

**The Council for Sustainable Forest Management
in Republic of Macedonia**

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Institute for forest certification in Slovenia

Association of private forest owners “Naša Šuma”

Certification and Accreditation Procedures

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Institute for forest certification in Slovenia

Association of private forest owners “Naša Šuma”

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1. Introduction

In the process of forest management certification (individual or group), the Certification Body must conduct the audit in accordance with internationally recognized procedures. Therefore, the Certification Body (CB) shall possess accreditation issued by National Accreditation Body (NAB) that is a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and/or European co-operation for Accreditation (EA).

In the process of building the PEFC Balkan Forest Certification System (BFCS), currently three National Governance Bodies (NGB's) from Slovenia, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were participating and accepted the PEFC BFCS.

This document may serve also to PEFC members from the countries that belongs or are neighbouring to the Balkan Region willing to join the BFCS, if they decide to accept the principles of the PEFC BFCS, and to adopt the scheme documentation outside of the FM standard.

The PEFC Balkan Forest Certification System is facilitating the efforts of new countries willing to join the Balkan FC System and to support the PEFC global efforts for sustainable forest management.

In principle, the CB that is accredited by the NAB in the country is eligible to operate forest management certification according to requirements of the PEFC Balkan certification system. In the countries that are participating in the PEFC BFCS and where NAB's have not developed accreditation procedures, any CB that is accredited by any of the NAB from the countries that are participating in the PEFC BFCS is eligible to operate forest management certification.

The certification procedure shall be conducted only by CB that is independent and impartial body, which has taken no any participation in the process of drafting the standards, certification procedures or accreditation procedures.

2. Scope

This document describes the certification and accreditation procedures that the CB shall fulfil in order to conduct forest management (FM) certification.

The requirements specified in this document may be supplemented in case of changes in the documentation by the PEFC Council.

The requirements which refer to the CB's certifying the fulfilment of requirements with reference to the chain of custody are specified in "Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against the PEFC International Chain of Custody Standard" (PEFC ST 2003:2020).

3. Referential documents

PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia – PEFC MK 03:2021;

PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Slovenia – PEFC SL 03:2021;

PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in B&H – PEFC B&H 03:2021;

Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC BS 06:2021;

PEFC Logo Usage Rules – Requirements – PEFC ST 2001:2020;

Issuance of PEFC trademarks license procedures – PEFC BS 07:2021;

Notification of certification bodies – PEFC BS 05:2021;

ISO/IEC 17021-1, "Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems" Recent version;

ISO 19011, "Guidelines for auditing management systems" Recent version;

ISO/IEC 17011, "Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies" Recent version;

4. Certification Body Accreditation

4.1. Accreditation procedures

The bodies conducting FM certification in accordance with the PEFC National Standards for SFM requirements, including the group certification shall be accredited. The accreditation shall be obtained from the National Accreditation Body (NAB) that is a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and/or European co-operation for Accreditation (EA).

The NAB conducting accreditation of CB shall implement the procedures according to the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011 (recent version) "Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies". Accreditation shall be conducted in accordance with the legislation.

As stated above, any CB that is accredited by any NAB from the countries that are participating in the PEFC Balkan certification system is eligible to operate forest management certification.

4.2. Notification of CB

CB's conducting individual or group forest management certification shall be notified by the NGB authorized by the PEFC Council for management of PEFC system in the country of operation and in accordance with the "Notification of certification bodies, PEFC BS 05:2021".

4.3. Sustainable forest management certification, including group certification

CB's conducting conformity assessment for sustainable forest management (SFM) and group certification shall fulfil the requirements of ISO/IEC 17021-1 (recent version) "Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems" supplemented by the specific requirements of the PEFC NGB for the needed sector expertise.

The CB shall:

1. Fulfill the general requirements for certification bodies defined in the standard ISO/IEC 17021 (recent version).
2. Implement documented method according to which forest management can be audited (certification procedure).
3. Good understanding on the PEFC Balkan System for sustainable forest management.
4. Possess competency for forest management and its economic, social and environmental impact.

4.4. Additional requirements

The additional requirements for the CBs conducting conformity assessment for sustainable forest management and group certification with reference to the standard ISO/IEC 17021-1 are:

4.4.1. Registration and Information

The CB shall provide the NGB with information for all forest management certificates issued according to the PEFC BFCS and all the changes which refer to the importance and contents of the certificates. In that sense, the CB shall keep and update data for all issued certificates for individual and group certificates according to the PEFC BFCS.

The Information Register which is submitted to the PEFC NGB shall contain the following information:

For certified forest according to the individual certification:

- data for the owner (user) of the forest (name of individual, owners or legal entity)
- data for certified area (location, area in ha)
- address

- contact number, electronic address
- name and surname of contact person
- certificate number
- date on which the certificate comes into force
- expiry date of the certificate

For certified forest according to group certification:

- name of the organization
- total area and location of the certified forest
- name and surname of contact person
- address of contact person
- contact number, electronic address
- certificate number
- date on which the certificate comes into force
- expiry date of the certificate

4.4.2. Certificates Cancellation

The certificate owner can cancel the certificate at any time.

The cancellation comes into force when the CB receives a written request by the certificate owner.

4.4.3. Certificates Termination and Withdrawal

The CB may also terminate validity of issued certificate based on the audit findings.

The CB is obliged to inform the NGB within 14 days for each terminated or withdrawn individual or group sustainable forest management certificate.

4.5. Individual or group SFM Certification and Revision Procedures

4.5.1. General Principles

The definition of the objective of the audit is always the responsibility of the auditee. The scope and limits are defined so that the objective of the audit is achieved. The scope of the audit is defined by the lead auditor nominated by the CB. The purpose of the audit is to evaluate whether the evidence collected from the auditee or its units conform to the auditing criteria.

The auditing criteria are primarily the requirements of the PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in North Macedonia, Slovenia or Bosnia and Herzegovina – PEFC MK, SL, B&H 03:2021 and Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC BS 06:2021. In addition, the auditee may define other auditing criteria, e.g., policy, legislation, guidelines, practices and procedures.

The objective, scope and auditing criteria are documented in the auditing plan, which guides the execution of the audit. The auditing plan must also indicate the timetables, places, persons and other information, for which preparations are required in advance by the auditee or its units.

The audit is carried out by an audit team. In addition to the lead auditor, the audit team has an adequate number of auditors. The sectoral competence of auditors may be complemented, if necessary, with technical experts who are not auditors. The audit team is set up by the certification body, which ensures competence and independence and other appropriateness to the task of the team members.

The CB shall establish internal revision and certification procedures for SFM in accordance with the PEFC BFCS.

The process consists of the following stages:

1. Application and Certification Consent
2. Pre-audit

3. Documentation inspection and revision preparation
4. Certification Revision
5. Certification Report
6. Certification Decision
7. Informing the PEFC NGB
8. Supervision
9. Recertification

4.5.2. Application and Certification Consent

As a first step, the application on implementing the certification has to be submitted to the accredited CB by the applicant (depending on the level of certification).

Prior to any certification activities, an agreement for certification between the CB and the applicant shall be signed. After the agreement is signed, the necessary documentation shall be sent to the CB by the applicant.

4.5.3. Pre-audit

On a voluntary basis, the CB can carry out a pre-audit preceding the real audit. The objective of this pre-audit is to guarantee that all requirements for the certification are taken into account in the application. The implementation of this pre-audit is supposed to avoid a time loss due to formal insufficiencies.

4.5.4. Documentation inspection and revision preparation

The CB shall inspect the documents submitted and determine if the applicant has submitted all the necessary documentation. Documents and procedures, which have to be developed and implemented by the applicant, form the basis for certification, and are used by the notified CB to check the compliance with the PEFC requirements.

In case of a positive documents evaluation, the CB prepares a plan of further activities which is submitted to the applicant who decides whether to continue with the process. After a positive response, the CB nominates a qualified auditor to conduct an assessment of compliance to the certification criteria.

4.5.5. Certification Revision- main revision

The main revision is concluded once in a period of five years. The maximum period for main revision audit not exceed period of five years. The Certification Revision consists of the following stages:

a) Public Consultation

Prior to the assessment for compliance with the requirements of the PEFC National SFM Standard - PEFC MK, SL, B&H 03:2021, a consultation with relevant interested parties from the area where assessment takes place is required. The time period for this consultation is not shorter than 14 days and is announced on the PEFC NGB and CB website. When assessing compliance, the relevant remarks and comments from other persons shall be taken into consideration.

b) Initial meeting

Prior to start of the audit process, the CB and the applicant are having a meeting to define the objective and the scope of the audit, timeframe, selected areas for auditing, to present the team of auditors/technical experts and to define other details that are of technical nature with aim for successful audit operation.

c) Providing assessment data

The compliance to the forest management standard by the applicant is assessed according to the requirements specified in the SFM National Standard - PEFC MK, SL, B&H 03:2021. The auditor shall provide the need for basic data for assessment whether the applicant fulfills the requirements of the afore mentioned Standard.

In case of a group certification, the Audit is performed on a sample not smaller than the square root of the number of participants in the group.

d) On-site audit

In the scope of a PEFC certification the on-site audits are a tool for controlling the forest owners, who have applied for or have declared their participation in the certification system. The examination is carried out by the auditors of an accredited certification body.

Within the on-site audits the compliance with the SFM standard and the implementation of the procedures for system stability are examined in the participating forest enterprises respectively organisational units.

Depending on the level of application (group, enterprise) suitable sampling procedures are implemented.

e) Evaluation of the assessment data

The CB evaluates the compliance to certification requirements by the applicant and determines if there is any non-conformity that shall be resolved in order to provide full compliance with certification requirements.

f) Final meeting

The certification body presents the revision results to the applicant verbally and in writing. In the final meeting, the audit results of all the units audited are collectively presented to the auditee. The audit observations, which are not in conformity with audit criteria are always documented in the audit report.

g) Report on the revision conducted

The report on the revision conducted is prepared according to the procedures of the CB. A summary of the certification report, including a summary of findings on the auditee's conformity with the Forest Management Standard for the country, written by the certification body, shall be made available to the public by the NGB participating in the Balkan Certification System. The requirements for public consultation and public availability of the certification report's summary shall be implemented within six months of the official adoption of this document.

4.5.6. Certification report

The Certification Report shall include the following elements:

- Data about the auditors involved in the revision by the CB.
- Certification Scope.
- Compliance with the certification requirements. The remarks and possible deviations shall always be included in the report.
- Summary of the public consultation.
- Final summary of the entire report which will be open to the public and provided by the CB.

4.5.7. Certification Decision

The certification decision is made by the CB on the basis of the audit report. The decision may be positive, conditional or negative. A positive decision leads to immediate certification and issuance of the certificate.

The basis for a conditional or negative certification decision is based on nonconformity against certification criteria. A conditional certification decision requires an implementation plan for

corrective action and correction of non-conformities according to a timetable to be separately agreed upon. The certificate may be conditionally issued when the plan of corrective action is approved.

Non-conformities to the certification criteria must always lead to corrective action and possibly to the rejection, postponing or withdrawal of the certificate. Non-conformities are classified as minor and major. Minor non-conformities are not necessarily an obstacle for certification. Major non-conformities always prevent the issuance of the certificate.

4.5.8. Validity of Certificate

The certificate is valid for a maximum of five years. The certification body may withdraw a granted certificate permanently or suspend it for a specified time period. The withdrawal, or suspension decision and its justification are communicated to the auditee in writing.

The auditee may denounce the certificate any time during its validity. The denouncement takes effect immediately after the certification body has received a notice in writing

4.5.9. Information which refer to the PEFC NGB

The certification body informs the PEFC NGB for all individual or group certificates issued as well as for all current changes in their scope and validity.

4.5.10. Supervision

The CB shall conduct supervision on certified forest areas (individual and group certification) at least once a year while the certificate is valid in order to verify the continuity of compliance with the requirements of the PEFC Balkan certification system. Supervision can exclude the public consultation.

The certificate owners shall immediately inform the CB about every change in the management or procedures which refer to the data already registered by the CB, in order to create a plan for implementation of corrective measures if necessary.

4.5.11. Recertification

The recertification procedure is conducted after the expiry of the certificate which is valid for 5 years. The recertification procedure is identical to the initial certification.

4.6. Information for the certificates

The certificate shall contain at least the following information:

- Name and address of the forest owner or the group representative
- The standard it refers to
- Location and area of the forest the certificate refers to
- Date of issue and validity
- Certificate number
- Name of accreditation body, an accreditation symbol of the relevant accreditation body and number of accreditation of the certification body

4.6.1. Relation to standard

Upon certification the compliance to the following standard shall be assessed:

- PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia, Slovenia or Bosnia and Herzegovina – PEFC MK/SL/B&H 03:2021;
- Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC BS 06:2021.
- PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements - PEFC ST 2001:2020
- Issuance of PEFC trademarks license procedures - PEFC BS 07:2021.

4.7. Appeals and complaints

The Complaints and Appeals Procedure, PEFC BS 08:2021 applies for this document.

Annex 1

The qualification criteria for external auditors and certification bodies, and certification procedures

1. Aim of the document

This document defines the qualification criteria for external auditors and certification bodies, and certification procedures for forest management. PEFC Council recognized certifications for forest management and chain of custody rely on international certification and accreditation procedures as defined in the documentation of the International Standardization Body (ISO) and European co-operation for Accreditation (EA) as well as in the International Accreditation Forum (IAF). This document belongs to the series of standards of the PEFC Balkan Forest Certification System.

2. Scope and Field of Application

This document defines the qualification criteria for external auditors, certification bodies, and certification procedures.

This document is applied in accordance with the PEFC Balkan Certification System covering:

- PEFC National Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in North Macedonia, Slovenia or Bosnia and Herzegovina – PEFC MK, SL, B&H 03:2021;
- Group certification rules and procedures – PEFC BS 06:2021.
- PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements - PEFC ST 2001:2020
- Issuance of PEFC trademarks license procedures - PEFC BS 07:2021.

3. Qualification Criteria for Auditors

3.1 Certification of Forest Management

The qualification criteria for auditors engaged in certification audits are based on the general auditing guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems, or the general criteria for certification bodies operating management system certification, and complemented with sectoral expertise.

The auditors must:

1. Fulfil general criteria for quality and environmental management systems as defined in ISO 19011.
2. Fulfil general criteria for certification bodies operating management system certification ISO/IEC 17021-1.
3. Have a good knowledge on the PEFC BFCS with regard to forest management.
4. Have a general understanding on the forest management sector, practice and legislation in the countries that are part of the BFCS (North Macedonia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and its environmental, social and economic impacts. Additional and detailed expertise on the above mentioned fields shall be supported by the local experts.
5. Professional expertise in forest management and its environmental impacts is proved on the basis of appropriate education and/or professional experience. The auditor shall at minimum have a bachelor degree in forestry and minimum 5 years of experience in forest management.
6. Practical experience in auditing (at least 5 audit days as co-auditor with PEFC, there- of 3 days at on-site-audits).

4. Qualification Criteria for Certification Bodies

4.1 Accreditation

Certification bodies carrying out forest management certification shall be accredited by the NAB in the country is eligible to operate forest management certification according to requirements of the PEFC Balkan certification system.

In the countries that are participating in the PEFC BFCS and where NAB have not developed accreditation procedures, any CB that is accredited by any of the NAB from the countries that are participating in the PEFC BFCS is eligible to operate forest management certification.

The accreditation shall be issued by an accreditation body which is a part of the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA) and/or the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) umbrella and which implement procedures described in ISO 17011 and other documents recognized by the above mentioned organizations.

Accreditation symbol of the relevant accreditation body shall accompany any issued forest management certificate.

4.2 Certification of Forest Management

The qualification criteria for the CBs used in certification audits are based on general criteria for CBs operating quality and environmental system certification, complemented with sectorial expertise and applied to forest management. Applied auditing procedures shall be compatible with requirements of ISO 19011.

The certification body must:

1. Fulfil the criteria for certification bodies defined in latest version of ISO 17021.
2. Use a documented method, according to which forest management may be audited and certified.
3. Undertake forest management certification as “accredited certification” based on latest version of ISO 17021 and have the relevant forest management standard(s) covered by the accreditation scope.
4. Have general knowledge on forest management and its environmental impacts.
5. Have a good knowledge on the PEFC BFCS with regard to forest management.
6. Be impartial, independent third party that cannot be involved in the standard setting process as governing or decision making body, or in the forest management and is independent of the certified entity.

Professional expertise in forest management and its environmental impacts is proved on the basis of certification experience in the field and/or appropriate education and professional experience of the staff.