

Plenty of FSC timber in Suriname; but the market must adapt to the forest

Recently, with the support of the Guiana Shield Tropical Timber Program of the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), more than 400,000 hectares of tropical forest have been FSC-certified. The Surinamese FSC-certified companies are eager to connect with buyers of sustainably sourced timber. This is consistent with the wishes of the European Sustainable Tropical Timber Coalition (STTC) to increase the demand for sustainably sourced timber. Therefore, the European Timber Trade Federation (ETTF) together with Environmental Services & Support (ESS) in Suriname and Probos initiated a FSC trade mission to Suriname. With the support of the STTC 17 timber importers from six European countries travelled to Suriname mid-November. And everyone is enthusiastic. The first orders have been placed.



Plenty of FSC timber in Suriname; but the market

During the trade mission, the importers – from forest management, timber harvesting and processing – were able to evaluate the potential of these companies. Moreover, they were informed about the preconditions for successful trading, such as the role of the Surinamese Foundation for Forest Management and Production Control (SBB), the level of research and education and the export facilities in the harbour.

Huge potential

Suriname is with 94% forest cover (14.8 million hectares) one of the most forested countries in the world. Of this, 4.5 million hectares are designated as potential production forest. The most important of this is issued as logging concessions (1.7 million hectares) and community forest (0.6 million hectares). Approximately 70% of the forest in Suriname is unaffected by forestry. Of this, 13% has a protected status or is situated south of the 4th parallel where no exploitation is allowed. It is expected that with the current rotation system the southern reserves can be left unexploited. Although 1.7 million hectares are put forth as logging concessions, only about 1 million hectares are currently actively managed. Of this, 428,954 hectares are FSC-certified by four companies (see text box FSC-certified companies in Suriname), including 42,754 ha of FSC Controlled Wood.

Timber production and export

Since 2010, the harvest of industrial roundwood has almost doubled in Suriname; from 246,158 m³ of roundwood equivalents (rwe) in 2010 to 492,773 m³ rwe in 2014. According to official statistics of SBB, 133,000 m³ of sawn timber and 3,920 m³ plywood was produced out of

FSC-certified companies in Suriname

Dennebos Suriname NV, <http://dennebossuriname.com>

Greenheart Suriname NV, http://www.greenheartgroup.com/en_op_ko01.html

Soekhoe & Sons SA, <http://www.soekhoezonen.sr>

Troloco Holding NV (Tropical Wood Company & Caribbean Parquet Flooring) <http://cpfnv.com/web>

All companies have their own forest and wood processing facilities. For more information about their products visit their own websites or <http://info.fsc.org/>.

this roundwood in 2014. Besides, a significant portion is exported as roundwood (144,401 m³), mainly to Asia (99%), with 63% going to China and 25% to India. In 2014 Europe imported 1.326 m³ roundwood from Suriname. In 2014 Suriname exported 21,100 m³ of sawn wood, of which 46% went to Asia and 38% to Europe. Almost 70% of this went to Belgium and 17% to the Netherlands. For the European and especially Dutch market the square posts (Basralocus) are an important export product in terms of volume. Looking at the value, Letterhout (snakewood) is an important product especially for the Asian market. The plywood is sold almost entirely on the local market. The statistics about the forest, the production and the export are available on SBB's website: www.sbbsur.com.

Good preconditions sustainable forest management

Despite the doubling of the harvest in the last five years, there is still plenty of room to increase the production, without affecting sustainable forest management. In the 70s and 80s of the last century, The Centre for Agricultural Research in Suriname (CELOS) laid the foundation for today's sustainable forest management in Suriname. Based on extensive research they found that within the limits of sustainable forest management 25 m³ per ha can be harvested in a cutting cycle of 25 years. However, in practice, only

between 8 and 12 m³ is harvested per ha. This is not necessarily good news (more about this later). However, it can be said that there is a good scientific basis for forest management in Suriname, the principles of which are legally defined (in the Forest Management Act). This for example also applies to the traceability of roundwood to the stump. SBB is responsible for monitoring the commercial timber harvesting and enforcement of the law. In its execution of these tasks every step is checked; the identification, exploitation, transport, round wood processing (sawmills) and the inspection on quality and origin of consignments that are ready for export. At each step you will find the mark of the



FSC-certified Fava Amargosa, suitable for use in a.o. waterworks (photo: Mark van Benthem, Probos)

must adapt to the forest



Demonstration of RIL-techniques (photo: Mark van Benthem, Probos)

SBB label and the hammered logo. Participants of the trade mission noted that in the framework of the European Timber Regulation (EUTR), they can import the wood from Suriname and place it on the European market with confidence.

The social aspects, in many tropical countries a huge challenge, do not lead to major problems under FSC-certification in Suriname. However, there are discussions on traditional use rights at the national level. That social aspects cause few problems, can first of all be explained by the low population pressure in the production forests. Moreover, most local communities have their own community forest, where they can harvest timber for their own use. In some cases, concessions are used for hunting by local communities. However, as long as hunters adhere to the hunting law, this is allowed. The concessionaires keep an eye on this in cooperation with the authorities. Because there is little infrastructure, it usually is

quite easy to control this. The inventory of the so-called High Conservation Values (HCV) was also not a barrier for the concessionaires. The principle is that all the native forest is defined as High Conservation Value. In sensitive marshes, savanna soils, steep slopes or along water streams no forestry takes place and buffer zones are respected. The binding conditions under which a concession is granted and the Surinamese Code of Practice for sustainable forest management (draft) are a solid foundation for FSC-certification.

FSC

If there already is such a strong basis for sustainable forest management, what is the added value of certification according to the principles of FSC? During the trade mission this question was frequently asked. It became clear that FSC-certification in Suriname mostly adds to the various aspects that are not directly related to the actual forest management.

At various components FSC makes an important difference; for the position of employees of the FSC-certified companies and the fact that subcontractors must demonstrate compliance with relevant laws and regulations. An example is the recent statutory insurance covering medical expenses and retirement. This is not yet widely introduced in the forestry sector in Suriname, but it is introduced by the FSC-certified companies. In addition, FSC has contributed to focussing on safety, hygiene in business activities in the forest and the living conditions of employees.

Looking at the forest, FSC-certification makes a difference in requiring application of 'Reduced Impact Logging' (RIL). With this technique, damage to the felled trees and the surrounding future harvestable trees (in 25 years) is minimised and skid trails are carefully planned. Skid trails can cause much damage to the vegetation and the soil.

Challenges

In order to also be able to speak about sustainable forest management in Suriname from an economical point of view, the range of species to be harvested needs to increase and be given a place on the market. An important reason that the current harvest volume lacks behind is the fact that the forests in the Amazon are very species-rich; in Suriname only, there are more than 1,000 tree species. By harvesting only a very limited number of known and easy to market species, the potential of the forest -and with this the harvest volume and revenue for the forest companies - is underutilized and also creates the risk that certain commercial species become rare.



Timber processing facilities of the FSC-certified companies have been visited (photo: Mark van Benthem, Probos)

Market introduction of lesser used timber species

Natural tropical forests are very species rich. In Suriname only a few of the hundreds species are harvested commercially. This has an impact on the availability of the commercial species on the long term, but also means a loss of biodiversity, less revenues and a decreasing economic value of the forest. To really be able to speak about sustainable forest management it therefore is crucial that a wider range of timber species is used. Therefore recently a project is started to introduce some lesser used Surinamese FSC-certified species on the European market. A first selection of ten species is made on the basis of the potential of these species and their occurrence in the FSC-certified concessions. Within the project laboratory research will be conducted and practical experiences gathered through pilot projects. The project is an initiative of the FSC-certified companies in Suriname, Tropenbos Suriname, Probos and ETTF. The project is supported by the STTC, which aims to make sustainably sourced tropical timber the norm in Europe, remove bottlenecks in the market and with this encourage sustainable forest management. Importers interested in the project can join the consortium. See www.probos.nl/projecten and www.europeansttc.com.

For sustainable forest management it is thus crucial that the market is open to species with which they are - currently - less familiar (see text box Market introduction).

For sustainable forest management and the continuity of supply of timber, it is crucial that specifiers and architects do not specify timber species, but properties to which the species should adhere or the proposed use or appearance. Timber experts then can bring the right wood to the right place. In general, this is also (more) cost efficient. This, however, might require an investment of the timber trade, e.g. in expertise.

Another challenge also linked to the species diversity of Surinamese (Amazon) forests is that, partly as a result of sustainable forest management, the availability of species in the required volumes cannot be guaranteed. On the basis of a 1% inventory, optimal logistics and a cutting cycle of 25 years, concessions are divided into 25 cutting blocks. It may be that during the 100% inventory

prior to the actual timber harvesting it is found that certain species are not or only very limited present in the cutting block for that year. For continuity of supply and stimulating sustainable forest management, this is another reason why it is important that the timber trade is open to alternative wood species. If there is sufficient knowledge about these alternative wood species available (see text box Market introduction) importers should be willing to purchase these species, even if there is not (yet) a direct market. This may result in the need for importers to (again) have or increase stock. But if we really are talking about sustainable forest management, the forest determines the supply, not the market.

When we make sure that at every level in the chain this awareness increases (the forest determines what the market can offer), then the forest management in Suriname is heading in the right direction. In fact, not only in Suriname. Every tropical forest is characterized by its huge diversity.

With their visit to Suriname, the participants of the trade mission got to know the importance, but also the opportunities and challenges of using the diversity a tropical forest has to offer. They are excited about the trade mission and the potential of forest sector in Suriname. The same applies for the Surinamese FSC-certified companies by whom they were invited. Such a mission is worth repeating and the Surinamese companies and organizations very willing to cooperate.

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*Photo cover: participants of the trade mission
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