

Advice Note 06: HCSA and HCV–HCSA Assessments

11 May 2022

About this HCSA Advice Note:

The purpose of this document is to respond to technical queries that arise from the implementation of the HCSA methodology and the evaluation of HCSA and HCV-HCSA assessment reports. Queries are gathered through HCSA or HCVN and centralised in a query tracker. Then, subject area experts propose a response. Next, the query and draft response are shared with the HCSA Technical Panel for input. Finally, the advice note is updated accordingly and published.

If you have a technical query, please contact the HCSA Quality Assurance team:

qa@highcarbonstock.org

If your query is related to an HCV-HCSA assessment currently under ALS evaluation, contact the ALS Quality Manager: qualitymanager@hcvnetwork.org

NOTE-2022-01-01	Age of satellite imagery at the time of field visits when field work is delayed
Main Topic(s)	Vegetation classification, satellite imagery
Date published	11 May 2022
Date revised	-
Date(s) of applicability	Applies for new assessments from 11 May 2021 and to assessment reports undergoing ALS evaluation and HCSA peer review as of this date.
Document reference	HCSA Toolkit Module 4 (V2.0, May 2017): Section B; Technical Requirements; Optical satellite data (Page 15)
Query / request for clarification	
<p>Can older satellite images be used as part of the landcover classification process if an assessment is delayed such that the images used for the preliminary landcover classification are more than 12 months old by the time the assessment team can conduct the required fieldwork and the final landcover classification?</p>	
Response by HCSA	
<p>In all cases, as per the requirements of HCSA Toolkit Module 4 (Page 15), the satellite images used in the vegetation classification process must be no older than 12 months.</p> <p>In cases where it has not been possible to conduct field work for the main assessment within 12 months of the date of the satellite imagery used to prepare the preliminary landcover map, the preliminary land cover classification, based on the initial satellite imagery and ground truthing shall still be presented, including the preliminary accuracy assessment. This shall be presented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In HCSA Assessment Reports: in Section 6.4 Land cover map with title, date, legend and any HCS forest patches identified • In HCV-HCSA Assessment reports: Section 6.6 Image analysis and land cover classification <p>The final land cover classification shall then be made using newer imagery that is no older than 12 months at the time of the field visits for ground-truthing.</p> <p>Once the final landcover map has been produced, the assessor shall compare it with the preliminary land cover map to identify whether there have been landcover changes between them. Where clearance of potential HCS forest or HCV area is detected, Advice Note 2022-01-02 applies.</p>	

NOTE-2022-01-02	Clearance of potential HCS forest or HCV area detected during the assessment
Main Topic(s)	Vegetation classification, Land clearing, Moratorium
Date published	11 May 2022
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Date(s) of applicability	Applies for new assessments from 11 May 2021 and to assessment reports undergoing ALS evaluation and HCSA peer review as of this date.
Document reference	HCSA Toolkit Module 4 (V2.0, May 2017): Section B
Query / request for clarification	
<p>What shall assessors do if clearance of potential HCS forest or HCV area is detected between the preliminary landcover classification and the final landcover classification by the assessor or by HCSA Peer Reviewers or HCVN ALS Quality Panelists?</p>	
Response by HCSA	
<p>Where clearance of potential HCS forest or HCV area is detected in the development area, the assessor shall clearly state that land clearing has been detected, identify the landcover types that have been cleared, and map (delineate and label) the areas where this happened within the development areas as part of the land cover classification (Section 6.4 of HCSA Assessment Reports, Section 6.6 of HCV-HCSA Assessment reports).</p> <p>As part of the HCS forest analysis, the results of the HCS forest stratification shall be applied to the cleared areas to estimate whether such areas were forest (low-, medium-, or high-density forest), or young regenerating forest for the purpose of the patch analysis decision tree.</p> <p>When conducting the patch analysis, such areas must be treated as if they were still forested or contained HCV but be clearly differentiated from remaining forest and HCV areas and be labelled as either degraded or cleared HCS forest and/or HCV area. The final patch analysis map shall identify the areas that should have been conserved had they not been cleared (as determined by the steps in the patch analysis decision tree) so that they can later be identified for restoration¹ by the company.</p> <p>NOTE: The purpose of this clarification is to ensure that the correct landcover, particularly the extent of potential HCS forest and HCV area, is captured within HCSA and HCV-HCSA assessment</p>	

¹ HCSA has published Restoration and Remediation Guidance, which outlines HCSA’s Principles and Criteria for ecological restoration and social remedy for wrongly directly or indirectly cleared and/or degraded HCS forest(s), HCV area(s), peatland(s), or community land(s) managed by HCSA Steering Group members, including investment holdings regardless of the stake, and their suppliers, or any party committed to or implementing the HCS Approach via either stand-alone HCSA or HCV-HCS assessments: https://highcarbonstock.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/HCSA-Restoration-Remediation-Guidance_V1-approved-1-Mar-2022_Copy-Edited-1.pdf.

reports as it occurred at the beginning of the assessment. This serves to ensure that assessment results do not mask recent land clearing that occurred after the assessment was commissioned and that assessments provide accurate information that is relevant for the implementation of no-deforestation commitments, and restoration responsibilities and activities where relevant.

While assessors conducting HCV-HCSA assessments are required to check that companies commissioning assessments have a moratorium in place, and land clearing during an assessment indicates that a moratorium is not implemented, assessors make this check prior to conducting the assessment. Therefore, the assessor may still meet all requirements that apply to them and the evaluation of the assessment reports even if land clearing has occurred after the assessment begins. Publication of an assessment report based on the assessor meeting their requirements ensures that the important information contained within reports that is needed to ensure that companies implement no-deforestation commitments is captured and made public. The alternative of failing and not publishing an assessment report (in the case of HCV-HCSA assessments) due to activities beyond the assessor's responsibility would mean that the findings of the assessment are instead lost.