,6\sqrt{x}$, rounded up to the next integer.

c) Participants not included in previous audits shall preferably be included to ensure the widest possible coverage of audits during the certification period.

d) In case of participation in pre-existing organizations or group or the members participation, such as a forest owners/managers association shall be additionally sampled. The square root formula shall be used in steps for total number of forest owners/managers covered by the group certificate and for number of participants. The first result shall be divided proportionally to the participants number from the second result. During the period of the certificate, each participant shall be audited at least once.
Note: Example
Group composed by 5 participants associations of owners/managers with 6,9,16,16 and 17 members.
Calculation:
6+9+16+16+17= 64 total members
$\sqrt{5}$=2,2 rounded up to 3
$\sqrt{64}$=8 members to be audited from 3 participants.

9.3.1.3 The sample size may be adapted taking into account one or more of the following indicators:

a) the results of a risk assessment. In this case, deviations of sample sizes in case of low or high risk shall be defined for individual categories;

b) results of previous internal or certification audits;

c) quality/confidence level of the internal monitoring programme;

d) use of technologies that allow the collection of information on specified requirements;

Note: Such technologies can be, for example, the use of satellite data, drones or LIDAR technology and allow declarations of conformity for specific requirements of a sustainability standard or support risk-based sampling.

e) on the basis of other means of collecting information on activities carried out on the ground.

Note: One way could be a survey with participants who provide some information about their activities on the ground.

9.3.2 Determination of sample categories

9.3.2.1 The categories of samples shall be established on the basis of the results of a risk assessment. The indicators used in the risk assessment reflect the geographical scope of the standard. The following non-exhaustive list of indicators may be used for risk assessment:

a) type of property (e.g. state forest, UAT-owned forest, private forest);

b) size of management units (different size classes);

c) geographical region (e.g. plains, hills, low mountain ranges, high mountain ranges);

d) operations, processes and products of potential participants in the group;

e) deforestation and forest conversion;

f) rotation period(s);

g) richness of biological diversity;

h) recreation and other socio-economic functions of the forest;

i) dependence on and interaction with local communities;

j) resources available for administration, operations, training and research;

k) governance and law enforcement.

9.3.2.2 The conditions constituting risk for each low, medium and high indicator and the respective consequences for sampling shall be defined.

9.3.3 Sample distribution

The sample shall be distributed to categories according to the outcome of the risk assessment.

9.3.4 Selection of participants

9.3.4.1 At least 25 % of the sample should be selected randomly.

9.3.4.2 A risk-based procedure shall be specified for the selection of participants.

9.4 Analysis by the group administrator

9.4.1 The annual review by the group administrator shall include at least:

a) the status of actions in previous reviews;

b) changes in external and internal aspects that are relevant to the group's management system;

c) the status of compliance with the sustainable forest management standard, which includes review of the results of the internal monitoring programme, internal audit and evaluations and supervision of the certification body;

d) information on the group's performance, including trends in:

   i. non-conformities and corrective actions;

   ii. monitoring and measurement results;

   iii. audit results;

e) opportunities for continuous improvement.

9.4.2 The results of the analysis carried out by the group administrator shall include decisions related to opportunities for continuous improvement and any need to changes to the group management system.

9.4.3 The group administrator shall keep documented information as evidence of the results of the analyses carried out.

10. Improvement

10.1 Non-compliance and corrective measures

10.1.1 When a non-compliance occurs, the group organization shall:

a) react to non-compliance and, where appropriate:
   i. take measures to control and correct it;
   ii. cope with the consequences;

b) assess the need for action to eliminate the causes of non-compliance, so that it does not recur or occur elsewhere, by:
   i. review of non-compliance;
   ii. determining the causes of non-compliance;
   iii. determining whether similar non-compliances exist or could occur;

c) implement any necessary action;

d) review the effectiveness of any corrective actions taken;

e) make changes to the group management system, if necessary.

10.1.2 The group organization shall maintain documented information as proof of:

a) the nature of the non-conformities and any follow-up action taken;

b) the results of any corrective action.

10.1.3 A participant who has been excluded from a group certification shall be internally audited by the group administrator before being allowed to re-enter the group certification. Internal audit shall not take place earlier than 12 months after exclusion.

10.2 Continuous improvement

Adequacy and effectiveness of the group management system and sustainable forest management will be continuously improved.

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