



200 YEARS OF CARING FOR THE CUENCA FOREST
The first FSC® certificated forest in Castilla-La Mancha

MONTE DE UTILIDAD PÚBLICA (MUP) 106 "LOS PALANCARES Y AGREGADOS"

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1. A very special and carefully preserved forest

The municipality of Cuenca boasts the largest forest area in the whole of the European Union. With more than 53,000 hectares of organised forest land, some of which dates back to the 19th century, this enormous natural heritage can trace its origin to the public donation made by Alfonso VIII, King of Castile in 1177 when the first laws were passed to guarantee the forest's use and protection.

This forest area, in the great majority wooded, serves a variety of purposes ranging from timber production to public recreational use whilst also generating indirect benefits such as CO₂ fixation, biodiversity development, increased air and water quality and soil-protection.

The jewel in the crown of this extraordinary “arboreal patrimony” is the “Los Palancares y Agregados” forest with nearly 5,000 hectares of extremely high ecological value forest that was the first in Castilla y La Mancha to obtain the prestigious FSC certificate for sustainable management.

Such certification guarantees careful management whilst also providing various benefits for the socio-economic activity derived from forestry. In addition, forest products accompanied by the FSC seal can move freely in the majority of the world markets ensuring increased values. This, in turn, enriches the rural areas and generates development opportunities.

This brochure summarises the value of this symbolic forest. It also explains the FSC certification process, who have made it possible and what the objectives of such an important statement are.

It is not an easy task to obtain this prestigious certification and the collaboration of many people has been necessary:



1. A very special and carefully preserved forest

Prestigious certification obtained with the collaboration of:

1

Forest and environmental technicians from the provincial services of the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha (Community Board of Castilla-La Mancha). These professionals possess great knowledge of the forest and also have primary responsibility for its care and proper management. Without their collaboration and hard work, it would have been impossible to obtain FSC certification.

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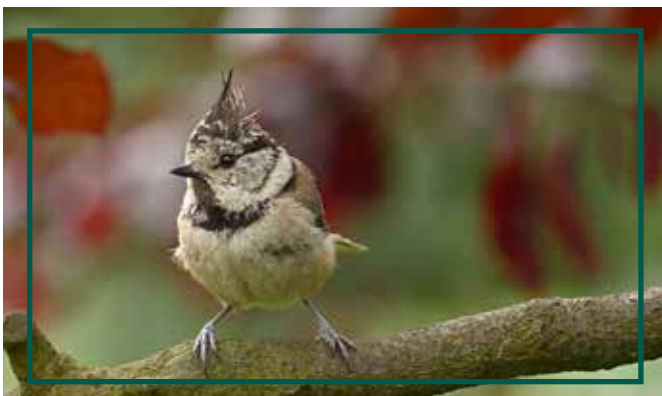
Preferred by Nature (previously NEPCon) are the certifying body that has audited the Los Palancares y Agregados forest and granted its certification. It is a non-profit organisation that operates in more than 100 countries throughout the world for the purpose of developing better land use and business practices that benefit the community, nature and the climate. In its 25 years of existence, it has specialised in sustainable forest management engaging with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Rainforest Alliance and other sustainability standards with the aim of increasing the industry's ability to adopt responsible practices.

3

GEA Forestal are the consultants responsible for advising Preferred by Nature in the implementation process of the Los Palancares y Agregados FSC certification. This team of engineers is specialised in FSC certification, technical environmental advice and consulting and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) projects for companies. They are committed to nature protection and promote technical and quality work procedures that ensure socially beneficial and environmentally friendly results. Their objective is to help owners and companies in the forestry sector achieve excellence in the technical, social and environmental management of the forests as well as enable them to be at the forefront of a market that increasingly demands these values.

4

FSC España is the Spanish office of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an accredited and certified non-governmental organisation dedicated to the promotion of sustainable forest management throughout the world. Its mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable forest management. Individuals or bodies that are interested in the sustainable consumption of timber, paper and other forest derivatives can obtain FSC certification for their products. The FSC certification is also used to demonstrate sustainable forest management that goes beyond wood-based values, including its ecosystem services. Through a process of consultations, the FSC develops standards and policies for sustainable forest management as well as accrediting certifying bodies for the purpose of evaluating certification candidates. Currently there are more than 350,000 hectares in Spain certificated by the FSC and more than 220 million hectares throughout the world.



2. “Los Palancares y Agregados”: The green heart of Spain

The “Monte de Utilidad Pública (MUP)” 106 “Los Palancares y Agregados” is in the municipality of Cuenca, in the area known as “Palancares y Tierras Muerta” to the north east of the province and in the foothills of the Sistema Ibérico mountain range. It is located within the Natural Monument “Palancares y Tierras Muerta” and is also part of the Natura 2000 network (ZEC y ZEPA Serranía de Cuenca). “Los Palancares y Agregados” has a total public area of 4,863.11 hectares (according to the latest ordination review 2006-2020) and is owned by the Provincial Council of Cuenca.

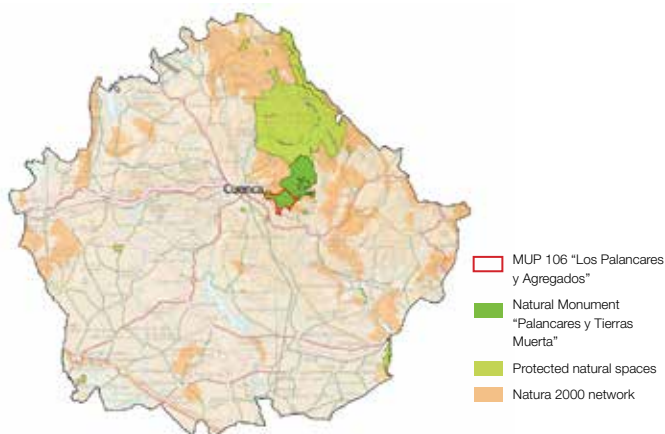


Figure 1. Location of MUP “Los Palancares y Agregados”.

The terrain is generally smooth with typically deep and loose soil and with no steep inclines except in the extreme north west of the area where Hoz de San Miguel and Hoz Chiquilla are located.

The forest is located in an extensive area of calcareous mountain ecosystem in which special features of

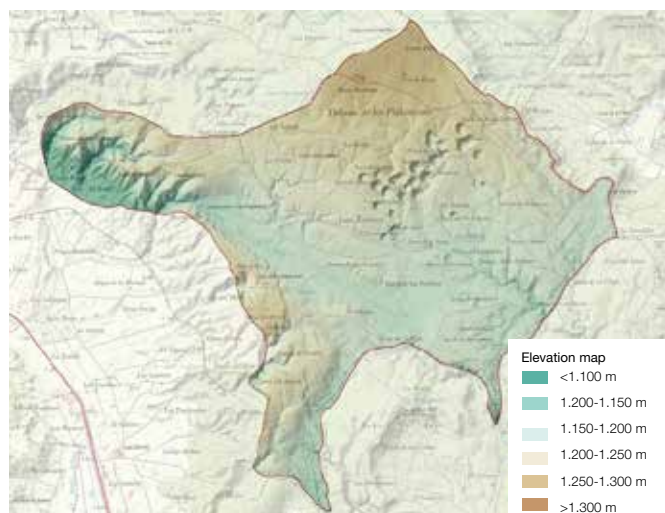


Figure 2. Elevation map of MUP “Los Palancares y Agregados”

karstic origin have evolved such as “torcas” or “dolinas” (clay-bottomed depressions) “lapiaces” (rocks with furrowed grooves) and scarps etc. all of which are “Elementos Geomorfológicos de Protección Especial” (Specially Protected Geomorphological Elements) as protected under Law 9/1999 of “Conservación de la Naturaleza de Castilla-La Mancha” (Castilla-La Mancha Nature Conservation).

«Los Palancares y Agregados»

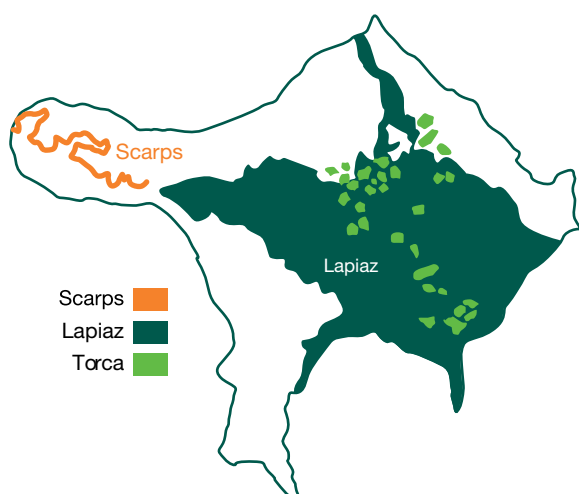


Figure 3. Location of “Elementos Geomorfológicos de Protección Especial” (Specially Protected Geomorphological Elements)

The predominant vegetation in the forest is composed of pine groves with **Black Pine** (*Pinus nigra* subsp. *salzmannii*) accompanied to a lesser extent by, and found growing together with **Spanish Juniper** (*Juniperus thurifera*), **Portuguese Oak** (*Quercus faginea*), **Holm Oak** (*Quercus ilex* subsp. *ballota*) and **Cade Juniper** (*Juniperus oxycedrus* subsp. *badia*). The shrub stratum is mainly formed of gorse, soft bush, sage, lavender, and thyme whilst at the herbaceous stratum, retuse torgrass swards and dry calciphile annual grasses can be found in the dryer areas, montane xerophile calcareous grasslands of *Brachypodium phoenicoides* in the valleys and short-grass perennial grasslands in the more heavily grazed lands.

At the bottom of the “torcas” the microclimatic conditions and deep soil are favourable to plant communities typically more demanding in humid and low ambient temperatures and more usually associated with higher latitudes such as mixed Euro-Siberian forests with the **Common Hazel** (*Corylus avellana*), the **Common Yew**

2. “Los Palancares y Agregados”: The Green Heart of Spain

(*Taxus baccata*) and the **Wych Elm** (*Ulmus glabra*) being particularly prevalent therein. Together with these forests one can typically find sub-Mediterranean deciduous thickets, including vegetation such as the hawthorn, privet, cherry, blackthorn, dogwood and blackberry.

The broad-leafed spindle tree (*Euonymus latifolius*) is also present in these environments, being one of the rarest relict shrubs in the Iberian Peninsula. Due to its recent discovery, this species is not yet legally protected in the region although it is protected at a national level.

Given the wealth of flora and diversity of habitats in “Los Palancares y Agregados”, the number of protected taxa

that are found both on a regional level (Regional Catalogue of Threatened Species) and on a national and European level is considerable. The plant communities that inhabit the forest are considered to be community interest habitats protected by the “Directiva Hábitats” (Habitats Directive) (Directive 92/43/CEE) and by “Hábitats de Protección Especial” (Special Protection Habitats) under Law 9/1999 of Castilla-La Mancha Nature Conservation.

16 Community Interest Habitats

15 Special protection habitats

21 Species of flora protected in Castilla-La Mancha

COMMUNITY INTEREST HABITATS		SPECIAL PROTECTION HABITATS	COMMUNITY INTEREST HABITATS
3170	Lakes and temporary Mediterranean ponds	Seasonal wetland terrain amphibian communities	
4090	Endemic oro-Mediterranean heaths with gorse	Mediterranean heaths of a permanent nature	
5210	Arborescent bushes <i>Juniperus</i> spp.		
6170	High limestone mountain grassland		
6220	Mediterranean xerophytic grasslands, annual and vibrant		
6420	Mediterranean herbaceous hygrophilic communities	Carbonated drainage communities	
7220	Tophaceous formations generated by bryophyte communities in carbonated waters	Petrifying springs with tufa formation (<i>Cratoneurion</i>) and humid tobas.	<i>Pinguicula mundi</i> (VU)
8130	Thermophilic and western rocky detachments	Peri-Alpine thermophilous screes.	
8210	Rocky slopes with casmophytic vegetation	Thermophilous rock communities	
9180	Mixed deciduous forests with steep hillsides, loose rock / rock slides or ravines (primarily <i>Tilio-Acerion</i>)	Mixed Euro-Siberian forests	<i>Corylus avellana</i> (IE), <i>Euonymus latifolius</i> (1), <i>Sorbus aria</i> (IE), <i>Taxus baccata</i> (VU), <i>Ulmus glabra</i> (IE)
9240	Iberian oak groves of <i>Quercus faginea</i> and <i>Quercus canariensis</i>	Forests of <i>Acer monspessulanum</i> .	<i>Acer monspessulanum</i> (IE), <i>Monotropa hypopitys</i> (IE), <i>Neottia nidus-avis</i> (IE)
9340	Holm Oak of <i>Quercus ilex</i> and <i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>		
9380	Forests of <i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Forests of <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> .	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i> (IE)
9530	South-Mediterranean pine groves of endemic <i>Pinus nigra</i>		<i>Aceras anthropophorum</i> (IE), <i>Arenaria vitoriana</i> (IE), <i>Armeria trachyphylla</i> (IE), <i>Coronilla glauca</i> (IE), <i>Colutea brevialata</i> (IE), <i>Cotoneaster tomentosus</i> (VU), <i>Dictamnus albus</i> (IE), <i>Euphorbia nevadensis</i> (IE,2), <i>Sorbus torminalis</i> (IE), <i>Thymelaea subrepens</i> (IE)
9560	Forests of endemic <i>Juniperus</i> spp.	Spanish Juniper	
92A0	Poplar, elm and willow forest from the Atlantic, Alpine, Mediterranean and Macaronesian regions	Willow	
		Sub-Mediterranean deciduous thorn bush	<i>Prunus mahaleb</i> (IE)
		Hazel groves	
		Riparian and marsh formations of large crowded tussocks of <i>Carex</i> spp	
		Primary scrub formations of <i>Amelanchier ovalis</i>	

(1) Catalogued in the red book in critical condition.

(2) Included in annex IV of the Habitats Directive

2. “Los Palancares y Agregados”: The Green Heart of Spain

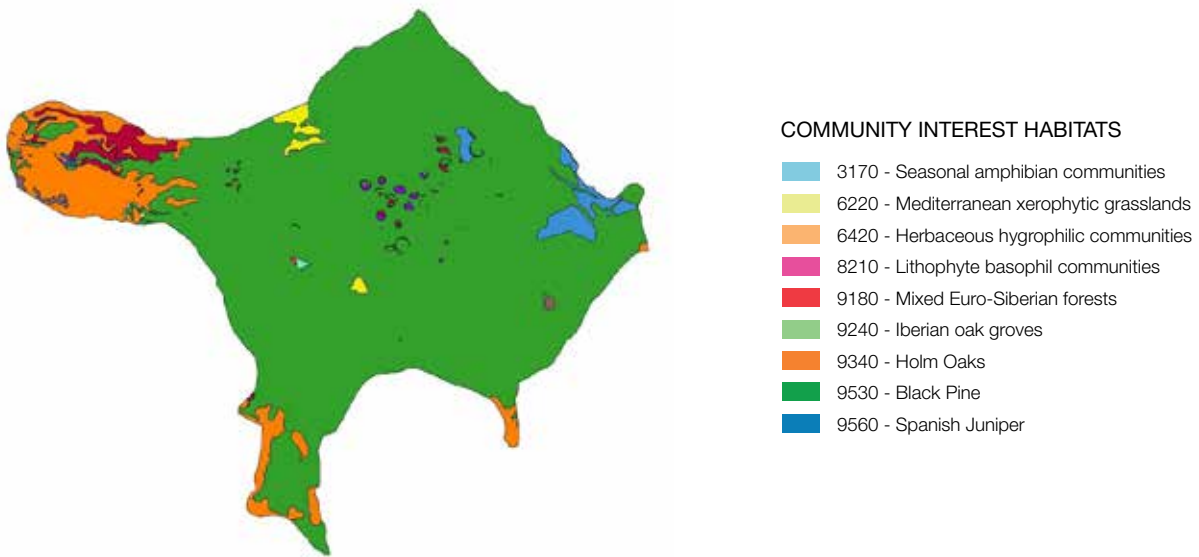


Figure 4. Community Interest Habitats in the MUP “Los Palancares y Agregados”.

With regard to the fauna that inhabits “Los Palancares y Agregados” which is mainly a forest area with some scarps and rocky slopes, particular attention should be drawn to protected birds of prey such as the **Per-egrine Falcon** (*Falco peregrinus*), **Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the **Egyptian Vulture** (*Neophron percnopterus*) all of which are considered vulnerable species in Castilla-La Mancha. **Bonelli’s Eagle** (*Aquila fasciata*) are also found in the Critical Area of “Los Palancares y Agregados”.

Amongst the forest birds of prey, there are protected species such as the **Northern Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*)

and **Eurasian Hobby** (*Falco subbuteo*) which are both included in the “vulnerable” category of the “Catálogo Regional de Especies Amenazadas” (Regional Threatened Species Catalogue) and the **Common Buzzard** (*Buteo buteo*) and the **Booted Eagle** (*Hieraaetus pennatus*), both of which are of Special Interest.

With reference to the mammals under threat, special mention should be made of bats such as the **Horseshoe Bat** (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) and Geoffroy’s Bat both being taxa species considered vulnerable on a regional scale.



3. A sustainable forest management model since 1894

From its first ordination in 1894 up to the present day, the MUP 106 “Los Palancares y Agregados” is an example of sustainable forest management at a national level.

Ordination objectives:

- The sustainable management of the MUP 106 “Los Palancares y Agregados” forest.
- A balanced implementation of the forest’s multifunctionality.
- Forest planning within the framework of the land ordination.
- Development of forestry production and its associated economic sectors.
- Development of the rural environment.
- Preservation and restoration of the forest ecosystems’ biodiversity.
- Division of the area (dasocratic division) in 3 sections, 17 quarters and 85 tranches (5 per quarter).

Ordination Projects	1 st Ordination (1894)	2 nd Ordination (2006)
Preferred use	Timber production	
Profit method	High mountain	
Principal mass	Semi irregular masses or irregular masses with first grade irregularity.	
Ordination method	Permanent periodic tranches	
Type of felling	Successive uniform clearing	
Frequency	100 years	150 years
Regeneration period	20 years	30 years

Irregular form with first grade irregularity: form with at least 90% of the feet/root/stalk belonging to three artificial classes of cyclically contiguous age. (MADRIGAL, 1994).



3. A sustainable forest management model since 1894

MULTIPLE USAGES OF THE FOREST

- Timber (rolling, shredding, biomass or posts)
- Pastureland (sheep, goat, cattle and horse livestock)
- Hunting: big game (red deer, fallow deer, roe deer, mouflon and wild boar) and small game (red-legged partridge, rabbit, hare, fox, woodcock, wood pigeon, European turtle dove, thrush and crow).
- Firewood
- Mycology: fungi and truffles.
- Apiculture

- Interpretative centre and equipment for public use
- Recreational area "Fuente del Royo"
- Youth camp "Los Palancares"

- Stand reserve without human intervention (6 hectares)
- Research plots in collaboration with INIA "Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Tecnología Agraria y Alimentaria".

- 2 protective buildings (Hoz San Miguel and Hoz Chiquilla)
- 1 scenic and recreational building "Cuartel Torcas"
- Special treatments in mixed forms of pine with holm oaks, gall oaks, common junipers and Spanish Juniper.
- Identification and preservation of special trees.



Throughout the 126 years of uninterrupted management of "Los Palancares y Agregados", whilst timber production has been underlying purpose of the forest, from the very outset, its multifunctionality possibilities have been considered with each management revision.

This forest is also a good example of sustainable and multiple management particularly when taking into consideration its age. Such management has produced numerous income opportunities, ensured the sustainability of the natural resources whilst simultaneously emphasising the importance of conservation, ecological and social values.

In the resources evaluation process not only are the products with a market value (timber, Pasture land, hunting etc.) taken into consideration, but also uses such as recreation and tourism.

3. A sustainable forest management model since 1894

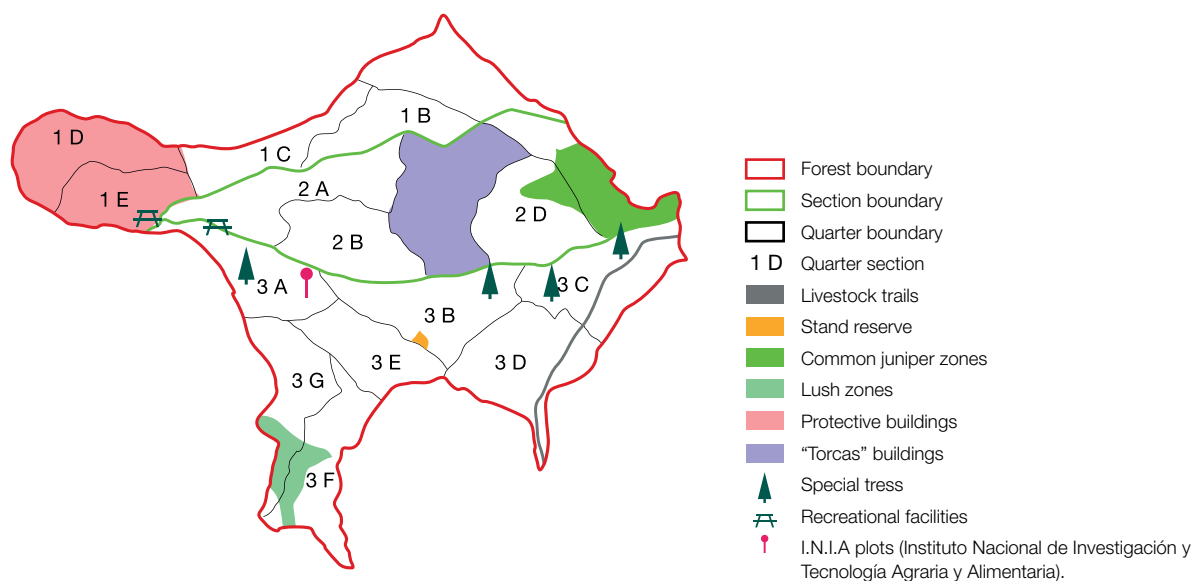


Figure 5. Uses of MUP "Los Palancares y Agregados"

A sustainable and profitable model:

When comparing the initial condition of the forest in 1894 with that of 2006, it can be seen how the forest inventory has increased by 55,000 m³ even though more than 560,000 m³ have been forested during this period. This clearly demonstrates the sustainability of the management model used on this forest.



Figure 6. Comparative state of the forest between 1894 and 2006.

4. FSC Forest Certification

The MUP 106 “Los Palancares y Agregados” was the first public forest in Castilla-La Mancha to obtain FSC certification, in August 2020.



What is the purpose of FSC certification?

Accreditation from an independent body that the forest management is carried out utilising sustainable economic, environmental and social criteria.

Forest products and services with added value — compared with non-certificated products— access to new markets and capture of new customers committed to the environment.

Certification of a chain of custody —guarantee of compliance with sustainable criteria throughout the production process; from the standing tree to the finished product leaving the factory for public sale (traceability).

Valuation of other benefits of the ecosystem, in addition to those resources which have an exchange value in the marketplace (timber, pastureland, hunting etc.). Such benefits include recreative use, biodiversity conservation, basin protection, the capture and storage of CO₂ etc., all key aspects in the fight against climate change.

Economic valuation of recreational use. It is estimated that the economic value of the recreational facilities in the forest (“Las Torcas” recreational lodge and the Palancares youth camp) to the company amounts to almost 7.4 million euros.

Promotion of citizen information and participation in the process.

Guarantee of workers’ rights and the socioeconomic development of the area.

What does FSC certification entail?

FSC certification entails evaluating the achievement of sustainable forest management objectives through the compliance with principles and criteria established by FSC by way of a series of indicators. In addition, the establishment of preventive and corrective measures in the event of the detection of possible environmental and social impacts.

4. FSC Forest Certification

FOREST BENEFITS

The efficient use of the forest's multiple products and services are promoted to ensure its economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits.

Timber usage with important financial income.

Economic benefits from other usages: hunting, live-stock, mycology, apiculture, etc.

Continuity of the natural resources and the ecological functions and processes.

Integrated and sustainable management of "Los Palancares y Agregados" facilitating the development of multiple usages (timber, firewood, fruit, pastureland, hunting, mushrooms, honey, recreational, environmental education, conservation, research, etc.)

Promotion of the optimal use and local transformation of all the forest products. Extracted timber is sent

to the "Fábrica Municipal de Maderas de Cuenca" (Cuenca Municipal Timber Company) where the forest products are transformed thereby contributing to the local economy and labour market.

Residues related to the various usages are reduced to a minimum to avoid damaging other forest resources. Small cutting debris with a high nutrient content is left in the forest, whilst the maximum time period for larger cutting debris and the stockpiled product is clearly specified in the usage contracts. The debris is handled mechanically.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE FOREST

All forest management should conserve biological diversity and its associated values such as water resources, soil, the fragile and unique ecosystems as well as the natural landscapes. By fulfilling these objectives, the ecological functions and integrity of the forest can be preserved.

Identification of protected habitats and species included in the 92/43/EEC and 79/409/EEC Directives ("Habitat" and "Bird" directives respectively) and those protected at a regional and national level.

Mapping of the distribution of the aforementioned in the forest is available.

Establishment of protection and conservation areas for those species most under threat, rare, or sensitive to change in their habitat (protection buildings in Hoz de San Miguel and Hoz Chiquilla, protection of the bottoms of the "torcas", special treatment of the mixed forms etc.).

Usages are excluded from special or unusual habitat areas, mature stands (with hard wood trees or dead wood at different levels of decomposition) as well as crags, torcas, ledges, etc.

To guarantee the natural regeneration of the forest, the ordination plan is made more flexible or adapted in accordance with the regeneration rate observed in the previous period. Having noted the difficulty in forest regeneration (after the 1st Ordination) it was de-

cided to lengthen the shift from 100 to 150 years and increase the regeneration period from 20 to 30 years.

Establishment of work guidelines to minimise damage to the forest's natural resources, control erosion, protect water resources, etc. (Usage Contract Specifications).

Environmental agents ensure the non-occurrence of inappropriate hunting, and where necessary, effect relevant measures to protect protected species in nesting and feeding areas.

Adequate defence infrastructure against forest fires (firebreak areas, strips, water points, etc.) as well as trained human resources and materials necessary for the prevention, detection and extinction of forest fires.

The development and deployment of non-chemical methodology in pest treatment, avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and preferably utilising integrated pest control. If its use is justified, the chemical product is registered together with relevant details (date of use, location, amount per hectare, method of use, etc.).

5. FSC—Guardian of the Forests of the World

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) is an independent, international, non-governmental and non-profit making organisation. It was founded in Toronto (Canada) in 1993 for the purpose of promoting sustainable forest management throughout the world's forests by being economically viable, socially beneficial and environmentally responsible in accordance with international regulations.

- **Economically viable forest management** means that the forest management plans are profitable without compromising the sustainability of the forest resources, the ecosystem or the population.
- **Socially beneficial forest management** enables local populations and society in general to enjoy the forest ecosystems over the long term whilst at the same time incentivising the local communities and other interested parties to participate in the forest management.
- **Responsible forest management** ensures that all of the action taken, from planning to post timber and/or non timber forest products usage, contributes to maintaining the biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes of the forest.

The national office of the FSC in Spain is represented by the “Association for the Promotion of Rational Usage of Forest Products and Services”. It is a non-profit making association. Its principal objectives are to promote the sustainability of resource usage, the benefits of the forest spaces and forms as well as the conservation of the biodiversity.

The FSC standards are the guide to good management

The Spanish FSC forest management standards were approved by FSC International in 2006. Since then, their development and application on Spanish territory has been one of the prime responsibilities of FSC Spain.

The FSC policy framework is composed of policies, standards, procedures, directives, explanatory notes and interpretations. In developing and revising FSC policy documents, the requirements specified in procedure FSC-PRO-01-001 are followed.

Version 5-1 of the Principles and Criteria of global application (P&C V5-1) was approved in January 2012 (FSC-STD-01-001 V 5-1 ES) as a result of more than 20 years of experience in the certification of forest management in forests around the world.

From that time onwards, each country should commence a process of adaptation and transfer of its forest management standards to the new P&C version.

More than 200 indicators

In order that this transfer could be effected throughout the world and that the new P&C be used in a homogenous manner, the FSC also developed a group of Generic International Indicators (GII) the final version of which was approved in 2014 (FSC-STD-60-004 V1-2 ES: Generic International Indicators FSC). This document includes 202 generic indicators, or 186 discounting those in Principle 3 which relate to indigenous communities which is not applicable in Spain.

As countries revise and transfer the indicators to national FSC standards of forest management by way of the GII, compliance with the established requirements of the new P&C V5-1 is assured. This model ensures global consistency and the credibility of the FSC system whilst harmonising the standards of the different countries.

5. FSC – Guardian of the forests of the world

The Spanish FSC standard

The national standard (FSC-STD-ESP-01-2006 Spain (V2-0) ES) valid until the approval of the current standard, is based on version 4 of the FSC P&C. It was approved by FSC International in January 2006 and has been modified twice in 2007 and 2009 as well having two revisions of the terms and indicators in 2010 and 2012.

The said FSC regulation covers all of the management activities related to the management unit (MU). The standard is applicable to all types and sizes of forests including natural forests, plantations and other types of forest areas. It is also applicable to all types of timber production, cork and resin.

The Spanish Standard of Forest Management for FSC Certification establishes which items are to be evaluated by the FSC, accredited bodies in terms of the forest management practises as covered by this standard.

The Spanish Standard of Forest Management for FSC Certification (FSC-STD-ESP- ES Draft 3-0) is applicable to all types of forest (refer to the definition in article 5 of the Forest Law 43/2003), independent of its origin (natural, semi-natural or artificial), irrespective its type of ownership and development area and which are located in Spanish territory.

The forest management and production certification encompass: timber and non-timber products and ecosystem services.



Much more than timber

The extension of the FSC forest certification in Spain to cover all non-timber production (until now it has only been possible to certificate timber, cork and resin with the national standard) is in response to the growing demand from members, certifying bodies, owners, managers and other interested parties to value all types of Spanish forest production, enabling them to be commercialised in the market with the FSC certificate.

In this way, the certification of a forest means that all of its types of production can be certified thereby fulfilling the standard's group of indicators.

In Annex G additional indicators are included for the certification of NTFP (Non-timber forests products).

The FSC certification guarantees that the forest products, timber and non-timber products, are originated from forests whose management address the FSC's P&C. It does not imply any other type of product quality standard or designation.

5. FSC—Guardian of the forests of the world

The non-timber productions included in forest management and covered by the standard are as follows:

- Cork
- Resin
- Honey and its derivatives (integrated production from FSC certificated forest)
- Extensive livestock (suckler cow, sheep, goats, Iberian pigs and other indigenous breeds, breeding horses and various indigenous breeds)
- Hunting
- Pastureland
- Fruit (chestnut, pine, acorn, fruits of the forest)
- Aromatic and medicinal plants
- Toadstools and mushrooms.

The forest management and planning of these productions take into consideration the best techniques and recommendations available in each sector.



Certification of the ecosystem services

The FSC forest management certification and chain of custody offers companies and customers a guarantee that the certificated forest products originate from responsibly managed forests. The extension of the FSC certification to cover ecosystem services also guarantees that the forest management maintains and/or improves the delivery of these services specifically on a certified forest management unit basis.

The indicator 5.1.3 is included in the standard so that forest management FSC certificates in Spain can make FSC statements regarding ecosystem services: water, carbon, biodiversity, soil and recreational services.

In this way it is possible for Spanish forest management certificate holders, to make FSC claims on verified and certified ecosystem service assets in the global market.

The FSC certification of ecosystem services in Spain meets a longstanding and still present demand from forest owners and managers who claim their right to receive financial compensation for the positive externalisation that they provide in the form of a large number of ecosystem services which benefit society beyond the territorial limits of the forest property that produce them.

6. An external, independent and voluntary audit

Once a year the MUP 106 “Los Palancares y Agregados” undergoes an external audit by a certified and accredited organisation in the area of FSC forest certification.

This task has been given to Preferred by Nature (NEPCon), an independent organisation whose auditing is based on procedures approved by the FSC and the organisation subcontracted by the FSC for the supervision of certification bodies. In turn the certification body has a team of auditors composed of professionals with different profiles charged with handling the various sustainability procedures of the standard.

A national forest engineer with a number of years’ experience in these types of certifications and with local contacts in interested third parties collaborated with the preparation of the first audit. In addition, the work was led by a professional resident in Spain with experience in more than 40 countries.

How is forest sustainability audited?

Throughout the auditing process the team visits the forest to understand the ordination activities in process under a code of confidentiality on the part of employees and sub-contractors alike. It visits high conservation areas and verifies the actions described in the support documents. An important part of this work consists of public consultation which is a process of contacting interested third parties who can give advice on the auditing operation.

The work involves verifying evidence of compliance with the Spanish FSC forest certification standard requirements. The auditors then produce an audit report for review which includes either a recommendation for certification, a continuation of the same or its suspension. A public summary of the developed management plan is available for consultation on the FSC website <https://es.fsc.org>

This process is repeated annually. As this is a voluntary scheme, the certificate owner can suspend or cancel the certification process by following the publicly available FSC protocols for such cases.

Some of the more important elements of the certification audit include the long-term nature of the ordination, environmental evaluations, work safety and the upkeep of certain conserved forests for the purpose of observing their natural dynamics. The ongoing education of those people involved in the forest management, the close relationship that the community has with the forest, its history and its beauty are also a process of interest.

When analysing the future conservation challenges of these forests it is clear there is a need for greater communication between the various parties that form this project, a monitoring adapted to the requirements of the FSC certification standard and a better understanding of those aspects related to high value conservation areas.

The FSC certification is part of a long-term process in which all the participants, including third parties, find a space for dialogue about environmental, social and forestry issues. In other words, an education space that is difficult to find in other areas.



6. An external, independent and voluntary audit

The most important parts of the standard

The FSC standard is more than simple forest certification. It takes into consideration positive social impacts which include health and safety training for the forest workers, as well as gender equality accreditation, fair salaries and job opportunities. In addition, the control of unauthorised activities.

It identifies and evaluates the environmental values of the forest and its conservation areas as well as the representative samples of interesting vegetation. This includes the identification and detection of endemic and protected species, the establishment of conservation measures for these species and fire risk studies.

It also identifies and mitigates possible environmental risks related to the work practices and establishes prevention and compensation measures.

It includes the drafting of a manual for good practice in forest management which is given to the companies that work in the forest.

It also enforces fertilizer and pesticide controls and promotes the use of biological control agents.

A complete exercise in public participation

The consultation process and involvement of the interested parties (stakeholders) in the certification of the Los Palancares and Agregados forest was as follows:

- In collaboration with Provincial Delegation of the Sustainable Development Council, the creation of a list of interested parties (register SIGFS-IM-17) which included 47 social, environmental and financial representatives.
- Consultation with these representatives via email and telephone regarding:
 - The possible existence of High Value Conservation Areas (HVCA) as defined by the FSC, compiling comments and presenting the results in the "SIGFS-EO2 Analysis of the existence of a HVCA and its management" study.
 - Its opinions and recommendations regarding the existing forest management which was taken into consideration in the process of adapting the FSC Forest Management Standard of Sustainable Management Integrated System.
 - The convening and implementation of an Information and Participation Day, inviting the aforementioned 47 representatives and the general public to the Council's offices and with the owner's participation (Cuenca Council as represented by the mayor), the manager (Provincial Delegation of the Sustainable Development Council of Cuenca represented by the provincial delegate), FSC Spain and the consultancy firm responsible for its implementation (GEA Forestal).
- This complete process guarantees transparency in the management of both the Council and the Provincial Delegation. It also provides the opportunity to submit opinions, criteria and complaints regarding the representatives involved and potential users in general.
- It is an open process which is repeated annually for the purpose of assisting the annual planning of improvements and usages as well as possible changes in the forest management.

6. An external, independent and voluntary audit

Public information of auditors reports and the FSC public database

As part of this large exercise in transparency and exchange of information which forest certifications entail, the Community of Castilla-La Mancha has made the following reports publicly available:

- A summary of the management plan: The Ordination of the Los Palancares and Agregados Forests Project.
- Follow-up reports on the forest usages.
- A review of the ordination project.
- Publication on the official website: <https://www.castillalamancha.es/gobierno/desarrollosostenible/estructura/dgapfyen/actuaciones/certificacion-forestal-en-cuenca>
- FSC Spain has made the following publicly available:
Audit report by the certification body.
Available on the website: <https://info.fsc.org/certificate.php>



Edited by:



FSC® F000228

C/ Alcalá nº 20, 2ª planta. Oficina 202
28014 Madrid - Spain

Telephone: **(+34) 91 446 48 81**

E-mail: **informacion@es.fsc.org**

Web: **<https://es.fsc.org>**

With the collaboration of:

