

# Deforestation and Conversion

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## 6 Minute Read



Forests and other natural ecosystems are critical for carbon storage, biodiversity protection, water supply, mitigation of natural hazards, adaptation to climate change, and sustaining the wellbeing of indigenous peoples and local communities. The Accountability Framework advocates for eliminating natural ecosystem conversion for agriculture or plantation forestry production, and identifies no-deforestation and no-conversion as essential elements of an ethical supply chain. No-conversion is a broader goal that seeks to avoid destruction of all types of natural ecosystems, while no-deforestation addresses only natural forests.



Accountability  
Framework

Delivering on  
ethical supply chain  
commitments

Find out more here:  
[Deforestation and Conversion](#)

## Related Core Principle



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Protection of forests and other natural ecosystems

[Learn More >](#)

The Accountability Framework is a resource to help companies produce and source commodities while protecting forests and other natural ecosystems.

Companies can do this by:

- Setting clear commitments and goals related to deforestation and conversion, in line with accepted norms;
- Implementing these commitments through land management, sourcing, and supplier engagement practices that are protective of forests and other natural ecosystems and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities; and
- Using credible monitoring tools to assess deforestation and conversion risk, impact, and progress toward commitments.

## How are deforestation and conversion defined?

The Accountability Framework clarifies these terms by providing the following definitions, which apply worldwide.

### **Deforestation:**

the loss of natural forest as a result of:

- a) conversion to agriculture or other non-forest land use;
- b) conversion to a plantation; or
- c) severe or sustained degradation

*See the figure on page 4 for a summary of these three deforestation scenarios*

### **Conversion:**

Change of a natural ecosystem to another land use or profound change in the natural ecosystem's species composition, structure, or function

### **No-deforestation:** (or no-conversion):

Commodity production, sourcing, or financial investments that do not cause or contribute to deforestation (or conversion)

**Forest:**

Land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ. It does not include land that is predominantly under agricultural or other land use. Forest includes natural forests and tree plantations. For the purpose of implementing no-deforestation supply chain commitments, the focus is on preventing the conversion of natural forests. (Adapted from FAO definition.)

**Natural Forest:**

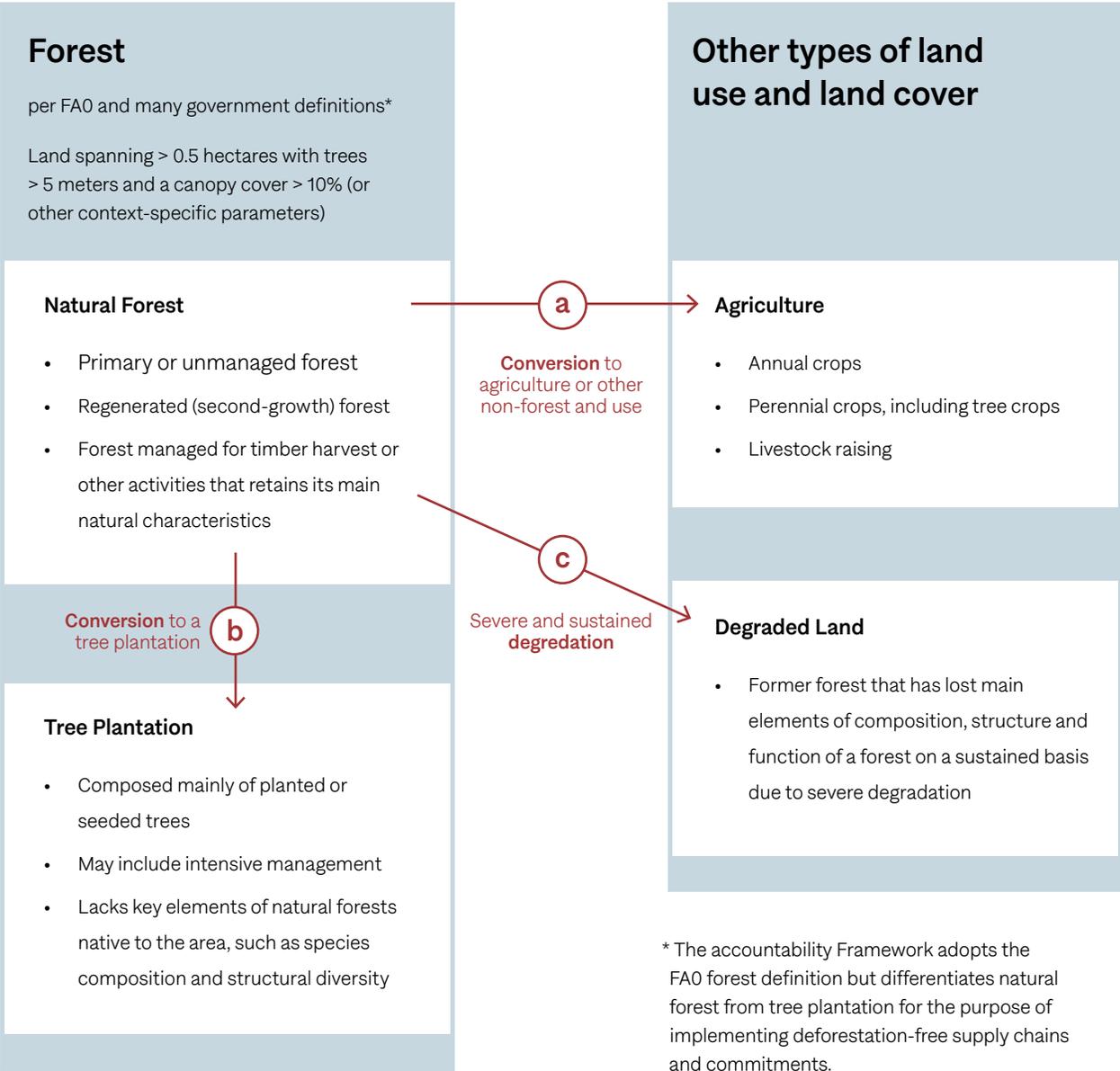
A forest that possesses many or most of the characteristics of a forest native to the given site, including species composition, structure, and ecological function. Natural forests include: i) primary forests; ii) regenerated (second-growth) forests; iii) managed natural forests where natural ecosystem characteristics exist alongside activities such as timber harvesting; and iv) forests that have been partially degraded by human or natural causes (e.g., harvesting, fire, climate change, invasive species, or others) but where the land has not been converted to another use.

**NOTE:** this is a summarized version of the definition; see AFi website for [full definition](#).

**Figure:** three types of land-use change events that constitute deforestation, as defined in the Accountability Framework.

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

→ Indicates deforestation event



\* 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.

## How can the Accountability Framework definitions be applied in context?

The Accountability Framework's global definitions can be applied and contextualized to different regions and commodity production contexts. This creates alignment between global-level commitments and localized methods for ecosystem identification and land-use change monitoring. The Framework's definitions can be contextualized in two ways:

### **Selecting localized definitions that align with the Accountability Framework**

- Legitimate national, sector, or context-specific definitions that align with the Accountability Framework definitions should be used where available. The Framework's global definitions may be used where local definitions are absent, unclear, or unaligned with the Framework.
- Many existing definitions and standards align with the Framework's no-deforestation and no-conversion approach, including those of the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF), the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA), Collaboration for Forests and Agriculture's Deforestation and Conversion Free (DCF) Regional Guidance, and many certification standards.
- Further guidance on selecting suitable localized definitions that align with the Accountability Framework can be found in Section 1 of the Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation, Conversion, and Protection of Ecosystems.

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### Classifying specific land uses or land use changes

The Framework provides guidance on specific land-use types and land use change scenarios that may be encountered in commodity-producing landscapes. This includes:

- Classification of various kinds of sites in commodity-producing landscapes
- Explanation of various conversion scenarios and whether each is considered compatible with no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments
- Guidance on how to treat “boundary cases”

Further guidance on land use and land use change classifications can be found in Section 2 of the *Operational Guidance on [Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation, Conversion, and Protection of Ecosystems](#)*

## How should cutoff dates be selected and applied?

A cutoff date is the date after which deforestation or conversion renders a given production area non-compliant with no-deforestation or no-conversion commitments. To clarify expectations across the supply chain and to enable consistent monitoring, policies addressing no-deforestation and no-conversion should include a cutoff date.

- If a sector cutoff date already exists, company policies should use this date to support a more comprehensive solution and stronger market signal.
- If a sector-wide cutoff date does not exist:
  - No-deforestation policies should use a cutoff date of January 1, 2020 or earlier to align with the NYDF and UN SDGs.
  - No-conversion policies should set the cutoff date no later than the date that the company issues its policy.
  - Companies should work with peers and other actors to work toward establishing a sector-wide cutoff date that “levels the playing field” for all producers and companies.
- If a company has existing business relationships with suppliers who produce or source materials from land that was deforested or converted after the cutoff date, the Framework’s best practices for addressing [supplier noncompliance](#) and facilitating [environmental restoration](#) should be followed.

# Next steps

## Review Additional Guidance on Deforestation and Conversion

- [Core Principle 1](#) Protection of forests and other natural ecosystems
  - [Accountability Framework Definitions](#)
  - [Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation, Conversion, and Protection of Ecosystems](#)
  - [Operational Guidance on Cutoff Dates](#)
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## Apply the Framework

Companies can use the Framework to work toward no-deforestation and no-conversion supply chains in the following ways:

1. **Set or strengthen company policies** on forests and natural ecosystems
  - a. Assess the content and specification of your current policies and commitments  
[Self-assessment tool](#) >
  - b. Learn how to craft a commitment or policy that aligns with the Accountability Framework  
[How to set a policy](#) >
2. **Assess and improve implementation** systems using consensus-based best practice  
[Implement ethical supply chains](#) >
3. **Determine how to best to report on progress** using existing reporting systems and in alignment with the Framework:  
[Report on progress](#) >

# Next steps

## Find additional support

Even with the Framework's clear guidance, there can be numerous decisions and challenges in setting up a no-deforestation and no-conversion approach that is well-suited to your company. Many companies seek the support of a service provider whose approach and advice are aligned with the Accountability Framework.

You may also [contact the AFi](#) to discuss your company's next steps. The AFi is not a service provider and does not accept funding from companies but will help identify options for further support based on your company's need.