

FINAL REPORT
of the regional Forest Dialogue
FSC Certification: Local Communities and Logging Companies, 11 – 12 May, 2017

General Info

The Forest Dialogue held in Syktyvkar on May 11–12, 2017, with WWF’s support, was devoted to interaction between local communities and harvesting companies holding FSC certificates. The Dialogue – the already traditional meeting for various participants of forest relations in order to analyze the current experience in cooperation and joint participation in forest management, and to discuss the hottest issues and possible solutions – was initiated by the Silver Taiga Foundation for Sustainable Development.

Silver Taiga has been arranging Forest Dialogues that have become a demanded ground for win-win discussions and productive cooperation of all forest relation participants in Komi since 2008. In different years such dialogues addressed various topics, which however were always related to forest and forest use. Interaction between forest business and residents of forest areas (rural districts) were for the first time discussed at the Forest Dialogue in December 2009. In April 2012 the Forest Dialogue participants, together with Mondi Syktyvkar, continued discussion about how big forest business affects the social and economic environment in rural areas of the Komi Republic and tried to analyze the changes over the previous two and a half years, as well as if there had been any progress in cooperation of populated areas with forest business.

At the Forest Dialogue of May 11–12 this year, the issues of cooperation of forest business with local communities were for the first time reviewed through the prism of forest certification requirements under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme. 58 people – representatives of local residents and districts’ self-government bodies, Ministry of Industry of the Komi Republic, the Institute of Social, Economic and Power Problems of the North of the Komi Scientific Center, Ural Branch of RAS, public Forest Councils, regional public movement *Indigenous Women of the Komi Republic*, district representative offices of the interregional public movement *Komi Voytyr*, community of Indigenous people *Udorachi*, the Silver Taiga Foundation, experts of forestry companies – Mondi Syktyvkar, Luzales, Sorvizhi Les (Kirov region), Norwood SM, SLDK, members of the technical committee and coordination council of the FSC National Working Group, and journalists – participated in the conversation dedicated to social aspects of FSC certification.

Part of the Forest Dialogue arranged as work in four sections allowed the participants to discuss the problems related to certificate holders’ meeting social FSC standard requirements in more detail. The sections (round table meetings) were focused on social effects of wood harvesting and search for ways to minimize its negative impact; social partnership development; rights and liabilities of stakeholders under the FSC certification; challenges faced by stakeholders and companies when allocating high conservation value forests (HCVF 5-6).

Recommendations of the Forest Dialogue and its round tables:

Participants of the Forest Dialogue note that full and effective compliance with social requirements of FSC certification depends on the certificate holder’s purpose – whether it is to formally meet the requirements of the standard, or to conduct business responsibly, and on activity of stakeholders and availability of well-prepared expert society. Joint search of solutions instead of confrontation, mutual responsibility of all partners, and periodic assessment of social effects of the certified company’s activity are important factors.

Participants of the Forest Dialogue also note that the small number of incompliances with regard to social criteria, if compared to environmental ones, can be explained by auditors’ error rather than by actual

absence of incompliances; that insufficient focus of most companies holding certificates on social criteria of the certification is connected with the absence of systematic approach in companies, vague wording in the Russian national standard, lack of enough social experts specializing in forest certification.

Participants of the Forest Dialogue find it necessary to:

- Address FSC Russia and WWF Russia with a request to find a possibility and to jointly implement a project aimed at training social experts for the forest certification;
- Request from FSC Russia's experts to develop and arrange awareness activities for controlled wood suppliers and municipal administrations to learn about the new Controlled Wood Standard;
- Undertake joint actions aimed at forest hunting huts legalizing. Over the last 2-3 years state supervision authorities in different regions of Russia demand disposal of hunting huts in the forest as they are seen as illegal structure. In March 2017 forestries in the Komi Republic also received a letter stating the necessity to destroy them. As a result of all this fuss about hunting huts, auditors started interpreting presence of hunting huts at leased forest areas of certificate holders as failure to meet 1 principle of FSC (compliance with the Russian legislation). Meanwhile, hunting huts are part of the culture and traditional way of life of the indigenous people of Komi, as well as other representatives of local communities depending on forest and forest resources. In addition, huts have always ensured safety for those who stay for a night in the forest, gave shelter for the lost ones, and were often built on the route for travelers to stay in. They still serve the same purpose. Hunting huts in many other regions of Russia have the same meaning. So, it is vitally important to preserve them. The Forest dialogue participants suggest raising the hunting huts legalizing issue to public environmental councils at municipalities and ministries both in the Komi Republic, and on the federal level (Council at Rosleskhoz), and addressing the issue to the State Council of the Komi Republic to request for their legalizing on the regional level. Before the problem is solved, the participants of the dialogue ask FSC Russia to provide explanations for the auditors and consultants about the necessity to preserve hunting, fishing, mowing and other huts in the forest stating that a few years ago preservation of key biotopes at companies' logging plots faced a similar challenge, as it was penalized by fines from forestries, but later the contradiction between the certification requirements and Russian laws was eliminated, and biotopes were decided to be conserved.

The participants of the Forest Dialogue highlight the following for the companies holding certificates, FSC consultants, heads of forestries and other stakeholders:

- It is more reasonable for certificate holders to collect data and interact with rural activists representing the interests of their villages, rather than with heads of administrations (proactive villagers are more motivated and rotate less frequently than heads of administrations and rural settlements) in the long-term perspective.
- When allocating social HCVF the companies should not restrict their communication to administrations only, it is necessary to work with each populated area, with local activists.
- If the company (forestry) loses its certificate or refuses from forest management certification, plots that have lost their status of HCVF, but are still significant for the local residents, have to be reported during forest surveying as Specially Protected Areas.
- Significant part of information related to social HCVF must be kept confidential (mapped hunting grounds, huts, trappers' trails, wood grouse courting grounds, mushroom and berry grounds – must not be accessible for wider public, for instance, in the internet).
- The problem of the local population and small businesses regarding poor accessibility of resources (firewood, saw logs, etc.) is to be solved through agreements between a municipality and a company, or a trilateral agreement (municipality, company, small enterprise).
- Arrange tours for the local residents to logging plots, explain things for them – it will mitigate the negative perception of many aspects related to reforestation, condition of logging plots after cutting, etc.

- In addition to signing social partnership agreements with municipalities it is recommended to initiate annual social project contests aimed at activation of local communities and public organizations.
- Admitting that disturbance of the water balance of the area and its traditional landscape is one of significant long-term social and environmental effects of the logging activity, it is necessary to progress step by step to solving the problem (monitoring, research, recommendations...)
- Remember that minimizing negative impact of the logging activity = preventing such negative effects (through identification of stakeholders' interests, preliminary approvals, discussion of possible consequences).

The participants of the Forest Dialogue find this two-day conversation productive and useful, they believe it is important to continue such meetings in the future.