

Putting No Deforestation into Practice The High Carbon Stock Approach A Nature-Based Solution Contributor November 2021

Tropical rainforests are staggeringly productive reservoirs of life and biodiversity, and their protection is a critical nature-based solution that will contribute real progress toward the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5°C. One of the main drivers of tropical deforestation, and a consequential contribution to climate change, is agricultural and plantation expansion – the primary driver of nearly half of deforestation worldwide.¹

The [High Carbon Stock Approach's](#) (HCSA) mission is to end commodity-driven tropical deforestation by providing land managers with practical, credible, and inclusive tools for land use planning. The HCSA effectively identifies tropical forest areas that are under threat from deforestation due to commodity production expansion. By protecting rather than converting, these forest areas and the carbon they contain are conserved along with other ecosystem services and social values; the natural system is maintained to allow continued sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere. Realising the carbon storage and sequestration potential from conserving High Carbon Stock (HCS) forests across the tropics is essential to meeting the nationally determined contribution (NDC) targets of tropical forest jurisdictions and the broader goals of the Paris Agreement.

Established in 2014, [the HCSA](#) sets the standard approach for implementing no deforestation on-the-ground for any commodity grown in moist tropical forest landscapes. It uses remote sensing and field data to stratify land cover into different HCS forest classes. This is implemented using a rights and conservation science-based approach to reach integrated conservation land use plans that incorporate the protection of HCS forests, High Conservation Value (HCV) areas and peatlands, as well as community use and plantation development areas. Its social requirements ensure that this occurs with free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of affected Indigenous Peoples and communities. If FPIC is obtained, land managers must cooperate with fair and equitable representation from the community(s) in its implementation of the HCSA to ensure indigenous people and local community rights and livelihoods (including land, food security, and labour rights) are upheld, as guided by [HCSA's social requirements](#).

The HCSA is being [implemented](#) in 12 countries in Asia Pacific, Africa, and Latin America for plantations of oil palm, pulpwood, cocoa, and rubber. The HCSA is innovating its methodology for application by independent small farmers, and large-scale indicative HCS mapping is underway to scale its accessibility and implementation.

The HCS forest, HCV area, and community use outcomes are reported via [publicly available](#) and independently reviewed [stand-alone HCSA or HCV-HCSA assessments](#). As of [September 2021](#), over 3.3 million hectares of land had been subject to assessments using the HCSA methodology, with over 635,000 hectares of HCS forests identified. These forest areas are in the process of being or have been set aside by companies for conservation. The above-ground biomass in these conservation areas is estimated to hold over 52.3 million tonnes of carbon. Additionally, the HCSA has contributed to preventing the deforestation of [9.2 million](#) hectares of palm oil concession areas in Indonesia through the adoption of commitments to achieve No Deforestation through the application of the approach by a majority of actors in the sector. The HCSA's Global Forest Watch Pro platform is used to monitor the long-term maintenance of such conservation areas.

In recognition of HCSA's contributions to climate change mitigation and resilience within natural ecosystems, agricultural landscapes, and local communities, the HCSA is acknowledged as a Nature-based Solution to climate change by the [United Nations](#).

The primary collaborating organisations involved are [HCSA's Steering Group \(SG\) members](#):

Small Holder Organisations: Serikat Petani Kelapa Sawit (SPKS).

¹ Classifying drivers of global forest loss. Philip G. Curtis, Christy M. Slay, Nancy L. Harris, Alexandra Tyukavina and Matthew C. Hansen. Science 361 (6407), 1108-1111. 14 September 2018.

NGOs: Conservation International, Forest People Programme, Greenpeace, Mighty Earth, National Wildlife Federation, Rainforest Action Network, and World Wide Fund for Nature.

Companies: Asia Pulp & Paper, Asian Agri, Cargill Tropical Palm Holdings Pte Ltd, Golden Agri-Resources, IOI Group, Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad, Musim Mas, Barry Callebaut, BASF, Ferrero Trading Lux SA, Nestlé S.A, Procter & Gamble and Unilever.

Technical Support Organisations: Daemeter, Earthworm Foundation, Ekologika, Proforest, Rainforest Alliance, and Aidenvironment.

HCSA's partners: [United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#), [Build Indonesia to Take Care of Nature for Sustainability \(Bangun Indonesia untuk Jaga Alam demi Keberlanjutan\)](#), [HCV Network \(HCVN\)](#), [World Resources Institute \(WRI\)](#), [World Cocoa Foundation \(WCF\)](#), [Science Nature and People Partnerships \(SNAPP\)](#) and [Accountability Framework initiative \(AFi\)](#).

HCSA Achievement Highlights

Government Engagement:

- **African Palm Oil Initiative:** Seven African nations support the conservation of High Conservation Value areas and High Carbon Stock forests.
- **Indonesian government:** HCSA provided technical expert support in the process to develop Ecosystem Essential Areas guidance.
- **Jurisdictions adopting HCSA:** e.g., [Sabah State](#) and [Aceh](#), West Papua, and [West Kalimantan](#) in Indonesia.
- **EU Commission (2019)** – The HCSA is referenced as a tool for forest conservation in the EU's 'Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests' [report](#);
- **French government strategy** (Nov 18): Discusses importing requirements in relation to deforestation and references the HCSA toolkit.
- **Tropical Forest Alliance** references HCSA where it may assist in convening on its role to assist the development/implementation of national policy in tropical forest regions.

HCSA in Leading Certification Schemes and Initiatives:

- The HCSA was incorporated into the **Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)**'s P&C for the [Production of Sustainable Palm Oil](#) (2018).
- HCSA is referenced for implementing No Deforestation requirements and identifying HCS forests in the following initiatives: **Climate Bonds Initiative (CBI)** – [Forestry criteria](#) (Nov 2018); **Cocoa Forest Initiative Framework for Action** – [Ghana](#) (2017), [Côte d'Ivoire](#) (2017), [Cameroon](#) (2019); [Global Platform Sustainable Natural Rubber](#) (2020); **Forest Stewardship Council** – ['Guidance for Demonstrating Ecosystem Services Impacts'](#); **Consumer Good Forum's** Forest Positive Coalition [Palm Oil Road Map](#) (2021).

Financial Institutions:

- Financial institutions/assessments referencing HCSA, incl. via RSPO and AFi, for no deforestation implementation: ['Banking Beyond Deforestation How the banking industry can help halt and reverse deforestation'](#) **The Banking Environment Initiative** by University of Cambridge (2021); **Forest 500** ['Financial Institution Assessment Methodology'](#) (2020); **Bank Track's** ['Soft Commitments, Hard Lessons: an analysis of the Soft Commodities Compact Soft Commodities Compact'](#) (2020); **Barclays** ['Soft Commodities Compact Progress Report'](#) (2019); **ShareAction's** ['Banking on a Low-Carbon Future'](#) ranking report (Dec 2017).

HCSA Toolkit & Smallholder adaption:

- HCSA Toolkit V1 launched (March 2015); [Toolkit version 2](#) launched (May 2017).
- In collaboration with the Indonesian Palm Oil Farmers Union (SPKS), an HCS-HCV Simplified Approach for Indonesia by Q4/21 and global application by 2022/23 is being developed.
- To speed up the adoption of HCSA, particularly for small farmers and governments, large-scale indicative mapping of HCS forests is being carried out in key regions in [Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines](#).
- The HCSA Executive Committee is supporting the development of HCSA Restoration and Remediation requirements and guidelines.