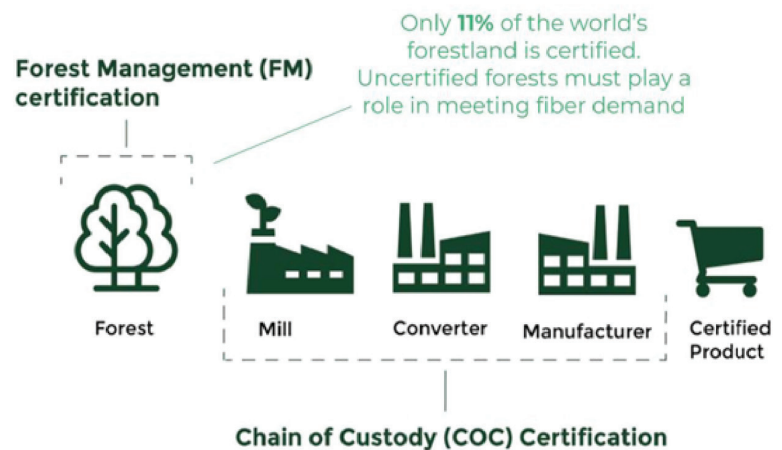


## OUR FORESTS ARE UNDER THREAT—HERE'S HOW THEY ARE CERTIFIED

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**Paper - III**  
(Environment and Ecology)

Large-scale destruction of forests has always been a concern for the environment, but with climate change, deforestation has become a critically sensitive issue globally in recent years. Forests absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide that is emitted in various economic activities, keeping a check on global warming. At the Glasgow climate meeting in 2021, more than 100 countries took a pledge to stop, and start reversing, deforestation by 2030.



### Regulation of World and Forest Products

Several countries and corporates, keen to present an environment-friendly image, now try to ensure that they avoid consumption of any product that might be the result of deforestation or illegal logging. And Europe and the United States have passed laws that regulate the entry and sale of forest-based products in their markets. This is where the certification industry comes in — offering a multi-layer audit system that seeks to authenticate the origin, legality, and sustainability of forest-based products such as timber, furniture, handicraft, paper and pulp, rubber, and many more.

### Sustainability & Certifications

Stopping deforestation does not mean forests cannot be harvested in a sustainable manner for the products. In fact, periodic harvesting of trees is necessary and healthy for forests. Trees have a life span, beyond which they die and decay. Also, after a certain age, the capacity of trees to absorb carbon dioxide gets saturated. Younger and fresher trees are more efficient at capturing carbon dioxide. The problem arises only when trees are felled indiscriminately, and the cutting of forests outpaces their natural regeneration.

The approximately three-decade-old global certification industry began as a way to establish, through independent third-party audits, whether forests were being managed in a sustainable manner. Over the years, a range of certifications have come to be offered for various activities in the forestry sector. There are two major international standards (there are a few other less widely accepted ones as well) for sustainable management of forests and forest-based products. One has been developed by Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC; the other by Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certifications, or PEFC. FSC certification is more popular and in demand, and also more expensive.

Organisations like FSC or PEFC are only the developers and owners of standards — like, for example, the International Organisation of Standardisation (ISO) or Bureau of International Standards (BIS). They are not involved in the evaluation and auditing of the processes being followed by the forest managers or manufacturers or traders of forest-based products. That is the job of certification bodies authorised by FSC or PEFC.

The certification bodies often subcontract their work to smaller organisations. PEFC does not insist on the use of its own standards. Instead, like its name suggests, it endorses the ‘national’ standards of any country if they are aligned with its own. Two

### What is Forest Certification?

- Forest certification is a global movement launched in the 1990s after the Rio Earth Summit, certification by an independent third party A market-based non-regulatory certification designed to promote sustainable management of forests and trees outside forests protection device. As many developed countries have imposed trade restrictions on the import of non-certified timber, non-timber forest products and wood-based goods into their countries, it has become mandatory to obtain a Sustainable Forest Management Certificate for export.
- Forest certification is a mechanism for forest monitoring, tracing and labeling of timber, wood and pulp products and non-timber forest products where the quality of management from an environmental, social and economic perspective is judged against a range of agreed standards . It is a process that leads to the issue of a certificate by an independent party, which verifies that an area of forest is managed according to a defined standard.

### Two major international standards for sustainable management of forests and forest-based products

1. Developed by Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) - more popular and expensive
2. Developed by the Program for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) - supports any country's 'national' standards

### Two main types of authentication-

1. **Forest Management Unit Certification (FMU):** Forest Management Certification is a process that verifies that an area of forest/plantation from where timber, fiber and other non-timber forest products are extracted, is managed according to a defined standard. is done.
2. **Chain of Custody (COC):** CoC certification is a process of tracking forest products from a certified forest to the point of sale to ensure that the product originated from a certified forest.

main types of certification are on offer: forest management (FM) and Chain of Custody (CoC). CoC certification is meant to guarantee the traceability of a forest product like timber throughout the supply chain from origin to market.

### **Forest certification in India**

The forest certification industry has been operating in India for the last 15 years. Currently, forests in only one state — Uttar Pradesh — are certified. Forty one divisions of the UP Forest Corporation (UPFC) are PEFC-certified, meaning they are being managed according to standards endorsed by PEFC. These standards have been developed by the New Delhi-based nonprofit Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF).

Some other states too obtained certification, but subsequently dropped out. The Bhamragad forest division in Maharashtra was the first to obtain FSC certification for forest management. Later, two divisions in Madhya Pradesh and one in Tripura also obtained FSC certification. UPFC too had FSC certification earlier.

However, all of these expired over time. Only UPFC extended its certification — but with PEFC.

Many agroforestry projects, such as those run by ITC, and several paper mills too have forest management certification. The forests here are meant for captive use of the industry. There are a large number of CoC certifications, but the dropout rate is 40 percent. As of now, there are 1,527 valid CoC certifications by FSC, and 1,010 that are suspended, expired, or have been terminated. A total 105 entities have obtained PEFC CoC certification in India so far, 40 of which have expired, or have been suspended or terminated.

### **India-specific standards**

India allows the export of only processed wood, not timber. In fact, the timber harvested from Indian forests is not enough to meet the domestic demand for housing, furniture, and other products. The demand for wood in India is 150-170 million cubic metres annually, including 90-100 million cubic metres of raw wood. The rest goes mainly towards meeting the demand for paper and pulp.

#### **Forest certification in India**

- The Certification Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) has been developed by the Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF), an Indian non-profit organization. The PEFC, on the other hand, provides independent third-party certification for sustainable forest management.
- The NCCF was set up in 2015 by representatives of forest-based industries, non-profits, forest auditors and government forest departments with an aim to set standards for certifying India's forests, their products and their sustainable management.
- The NCCF's forest certification scheme is aimed to improve India's forest management regime that is often criticised for various issues ailing the sector such as forest rights, forest degradation, biodiversity losses, encroachments, lack of manpower etc.

#### **Significance and the need for forest certification:**

Forest certification has been accepted as an efficient tool for forest management world over. Given that forests of India serve important ecological, economic and social functions that also provide livelihood to over 275 million forest dependent people of this country, there is a need for certification for sustaining and enhancing these roles of forests.



India's forests contribute just about five million cubic metres of wood every year. Almost 85 per cent of the demand for wood and wood products is met by trees outside forests (ToF). About 10 per cent is imported. India's wood import bill is Rs 50,000-60,000 crore per year.

Since ToF are so important, new certification standards are being developed for their sustainable management. PEFC already has certification for TOF and last year, FSC came up with India-specific standards that included certification for ToF. Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav launched the FSC's India standards in June 2022.

### **The Govt's own standards**

Long before private certification bodies set up operations in India, the government had moved to define national standards for the management of forests. Based on the recommendations of an expert committee in 2005, the Environment Ministry had asked relevant institutions like the Bhopal-based Indian Institute of Forest Management to draw up national forest standards. Considerable work was done, and a draft Cabinet note seeking the government's approval for setting up such standards was drawn up. However, the effort did not come to fruition.

When the NCCF came into being in 2015, offering PEFC certification in India, the Environment Ministry nominated an officer on the governing board, lending it official legitimacy. But the nomination was later withdrawn. Last year, the Ministry associated itself with FSC, by launching its new India standards.

The role of private certification agencies, especially with regard to forest management certification, has come under sustained criticism from a group of influential retired forest officials. In response to this criticism, and also to the increasing complaints about corruption in the private certification space, the Ministry has restarted efforts to develop official national forest standards.

The government says the "indigenous system of certifications" will be simple, transparent, and easy to adopt, even by small farmers and tree growers. The benchmarks will adhere to internationally accepted norms, but will take into account India's national circumstances. The purpose is to make available sustainably grown and managed forest products in the domestic market.

### Expected Question

**Que. Consider the following statements-**

1. Forest Management Unit Certification (FMU), is a process that verifies that an area of forest/ plantation from where timber, fiber and other non- timber forest products are extracted is managed according to a defined standard .
2. Chain of Custody (CoC) certification is a process of tracking forest products from a certified forest to the point of sale to ensure that the product originated from a certified forest.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer : C**

### Mains Expected Question & Format

**Que.: What is Forest Certification? State its importance and necessity and throw light on the certification of forest in India.**

**Answer Format :**

- ❖ What is forest certification.
- ❖ Explain the importance and need of forest certification.
- ❖ Explain about the certification of forest in India.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion.

**Note:** - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.