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Standard**

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**Group Forest Management Certifications according to
the PEFC-System in Austria - Requirements**



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Foreword

PEFC Austria (PEFC: Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) is a national organisation with the purpose of facilitating sustainable forest management through sustainable forest management certification and labelling of wood products. Consumers can trust that products carrying the PEFC label are made of raw material from sustainably managed forests, from recycling and/or non-controversial sources. PEFC Austria is a work group responsible for the standard setting and the administration of the Austrian PEFC scheme.

PEFC Austria standards are developed within an open and transparent procedure based on consensus and supported by consultation of a variety of stakeholders. Since 1999, PEFC Austria is full member of PEFC International whose strict endorsement procedure guarantees international recognition.

To improve the readability, the male form is used for all denominations of persons. It refers to all genders.

Introduction

PEFC provides the possibility to participate in forest management certification in course of a group certification. A group of forest owners can apply for certification as a group. All owners represented in the group are obliged to fulfill the requirements of the PEFC standard for sustainable forest management and other requirements of the certification scheme. The forestlands of the participating forest owners do not have to be connected.

To ensure the effectivity of measures on connected forest areas, not only single enterprises should be considered, but the description of forest conditions and the planning of measures should be based on larger areas. Furthermore, particularly in small-scaled forestry data for detailed reports of individual forest owners are not available in the required extent. Besides, the general requirements of individual forest management certification would put small forest owners and family forest enterprises as a disadvantage in terms of costs.

In Austria, a regional approach is considered to be as particularly appropriate method for the certification of sustainable forest management, especially to give owners of small-scaled forests the possibility to take part in forest management certification. The group certification in natural growth regions is a kind of group certification which encompasses whole Austria. For target setting and planning of measures for implementation natural growth regions are defined based on natural and administrative borders. In Austria a number of monitoring systems exist, which provide a comprehensive picture of the state of the forests. This includes the Austrian Forest Inventory (ÖWI), which is, besides other statistics and data sources the basis for the PEFC-sustainability report. Therein, targets and measures for implementation are defined, based on a continuous improvement process, depending on the particular indicator, for the regional level or for whole Austria. In this process all relevant interest groups of the forest environment are involved. The report is evaluated by independent experts.

Besides the group certification in natural growth regions, defined by geographical borders, forest enterprises may also ally in other groups. The standard includes the requirements for group certification in general, additional requirements for the group certification in natural growth regions and specific circumstances which influences the implementation if the group management system are comprised in the appendices 1 and 2.

The term “shall” is used throughout this document to indicate those provisions that, reflecting the requirements that are mandatory. The term “should” is used to indicate guidance that, although not mandatory, is provided as a recognised means of meeting the requirements. The term “may” used throughout this standard indicates permission expressed by this standard whereas “can” refers to the ability of a user of this standard or to a possibility open to the user.

1 Scope

The document defines the requirements for group forest management certifications according to the forest management certification system of PEFC Austria.

Requirements for group certifications are contained in the main part; appendix 1 contains additional requirements for the group certification in natural regions. For the group certification in natural growth regions appendix 1 and appendix 2 are binding.

Group forest management certification requires establishing a specific management structure that includes the individual forest owners/managers or their representatives. A group representative represents the forest owners/person responsible in forest management certification in order to ensure the correct implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and provide a sufficient level of confidence in sampling-based certification activities.

Note: The term “group certification” is equivalent to other terms, where a number of individual forest owners are certified under one certificate.

2 Normative References

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies:

- PEFC AT ST 1001 PEFC-Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Austria
- PEFC AT ST 1002 Criteria and Indicators for the Determination of Sustainable Forestry in Austria

Note: The requirements specified by the PEFC Standard for Sustainable Forest Management in Austria (PEFC AT ST 1001:2024) shall be met by the group participants, unless the governing body of the group organization is explicitly responsible for implementation.

3 Definitions

For the purposes of this document the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996 apply together with the following definitions.

3.1 Certified area

The forest area covered by a group forest certificate representing the sum of forest areas of the participants.

3.2 Governing body of the group organisation

The governing body of the group organisation represents the participants, with overall responsibility for ensuring the conformity of forest management in the certified area to the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest management certification scheme.

Note 1: In the group certification of natural growth regions the “regional committee” is the “governing body of the group organisation” (see 3.7).

Note 2: The relationship between the terms “group organisation”, “governing body of the group organisation” and “participant” is shown in Figure 1.

3.3 Group forest certificate

A document confirming that the group organisation complies with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest management certification scheme.

Note: The term “group forest certificate” is equivalent to the term “regional group certificate” or other terms chosen by a relevant forest management certification scheme which comply with the content of this definition.

3.4 Group forest management certification

Certification of the group organisation under one group forest certificate.

Note: The term “group organisation” is equivalent to the term “regional forest management certification” or other terms chosen by the relevant forest management certification scheme and complying with the content of this definition. The term “regional forest management certification” is to be understood as “group forest management certification” limited by geographical boundaries.

3.5 Group organisation

A group of participants represented by the governing body of the group for the purposes of implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and its certification.

Note1: The term “group organisation” is equivalent to the term “region” or other terms chosen by the relevant forest management certification scheme and complying with the content of this definition.

Note 2: The relationship between the terms “group organisation”, “governing body of the group organisation” and “participant” is shown in Figure 1.

Note 3: The participants can be members of a specific geographic region or an organisation. However, this is not a requirement of the issuance of a group forest certificate.

3.6 Group certification in natural growth regions

Is a group forest management certification, which contains whole Austria and includes different natural growth regions.

Note 1: Group certification in natural growth regions is a one option of group forest management certification in Austria.

Note 2: The segmentation in natural growth regions is illustrated in appendix 2.

3.7 Regional committee

The regional committee is the governing body of the group organisation of the group certification in natural growth regions. The regional committee is represented through its chairman or his deputy.

Note: Group certification in natural growth regions is a one option of group forest management certification in Austria.

3.8 Participant

A forest owner/manager, person responsible or other entity or a forest cooperative covered by the group forest certificate, who has the legal right to manage the forest in a clearly defined forest area, and the ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard in that area.

Note1: The term “ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard” requires the entity to have a long-term legal right to manage the forest and would disqualify one-off contractors, such as forest entrepreneurs, from becoming participants in group certification.
 Note 2: The relationship between the terms “group organisation”, “governing body of the group organisation” and “participant” is shown in Figure 1.

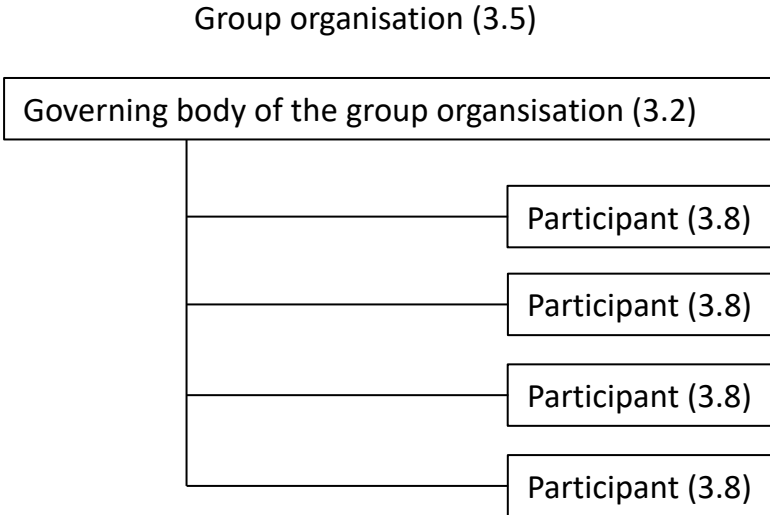
3.9 Confirmation of participation

A document issued to an individual participant or is made accessible to him that refers to the group forest certificate and that confirms the participant as being covered by the scope of the group forest management certification.

3.10 Declaration of participation

A document, in which the participant commits himself, to comply with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest management certification scheme.

Figure 1: Illustration of the elements of a group organisation



4 Requirements

4.1 General requirements

4.1.1 A participant shall be only covered by one certificate.

Note: This can be either an individual certificate or a certificate of the group certification in natural growth regions or another group forest certificate.

4.1.2 Participants shall participate with the whole forest area located in the group forest management certification.

4.1.3 The governing body of the group organisation shall take the overall responsibility for the implementation of the requirements of this document and participant’s compliance with the requirements for sustainable forest management as defined in PEFC AT ST 1001 and other applicable documents.

4.1.4 The governing body of the group organisation shall be the holder of the group forest certificate.

4.1.5 The governing body of the group organisation shall identify the affected stakeholders that are relevant for the group management system and their relevant expectations.

4.1.6 The governing body of the group organisation shall assign one or more authorised representatives (group representatives) representing the group organisation, who are responsible for several issues concerned with the forest management certification.

Note 1: Group organisations can use existing body and decision processes, or may define own governing bodies and decision processes for the sake of the forest management certification.

Note 2: Additional requirements for the group certification in natural growth regions are contained in appendix 1.

4.1.7 The governing body of the group organisation shall centrally administer the compliance with the sustainable forest management standard through the participants.

4.1.8 Participants shall be subject to an internal annual monitoring programme of the group organisation, which creates sufficient confidence, that the whole group organisation with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of PEFC Austria.

4.1.9 The governing body of the group organisation shall have available sufficient data material to prove the compliance with the respective criteria and indicators PEFC AT ST 1002.

Note: For the group certification in natural growth regions criteria and indicators shall be applied which are suitable for the perspective on regional or group level PEFC AT ST 1002 (Part A).

4.1.10 Personal and material Resources needed for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of the group management system shall be determined and provided by PEFC Austria and the Members of FHP-Cooperation.

4.1.11 Persons, doing work in the governing body of the group organisation shall be qualified foresters, who have sufficient knowledge concerning

- a. the standard for sustainable forest management and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme of PEFC Austria
- b. the targets in the sustainability report and the measures for the implementation
- c. the procedure for system stability (4.2.3)

4.1.12 Suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the group management system and the sustainable management of the forest shall be continuously improved.

4.2 Functions and responsibilities of the governing body of the group organisation

4.2.1 The tasks and responsibilities of the governing body of the group organisation comprise:

- To represent the participants in the certification process (4.2.2)
- To establish written procedures for the management of the group organisation and the implementation of the standards and other applicable requirements (4.2.3)
- To establish contractual agreements with participants, issuance of confirmations of participation (4.2.4-4.2.5)

- Keep a list with the relevant data of participating forest owners and documentation of the data of the group organisation (4.2.12)
- Providing of information and recommendations for action (4.2.8-4.2.9)
- Communication with the local population and interest groups (4.2.6)
- Operation and documentation (4.2.10-4.2.12)
 - of an annual internal monitoring programme
 - monitoring the conformity with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard, and other applicable requirements of the forest management certification scheme
 - preventive and/or corrective actions, exclusion of participants
 - the achievement of the targets which are formulated in the sustainability report and the measures taken
- Establishing and executing a complaint and dispute settlement process (4.2.13)

4.2.1.1 The governing body of the group organisation can assign third parties with tasks, which are part of the group forest management certification. It shall be ensured that

- a. The tasks are performed according to the requirements
- b. No rights of the group members, for example, data privacy laws are infringed.

4.2.1.1.1 The power of decision shall remain with the group organisation.

4.2.1.1.2 The governing body of the group organisation remains responsible for the compliance with the requirements towards the certification body.

Note: Tasks may comprise, for example, administrative activities (data administration), communication tasks (mailings, draft of newsletters) or tasks within the scope of the internal monitoring programme.

4.2.2. The governing body of the group organisation shall represent the group organisation in the certification process and have the responsibility for following

- a. communication and representation towards the certification body and third parties
 - upon request, making available a summary of the auditing results
- b. filing the application for certification (4.2.1.1)
- c. concluding a contract with the certification body.

4.2.2.1 The application shall contain

- a. data of the participants (contact details, identification of their forest property and its/their size(s))
- b. sustainability report
- c. documented procedure for system stability
- d. a description of the applicant in charge (responsibility, training, etc.)

4.2.2.2 The governing body of the group organisation shall provide a commitment on behalf of the whole group organisation

- a. to comply with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the PEFC Austria
- b. to integrate the group certification requirements in the group management system
- c. to continuously improve the group management system
- d. to continuously support the improvement of the sustainable management of the land/forests by the participants.

The commitment of the group entity may be part of a group management policy and shall be publicly available as documented information upon request.

4.2.3 The governing body of the group organisation shall make available the scope of this standard as documented information and establish written procedures for the management

of the group organisation (group management plan) and document the implementation (procedure for system stability). These contain:

- a. Documentation of tasks and responsibilities in the group organisation: measures, tasks and responsibilities are established and documented.
- b. Procedures for providing information and guidance, particularly requirements of PEFC, targets and measures for the implementation:
 - All persons, with tasks in forest management, need to be sufficiently informed about the PEFC requirements and the certification procedure.
 - The provision and exchange of information shall be comprehensible.
- c. Procedures for the effective implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of PEFC Austria; particularly procedures to achieve the targets formulated in the sustainability report and the corresponding measures for their implementation.
- d. Procedures that information received and new findings taken into consideration in the group organisation and, if necessary, suitable measures are defined and implemented.
- e. Procedures for the admission of new members of the group organization, which include at least the verification of the applicant's contact details and the clear identification of its forest property and its size.

4.2.3.1 If a group organisation plans any changes in the group management system, these changes shall be included in a group management plan. The functionality of the procedure for system stability shall be proven within the scope of an internal monitoring programme.

4.2.3.2 The governing body of the group organisation shall arrange the preparation of a sustainability report, which shall

- a. describe the current situation of the sustainable forest management in the context of the group organisation and formulate targets and suitable measures for a continuous improvement
- b. be prepared based on PEFC AT ST 1002 and adhere to the organization and structure thereof and contain the contents described in 4.2.3.2.2
- c. be publicly available.

4.2.3.2.1 The Sustainability report shall be prepared in regular intervals:

- For the reports, which are based on data of forest enterprises, the maximum interval to the last report shall not exceed five years.
- If the report is based on the inventory results of the Austrian Forest Inventory (ÖWI), in the following year to the publication of the results of the main survey, the report should be prepared, if possible. The interval to the last report principally shall not exceed ten years.

Note: The inventory results of the ÖWI are the most important data basis on regional level. For this reason, the surveying interval of the ÖWI shall be considered.

4.2.3.2.2 A sustainability report shall comprise following elements:

- a. Description of the current state of the forest / forest management in the group organisation (database) according to forestry data and other relevant data
- b. Interpretation of the results
- c. Resulting from items a) and b), there may be a call for action to improve sustainable forest management. Each indicator should be addressed in terms of the need for action. There is a differentiation between the two types of indicators:
 - indicators, whose development cannot be influenced by the forest management of the group organisation
 - indicators, whose development can be influenced by the forest management of group organisation (system-relevant)

- d. A target achievement analysis, (status quo/target comparison), if applicable.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.3.2.3 Targets include both long-term goals (such as the length of the rotation period), which set the direction of development in the group organisation, and short-term goals, which represent stages in achieving the long-term goals and can be implemented until the preparation of the next sustainability report. Deduced from the long-term goals at least 10 short-term, system-relevant targets (target indicators) as operational and measurable targets have to be set and suitable measures, or plans for measures, for the purpose of achieving these targets, have to be defined. The target-indicators are stipulated by the governing body of the group organisation and include indicators, which are considered significant for the management.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.3.2.4 The short-term targets („system-relevant targets“) have to be adjusted according to the aimed interval until the next sustainability report is drafted.

4.2.3.2.5 A sustainability report has to be prepared by one or more qualified expert(s). If they are external experts, the targets and the measures for achieving these targets are to be worked out in agreement with the group representative(s) and to be decided upon by the governing body of the group organisation. Relevant interest groups or experts are also invited to participate in this process.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.3.2.6 The achievement of the targets has to be reviewed and evaluated by the certification body if a current sustainability report is available.

4.2.4 The governing body of the group organisation shall establish connections based on a written agreement, which include the participants' commitment to comply with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the PEFC Austria, particularly the targets and measures for achieving these targets, which are formulated in the sustainability report. Group representatives shall have a written contract or other written agreement with all participants covering the right of the group organisation to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive measures, and to initiate the exclusion of any participant from the scope of certification in the event of non-conformity with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable documents of the PEFC Austria.

Note 1: The requirements for “participant' commitment” and “written contract or other written agreement with all participants” can also be satisfied by the commitment of and written agreement of the forest owners/managers' association, where the association can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the contract are enforceable.

Note 2: The agreements do not need to be available in paper. Electronically concluded or submitted agreements fulfil the requirement.

Note 3: The membership of forest cooperatives is only possible in case of the group certification in natural growth regions.

Note 4: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.5 The governing body of the group organisation shall provide participants with the access to a confirmation of participation in the group forest management certification.

Note: The access to a document in electronic form fulfils the requirement.

4.2.5.1 Confirmation of participation

Participants are issued a confirmation of participation from the governing body of the group organisation upon signing the respective declaration of participation. The prerequisite is that the group organisation has a valid certificate.

4.2.5.2 Termination or withdrawal of the confirmation of participation

Confirmations of participation become invalid in case of their termination or withdrawal. In this case the participant must not declare his timber as "PEFC-certified" or use the PEFC label. The group representative shall document this.

Note: Within the group certification in natural growth regions participants can terminate their participation in the forest management certification at any time.

4.2.5.2.1 The governing body of the group organisation shall notify the certification body in case of the exclusion of a forest owner.

4.2.5.2.2 If a participant has been excluded due to major non-conformities he cannot be accepted within after 12 months after exclusion. Before it is allowed to re-enter the group certification the excluded participant shall be internally audited by the group entity and an on-site inspection has to be conducted by the certification body at the cost of the forest owner. This involves inspecting whether the non-conformities have been eliminated and whether the requirements of the forest management certification scheme of PEFC Austria are met.

4.2.6 The governing body of the group organisation shall arrange the internal and external communication and apply appropriate instruments for the information exchange. It shall be determined

- a. on WHAT to communicate
- b. WHEN to communicate
- c. with WHOM to communicate
- d. HOW to communicate

External communication shall consider local population and stakeholders in particular.

Note 1: The regional committee is an instrument for the information exchange between different interest groups and for considering local knowledge and expert knowledge, particularly regarding the target setting, planning and the evaluation of measures.

Note 2: Means for communication exchange can be, for example, presentations, participation in discussion, information in publications, on websites, e-mail exchange. The information exchange can be also arranged also through forest cooperatives.

4.2.7 In group organisations local knowledge about forest management practices and knowledge of local forest owners, interest groups and NGOs should be considered.

Note 1: The regional committee is an instrument for the information exchange between different interest groups and for considering local knowledge and expert knowledge, particularly regarding the target setting, planning and the evaluation of measures.

Note 2: Means for communication exchange can be, for example, presentations, participation in discussion, information in publications, on websites, e-mail exchange. The information exchange can be also arranged also through forest cooperatives.

4.2.8 The governing body of the group organisation shall provide all participants and persons who perform tasks in sustainable forest management, with information and guidance required for

- e. the effective implementation of the targets formulated in the sustainability report and measures for achieving these targets and
- f. the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of PEFC Austria, particularly
- g. raising in the awareness of participants concerning their contribution to the effectiveness of the group management system and the sustainable forest management, including the benefits of improved group performance and
- h. the implications of not conforming with the group management system requirements.

Note: Information about targets, for example as folders, can be also transmitted electronically, for instance, as download document.

4.2.9 The governing body of the group organisation shall take care of the provision of information about new markets particularly market opportunities for products and services.

Note: This information can be provided, for instance, in articles, publications or on websites, in newsletter, presentations, etc.

4.2.10 The governing body of the group organisation shall realize the actions determined in chapter 4.2.3 and plan, implement and control internal processes and an annual internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the participants' conformity with the requirements of group certification standard and the sustainable forest management standard. Necessary processes shall be defined and controlled in accordance with established criteria.

The governing body of the group organisation shall evaluate the group management performance and the effectiveness of the group management system concerning the implementation of the sustainable forest management requirements.

The observations and results shall be documented and documentation shall be saved.

4.2.10.1 The internal monitoring programme shall review and evaluate following elements once-a-year:

- a. Compliance with the PEFC standard for sustainable forest management in Austria (PEFC AT ST 1001) and other relevant requirements of the forest management certification scheme of PEFC Austria.
- b. Compliance with the general legal regulations for forestry (in particular Austrian Forest Law 1975 in the current version)
- c. Activities of the group organisation or participants regarding
 - the requirements of the national group certification standard and the group organisation's own requirements for its group management system and its effective implementation and maintenance
 - implementation of the sustainable forest management standard
 - the achievements of the targets in the sustainability report.

4.2.10.2 Elements of an internal monitoring programme can be:

- a. evaluation through an individual internal monitoring/ revision or quality management system or controlling of the participants;
- b. internal audits on-site implemented or commissioned by the group organisation
- c. evaluation of the participants carried out by independent third parties
- d. evaluation as part of an inventory and planning process of the participating enterprises;
- e. evaluation carried out by forest owners associations;

- f. any other independent evaluation regarding the compliance of the participants with the PEFC requirements.

4.2.10.2.1 Evaluation activities may be done currently by responsible persons. Results of on calendar year shall be analysed and evaluated by the governing body of the group organisation in the beginning of the following calendar year. Analysed and evaluated results shall be available and saved as documented information and given to PEFC Austria.

4.2.10.2.2 The governing body of the group organisation shall define and concretise the internal audit programme. It shall cover at least:

- a. Planning, establishing, implementing and maintaining an audit programme(s) including the frequency, methods, responsibilities, planning requirements and reporting, which shall take into consideration the importance of the processes concerned and the results of previous audits
- b. Definition of the audit criteria and scope for each audit
- c. Selection of auditors and conducting of audits to ensure objectivity and the impartiality of the audit process
- d. Ensuring that the results of the audits are reported to relevant group management
- e. Retaining of the documented information as evidence of the implementation of the audit programme and the audit results.

4.2.10.3 Persons, who conduct an internal audit programme shall be qualified foresters, who have sufficient knowledge concerning

- d. the standard for sustainable forest management and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme of PEFC Austria
- e. the targets in the sustainability report and the measures for the implementation
- f. the procedure for system stability (4.2.3)

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.10.4 The governing body of the group organisation can apply sampling for on-site audits in course of the internal monitoring programme. On-site audits shall ensure sufficient confidence in the conformity with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification in Austria and the pursuit of the targets in the sustainability report through the group organisation.

Note: In group organisation up to 10 participants all participants have to be audited.

4.2.10.4.1 The sample should be partly selective based on following factors (4.2.10.4.2), and partly non-selective (4.2.10.4.3).

4.2.10.4.2 Samples shall

- a. be representative regarding the plot size (z.B. < 10 ha; 10 < 200 ha; ≥ 200 ha), the ownership category and potentially the geographical distribution of the participants and consider the differences among the growth regions.
- b. consider the results of former audits, discovered non-conformities and corrective measures.
- c. consider complaints or information from third parties regarding conformity with certification requirements.
- d. contain preferentially participants that have not been audited before to ensure a high coverage of the audits during the duration of the certificate.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.10.4.3 A minimum of 25 % of the participants shall be selected randomly and for the selection of the participants a risk-based procedure shall be specified.

4.2.10.4.4 The governing body of the group organisation shall apply suitable procedures for the determination of the sample size. Based on the results of a risk assessment, sample categories shall be established and samples shall be distributed. The indicators used in the risk assessment shall reflect the geographical scope of the standard. The following indicators may be used for the risk assessment:

- a. ownership type (e.g. state forest, communal forest, private forest);
- b. size of management units (different size classes);
- c. biogeographic region (e.g. lowlands, low mountain range, high mountain range);
- d. operations, processes and products of potential group participants;
- e. deforestation and forest conversion;
- f. rotation period(s);
- g. biological diversity;
- h. recreation and other socio-economic functions of the forest;
- i. dependence of and interaction with local communities
- j. available resources for administration, operations, training and research;
- k. governance and law enforcement.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

For selected indicators conditions which constitute risk on low, medium and high level and shall be defined.

4.2.10.4.5 The sample shall be determined based on the number of participants of the group organisation additively according following method. The result shall be rounded to the upper whole number.

For the

Participants ≤ 1-10 census

Participants ≤ 11-30 audit of every 2nd participant

Participants ≤ 31-100 audit of every 5th participant

Participants > 100 audit of every xth participant, derived from the SQRT (# of Participants) * reduction factor $y = \sqrt{x}$ * reduction factor

Internal on-site audits	Reduction factor
Group size < 1000	1
Group size ≥ 1000	
Previous to initial audit	1
Previous to re-certification audit	0,8 (in case the certification requirements proved to be effectively implemented over the certification period)
Previous to surveillance audit	0,6

Example: Calculation of the sample size for internal audits previous to a surveillance audit

	Sample size
Number of participants (individual enterprises):	45 => $10 + (30-10)/2 + (45-30)/5 = 10 + 10 + 3 = 23$
Number of participants (individual enterprises):	2984 => $10 + (30-10)/2 + (100-30)/5 + (\sqrt{(2984-100)}) * 0,6 = 66,2 => 67$

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1.

4.2.10.4.6 The size of the sample may be adapted by a standard taking into account one or more of the following indicators:

- a. results of a risk assessment. In this case deviations of sample sizes in case of low or high risk for individual categories shall be defined;
- b. results of internal audits or previous certification audits;
- c. quality / level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme;
- d. use of technologies allowing the gathering of information concerning specified requirements;

Note: Such technologies may be e.g. the use of satellite data or drones and allow compliance statements for specific requirements of a sustainability standard or support the risk based sampling.

e) based on other means of gathering information about activities on the ground.

Note: One way could be a survey with participants who provide some information about their activities on the ground.

4.2.10.5 The governing body of the group organisation shall analyse non-conformities, whether these non-conformities are of systematic nature or specific to the individual participant and classify them as follows:

- a) non-conformities of individual forest owners with no impact/relevance to other members of the group (only reviewed and resolved by actions at the relevant FMU level),
- b) non-conformities of individual forest owners with potential impact/relevance to other members of the group (to be resolved at the FMU level plus reported to the group level, reviewed and with actions for the whole group, e.g. preventive measures),
- c) non-conformities on group level (reviewed and resolved by actions at the group level).

4.2.10.5.1 According to this analysis corrective and preventive (in case of systematic non-conformities) measures shall be implemented covering the following elements:

- a. description of measures to be implemented
- b. responsibility for their implementation;
- c. timetable for their implementation;
- d. means for the evaluation of their implementation (e.g. follow-up audit, evidence submitted by the participant, etc.).

If necessary, changes to the group management system shall be made.

4.2.10.5.2 The governing body of the group organisation shall retain

- documented information as evidence of the nature of the nonconformities and any subsequent actions taken
- the results of any corrective action.

4.2.11 Once-a-year the governing body of the group organisation shall assess the compliance with the requirements of the standard for sustainable forest management (management evaluation), which contains:

- a. the status of actions from previous management reviews
- b. changes in external and internal issues that are relevant to the group management system
- c. the evaluation of the results of the annual internal monitoring programme and the evaluation through the certification body and their surveillance activities
- d. preventive and corrective measures and, if applicable
- e. the evaluation of the effectiveness of applied corrective measures.
- f. opportunities for continual improvement

4.2.11.1 The outputs of the management review shall include decisions related to continual improvement opportunities and any need for changes to the group management system

4.2.11.2 The governing body of the group organisation shall address nonconformities reported from group members which were identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification and ensure implementation with all group members.

4.2.12 The governing body of the group organisation shall retain records of

- a. the governing's body and participants' conformity with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard, and other applicable requirements of PEFC Austria,
- b. all participants, including their contact details, identification of their forest property and its/their size(s),
- c. the certified area,
- d. the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its review and any preventive and/or corrective actions taken
- e. the achievement of targets formulated in the sustainability report or the corresponding measures for their implementation, and the development concerning target achievement.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1

4.2.12.1 The governing body of the group organisation shall annually draft a management report.

Note: The contents are defined in PEFC AT ST 1001.

4.2.12.1.1 The contents of the management report shall be based on representative data, particularly concerning the size classes and the spatial distribution of participants.

4.2.12.1.2 The management report shall be presented to the governing body of the group organisation and possible suggestions for changes shall be included.

4.2.12.1.3 The management report shall be adopted by the governing body of the group organisation and be object of the audit by the certification body. The governing body of the group organisation shall act on the the results of the management report.

4.2.12.1.4 A summary of the auditing results or the management report shall be made available upon request.

4.2.13 The governing body of the group organisation shall establish a complaints and dispute resolution mechanism and deal with complaints and disputes according to the mechanism.

4.2.14 The governing body of the group organisation shall provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the certification body, accreditation body, PEFC International or PEFC Austria for relevant data, documentation or other information an ensure allowing access to the forest area covered by the group organisation.

4.2.15 The governing body of the group organisation shall ensure that the documented information relevant to the group management system and the conformance with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard is up to date, available and suitable for use, where and when it is needed and adequately protected against loss of confidentiality, improper use, or loss of integrity.

4.3 Functions and responsibilities of the participants

4.3.1 Participants shall provide the group organisation with a written agreement (declaration of participation), including a commitment on conformity with the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme of PEFC Austria.

Note 1: The requirement for “written agreement” and participants’ “commitment” is also satisfied by the written agreement of the forest owners/managers’ association with the group entity, where the forest owners/managers’ association can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the written agreement are enforceable.

Note 2: The agreements do not need to be available in paper. Electronically concluded or submitted agreements fulfil the requirement.

4.3.1.1 Participants shall provide the group entity with information about previous group participation.

4.3.2 Participants shall comply with the sustainable forest management standard (PEFC AT ST 1001) and other applicable documents of the forest certification scheme of PEFC Austria. Participants shall inform the group entity about nonconformities identified under other PEFC certifications than the particular group certification.

4.3.2.1 The participant shall ensure, that contractual assigned work in forest management is conducted according the requirements of the forest management certification scheme of PEFC Austria.

Note: Additional requirements to the group certification in natural growth regions are given in appendix 1

4.3.3 Participants shall provide full co-operation and assistance in the effective implementation of all requirements of the group organisation or the certification body; which includes providing:

- a. relevant data, documentation or other information,
- b. access to his forests and other facilities,

whether in connection with external audits, internal monitoring or other control measures.

4.3.4 Participants shall implement relevant corrective and preventive actions established by the group organisation.

Appendix 1 Requirements for group certification in natural growth regions

Additional requirements for 4.1.5

- a. As governing body for the group certification in natural growth regions a committee shall be established. The parties interested in regional certification, in the sectors of:
 - forestry
 - wood processing, pulp and paper industry, and retailing
 - environmental groups
 - social affairs, such as unionsform a regional committee on their own subsidiary initiative. The representatives of forestry represent at least 50 percent of the forest area in this region. This regional committee is a working group of the Chamber of Agriculture of Austria, which thus makes it a legal entity.
- b. For each natural growth regions an authorised representative of the committee (= the regional representative) is appointed. The authorized representative of the committee and his deputy are representatives of the Chamber of Agriculture in the regional committee. He is in the corresponding region the contact person in certification matters and responsible for the tasks in course of the implementation of the group certification in natural growth regions.

Additional requirements for 4.2.3.2.2

- For the group certification in natural growth regions the description and the target setting, depending of the particular indicator, can be done on the group level (for whole Austria) and for particular growth regions.

Additional requirements for 4.2.3.2.3

- a. The expert committee shall evaluate in sustainability reports in accordance with the group certification in natural growth regions the conformity and the measures for implementation with the requirements of the normative documents of PEFC Austria, this includes:
 - the evaluation of the sustainability report of the group organisation, in terms of the complete data and the credibility of the conclusions
 - the evaluation of measures taken, in terms of the measurability of the targets, effectiveness of the measures and whether measures have been set for the selected system relevant targets.
- b. The expert committee shall draw up a written report on the results of the evaluation. If no changes or supplementations have to be made, then expert committee's report is considered to be the final report. If changes and supplementations are required, these must be included by the regional committee in the sustainability report, which shall be considered by the expert committee in the final report.

Note: The expert body is appointed by PEFC Austria and consists of at least two and at most four suitable experts, who must not have been involved in drawing up the sustainability report for the respective regional group. A forestry expert is also included, as well as an expert from the field of environmental groups. The committee operates independently and impartially. The expert committee is responsible for questions regarding content, especially to the documents PEFC AT ST 1001 and PEFC AT ST 1002, for example for those posed by certification bodies. In this case the expert committee reports to PEFC Austria. This feedback is a significant factor in continuous improvement process.

Additional requirements for 4.2.3.2.5

- In the case of a positive evaluation, the targets and measures, or plans for measures in the sustainability report become binding for the certification. The original reports are to be sent to the applicant, and copies are sent to PEFC Austria.

Additional requirements for 4.2.4

4.2.4.1 Voluntary Declaration of Participation

4.2.4.1.1 Participation of an Individual Forest Owner

4.2.4.1.1.1 An individual forest owner can participate in the group certification in natural growth regions, as soon as he has signed the voluntary Declaration of Participation for a forest owner (PEFC AT RL 3001), and has submitted it to the regional representative. This signed declaration also gives him the right to use the trademarks after concluding a trademarks usage contract with PEFC Austria.

4.2.4.1.1.2 The participation has to involve the total forest area of the forest owner/enterprise.

4.2.4.1.1.3 Cultivation alliances (Urbarialgemeinschaften) and agricultural cooperatives are to be treated in the same manner as individual enterprises.

4.2.4.1.2 Participation of a Forestry Cooperative

4.2.4.1.2.1 A forestry cooperative can apply to participate as a single unit (PEFC AT RL 3001), if it trades wood in the name and on account of its members. The following conditions have to be fulfilled in this case:

- a. a decision of the forestry cooperative to participate in certification
- b. the representative of the forestry cooperative has been given the right by the participating members to make an application for them and to represent them concerning certification matters.
- c. the participating members have been informed of the content of the "PEFC standard for sustainable forestry in Austria" (PEFC AT ST 1001) as well as the targets and measures in the region
- d. the individual voluntary declarations of participation of all participating members must be available to the representative of the cooperative*.

Note 1: *If a decision was made according the statutes of the organisation, that all members of the forest cooperative take part in the PEFC forest management certification, it is not necessary, that the voluntary declarations of participation of all participating members are available but document confirming this decision must be available.

Note 2: The forest cooperative may only declare timber as PEFC-certified coming from forests of members who participate in the PEFC forest management certification ('participating members'). Timber, coming from members of the forest cooperative, who do not take part in the PEFC forest management certification, must not be declared as PEFC-certified. For the trade with PEFC-certified timber, coming from suppliers, who are not member of the forest cooperative, a CoC-certificate is compulsory required. A chain-of-custody certification is also mandatory if the forest cooperative trades wood in its own name and on its own account (see PEFC AT RL 3001).

4.2.4.1.2.2 The tasks of the representative of a forestry cooperative are as follows:

- a. gathering and keeping on file a copy of the voluntary declarations of participation of the members, who are participating in certification and passing on the declarations to the group representative (regional representative).
- b. keeping an updated list of participants (including their forest areas; also in electronic form) and sending this list and information on relevant changes to the group representative (regional representative).

- c. The participating forest owners are to be informed by the group representative (regional representative) of any differences in the targets and measures.

Note 1: If a decision was made according the statutes of the organisation, that all members of the forest cooperative take part in the PEFC forest management certification, alternatively a document confirming this decision together with a list of the members can be submitted to the authorised PEFC representative. However, this does not release the forest cooperative from the obligation to submit the required data of every participant, given in the declaration of participation for forest owners, to the PEFC representative (see PEFC AT RL 3001).

4.2.4.1.2.3 Participation comprises the forest owner's entire area of forestlands.

4.2.4.1.2.4 The participating forest owners, as well as the forestry alliance itself, are subject to internal controlling and external on-site inspections by the certification body.

Additional requirements for 4.2.10.3

- In each region, foresters with several years of professional experience are designated by the regional representative in order to help him conduct the internal controlling. They have graduated from a university, college or technical school in the field of forestry or a degree as a forest warden or forest master and have proven experience with the content of the certification system, in particular with the:
 - a. management guidelines
 - b. targets and measures in the region
 - c. the procedure for system stability

Additional requirements for 4.2.10.4.2

- If applicable, one enterprise of the Austrian Federal Forests (ÖBF AG) shall be part of the sample in every natural growth region.

Additional requirements for 4.2.10.4.4.

- The number of audits shall be based on the number of participants and be split proportionally on natural growth regions and plot size categories (< 10; 10 <200; ≥200 ha).

Note: At least 3 participants per natural growth region and plot size category shall be audited.

Additional requirements for 4.2.10.4.5

- a. If applicable, forestry cooperatives shall be part of the sample.
- b. If applicable, at least one forestry cooperative per natural growth region shall be audited
- c. Sample size = square root (no. of forestry cooperatives of the group organisation) * reduction factor
- d. The audits shall be proportionally splitted into the particular natural growth regions.
- e. If a forestry cooperative can prove that they implemented measures for system stability, the whole forestry cooperative can be considered to be audited, if more than three of the forest owners participating in the forestry cooperative were audited. The precondition is that no non-conformities are determined in the course of this auditing.

Example:

Number of participants 20150 (20000 individual enterprises, 150 forestry cooperatives)

$10+(30-10)/2+(100-30)/5+(\sqrt{(20150-100)})*0,6 \Rightarrow 118,96 = 119$ Audits (individual enterprises and forestry cooperatives)

Thereof:

$\sqrt{150}*0,6 = 7,3 \Rightarrow 8$ Forestry cooperatives to be audited

Note: Individual forestry enterprises can be audited in course of the audits of forestry cooperatives.

Additional requirements for 4.2.12b)

- The district(s) in which the forest area is located shall be given (see PEFC AT RL 3001).

Additional requirements for 4.3.2

- For participants of the group certification in natural growth regions, the contents of the contract of the voluntary declaration of participation (PEFC AT RL 3001) are binding.

Appendix 2 Split into natural growth regions

- 1) Wald- und Mühlviertel (dark green, 1)
- 2) Nördliches Alpenvorland und nördliche Randalpen (light green, 2)
- 3) Pannonisches Tief- und Hügelland (grey, 3)
- 4) Südöstliche Randalpen und Hügelland (yellow, 4)
- 5) Südliche Randalpen (orange, 5)
- 6) Östliche Zwischenalpen (dark brown, 6)
- 7) Zwischen- und Innenalpen – Ost (light brown, 7)
- 8) Nordtirol und Vorarlberg (blue, 8)

