



2023 American Forest Foundation Standard Setting Requirements for Forest Certification under the American Tree Farm System®

Effective June 1, 2023

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Forward

The American Forest Foundation (AFF), a 501c (3), not-for-profit, organization located at 2000 M Street NW, Ste 550, Washington, DC, 20036 is the sole proprietor and has sole responsibility for establishing and maintaining Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification under the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS). It is acknowledged that the standard setting requirements will comply with PEFC ST 1001:2017.

These requirements were approved by the AFF Board of Trustees on June 1, 2023. The Standard Setting Requirements are publicly available at treefarmssystem.org and upon request.

1. Introduction

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is a 501(c)(3) national non-profit in the United States, with a mission to empower family forest owners to make a meaningful conservation impact in carbon sequestration, wildfire reduction, wildlife habitat, clean water, sustainable wood supplies and support for rural communities. AFF organized and incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia.

AFF is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, scientific, and educational purposes. In furtherance of such purposes, AFF promotes, encourages, and administers programs that:

- Educate the public about natural resources, the environment, wildlife, water quality and watershed health, productive and sustainable forestry.
- Inform and educate landowners about the benefits of sustainable forestry and about public policies that affect the management of forest lands, and family-owned forest lands in particular.
- Promote understanding of the role of individual citizens, landowners, and businesses in protecting environmental quality and the conservation of natural resources.
- Provide opportunities for landowners to promote and practice sustainable forestry.
- Assist landowners in improving conservation and management of their forests and provide recognition for those who have implemented outstanding practices.
- Create, sustain, and support volunteer networks that provide a platform for partnerships among industries, organizations, and individuals that share the goals of AFF.
- Offer opportunities for individuals and organizations to work together in promoting sound forestry and sound environmental practices.
- Serve as a clearinghouse to facilitate the exchange of ideas and techniques for operating effective educational programs among companies and organizations which share the goals of AFF.
- Conduct public opinion research and other scientific studies and educational activities related to the purposes of the Corporation and consistent with Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (the "Code").
- Receive contributions, grants, gifts, dues, bequests and endowments and utilize those funds and assets exclusively for scientific, charitable, and educational purposes described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS) is one of the programs of the American Forest Foundation. It comprises a nationwide network of family forest owners committed to sustainable forest management practices that assure the provision of wood supplies, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and clean water. ATFS operates on the ground via the organization of activities of state and regional affiliates, independently managed groups (IMGs) and third-party certificate holders. All lands enrolled within ATFS must adhere to the Standards of Sustainability. AFF maintains a national third-party certificate which is implemented on the ground by state or regional affiliates (often known as state Tree

Farm programs), thus providing landowners with a unique pathway to third-party certification as an alternative to membership in an IMG or an individually held certificate.

This document describes requirements for AFF's development and regular review and revision of the Standards for Forest Certification under ATFS and associated standard-setting requirements.

2. Normative references

ISO Guides are normatively referenced in this standard. For dated references, only the cited edition applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC Guide 59, *Code of good practice for standardization*.

ISO/IEC Guide 2, *Standardization and related activities – General vocabulary*.

PEFC GD 1007, *Endorsement and Mutual Recognition of Certification Systems and their Revision*.

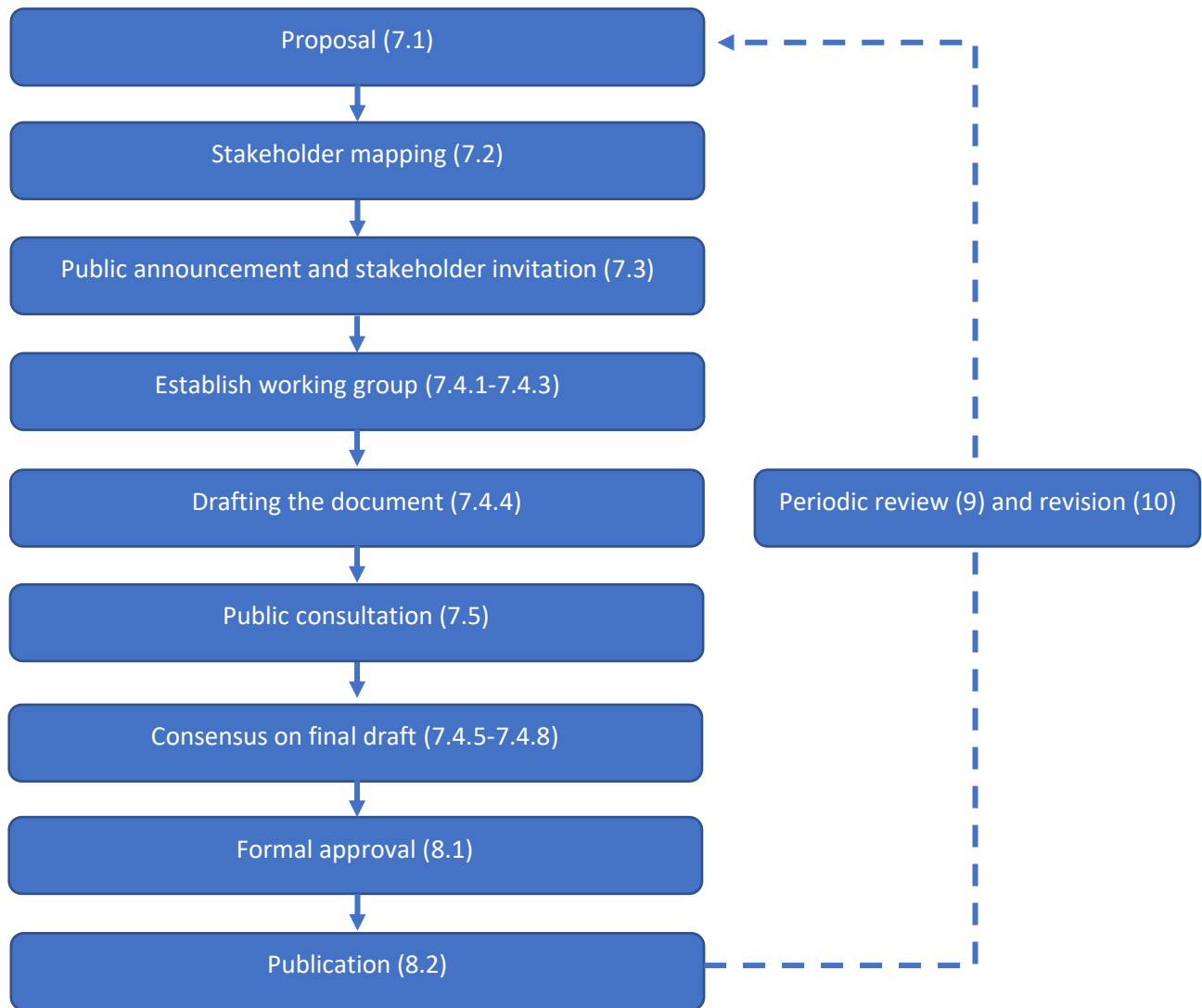
3. Standard-setting principles

The standard-setting process is governed by the key principles of:

- 3.1 Stakeholder engagement – an opportunity for meaningful participation in the process that is open to all stakeholders through participation in working groups and public consultations.
- 3.2 Balanced representation – no single stakeholder group should dominate or be dominated in the process. While each party is free to decide on its participation, AFF tries to ensure that all relevant stakeholder groups are represented and considers an appropriate gender balance.
- 3.3 Consensus – Standards are approved by consensus. Mechanisms for reaching consensus are further described in this document. Any sustained opposition to specific issues is resolved by means of dialogue whenever possible.
- 3.4 Improvement – periodic review of a standard seeks continual improvement and to ensure the standard continues to meet expectations of stakeholders.
- 3.5 Transparency – relevant documents are made publicly available at treefarmssystem.org or upon request so interested parties can follow developments during and after the process.

A sample timeline for standard-setting is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Sample Timeline of Standard-Setting Process



4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 AFF Board of Trustees

The AFF Board of Trustees (Board) sets the vision, mission, strategic plan, and budget for AFF. The Board of Trustees has control of the general affairs and management of AFF, to include all matters relating to the acquisition, holding, management, control, investment, and disposition of the funds and property of the AFF and may exercise all powers of AFF. The Board of Trustees shall be subject to the restrictions and obligations set forth by law and in AFF's Articles of Incorporation and established Bylaws.

4.2 Independent Standards Review Panel

The Independent Standards Review Panel (ISRP) is a volunteer body convened by the AFF Board of Trustees for the purposes of developing, reviewing, and revising the American Forest Foundation Standards for Forest Certification under ATFS (refer to 7.4). The members of the panel represent a broad spectrum of family and small forest owners, forest industry, conservation and environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOs), science and technological communities, foresters, and state and federal governments. They also represent consideration of the social, environmental, and economic sectors associated with family forest ownership in the United States.

4.3 Certification Committee

The AFF Board of Trustees will seat a Certification Committee. The purpose of the Certification Committee is to work with AFF staff to ensure credible implementation of the ATFS certification program. It is charged with making interpretations of the Standards which will be considered enforceable until the ISRP is again seated, and for this reason is also referred to as the National Standards Implementation Committee. Decisions rendered by this body will be achieved by consensus. All interpretations will be made publicly available and notice therein made to the Board of Trustees.

5. Terms and definitions

In addition to the definitions stated in this section, the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC Guide 2 are applicable for the purposes of this standard.

5.1 Consensus

General agreement characterized by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important part of the concerned interests and by a process that involves seeking to consider the views of all parties concerned and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. Consensus does not imply unanimity (ISO/IEC Guide 2).

5.2 Editorial changes

Changes to a system that do not alter the technical content. This can include clarifications, formatting, guidance, and grammatical changes.

5.3 Enquiry draft

A proposed document that is available for public consultation.

5.4 Final draft

A proposed document that is available for formal approval.

5.5 Normative document

A document that provides rules, requirements, procedures, or characteristics for activities or their results.

5.6 Publicly available

Generally accessible to the interested public at treefarmssystem.org without the need for a request. When information is available by request only, this is indicated explicitly in the document as available on request. Special consideration might be needed for disadvantaged stakeholders to ensure their access, e.g., providing hard copies to stakeholders identified as having no access to electronic media.

5.7 Revision

Introduction of all necessary changes to the substance and presentation of a normative document. The results of the revision are presented by issuing a new edition of the normative document. (ISO/IEC Guide 2)

5.8 Review

Activity of checking a normative document to determine whether it is to be reaffirmed, changed, or withdrawn. (ISO/IEC Guide 2)

5.9 Stakeholder

A person, group, community or organization with an interest in the subject of the standard.

5.10 Affected stakeholder

A stakeholder who might experience a direct change in living and/or working conditions caused by implementation of the standard, or a stakeholder who might be a user of the standard and therefore is subject to the requirements of the standard.

Note 1: Affected stakeholders may include neighboring communities, indigenous people, workers, etc. However, having an interest in the subject matter of the standard (e.g., NGOs, scientific community, and civil society) is not equal to being affected.

Note 2: A stakeholder who might be a user of the standard is likely to become a certified entity, e.g., a forest owner in the case of a forest management standard.

5.11 Disadvantaged stakeholder

A stakeholder who might be financially or otherwise disadvantaged by participating in the standard-setting process.

5.12 Key stakeholder

A stakeholder whose participation is critical to the outcome of the standard-setting process.

5.13 Standard

A document, established by consensus and approved by a recognized body that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree or order in each context. Standards should be based on the consolidated results of science, technology, and experience, and aimed at the promotion of optimum benefits.

5.14 Standardizing body

Body that has recognized activities in standardization (ISO/IEC Guide 2), in this case, the American Forest Foundation. A standardizing body for a forest management system/standard is a body which is responsible for the development and maintenance of standards for the forest certification system.

5.15 Working draft

Proposed document that is available generally for feedback or voting within a working group.

6. Responsibilities of standardizing body

6.1 Documented information

6.1.1 AFF shall keep documented information relevant to the standard-setting and review process, including:

- a) Standard-setting procedures,
- b) Stakeholder identification mapping,
- c) Contacted and/or invited stakeholders,
- d) Stakeholders involved in standard-setting activities including participants in each working group meeting,
- e) Feedback received and a synopsis of how feedback was addressed,
- f) All drafts and final versions of the standard,
- g) Outcomes from working group considerations,
- h) Evidence of consensus on the final version of the standard(s),
- i) Evidence relating to the review process, and
- j) Final approval by AFF.

6.1.2 Documented information shall be kept until completion of the next review or revision of the standard to which they refer. Otherwise, the documented information must be kept for a minimum of five years after publication of the standard.

6.1.3 Documented information shall be available to interested parties at treefarmssystem.org or upon request.

6.2 Handling of complaints and appeals

6.2.1 AFF shall establish procedure(s) for dealing with any substantial and process complaints and appeals relating to its standard-setting activities. It must make procedure(s) accessible to stakeholders. Upon receipt of a complaint or appeal, the AFF shall:

- a) acknowledge receipt of the complaint or appeal to the complainant,
- b) gather and verify all necessary information to validate the complaint or appeal, evaluate the subject matter of the complaint or appeal impartially and objectively, and decide regarding the complaint or appeal, and
- c) formally communicate the decision on the complaint or appeal to the complainant and describe the handling process.

6.2.2 AFF shall establish at least one contact point for enquiries, complaints and appeals relating to its standard-setting activities. The contact point shall be easy to access and readily available.

7. Standard-setting process

The AFF Board of Trustees will, at its discretion, initiate the standard-setting process on a five-year cycle. The start of the review process will be within 5 years of the AFF Board approval date of the current Standards. The standard development, review, and revision process is open, transparent, and consensus based. AFF shall make its standard-setting process publicly available and shall review its standard-setting process regularly, to include feedback from stakeholders.

7.1 Standard proposal

7.1.1 For the creation of a new standard, AFF shall develop a proposal including:

- a) the scope of the standard,
- b) justification of the need for the standard,
- c) a clear description of the intended outcomes,
- d) a risk assessment of potential negative impacts arising from implementing the standard, such as factors that could affect the achievement of the outcomes negatively, unintended consequences of implementation, actions to address the identified risks, and
- e) a description of the stages of standard development and their expected timetable.

Guidance for development of a proposal and justification is given in ISO Directives, Part 1, Annex C and Annex.

7.1.2 For the revision of a standard the proposal shall cover at least (a) and (e) of clause 7.1.1.

7.2 Stakeholder identification

7.2.1 AFF shall identify stakeholders relevant to the objectives and scope of the standard-setting activities by means of a stakeholder identification mapping exercise. It shall define which stakeholder groups are relevant to the subject matter and why. For each stakeholder group AFF shall identify the likely key issues, key stakeholders, and which means of communication would be best to reach them.

7.2.2 At least the following groups shall be included in the stakeholder mapping: forest owners, business and industry, indigenous people, non-government organizations, scientific and technological community, workers, and trade unions.

Other groups shall be added if relevant to the scope of standard-setting activities.

7.2.3 AFF shall identify disadvantaged stakeholders and key stakeholders and address any constraints to their participation in standard-setting activities.

7.3 Public announcement of the process

7.3.1 AFF shall make a public announcement of the start of the standard-setting process and include an invitation to stakeholders to participate in the process. The announcement shall be made with at least 4 weeks' notice via AFF or ATFS website and via email, as appropriate, to give stakeholders an opportunity for meaningful contributions. The announcement and invitation shall include:

- a) overview of the standard-setting process,
- b) access to the proposal for the standard (refer to 7.1),
- c) information about opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the process,
- d) requests to stakeholders to nominate their representative(s) or themselves to the Independent Standards Review Panel (refer to 7.4). The request to disadvantaged stakeholders and key stakeholders shall be made in a manner that ensures that the information reaches intended recipients and in a format that is easy to understand,
- e) explicit invitation and clear instruction on how to submit feedback on the scope and standard-setting process, and
- f) access to the standard-setting procedures.

7.3.2 AFF shall review the standard-setting process based on feedback received in response to the public announcement.

7.4 Working group requirements

7.4.1 AFF shall form a temporary working group to be known as the Independent Standards Review Panel (ISRP). Acceptance and refusal of nominations shall be justified in relation to the requirements for balanced representation of the ISRP, considerations of an appropriate gender balance, relevance of the organization, an individual's competence, an individual's relevant experience and resources available for standard-setting.

7.4.2 The working group shall:

- a) have balanced representation and decision-making by stakeholder categories, relevant to the subject matter and geographical scope of the standard, where no single concerned stakeholder group can dominate, nor be dominated in the process, and
- b) include stakeholders with expertise relevant to the subject matter of the standard, those that affected by the standard, and those that can influence implementation of the standard. The affected stakeholders shall be represented in an appropriate proportion among participants.

7.4.3 In order to achieve balanced representation, AFF shall strive to have all identified stakeholder groups (refer to 7.2) represented. AFF shall set targets for the participation of key stakeholders and proactively seek their participation by using outreach such as (but not limited to) personal emails, phone calls, meeting invitations etc. When a stakeholder group is not represented and key stakeholders cannot be encouraged to participate, AFF may consider alternative options.

7.4.4 Activities of the working shall be organized in an open and transparent manner where:

- a) working drafts shall be available to all members of the working group,
- b) all members of the working group shall be given meaningful opportunities to contribute to the development or revision of the standard and to provide feedback on working drafts, and
- c) feedback and views given by any member of the working group shall be considered in an open and transparent way where the outcome of these considerations is recorded.

7.4.5 The decision of the working group to recommend the final draft for formal approval shall be taken based on consensus. To determine whether there is any sustained opposition, the working group can utilize the following methods:

- a) face-to face meeting(s) where there is a verbal yes/no vote, a show of hands for a yes/no vote; a statement on consensus from the Chair when there are no dissenting voices or hands (votes); a formal ballot, etc.,
- b) telephone conference meeting(s) where there is a verbal yes/no vote,
- c) e-mail request to the working group for agreement or objection where the members provide a formal (written) response (vote), or
- d) combinations of these methods.

7.4.6 Where a vote is used in decision-making, two-thirds of the of the vote shall quantify the consensus threshold. However, a majority vote cannot override sustained opposition to achieve consensus.

7.4.7 When there is sustained opposition to a substantial issue, the issue shall be resolved using the following methods:

- a) finding a compromise through discussion and negotiation on the disputed issue within the working group,
- b) finding a compromise through direct negotiation between the stakeholder(s) making the objection and other stakeholders with different views on the disputed issue,
- c) additional round(s) of public consultation (if necessary) where further stakeholder input can help to achieve consensus on unresolved issues. AFF determines the scope and duration of any additional public consultation.

7.4.8 When a substantial issue cannot be resolved and sustained opposition persists, AFF shall initiate dispute resolution in accordance with its procedures for impartial and objective action.

7.5 Public consultation

7.5.1 AFF shall organize public consultation on the enquiry draft and shall ensure that:

- a) the start and the end dates of public consultation are announced in a timely manner, at least the day before the start of public consultation via the ATFS or AFF website and via email,

- b) a direct invitation to comment on the enquiry draft is sent to each stakeholder identified by stakeholder identification mapping (refer to 7.2) aiming for a balanced participation of stakeholder groups,
- c) invitations are sent to disadvantaged and key stakeholders by methods that ensure they reach recipients and are easy to understand,
- d) the enquiry draft is made publicly available,
- e) public consultation is for at least 30 days,
- f) all feedback is considered by the working group in an objective manner, and
- g) a synopsis of feedback is compiled for each material issue, including the outcome of considering the issue. The synopsis is made publicly available and is sent to each stakeholder/party that gave feedback.

For clarity AFF's synopsis may aggregate responses on material issues where there was similar feedback from different stakeholders. However, best practice would be to publish each piece of original feedback and the response, to allow each stakeholder to identify its own feedback.

7.5.2 For new standards AFF shall organize a second round of public consultation lasting at least 30 days.

7.6 Pilot testing

AFF shall organize pilot testing of new standard(s) to assess the clarity, auditability, and feasibility of the requirements. The working group shall consider the outcome of pilot testing.

8. Approval and publication

8.1 Formal approval of standards

The AFF Board of Trustees shall approve the standard(s)/normative document(s) formally based upon the recommendation of the working group(s).

8.2 Publication and availability of standards

8.2.1 The formally approved standard(s)/normative document(s) shall be published and made publicly available at no cost within 14 days of approval, or as otherwise defined by AFF.

8.2.2 Standard(s) shall include:

- a) identification and contact information for AFF,
- b) identification of English as the primary language, and a statement regarding other languages in which the standard may be available
- c) a note that when there is inconsistency between versions, the English version of the standard as endorsed by the PEFC Council is the reference.

d) The approval date and the anticipated date of next periodic review

Note: The date of next periodic review may be within a shorter period than five years based on (for example) stakeholder expectations or other unforeseen developments.

8.2.3 Printed copies shall be made available upon request at a price that covers no more than administrative costs (if any).

8.2.4 AFF shall make the development report publicly available. Development report shall include:

- a) A summary of the standard setting process with timetable,
- b) List of stakeholders identified in the stakeholder mapping,
- c) Information on the announcement of the process and the invitation to stakeholders,
- d) Synopsis of comments from the public consultation(s),
- e) Evidence on the consensus, including a summary of presented oppositions and their resolution, and
- f) A summary of major changes and justification (for revised standards).

9. Periodic review of standards

9.1 General

The standard(s)/normative document(s) shall be reviewed at intervals that do not exceed a five-year period. The review shall be based on consideration of feedback received during the standard's implementation and a gap analysis. If necessary, a stakeholder consultation shall be organized to obtain further feedback and input.

9.2 Feedback mechanism

9.2.1 AFF shall establish and maintain a permanent mechanism for collecting and recording feedback on a standard. This mechanism shall be accessible at treefarmssystem.org with clear directions for providing feedback.

9.2.2 All feedback received through all channels, including meetings, training courses, etc. shall be recorded and considered.

9.3 Gap analysis

9.3.1 At the start of a review, AFF shall evaluate the standard against appropriate PEFC International standards, national laws and regulations, and other relevant standards to identify potential gaps in the standard.

9.3.2 AFF shall consider the latest scientific knowledge, research, and relevant emerging issues.

9.4 Stakeholder consultation

9.4.1 Where the feedback and the gap analysis do not identify a need to revise the standard, AFF shall organize stakeholder consultation to determine whether stakeholders see a need for revising the standard. AFF shall include the gap analysis in the stakeholder consultation.

9.4.2 At the start of a review, AFF shall update the stakeholder identification mapping (refer to clause 7.2).

9.4.3 AFF shall organize:

- a) a public consultation period of at least 30 days (following the requirements of clause 7.5.1) and/or,
- b) stakeholder meetings.

9.4.4 AFF shall announce the review in a timely manner (refer to 7.3).

9.5 Decision-making

9.5.1 Based on the feedback received during the period of a standard's implementation, the outcome of the gap analysis and the consultations, AFF shall decide whether to reaffirm the standard or whether a revision of the standard is necessary.

9.5.2 The decision shall be made by the AFF Board of Trustees

9.5.3 Where the decision is to reaffirm a standard, AFF shall provide a justification for the decision and make the justification publicly available.

9.5.4 Where the decision is to revise the standard, AFF shall specify the type of revision (normal or editorial revision).

10. Revision of standards

10.1 Normal revision

Procedures for revision of standard(s)/normative document(s) shall conform to those stated in section 7.

A normal revision can occur at the periodic review, or between periodic reviews, but does not include editorial revisions and time-critical revisions.

10.2 Editorial revision

Editorial revisions can be made without triggering the normal revision process. AFF shall approve the editorial changes formally and publish an amendment or a new edition of the standard.

10.3 Time-critical revision

10.3.1 A time-critical revision is a revision between two periodic reviews using a fast-track process.

10.3.2 A time-critical revision can be conducted only in the following situations:

- a) Change in national laws and regulations affecting compliance with PEFC International requirements
- b) Instruction by PEFC International to comply with specific or new PEFC requirements within a timescale that is too short for a normal revision.

10.3.3 The time-critical revision shall follow these steps:

- a) AFF shall draft the revised standard,
- b) AFF may consult stakeholders, but it is not mandatory,
- c) The revised standard shall be approved formally at the highest appropriate decision-making level of AFF,
- d) AFF shall explain the justification for the urgent change(s) and make the justification publicly available.

10.4 Application and transition of revised standards

10.4.1 A revision shall define the application date and transition period of the revised standard(s)/normative document(s).

10.4.2 An application date shall not be more than one year after the publication of the standard. This allows time for endorsement of the revised standard(s)/normative document(s), introduction of change(s), information dissemination and training.

10.4.3 The transition period shall not exceed one year. AFF may determine a longer period when justified by exceptional circumstances.