

The Healthy Forest Landscapes (HFL) Approach



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Earthworm

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A Tool for Productive Forest Landscapes

Collectively, we have a responsibility and opportunity to regenerate the health of our planet's forests. Productive forests face climate change, widespread fires, and growing fuel and fiber needs. Alongside steady demand for traditional fiber-based materials such as paper, tissue, and packaging, the rise of newer forest products like wood pellets and manmade cellulosic fibers have prompted NGOs and companies alike to ask,

“How can we sustain and heal our forest landscapes?”

In the last ten years, many companies have adopted “no deforestation” commitments and/or certification standards to balance competing demands on forests. The forestry industry has also demonstrated its ability to drive afforestation, identify and protect High Conservation Values (HCVs), and collaborate with local communities. However, these efforts often do not address or prevent major impacts specific to productive forest landscapes. They also do not address the very dynamic, unpredictable, and increasingly diverse nature of the impacts on forests. In temperate and boreal forests in particular, significant impacts on forest health are driven by degradation: the long-term decline in a forest's capacity to provide ecosystem services, from timber to biodiversity, habitat, and carbon storage.

Earthworm and Drax have worked together to create an approach that measures and evaluates the health of a forest at landscape level to help determine opportunities for positive impacts and take action to mitigate negative impacts.

We have focused on four key values of forest landscape health - forest cover, forest carbon, biodiversity, and the well-being of communities in and around forests. It was out of this exploration and these four metrics that the Healthy Forest Landscapes approach was born.

The Healthy Forest Landscapes (HFL) approach is a cycle of measurement, engagement, diagnosis, and potential intervention, leading to a transparent evaluation of forest landscape health and a collaborative path forward to address issues. HFL is designed to provide a consistent framework for evaluation, even in different forest types and geographies.

We have seen the power of stakeholders cooperating to develop landscape-level solutions. In the palm oil sector, the High Carbon Stock (HCS) Approach was created by Earthworm, Golden Agri-Resources, and Greenpeace as a methodology to distinguish forest areas for protection from degraded areas suitable for development – incorporating both scientific evidence and input of communities beyond the boundaries of palm oil concessions. HCS is now the widely accepted approach for implementation of No Deforestation commitments. However, no comparable methodology exists to address the specific challenges within productive forest landscapes: long-term forest degradation, wildfires, pest outbreaks, harvesting in Intact Forest Landscapes, and Indigenous and community rights and wellbeing. Healthy Forest Landscapes fills this gap by providing an evidence-based approach for stakeholders to measure the health of productive forests at a landscape level and identify opportunities for positive impact.



What is HFL?

The goal of the HFL approach is to bring stakeholders together around consistent, shared metrics of forest landscape health, and collaboratively decide the appropriate path forward to address issues within the landscape. When threats to forest landscape health are identified and action is needed, HFL leads stakeholders to the co-creation of bottom-up, actionable, evidence- and place-based solutions.

HFL follows simple steps that facilitate powerful transparency and action.

Baseline **measurement** of four metrics — forest cover, forest carbon stock, biodiversity, and community well-being — provides a broad picture of the health of the forested landscape and any positive or negative trends. **Stakeholder engagement** incorporates local perspectives on issues and root causes. Together, these steps lead to a decision point of whether to dive deeper and develop interventions (if landscape health is poor), or to continue to remotely monitor (if landscape health is good). If landscape health is poor, a deep dive **diagnostic** identifies potential collaborators and solutions, and leads to the co-creation of **interventions** — management decisions and other actions that can address the issues identified. **On-going monitoring** tracks the impact of interventions, with project-specific indicators corresponding to the HFL metrics. Through these steps, companies gain a deeper understanding of sourcing areas, can prioritize landscapes in their global supply chains for intervention, co-create solutions, and provide transparency.

The HFL approach leads to different types of interventions according to the threats identified. In some cases, interventions will be fairly simple and limited in scope, and may arise directly from suggestions from local stakeholders during engagement. Targeted interventions could include changes to a company's forest management decisions, educational resources or funds for landowners to implement best practices, or job postings in a local newspaper to increase local employment at a forest product company. In other cases, the issues revealed may be systemic and intertwined, necessitating a more comprehensive approach. In these instances, the HFL approach may guide stakeholders towards the creation of holistic, multi-stakeholder, and scalable initiatives that address complex issues of ecological and community well-being. At times, there may be trade-offs between the multifaceted, interlinked elements of forest health captured by the HFL metrics, making the stakeholder engagement crucial to understanding the appropriate path forward.

Healthy Forest Landscapes Metrics



Forest Cover

All other forest landscape attributes depend upon forest cover, so particular attention is paid to trends in forest cover change.



Carbon Stock

Carbon sequestration and storage in forests is critical to mitigating climate change, and therefore crucial to track. Measurement of forest carbon stock also provides a useful picture of forests' continuing productivity.



Biodiversity

Landscape scale biodiversity is an important indicator of healthy forest ecosystem functioning, and is of concern to both local and international stakeholders.



Community Well-being

Forests have many impacts on people who live and work within the landscape. This metric addresses social aspects of forest landscape health, prioritizing respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and includes socioeconomic and community health, encompassing industry workers' rights.



Co-Developing a Shared Industry Solution

Outcomes of the HFL Approach



Consistent data from monitoring of forest and community health across productive forest landscapes globally



Prioritized landscapes for deeper dives and intervention based on comparative indicators of forest and community health



Understanding of local stakeholder perspectives, as well as environmental and social health issues in priority landscapes



Solutions that are co-created and implemented with key actors present within priority landscapes

The HFL approach enables companies to comprehensively monitor the health of their forest product sourcing basins globally, and to engage in those landscapes in a credible, evidence-based way. HFL is adaptable to different local contexts, yet allows companies to simply and consistently communicate their progress, thereby building trust with local and international stakeholders.

EF and Drax have co-created the HFL approach and are currently piloting it, including tools and methodologies to capture data that are accurate indicators of the four HFL metrics. We will engage with scientific experts, policy makers, NGOs, and company leadership for feedback on these metrics and indicators, as well as the value of the HFL approach as a replicable methodology for evaluating landscape-level health. In the spirit of broad industry collaboration enabling solutions, we welcome the participation of interested partners. We look forward to sharing outcomes and learning from our initial pilots, and invite you to join us in creating, refining, and implementing HFL as an innovative approach to regenerating forest landscapes.

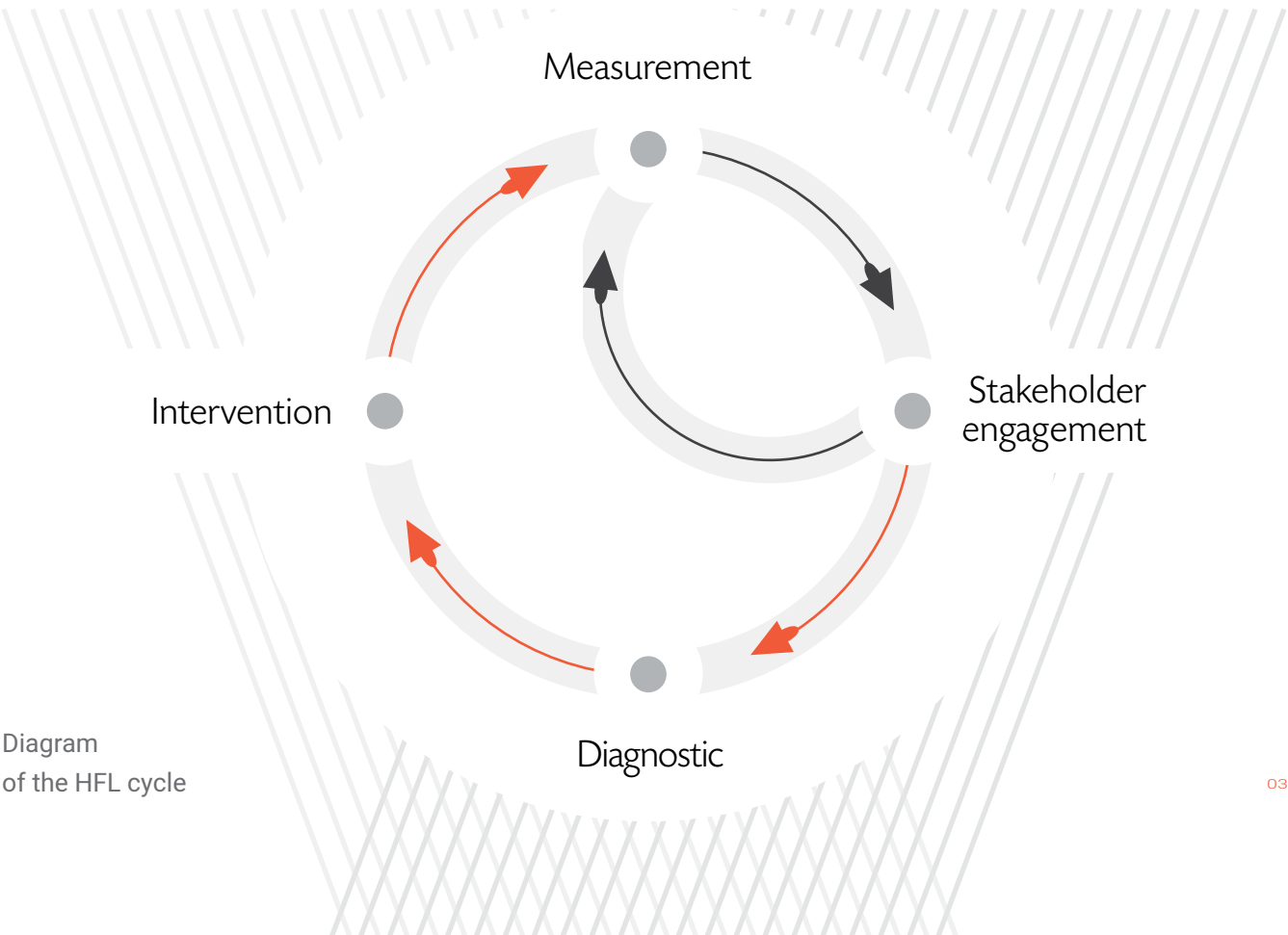


Diagram of the HFL cycle



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