Voluntary guidelines for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests

Key points

The *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests*:

- Update and replace the original *ITTO Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests*, which were published in 1990.

- Constitute an international reference for the development and improvement of national and subnational guidelines for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests.

- Provide technical guidance on the management of individual forest management units.

- Set out seven principles of sustainable forest management, guidelines within these principles, and suggested actions for the implementation of each guideline.

ITTO will work with member countries and all tropical forest stakeholders to put the guidelines into practice in a global effort towards achieving sustainable forest management in the tropics.

The purpose of the voluntary guidelines

ITTO has fully revised its guidelines for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests, which were first published in 1990. The *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* aim to:

- Identify the framework conditions for the application of forest management in natural tropical forests for the sustainable provision of forest goods and environmental services.

- Provide guidance for addressing the policy, legal, institutional, ecological, social and economic issues that need to be taken into account in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable forest management (SFM).

- Help forest owners and managers to implement SFM at the landscape and forest management unit (FMU) scales.

- Stimulate the adoption of appropriate adaptive management practices to maintain the capacity of natural tropical forest ecosystems to sustainably provide multiple goods and environmental services.

- Inform international processes on the role that the sustainable, multipurpose management of natural tropical forests can play in addressing climate change, maintaining water supply, conserving biodiversity, increasing food security, implementing sustainable agriculture and combating desertification.

Four objectives, seven principles

The *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* feature seven principles for managing natural tropical forests, organized under four objectives with the aim of:

1. Providing the enabling conditions for SFM

- Principle 1: Forest governance and security of tenure

- Principle 2: Land-use planning, permanent forest estate and forest management planning

2. Ensuring forest ecosystem health and vitality

- Principle 3: Ecological resilience, ecosystem health and climate-change adaptation

3. Maintaining the multiple functions of forests to deliver products and environmental services

- Principle 4: Multipurpose forest management

- Principle 5: Silvicultural management

4. Integrating social, cultural and economic aspects to implement SFM

- Principle 6: Social values, community involvement and forest-worker safety and health

- Principle 7: Investment in natural forest management and economic instruments.

Under each of the seven principles is a set of guidelines, as well as suggested actions for putting the guidelines into practice. The principles are explained on the next page.

The voluntary guidelines draw on the *ITTO Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* (themselves due to be revised) and complement other sets of guidelines produced by ITTO on various aspects of tropical forest management, including forest restoration and biodiversity conservation. The seven principles are applicable to SFM in natural tropical forests worldwide, with an emphasis on timber production forests. They are designed to encourage multipurpose forest management practices that, if applied over the long term, will:

- Maintain the yields of multiple products and the provision of environmental services in tropical forests.

- Safeguard the diverse values of tropical forests.

- Generate benefits that are distributed equitably among multiple stakeholders.

Principle 1: Forest governance and security of tenure

Political commitment, supportive national policies, strong institutions, laws and regulations, appropriate governance, secure forest tenure, and clearly defined access and use rights, including customary and traditional rights, are all necessary for SFM.

Sample guideline: **Empower communities and civil-society institutions and women to collaborate in SFM as part of good governance for SFM**

Principle 2: Land-use planning, the permanent forest estate and forest management planning

Land allocation to different uses and spatial planning within and outside forests must ensure that the economic, social and environmental values of forests are maintained or enhanced at a landscape scale. This requires the adoption of a forest management planning framework at the national and/or landscape scales.

Sample guideline: **Undertake periodic national or subnational forest resource assessments to provide reliable data for forest management planning**

Principle 3: Ecological resilience, forest health and climate-change adaptation

Ecological resilience is a key tenet of SFM in natural tropical forests, and it must be maintained or enhanced to reduce the risks posed to sustainability by destructive agents, climate change and other stresses and disturbances.

Sample guideline: **Restore degraded forest ecosystems to improve habitats for native species, forest structure, biodiversity, productivity and ecosystem functioning**

Principle 4: Multipurpose forest management

The role of natural tropical forests as providers of multiple goods and services should be safeguarded by the application of sound planning and management practices that maintain ecosystem functions and the potential of forests to yield the full range of benefits to societies.

Sample guideline: **Enable multipurpose forest management to manage forest products and environmental services**

Principle 5: Silvicultural management

In timber production forests, each FMU should have an approved management plan, with clearly stated management objectives and measures—including silvicultural measures—for achieving them. Silvicultural measures should be revised periodically in the light of accumulated experience, new information and changing circumstances.

Sample guideline: **Conduct preliminary studies and develop a multiresource inventory**

Principle 6: Social values, community involvement and forest-worker safety and health

Forest management should recognize and aim to meet social needs. Forest management decisions should be participatory and inclusive, and the costs and benefits should be shared equitably among stakeholders. Communities should be empowered to participate in SFM through measures to achieve equity and build capacity among stakeholders. The provision of safe and adequate working conditions is also an essential element of SFM.

Sample guideline: **Ensure the effective participation of relevant stakeholders in planning and implementing SFM**

Principle 7: Investment in natural forest management and economic instruments

SFM only succeeds if it is properly financed. Capturing the full value of forests, including environmental services, and ensuring the equitable distribution of costs and benefits, are essential for SFM.

Sample guideline: **Provide preferential access to markets for products from sustainably managed tropical forests**

Simple and evidence-based

The voluntary guidelines constitute an international reference document for the development and improvement of national and subnational guidelines for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests. They also provide a reference on technical issues at the landscape and FMU scales.

The voluntary guidelines are simple and practical, and they avoid unnecessary prescriptions. In formulating them, the intention was to ensure their usefulness for forest managers and to support suggested actions with science.

The voluntary guidelines are evidence-based, outcomes-focused advisory statements intended to assist decision-makers, forest managers and other stakeholders in making informed forest management decisions. When adapted to local circumstances and adequately applied, they will facilitate the systematic development of SFM and ensure the application of good practices in natural tropical forests.

The need for revision

There have been many significant developments in international policies related to tropical forests and forest management since the *ITTO Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* were published in 1990. These include the adoption, in 1993, of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1996; various UNFCCC decisions (in 2007–2013) on the development of REDD+ to mitigate climate change; and the 2007 agreement on the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests.

Other key developments that have affected the use and management of tropical forests since 1990 include:

• Increased recognition of the role of tropical forests in delivering "global" environmental services, including those related to biodiversity, water, carbon and ecosystem resilience.

• Increased recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities over forests and forest use, and the need to safeguard those rights.

• Increased decentralization of control over forests, including privatization and the transfer of ownership to indigenous and local communities.

• Increased awareness of illegality and corruption as major impediments to SFM.

• Increased demand for legal and sustainable timber in importing markets and evolving requirements for providing assurance of legality and sustainability.

• The emergence of forest certification as an important driver of SFM.

• An increase in the vulnerability of tropical forests to biotic and abiotic threats attributed to climate change and increased climate variability.

The revision process

A first draft of the voluntary guidelines was prepared by consultants in 2010 and reviewed in two expert meetings (in Switzerland and Brazil) in 2011. Three regional validation workshops were conducted in 2012—in Malaysia, Gabon and Peru. ITTO members reviewed the draft in the Committee on Reforestation and Forest Management at its 45th session (November 2011), 46th session (November 2012) and 47th session (November 2013), and revisions to the draft were made in light of comments received. The International Tropical Timber Council adopted the final draft of the voluntary guidelines in Decision 4(XLIX) made at its 49th session in November 2013.

Participants in the second expert group meeting on the revision of the guidelines for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests, held in Antimary, Brazil, in August 2011

Using the voluntary guidelines

The following groups involved in the management and protection of natural tropical forests are encouraged to use the voluntary guidelines:

- National and subnational producer-country **governments**, including policymakers and legislators; political parties; government agencies dealing with forests, conservation, the environment, and land-use planning; and development and extension agencies.

- **Forest managers**, who may be national, provincial or local forestry agencies, forest companies, producer associations, natural-forest smallholders or rural and forest communities.

- **Private-sector organizations**, such as small, medium-sized and large forest companies and their umbrella organizations, and trading groups.

- **civil-society organizations**, such as environmental and development non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups.

- **research and education institutions**—public and private forest research, education and training institutions.

- **consumer-country governments**, as well as donors such as public and private international funding and development agencies.

ITTO intends to support its tropical member countries in applying the voluntary guidelines in the field as a priority under its Strategic Action Plan and biennial work programmes. ITTO will work with its member countries and the full range of tropical forest stakeholders to put the guidelines into practice.

The *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* are voluntary in nature and not legally binding on ITTO member countries. They may be adapted as appropriate to national and local circumstances.

The *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* will be available in English, French and Spanish from early 2015 at www.itto.int/policypapers_guidelines. Order printed copies by contacting info@itto.int

All photos from the ITTO photo library.

International Tropical Timber Organization
International Organizations Center, 5th Floor
Pacifico-Yokohama, 1-1-1, Minato-Mirai
Nishi-ku, Yokohama, 220-0012 Japan
Tel: 81-45-223-1110 Fax: 81-45-223-1111
E-mail: itto@itto.int   Web: www.itto.int