Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation, Conversion, and Protection of Ecosystems

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Q&A and illustrative examples that demonstrate how to apply the Accountability Framework’s definitions related to protection of ecosystems in different contexts
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DISCLAIMER: This work product is intended to be advisory only and is not intended to serve as a legal opinion or legal advice on the matters treated. The reader is encouraged to engage counsel to the extent required.

The Accountability Framework was created through a consultative process with a wide range of stakeholders including companies, NGOs, and government, and following applicable good practices for multi-stakeholder initiatives.

This document is part of the Accountability Framework version 1.0 (released in June 2019), which represents the consensus of the Accountability Framework initiative (AFi) Steering Group members that participated in its development:

The AFi Backbone Team (secretariat) is co-led by the Rainforest Alliance and the Meridian Institute.

The AFi is funded by:

For more information on the AFi and the Framework development process, please visit www.accountability-framework.org

* For more information on current minor revisions in this document: www.accountability-framework.org/minor-revisions
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Purpose & summary

This document explains how the Accountability Framework’s definitions related to deforestation, conversion, and the protection of ecosystems should be applied in practice. The main part of the document addresses several common questions that companies and other users may encounter related to setting, implementing, and monitoring commitments. This information is supported by a visual representation of the deforestation and conversion concepts and by more detailed context-specific examples in the following three tables:

- Table 1 specifies how various types of sites that may be encountered in commodity-producing landscapes would be classified according to the Accountability Framework’s definitions. It also clarifies whether conversion of each such area to commodity agriculture or tree plantations would violate no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments.

- Table 2 provides guidance on a range of “boundary cases” (sites that have attributes of both natural ecosystems and production systems) to determine how they should be treated for the purpose of fulfilling (or assessing fulfilment of) no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments.

- Table 3 specifies the relationship between the Accountability Framework’s definition of deforestation and other key reference definitions. It also clarifies how the Accountability Framework’s definition may be applied to help fulfil various existing deforestation-related goals, targets, or standards.

Users of the Accountability Framework are invited to bring forward other questions or scenarios on which they seek greater clarity. The AFi will work to address these through additional supplements to this document or in future versions of the Framework.
1. Applying the definitions in different contexts

How do the Accountability Framework’s definitions relate to localized definitions for specific countries, commodities, or other contexts? When do localized definitions prevail and when should the Accountability Framework’s definitions be applied directly?

The Accountability Framework's definitions of forest, deforestation, natural ecosystems, conversion, and related terms are generic global definitions designed to apply broadly to most contexts. In many parts of the world, there are localized definitions that are congruent with the Accountability Framework’s definitions but provide greater context-appropriate specificity. Following are general guidelines on when companies should use a localized definition as the basis to implement or monitor their supply chain commitments:

- When recognised national, sector-wide, or context-specific definitions or land cover classifications exist and are compatible with key elements of the Accountability Framework's definitions, they are generally considered to fulfil the Accountability Framework and may be used where applicable.

  “Recognised” definitions or land cover classifications include those that: a) are provided as part of national law; b) are reflected as part of a national monitoring system or other technically sound monitoring system; or c) have been developed through a technically robust multistakeholder process.

  Compatibility of forest definitions or land cover classifications with the Accountability Framework requires at least two elements. First, the definition or classification should include (or be able to identify) primary, secondary, and partially degraded natural forest. These are all types of natural forest that should be identified and protected as part of a deforestation-free supply chain. Second, the definition or classification should distinguish natural forest from tree plantations, since the Accountability Framework treats these differently for the purpose of deforestation-free supply chains. If the given definition or classification does not recognise this distinction, then company commitments and implementation and monitoring practices will need to incorporate this distinction when using such a definition or classification.
Compatible definitions include many national or subnational definitions used as the basis for government forest mapping products, forest monitoring, and REDD+ implementation, as well as definitions developed through legitimate non-state processes such as the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA).

- When context-specific definitions are absent, contradictory, or unclear, the AFi recommends that the Accountability Framework’s definitions be used as the basis for establishing, implementing, and monitoring commitments. In these situations, the Accountability Framework’s definitions can also be used as a starting point to develop more nuanced context-specific definitions through government policy-setting, sector initiatives, or other processes.

- New and ongoing sector initiatives, policy frameworks, voluntary standards, and similar initiatives are encouraged to apply or adapt the Framework’s definitions to create context-specific definitions that align with the Framework’s common global approach.

*Given where our company is operating, what definition of forest should we use to establish and implement our no-deforestation commitments?*

Companies that operate across multiple contexts (e.g., producing, sourcing, or investing in multiple commodities and/or across multiple countries or biomes) should generally adopt the Accountability Framework’s common global definitions as the basis for setting, monitoring, and reporting on their no-deforestation commitments at a company-wide level. Companies that operate across multiple contexts may also wish to use context-specific definitions that align with the global Accountability Framework’s definitions to provide more nuanced or detailed specifications that guide commitment implementation or monitoring in particular contexts (e.g., specific commodity supply chains, countries, or biomes). Companies that operate only in one context may also wish to use context-specific definitions for the same reasons. The considerations described in the prior question/response detail should be used to determine which context-specific definitions align with the global Accountability Framework’s definitions.

*What definition of forest should our company use in the Brazilian Cerrado if we have a no-deforestation commitment but not a no-conversion commitment?*

Regardless of the company’s present commitment, the AFi recommends using the concept and definition of no-conversion, and the corresponding definition of natural ecosystem (vegetação nativa) to guide production, sourcing, and financial investments in the Brazilian Cerrado. The Cerrado is a mixed vegetation biome made up of a mosaic of forests, woodlands, and grasslands. Brazilian legislation and the official government monitoring system (Prodes
Cerrado) do not distinguish forest from other types of native vegetation. Thus, attempting to distinguish forest from other native vegetation types in the Cerrado is both technically challenging and legally problematic. Consequently, the multi-stakeholder processes, in which market actors in Brazil and companies from beyond Brazil sourcing in the Cerrado are engaged, also make no distinction between forest and other types of native vegetation in the Cerrado.

The AFi further recommends that companies with an existing no-deforestation commitment replace it with a no-conversion commitment for the Cerrado, while companies that do not yet have a commitment for the Cerrado adopt a no-conversion commitment directly.

**What is the value of the Accountability Framework’s global definitions if there are already localized definitions available in the context(s) where our company works?**

The global definitions provide a clear basis to determine which localized definitions comport with generally accepted concepts of no-deforestation and no-conversion in supply chains. Global definitions also establish coherence and comparability among localized definitions so that these can be linked to common measures of progress and outcomes. For companies that source from multiple contexts, these applications facilitate a coherent global approach to no-deforestation and no-conversion sourcing that can be appropriately adapted to different commodities and regions, while at the same time enabling overall management and reporting relative to a global sustainability strategy.

**What are some good ways to monitor deforestation and conversion in line with the Accountability Framework’s definitions? Are any existing monitoring tools capable of doing so?**

Geospatial data, from satellite or other remote-sensing methods, are increasingly capable of detecting deforestation and conversion. When the scale of a given agriculture or forestry operation is large and its associated land use change entails a distinct conversion event (e.g., forest to row crop production, or forest to pasture), large-scale open source products such as Global Forest Watch are generally suitable to monitor deforestation in line with the Accountability Framework. When production systems are smaller-scale or exist in mosaic landscapes (e.g., many smallholder systems), or when land-use changes are less distinct (e.g., boundary cases described in Table 2), then specialized, finer resolution, or custom tools may be required. In either case, when remote-sensing based methods detect potential deforestation or conversion (or when findings are unclear), validation through site visits, on-the-ground mapping, document review, or interviews with key stakeholders may be required.
2. Applying the definitions at the field level

*How do I know whether a given area of land within my company’s production unit or supply chain meets the definition of a forest, a natural forest, a tree plantation, a natural ecosystem, or an agricultural system?*

The classification of sites under the Accountability Framework’s definitions depends on the site’s present vegetation and land use. In some cases, the land use history is also a relevant consideration. See Table 1 for a list of common land cover and land use types, their characteristics, and relevant definitions. Some sites may include characteristics of both natural ecosystems and non-natural areas (e.g., production systems or degraded land). Table 2 provides guidance on applying the definitions in such “boundary cases.” When classification remains unclear despite this guidance, it is recommended to default to a classification that would avoid any deforestation or conversion, and therefore minimize risk to companies that have issued commitments.

*How do I know whether a given conversion event (i.e., from a prior land use or land-cover type, to a present or future agriculture or tree plantation operation) violates a no-deforestation or no-conversion commitment?*

The definitions of deforestation and conversion summarize the types of conversion events that are considered non-compliant with relevant no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments, respectively. Guidance for specific land use/land cover types can be found in Table 1. Visual explanations of when a land use/land cover change is considered deforestation or conversion can be found in two diagrams at the end of this document.
3. Relationship between the Accountability Framework’s definitions and other tools

*How do the Accountability Framework’s definitions relate to definitions or assessment approaches in other frameworks, standards, or tools? When should these other tools or frameworks be used?*

There is an increasing number of tools, standards, and frameworks to support implementation of responsible supply chains. The Accountability Framework serves to increase the level of alignment and comparability among such tools by recognising those that are already compatible with the Accountability Framework’s global approach while providing a common framework to help inform the development of new tools where needed.

Global frameworks that are compatible with the Accountability Framework’s no-deforestation guidelines include the Consumer Goods Forum Deforestation Resolution, the New York Declaration on Forests, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Accountability Framework’s definitions are also interoperable with the forest definition of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), which is the basis for many national forest definitions. Specifically, the Framework references the FAO forest definition while clarifying that natural forest (a subset of all forest) is the operative concept for definition, implementing, and monitoring no-deforestation supply chains.

Regional and commodity-specific frameworks that are compatible with the Accountability Framework’s no-deforestation guidelines include the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA), Collaboration for Forests and Agriculture (CFA),¹ and several voluntary standards that prohibit all or nearly all deforestation, including but not limited to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB), Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS), and Rainforest Alliance. Companies can apply these tools and standards (among others) to help fulfil no-deforestation commitments. See Table 3 for more information.

¹ See the CFA’s [Deforestation- and Conversion-Free (DCF) Regional Guidance](#).

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How does the High Conservation Value (HCV) approach relate to the Accountability Framework’s definitions? When should it be applied?

The HCV approach is a methodology for identifying important biological, ecological, social, or cultural conservation values that should be protected in the context of commodity production. These values are frequently associated with natural forests and other natural ecosystems, but can also be associated with other land areas, such as mixed-land use zones that are critical for watershed protection or for the livelihoods of indigenous peoples or local communities. Note, however, that the HCV approach is not intended or designed as a way to determine which land areas can be developed, and which must be conserved, in accordance with no-deforestation or no-conversion policies.

In relation to the Accountability Framework, companies should apply, or consider applying, the HCV approach under the following circumstances:

1) If the company has committed to HCV protection: Many existing company policies explicitly commit to protect HCVs. Companies that have made such commitments should apply (or ensure that the suppliers of raw materials in their supply chain apply) the HCV methodology as part of the site acquisition/site development process (see Core Principle 7) and to guide effective management of natural ecosystems and conservation values (see Core Principle 8).

2) As part of the site acquisition/site development process for new production areas: Even for companies that have not committed to HCV protection, application of the HCV methodology as part of the site establishment process (e.g., new plantation development or initiation of a new timber lease or timber harvest plan) is generally a best practice. This is especially true if the company does not have a comprehensive no-conversion policy. For instance, a company with a no-deforestation policy could apply the HCV approach as a supplementary tool to help ensure that critical non-forest natural ecosystems (e.g., wetlands or shrublands) and any associated High Conservation Values are protected as part of the site establishment process.

3) To facilitate effective land management and long-term protection of conservation values (related to Core Principle 8): Even for companies that have not committed to HCV protection, application of the HCV approach can provide a useful framework

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2 See https://www.hcvnetwork.org. In addition to the HCV approach, there are several other technically sound resources to identify areas with critical conservation values that warrant protection in the context of company operations. Global resources such as maps of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and critical wetlands (i.e., Ramsar Convention designation) as well as various national-level maps, can help identify areas that should be protected, based on free and easy-to-access data. HCV assessments can provide more in-depth and context-specific information on a site's conservation values.
for identifying, managing, and monitoring the key conservation values on and around a given production unit. Use of this tool can help fulfil Core Principle 8 of the Accountability Framework.

When conducting or commissioning HCV assessments, companies should utilise the HCV Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS) to help ensure that the assessment is of high quality, externally credible, and useful for informing land use and land management decisions that are compatible with company commitments. In addition to administering the ALS, the HCV Resource Network provides other tools to help apply the HCV approach, such as simplified approaches for smallholders and jurisdiction-level screening.
4. Key AFi positions related to the definitions

*Why does the AFi recommend no (gross) deforestation as a commitment target, rather than no net deforestation?*

The AFi recommends the use of no (gross) deforestation as a commitment target for four reasons:

1) No gross deforestation of natural forests is the principal normative reference for deforestation-free supply chains, enshrined in the New York Declaration on Forests as well as in the detail underlying the Consumer Goods Forum’s 2010 Deforestation Resolution.

2) The concept of no net deforestation implies a false equivalency between forest lost and forest gained. That’s because newly regenerated forest typically lacks many of the ecological and cultural values of recently cleared forest. Therefore, a no-net approach is likely to lead to the loss of significant forest conservation values, such as carbon storage, biodiversity, and others.

3) The concept of no net deforestation can be applied only for fixed land areas (i.e., based on determinations of forest lost and forest gained within a specific areas). Thus, the concept is largely impracticable for company supply chains, which typically lack fixed footprints.

4) There are few demonstrated models for supply chain actors to effectively restore forests and their values to offset deforestation. Thus, no-net approaches are likely to fall short in practice, even if the preceding conceptual problems could be overcome.

While the Accountability Framework is clear that forest restoration, regeneration, or afforestation may not be used to justify (new) gross deforestation as part of deforestation-free supply chains, it does consider a role for such activities as part of restoration or compensation required to remediate (past) deforestation in violation of company commitments or other obligations. This aspect of the Framework is summarized in [Core Principle 9](#) and elaborated further in the [Operational Guidance on Environmental Restoration and Compensation](#).
Is AFi’s recommendation to adopt no (gross) deforestation as a commitment consistent with the Deforestation Resolution of the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), which uses the term “zero net deforestation”?

Yes. As indicated in the prior answer, the CGF’s referenced definition of “zero net deforestation” specifies that natural forests should not be converted to commodity production areas. This is a no (gross) deforestation approach. The CGF urges companies to eliminate deforestation from their supply chains as an important contribution to achieving the broader (global) goal of zero net deforestation by 2020.

If my company has a no-deforestation commitment, is the AFi saying we need to move to a no-conversion commitment?

The AFi recommends that companies adopt no-conversion commitments to maximize positive outcomes and minimize risk related to their greenhouse gas footprint, biodiversity, and the social and cultural values of natural ecosystems. Thus, companies that have no-deforestation commitments are encouraged to move in the direction of no-conversion. However, no-deforestation commitments remain a valuable and important tool for the development of responsible supply chains, and the AFi respects those commitments. The AFi is conducting further analysis of the implications of a no-conversion approach in the context of different biomes, countries, and commodities.
TABLE 1. Classification of various land uses and land covers
According to the Accountability Framework’s definitions, including indication of whether conversion of each such area to commodity agriculture or tree plantation would violate no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments.

Key: [✓] signifies that the example fulfils the given Accountability Framework’s definition. “Yes” or “No” signifies whether conversion to commodity agriculture or tree plantation would violate no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use or land cover</th>
<th>Description and examples</th>
<th>How is this example classified according to the Accountability Framework’s definitions?</th>
<th>How is this example treated in assessing adherence to no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments?</th>
<th>Does conversion to plantation or commodity agriculture violate no-deforestation commitments?</th>
<th>Does conversion to plantation or commodity agriculture violate no-conversion commitments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unmanaged or minimally managed natural forest</td>
<td>+ Amazon and Congo Basin moist forest, SE Asia dipterocarp forest, portions of Brazilian Cerrado + May contain some human impacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed natural forest</td>
<td>+ Forests that are managed for harvest (of timber or other forest products) or for other services in a way that maintains most of the key elements of ecosystem composition, structure, and function over time + Forests undergoing selective harvest where high value species are planted or promoted</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Land Use or Land Cover | Description and Examples | How is this example classified according to the Accountability Framework’s definitions? | How is this example treated in assessing adherence to no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments?
--- | --- | --- | ---
Regenerated natural forest | Forests that have regrown and now have ecosystem composition, structure, and function similar to forest native to the site
- Regrowth of native vegetation for several years after agricultural abandonment
- Plantings of diverse native species through management for ecosystem restoration | ✓ ✓ ✓ | Yes Yes
Non-permanent or low-intensity cultivation within a natural forest | - Permanent, semi-permanent, or shifting cultivation that causes little disturbance of the canopy and retains a high proportion of species and main attributes of the forest’s structure and function
- Swidden cultivation in small, isolated patches harvested for short periods and then left fallow
- Low-intensity forest farming such as some rustic coffee and rubber agroforestry systems under forest canopy | ✓ ✓ ✓ | Yes Yes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use or land cover</th>
<th>Description and examples</th>
<th>How is this example classified according to the Accountability Framework’s definitions?</th>
<th>How is this example treated in assessing adherence to no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tree plantation       | - Eucalyptus or rubberwood plantations  
- Monocultures of temperate or boreal species growing where such monocultures would not have naturally existed |  
- Natural ecosystem  
- Forest  
- Natural forest  
- Tree plantation  
- Agriculture |  
- Does conversion to plantation or commodity agriculture violate no-deforestation commitments?  
- Does conversion to plantation or commodity agriculture violate no-conversion commitments? |
|                       |                                                                                           | Yes  
- No*  
* But may violate national forestry laws or other standards and raise concerns about GHG emissions, biodiversity loss, or loss of other ecosystem services. |  
- No* |
| Non-forest natural ecosystems | - Grasslands, savannas, wetlands, and other areas that are not recently transformed or intensively managed, and maintain much of the ecosystem's structure, composition, and function  
- Includes many traditional pastoral systems and well-managed livestock grazing on native vegetation |  
- Natural ecosystem  
- Forest  
- Natural forest  
- Tree plantation  
- Agriculture |  
- No  
- Yes |
### The Accountability Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use or land cover</th>
<th>Description and examples</th>
<th>Natural ecosystem</th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Natural forest</th>
<th>Tree plantation</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>How is this example classified according to the Accountability Framework’s definitions?</th>
<th>How is this example treated in assessing adherence to no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Permanent smallholder agriculture for local consumption and trade | + Annual or perennial cropping systems (including most agroforestry systems) where the production is for subsistence use within the household, local trade among individuals, or trade involving local intermediaries for local markets | | | | | | | | Yes* | No*  
> * Unless the initial conversion to agriculture occurred later than commitment cutoff date. Companies are responsible for understanding the land-use history of potential sourcing areas that were formerly in smallholder agriculture. |
| Permanent agriculture for commodity production | + Annual crops, intensive livestock raising, perennials in monoculture or simple polyculture, tree crops  
+ Soy, sugar, most cattle ranching, palm oil, coconut, fruit orchards, and coffee or cocoa grown with no shade or light to moderate shade | | | | | | | | Yes* | Yes*  
> * Conversion from one type of permanent agricultural production system to another is compatible with no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments. |
### Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation, Conversion, and Protection of Ecosystems

#### How is this example classified according to the Accountability Framework’s definitions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use or land cover</th>
<th>Description and examples</th>
<th>Natural ecosystem</th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Natural forest</th>
<th>Tree plantation</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>How is this example treated in assessing adherence to no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments?</th>
<th>Does conversion to plantation or commodity agriculture violate no-deforestation commitments?</th>
<th>Does conversion to plantation or commodity agriculture violate no-conversion commitments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severely degraded land</td>
<td>* Land formerly meeting the definition of a natural ecosystem (either forest or non-forest) that has experienced severe and sustained degradation that alters ecosystem composition, structure and function to the extent that regeneration to a prior state is unlikely</td>
<td>✓ (See note below)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No*</td>
<td>No*</td>
<td>* Unless degradation occurred later than commitment cutoff date. Companies are responsible for understanding the land-use history of degraded sites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Note:** if exceeding the thresholds stated in the definition of forest
TABLE 2. Guidance on boundary cases

While most sites can be clearly classified according to the descriptions and examples in Table 1, some sites are more difficult to classify because they exhibit both characteristics of natural ecosystems and characteristics of production systems or degraded land. The following guidance can help in determining how such “boundary cases” should be treated for the purpose of fulfilling (or assessing fulfilment of) no-deforestation and no-conversion commitments. When classification remains unclear despite this guidance, it is recommended to default to a classification that would avoid any deforestation or conversion and therefore minimize risk to companies that have issued commitments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boundary cases between:</th>
<th>Attributes indicating that a given site is no longer a natural ecosystem. If these attributes were introduced due to activities after the cutoff date, this may violate no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Natural ecosystem       | Natural forest | Tree plantation | • All or a substantial portion of planted trees are exotics  
• Monoculture and/or even-aged management where such management does not approximate the spatial and temporal dynamics of the natural forest ecosystem  
• Regular herbicide or pesticide usage |
|                         | Natural forest | Agriculture      | • Intensification of swidden agriculture in which patches become larger, cultivation periods longer, and fallsows shorter  
• Cultivation within forest areas leads to significant and long-term change in ecosystem composition, structure, and function |
|                         | Natural forest | Degraded land    | • Degraded natural forests are generally presumed to be natural forest as long as they remain above canopy cover thresholds stated in the definition of forest, unless:  
• the land is managed for uses other than natural forest, or  
• due to severe or sustained degradation, the forest is not able to regenerate much of its prior ecosystem structure, composition, and ecological, biophysical, and cultural functions naturally and/or through assisted regeneration |
| Non-forest natural ecosystem | Non-forest natural ecosystem | Agriculture | • Cultivation has led to significant and long-term changes in natural ecosystem composition, structure, and function |
### Boundary cases between:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural ecosystem</th>
<th>Production system or degraded land</th>
<th>Attributes indicating that a given site is no longer a natural ecosystem. If these attributes were introduced due to activities after the cutoff date, this may violate no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Non-forest natural ecosystem | Intensified or degraded livestock production system | • Livestock management results in substantial and sustained changes to the ecosystem’s composition, structure, or function  
• Intensive management of forage production, such as:  
  • Replacement of most native grass/fodder species with exotic species  
  • Irrigation and/or fertilization to increase forage production  
• Unsustainable management practices leading to sustained degradation, such as severe soil erosion, significant changes in species composition, or significant invasion by non-native species |
| Non-forest natural ecosystem | Degraded land | • Degraded natural ecosystems are generally presumed to be natural ecosystems unless:  
  • the land is managed for uses other than natural ecosystem, or  
  • due to severe or sustained degradation, the ecosystem is not able to regenerate much of its prior ecosystem structure, composition, and ecological, biophysical, and cultural functions naturally and/or through assisted regeneration |
TABLE 3. Relationship between the Accountability Framework’s definition of deforestation and other key definitions, standards, and targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference definition</th>
<th>Relationship to Accountability Framework’s definition</th>
</tr>
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| FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organization) | • The Accountability Framework adopts the FAO’s definition of forest, and provides further elaboration and clarification of this definition for use in the context of no-deforestation commitments.  
• For the purpose of implementing no-deforestation supply chains and commitments, the Framework clarifies that the focus is on the protection of natural forests. Therefore, natural forests are treated differently from tree plantations in the Framework’s definitions of deforestation and no-deforestation (see Table 1).  
• To facilitate interoperability between government forest definitions and monitoring (which are often based on the FAO definition) and supply chain definitions and monitoring, the AFI advocates that natural forests be distinguished from tree plantations for the purpose of monitoring forest loss and gain. |
| Consumer Goods Forum 2010 Deforestation Resolution | • The Accountability Framework’s concepts of deforestation and no-deforestation are congruent with, and may be used to operationalise, the CGF’s 2010 Deforestation Resolution.  
• Specifically, both initiatives specify no gross deforestation for commodity expansion and both consider deforestation to include the replacement of natural forest with tree plantations. |
| New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) | • The Accountability Framework’s concepts of deforestation and no-deforestation are congruent with, and may be used to operationalise, individual and collective pledges under the NYDF.  
• Specifically, the NYDF’s targets are stated relative to natural forests: “world leaders endorse a global timeline to cut natural forest loss in half by 2020, and strive to end it by 2030.” The NYDF also states that companies should eliminate deforestation from supply chains by no later than 2020. |
| UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) | • SDG Target 15.2 (under SDG 15) states: “By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.”  
• Application of the Accountability Framework’s definitions can help companies and governments contribute to this target through the protection of natural forests. |
## Reference definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</table>
| **High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA)** | • The HCSA methodology provides a functional definition of deforestation for the context of fragmented moist tropical forests. Where this methodology has been tested and validated, the AFI considers it as an appropriate tool to apply the Framework’s definitions.  
• Specifically, HCSA land-cover categories high-density forest (HDF), medium-density forest (MDF), low-density forest (LDF), and young regeneration (YR) are all types of natural forest, as defined by the Accountability Framework. No-deforestation activities generally must protect these land-cover categories, although some nuances and adjustments may be permitted in accordance with the HCSA’s detailed site planning methodology. |
| **Collaboration on Forests and Agriculture (CFA)** | • The CFA has developed a deforestation- and conversion-free (DCF) Regional Guidance for implementation of soy, beef, and leather supply chains in the Brazilian Amazon and Cerrado. The definitions of deforestation and conversion within this protocol are considered equivalent to those in the Accountability Framework. The DCF Regional Guidance has been developed as a regionally-adapted application of the Accountability Framework with full cross-compatibility and mutual recognition, and is included as a resource to complement AFI’s guidance.  
• The CFA’s subsequent work to develop a similar guidance for the Gran Chaco biome in Argentina and Paraguay will similarly align with the Accountability Framework. |
| **Global Forest Watch (GFW)** | • GFW quantifies tree cover loss based on interpretation of Landsat satellite imagery. This dataset is generally suitable for applying the Accountability Framework’s definitions in the case of transitions from natural forest to agriculture. It may be less capable of reliably detecting various boundary cases (Table 2) or transitions from natural forest to tree plantation.  
• Ongoing upgrades to GFW and its underlying data will increase the range of scenarios and level of precision by which GFW can track deforestation and conversion. The Accountability Framework is working closely with GFW to incorporate the Framework’s definitions into future GFW algorithms and tools.  
• The Operational Guidance on Monitoring and Verification and Operational Guidance on Reporting, Disclosure, and Claims provide further information on specific uses of GFW to measure and identify forest and forest loss. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference definition</th>
<th>Relationship to Accountability Framework’s definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government definitions and monitoring systems</td>
<td>• Government definitions and monitoring systems related to deforestation vary from country to country.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To facilitate comparability between government and supply chain monitoring, the AFI advocates that natural forests be distinguished from tree plantations for the purpose of tracking forest loss and gain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies and voluntary standards</td>
<td>• The Accountability Framework’s definitions are generally compatible with policies and standards that specify no gross deforestation.</td>
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<td>• These include (but are not limited to) the Brazil Soy Moratorium, sustainability criteria for the European Union Renewable Energy Directive, and the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council, Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials, and Round Table on Responsible Soy, among others.</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Details related to the Accountability Framework’s definition of deforestation (e.g., Tables 1 and 2, above) may be helpful for informing application, fulfilment, and monitoring/verification of these and other compatible policies and standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 1. What is deforestation?

The Accountability Framework defines **deforestation** for the purpose of implementing no-deforestation supply chains & commitments:

**Deforestation** is the *loss of natural forest* as a result of the three types of events shown below in red:

- Conversion to agriculture or other non-forest land use
- Conversion to a tree plantation
- Severe and sustained degradation

* The Accountability Framework adopts the FAO forest definition but differentiates natural forest from tree plantation for the purpose of implementing deforestation-free supply chains and commitments.

For more details, including full definitions for all terms, please see the Accountability Framework’s Definitions.
FIGURE 2. What is conversion?

The Accountability Framework defines **conversion** for the purpose of implementing no-conversion supply chains & commitments:

**Conversion** is the change of a natural ecosystem to another land use, or a profound change in the natural ecosystem’s species composition, structure, or function, as shown below in red:

An ecosystem that substantially resembles one that is or would be found in a given area in the absence of major human impacts. This may include human-managed and/or partially degraded ecosystems.

**Natural ecosystem:**

- Natural grasslands, woodlands, savannahs, wetlands, and peatlands
- May include sustainable livestock grazing on native forage

**Non-forest Natural Ecosystems**

- Composed mainly of planted or seeded trees
- May include intensive management
- Lacks key elements of natural forests native to the area, such as species composition and structural diversity

**Natural Forest**

- Primary or unmanaged forest
- Regenerated (second-growth) forest
- Forest managed for timber harvest or other activities that retains its main natural characteristics

**Agriculture**

- Annual crops
- Perennial crops, including tree crops
- Livestock raising, including where management practices have resulted in significant modification of grazed natural ecosystems

**Deforestation** (deforestation is a form of conversion)

**Tree Plantation**

- Former natural ecosystem that has lost its main natural characteristics on a sustained basis due to severe degradation

For more details, including full definitions for all terms, please see the Accountability Framework’s Definitions.