HIGH CONSERVATION VALUES

What are High Conservation Values?

High Conservation Values (HCVs) refer to biological, ecological, social or cultural values considered to be of outstanding significance or critical importance at the national, regional, or global scale. Though all natural ecosystems are important, there are some values within the natural environment that are considered to be of critical importance or outstanding significance, and that need to be protected and maintained. This may refer to resources such as rare, threatened and endangered species and their habitats as well as processes such as ecosystem functions, including watershed protection services provided by vegetation along water courses. The HCV concept provides an objective framework for assessing these exceptional values and managing them to ensure their continued existence. For more information on the HCV concept, visit www.hcvnetwork.org

The six HCV categories

The definition of HCVs refers to six categories which encompass ecological attributes, ecosystem functions and socio-cultural values. The six HCVs are briefly presented below:

**HCV 1:** Areas containing significant concentrations of biodiversity values (e.g. rare, threatened, endangered and endemic species) and the habitats needed for their survival, e.g. a forest area containing the endangered Western Chimpanzee.

**HCV 2:** Regionally or nationally significant large landscape level forests contained within or containing the management unit, e.g. the contiguous block of forest that stretches from the Oban Block Forest Reserve in South-eastern Nigeria to the Korup National Park and the Ejagham Forest Reserve in Cameroon.

**HCV 3:** Ecosystems that are naturally rare or whose extent has been significantly reduced and are consequently considered as threatened or endangered, e.g. rare montane forests.

**HCV 4:** Areas that provide basic services of nature (such as watershed protection, erosion control and prevention of the spread of wildfires) in critical situations, e.g. areas providing clean drinking water to populations with no alternatives.

**HCV 5:** Areas that are fundamental to meeting the basic needs of local communities, such as subsistence or health. For example, areas providing a source of traditional medicine.

**HCV 6:** This refers to areas that are critical for local communities’ traditional cultural identity or areas of important religious significance. Common examples include sacred groves and ancestral burial grounds.

This briefing note is part of a series of briefing notes developed for the RSPO Africa Roadshow. Other briefing notes available are:

1. An Introduction to the RSPO
2. Sustainable Palm Oil Production: The RSPO Principles and Criteria
3. The RSPO Certification Process

4. High Conservation Values
5. Free Prior & Informed Consent

All these briefing notes are available in English and French at: www.proforestinitiative.org/roadshow

Visit the above website for more information about the RSPO Africa Roadshow and for contact details of partners in this programme.
How does the RSPO protect HCVs

Under the RSPO, oil palm plantations cannot be established in areas required to maintain HCVs. To demonstrate compliance with this, the RSPO requires that a detailed, independent and participatory High Conservation Value Assessment should be conducted by RSPO approved HCV assessors before land preparation begins. The assessment must include a detailed biological and socio-economic study of the plantation area and its surrounding landscape.

This process helps to identify all HCVs that are present or potentially present within the management area as well as those in the broader landscape that may be affected by plantation establishment. In the case that all or part of the proposed plantation area is found to have High Conservation Values, management measures must be set out for their protection, to ensure their continued existence. The assessment process should involve consultations with experts, stakeholders and local communities. To ensure that new plantations do not inadvertently clear areas of High Conservation Value, the RSPO also requires that public notice is given of all new plantings prior to clearance. Under the RSPO New Plantings Procedure, a report summarising the findings of the HCV assessment is posted on the RSPO website for a thirty-day public consultation period. If the HCV assessment and its recommendations are found to be inadequate or inaccurate, aggrieved parties may activate the RSPO’s grievance mechanism.

In the absence of complaints and grievances, the project may proceed, as long as the company takes the necessary measures to conserve the HCVs identified in the report. During certification, the RSPO auditors carry out an assessment of the extent to which the recommendations included in the HCV report are adhered to and implemented on the ground.

Key principles in identifying HCVs

For high impact operations such as the establishment of an oil palm plantation, the HCV assessment process must be guided by some key principles that together help ensure that all relevant HCVs in the management area are adequately assessed and protected:

Assessment of all six values at the proper scale: An HCV assessment must evaluate the biological, social and cultural aspects of the concession area at the appropriate scale. Field data and background information must be used to assess the importance of the plantation area for endangered and endemic species, within the context of the landscape, and for the local people at the village level.

Consultation and participation: The bedrock of a good HCV assessment process is consultations with relevant experts, stakeholders and communities. In many cases, the field assessment may take place over a couple of weeks or months and require expert input to complete or validate results. Detailed consultations with local communities and stakeholders is particularly important for identifying critical subsistence and cultural values.

Precautionary principle: This ensures that values that are potentially present within the management area are considered as actually present until they have been proven absent beyond reasonable doubt. This means that if a value might exist, management must assume that it does, and manage the land accordingly. Adopting this principle ensures that the HCVs are maintained or enhanced, particularly when the effects of the activities are not fully known.

Fact-based framework: The HCV concept, though not a stand-alone guarantee of sustainability, helps to provide a systematic fact-based framework for decision making, based on best available ecological and social information. This then provides the tools for effective management and protection of the values based on information on its location, status and management requirements.

For further information: www.proforestinitiative.org/roadshow