

**PEFC Standard**

**PEFC EST 1002:2022**

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**Group Forest Management Certification – Requirements**



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**Estonian Forest Certification Council**

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## Foreword

PEFC (the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) is an international forest certification system promoting ecologically, socially, economically and culturally sustainable forest management through forest management certification, chain of custody certification and labelling of forest-based products originating from certified forests.

Forest certification offers assurances of sustainable management and use of forests. The PEFC certificate supports the goals of the society related to sustainable use of forests and provides citizens with a wide range of opportunities to enjoy the forest. PEFC guarantees businesses and consumers the responsible origin of forest products.

Estonian Forest Certification Council promotes and manages PEFC certification in Estonia and organises the development of the sustainable forest management standard using an open, transparent, consultative and consensus-based process involving stakeholders.

## Introduction

PEFC recognizes national and regional sustainable forest management certification schemes. Forests in different regions and countries differ in their ecological, social and historical conditions. Therefore, the PEFC standard enables to adapt the national and regional forest certification schemes to local conditions.

In Estonia, a significant part of the forest belongs to small forest owners. The limited capacities and resources of owners of such small forest holdings represent significant barriers to forest certification. Factors including but not limited to the periodicity of their management activities and revenues, the low intensity, small scale and low frequency of operations, limited access to information, technical support and knowledge limit access and participation of small holdings and ownerships in forest management certification.

Group certification is an alternative approach to individual certification, which is the most suitable approach to forest certification in Estonian context. Group certification allows forest owners and managers to become voluntarily certified under one certificate and share their responsibilities arising from forest certification. This approach aims at improving information dissemination and co-operation in forest management among individual forest owners and managers.

This standard is designed to enable forest owners or holders of different forest management units to participate in certification.

This document replaces the relevant clauses of PEFC EST 2 and PEFC EST 3 with an application date of 16 May 2023 and a transition period until 16 May 2024.

## 1. Scope

The document defines requirements for group forest management certification. Organizations can participate in certification as a group and are issued a group forest management certificate.

For group certification, the group entity creates a management system. The group entity represents and assists organizations in forest certification to ensure compliance with PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard and other requirements of the forest certification scheme.

## 2. Normative references

PEFC EST 1003:2022, *PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard*

PEFC ST 1002:2018, *Group Forest Management Certification – requirements*

## 3. Terms and Definitions

### Forest Certification Scheme

A set of standards of PEFC Estonia. The forest certification scheme includes PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard, Group Certification Standard and PEFC Trademark Standard.

### Affected stakeholder

A group of people directly affected by the activities of both the group entity and the organization.

Stakeholders include: local communities, the staff of the organization, immediate neighbours, regional businesses, government agencies, local authorities, customers and suppliers. (source: Group Forest Management Standard working group)

*Note:* Local communities: local people living in the area bordering or sufficiently adjacent to the certified area, with common forest management objectives and a designated spokesperson (source: PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard Working Group)

### Certification 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. Certification audit is performed by a certification body.

### **Certified area**

The area owned and/or held by the organization subject to compliance with the requirements of the PEFC Standard (source: PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard Working Group).

In the context of group certification the certified area is the total forest area of the organizations participating in certification covered by a group forest certificate.

### **Documented information**

Information required to be available and maintained by a group entity and/or an organization to ensure the carrying out of procedures as planned using any format and media from any source.

### **Document confirming participation in group forest management certification**

Documented information confirming participation in group certification. Documented information can be, for example, an e-mail, a note on the website of the group entity, PEFC International or EFCC or any other document confirming participation.

### **Organization**

A legal or natural person holding a PEFC certificate, participating in group certificate or applying for certification and being responsible for meeting the requirements of the forest certification scheme (source: Group Forest Management Standard working group)

### **Group entity**

An entity that represents the organizations participating in certification.

### **Group certificate**

A certificate issued to the group entity by an accredited certification body confirming that the organizations participating in the group comply with the requirements of the forest certification scheme (source: Group Forest Management Standard working group)

### **Group certification**

Certification of the organizations participating in a group under one group certificate (source: Group Forest Management Standard working group)

### **Group management plan**

A document, set of documents and/or electronic data set specifying the objectives, actions and control arrangements of the group and used by the group entity to describe the forest of the organizations participating in group certification and the long-term objectives and principles of sustainable forest management and the provision of key ecosystem services of the group. Also, the management plan includes intended changes to the management system of the group and the requirements of the forest certification scheme that the group is required to comply with.

*Note:* a management plan does not mean a forest management plan within the meaning of the Forest Act (source: PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard Working Group)

### **Group management system**

The work organisation of the group ensuring consistent achievement of established objectives and contributing to sustainable forest management and provision of ecosystem services. It requires the design, approval, execution, control and improvement of the processes (source: PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard Working Group, Group Forest Management Standard Working Group).

### **Internal audit**

Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine whether the requirements of the forest certification scheme are met, undertaken by the group entity itself. Group internal audits are divided into the forest management internal audit and the group management internal audit.

### **Policy**

Intentions and direction of a group, as formally expressed by the group entity.

### **Group**

A group consists of organizations and a group entity sharing common objectives for sustainable forest management.

### **EFCC**

Estonian Forest Certification Council

### **Forest Management Standard**

PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard

## 4. Context of group certification

4.1. The group entity shall determine the basis for the establishment of the group. It can be based on, for example, a region, objectives or principles.

4.2. Determining the scope of the group management system

4.2.1. For the establishment of the scope for the group management system the group entity shall determine the boundaries and applicability of the group management system.

4.2.2. The scope of the group management system is available as documented information.

4.3. The following requirements of the PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard can be implemented on group level:

4.3.1. Forest Management Standard clause 5.2. The organization shall confirm the compliance with the requirements of the PEFC standard and the confirmation shall be made available to the public on the website of the organization or EFCC or in another publicly accessible register /database.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the confirmation has been published on the website of the group entity or EFCC or in another publicly available register/database.

4.3.2. Forest Management Standard clause 5.3. Management system of the organization

5.3.1. The management system shall include the principles for planning, organizing, carrying out, monitoring and evaluating the results of forest management work and the assessment of the social, environmental and economic impacts of forest management work.

5.3.2. The organization shall systematically improve the management system in accordance with the requirements of sustainable forest management.

5.3.3. The organization shall establish principles for the management system and designate a person(s) responsible for the implementation of the requirements of the PEFC standard.

*Note:* If the organization is a natural person, he/she is by default responsible for the implementation of the requirements of the PEFC standard, unless the natural person has authorized someone else to be held responsible.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the principles of the management system have been developed and the responsible person(s) has/have been appointed. The group entity is able to provide no less than the following information: the structure of the organization, person(s) responsible for meeting the requirements of the PEFC standard, principles of document management, principles of communication with the local community, principles of carrying out an internal audit, principles of dispute and complaint resolution.

4.3.3. Forest Management Standard clause 6.2.1.: the organization shall identify the stakeholders affected by forest management activities and their potential needs and expectations.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the group entity has identified affected stakeholders, their potential needs and expectations.

4.3.4 Forest Management Standard clause 6.3.2.: the organization shall formulate forest management policies that support the good condition of the forest as an ecosystem in a longer term.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the group entity has established policies contributing to reducing the risk of damage to and the deterioration of the state of the forest as an ecosystem and contributing to ensuring the good condition of the forest as an ecosystem in a longer term.

4.3.5 Forest Management Standard clause 6.3.3. The management plan shall include no less than

(a) an obligation to comply with the requirements of the PEFC standard;

(e) long-term goals for sustainable forest management;

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:*

(a) the confirmation sentence can be found on the websites of the group entity, EFCC or in another publicly available register/database;

(e) the group entity has set out in writing long-term objectives for sustainable forest management;

4.3.6 Forest Management Standard clause 6.3.6.: The organization shall make the summary of the management plan publicly available. The management plan shall include no less than

(a) an obligation to comply with the requirements of the PEFC standard;

(b) long-term forest management objectives and a summary of forest management principles of the organization;

(c) a summary of the previous PEFC audit.

*Note:* confidential information, the disclosure of which is restricted by law (eg nature protection restrictions, personal data) and confidential information in the audit report shall be excluded from the summary of the management plan.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the information has been published on the website of the group entity and/or EFCC or in another publicly available register/database.

4.3.7. Forest Management Standard clause 9.1.1.: The organization shall periodically evaluate the quality of the forest management work and its impact on forest and key ecosystem services, and correct its activities, if necessary.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the quality of forest management work and the impact on forest and key ecosystem services has been evaluated. The results of the evaluation have been taken into account in the planning and execution of forest management work. The organization has set monitoring frequency.

4.3.8 Forest Management Standard clause 9.3.1.: The organization shall regularly review the management system; it shall include a review of the non-conformities and corrective actions identified in the previous audit and, if necessary, improvements to the management system.

Indicators to be implemented on group level: the group management system is being effectively implemented. Necessary corrective measures have been taken. Non-conformities and corrective measures have been discussed at the group management level.

4.4 The group entity shall also have established a chain of custody system provided the group entity acts as a trader of forest based material not covered by the group certificate.

## 5. Management

### 5.1. Group management system

5.1.1. The group entity shall draw up the principles of the group management system and designate the person(s) responsible for meeting the requirements of the group standard.

*Indicators to be implemented on group level:* the group entity shall be able to provide no less than the following information: group structure, responsibilities of the group entity, person(s) responsible for the requirements of the PEFC standard, principles of document management, principles of communication with the local community, principles of internal audit, disputes and complaints.

5.1.2. The group entity shall undertake to integrate the requirements of the group certification into the requirements of the group management system;

5.1.3. The group entity shall regularly review the management system including a review of the non-conformities and corrective actions identified in the previous audit and improvements to the management system, if necessary.

5.1.4. If the group entity introduces changes in the group management system, the changes shall also be introduced in the group management plan.

### 5.2. The roles, responsibilities and authorities of the group entity and organization

#### 5.2.1. The role and responsibilities of the group entity

##### 5.2.1.1 The group entity shall

a) ensure the implementation of a up to date and appropriate management system;

b) represent the group organizations in the certification process;

c) establish written procedures for the acceptance of new participants of the group organization and for resigning membership;

d) establish written procedures for the suspension and exclusion of the organization participating in group certification who do not correct or close nonconformities. Organizations excluded from any certification group based on nonconformities cannot be accepted in the group within 12 months after exclusion.

e) to keep documented information of:

a) the conformity of the group entity and the organizations with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard, and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme;

b) the data of all organizations, including their contact details, cadastral code and the size of forest area

c) the implementation of group internal audit programme and its review;

- f) to conclude a written agreement with the organization which shall include the organisation`s commitment to comply with the forest certification scheme, as well as the right of the group entity to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive measures, and to initiate the exclusion of any organization from the group in the event of nonconformity with the forest certification scheme;
- g) to provide all organizations with a document confirming participation in group certification;
- h) to provide all organizations with information and guidance required for the effective implementation and maintenance of the forest certification scheme;
- i) to address nonconformities reported by group members which were identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification or nonconformities identified by the certification body and to ensure implementation with all group organizations;
- j) to operate an internal auditing programme that provides for the evaluation of the organizations` and group entity`s conformity with the requirements of the forest certification scheme;
- k) to take relevant corrective actions to respond to nonconformities identified in the course of the internal audit;
- l) to provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all justified requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or the EFCC for relevant data, documentation or other information;
- m) allowing access to the forest area covered by the group organisation and other facilities, whether in connection with audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the group management system.
- n) implement other applicable requirements of the PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard and the Forest Certification Scheme;
- o) support the organization in improving sustainable forest management.

5.2.1.2 The responsibilities of the group entity shall be available to the public.

## 5.2.2. Functions and responsibilities of the organisation

### 5.2.2.1. The organization shall

- a) implement the requirements of the forest certification scheme and group management system and conclude a written agreement with the group entity on the requirements;
- b) to provide the group entity with information about previous participation in group certification;
- c) provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the group entity or certification body for relevant data, documentation or other information; allowing access to the forest and other facilities, whether in connection with audits or reviews or otherwise related or with implications for the management system;

- d) inform the **group entity** about nonconformities which were identified by the certification body under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification;
- e) to implement relevant corrective and preventive actions established by the group entity.

5.2.2.2. An organization excluded from a certification group cannot apply for group membership within 12 months after exclusion.

## 6. Planning

6.1. The group entity's management plan shall include no less than the following general principles for group management system:

- a) the objectives and activities of the group;
- b) measures of the internal audit;
- c) planned changes in the management system, improvement of the management system, if necessary;
- d) the requirements of the forest certification scheme the group is required to implement;
- e) a list of affected stakeholders and their potential needs and expectations;
- f) the procedure for internal and external communication of the group;
- g) the procedure for resolving complaints and disputes;
- h) the requirements of the PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard implemented on group level.

6.2. Taking into account the needs and expectations of affected stakeholders.

6.2.1. The group entity shall identify the affected stakeholders who are relevant to the group management system and their expectations.

6.3. The group management plan shall be relevant and up to date

6.4. The group management plan shall include the requirements of the PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard and other requirements of the forest certification scheme to be implemented on group level.

6.5. The group entity shall make the summary of the group management plan publicly available. The management plan shall include no less than

- (a) an obligation to comply with the requirements of the PEFC standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme;
- (b) long-term forest management objectives of the group and a summary of forest management principles;
- (c) a summary of the previous PEFC audit.

## 7. Support

7.1 The group entity shall plan the means to establish, operate and improve the group management system.

### 7.2 Competence

7.2.1. The person responsible for managing the group shall have the following competence:

- a) vocational or higher education in forestry or the environment;
- b) education can be equated with 3 years of experience in forestry.

7.2.2. The person responsible for the management of the group shall have knowledge of sustainable forest management and shall keep himself/herself up-to-date through continuous training, including no less than participation in a training or instruction introducing the principles of sustainable forest management.

7.3 The procedure for the internal and external communication of the group shall be determined including the following aspects:

- a) on what to communicate;
- b) when to communicate;
- c) how to communicate;
- d) with whom to communicate.

7.3.1. The internal communication of the group shall include no less than the following topics:

- a) forest management strategy of the group;
- b) the requirements of PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard;
- c) the consequences of non-compliance with the group management system;
- d) feedback on the forest management activities of the organization;
- e) information on the interpretation of and amendments to the legislation and PEFC standard and relevant trainings;
- f) information on the conducting, time and results of internal controls and audits.

7.4 The group shall have a policy for resolving complaints and disputes. Disputes and complaints shall be settled in accordance with these principles.

7.5 The documented information related to the implementation of the requirements of the group management system and forest certification scheme shall be:

- a) up to date and relevant;
- b) available to relevant persons in justified cases;
- c) protected against the breach of confidentiality clauses and improper use.

## **8. Operation**

8.1 The group entity shall plan, implement and control necessary processes needed:

- a) to meet the requirements of the forest certification scheme;
- b) to implement the actions specified in clause 6.

8.2 According to the requirements of the standard the planning, implementing and controlling shall be carried out by

- a) defining the necessary processes and establishing criteria for the implementation thereof;
- b) implementing control of the processes in accordance with the criteria;
- c) keeping documented information to the extent necessary to have confidence that the processes have been carried out as planned.

## 9. Performance evaluation

9.1. An internal auditing programme shall provide confidence that the group entity and the organization are in conformity with the requirements of the sustainable forest management scheme.

9.2. The group has determined the principles of carrying out the internal audit programme, in particular

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

9.3. The group entity may specify additional requirements for carrying out an internal audit in case the carrying out of internal audits has been delegated to third parties.

9.4. Group internal audits are divided into forest management internal audit and group management system internal audit.

9.5. Forest management internal audit

9.5.1. The group entity shall carry out an annual forest management internal audit to provide confidence in the conformity of the organization with the requirements of PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard and forest certification scheme.

9.5.2. General principles for the determination of the sample for carrying out the forest management internal audit.

9.5.2.1. The group entity shall establish the principles for the selection of organizations in the forest management internal audit programme. These requirements shall include the following procedures for

- a) determination of the sample size;
- b) determination of sample categories;
- c) distribution of the sample to the categories;
- d) selection of the organizations.

### 9.5.2.2. Determination of the sample size

9.5.2.2.1. The sample size shall be calculated for the organizations of the group.

9.5.2.2.2. The size of the sample generally should be the square root of the number of organizations: ( $y=\sqrt{x}$ ), rounded to the upper whole number.

9.5.2.2.3. The size of the sample may be adapted by a standard taking into account one or more of the following indicators:

- a) results of a risk assessment;
- b) results of internal audits or previous certification audits;
- c) quality/level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme of the organization;
- d) Note: in the course of monitoring, the organization shall assess the quality of forest management work and the impact on the forest and key ecosystem services. The results of the assessment have been taken into account in the planning and execution of forest management work.
- e) use of technologies allowing the gathering of information concerning specified requirements;
- f) Note: such technologies may be e.g the use of the satellite data or drones and allow compliance statements for specific requirements or support the risk based sampling.
- g) based on other means of gathering information about the activities on the certified area;
- h) Note: one way could be a survey with organizations who provide some information about their activities on the forest land;
- i) the length of membership in the group;
- j) the size of the certified area of the organization

9.5.2.2.4. The group entity can calculate the sample according to the result of the risk assessment; however, at least 25% of the sample should be selected at random.

### 9.5.2.3. Distribution of the sample and determination of sample categories

9.5.2.3.1. In case risk assessment has been used, the sample shall be distributed to the categories according to the level of the risk. Indicators may be used for the determination of the sample categories in the risk assessment, for example:

- a) ownership type and the size of the certified area of the organization;
- b) forestry operations and products of group participants;
- c) deforestation and forest conversion;
- d) rotation period(s);

- e) richness of biological diversity;
- f) recreation and other socio-economic functions of the forest;
- g) interaction with local communities;
- h) governance of the organization and law enforcement;

9.5.2.3.2. Conditions which constitute risk for each indicator on low, medium and high level shall be defined.

9.6. The group management system internal audit shall be implemented according to clause 9.2 in terms of the following activities:

- a) the conformity of the group entity to the requirements of the forest certification scheme;
- b) the timely implementation of the forest management internal audit(s);
- c) the availability of the methodology for calculating and implementing the sample;
- d) the requirements of PEFC Estonia Sustainable Forest Management Standard to be implemented on group level.

9.7 Review of group management system

9.7.1. An annual review of group management system shall at least include:

- a) the status of actions from previous management system reviews;
- b) changes in external and internal issues that are relevant to the group management system;
- c) the status of conformity with the requirements of the forest certification scheme that includes reviewing the results of the internal audits and certification audit;
- d) information on the group performance, including trends in:
  - i. results of the certification audit
  - ii. results of internal audit(s);
  - iii. nonconformities and corrective actions;
- e) opportunities for continual improvement.

9.7.2. The standard requires that the outputs of the management system review shall include decisions related to continual improvement opportunities and any need for changes to the group management system.

9.7.3. The group entity shall retain documented information as the evidence of the results of management system reviews.

## 10. Improvement

### 10.1 Nonconformity and corrective action

10.1.1 When a nonconformity is identified in the course of certification audit the group entity shall:

- a) react to the nonconformity and, as applicable:
  - i. take action to control and correct it;
  - ii. deal with the consequences;
- b) evaluate the need for action to eliminate the causes of the nonconformity, in order that it does not recur or occur elsewhere, by:
  - i. reviewing the nonconformity;
  - ii. determining the causes of the nonconformity;
  - iii. determining if similar nonconformities exist, or could potentially occur;
- c) implement any corrective action needed;
- d) review the effectiveness of any corrective action taken;
- e) make changes to the group management system, if necessary.

10.1.2 The group entity shall retain up to date and relevant documented information as evidence of:

- a) the nature of the nonconformities and any subsequent actions taken;
- b) the results of any corrective action.

10.1.3 An organization having been excluded from a group certification shall be internally audited by the group entity before it is allowed to re-enter the group certification. The internal audit shall not take place sooner than 12 months after the exclusion from the group.

### 10.2 Continual improvement

The group entity shall continuously improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the group management system and sustainable forest management.