



QUALIFOR PROGRAMME

Associated Documents

Number	AD 65
Title	FM Main Assessment Report
Page	1 of 22
Issue	05
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Forest Management Certification Report Public Summary Information

Project Number:	7688 JP SGS (M) F239-009
Client:	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative
Country:	Japan
Scope:	Group certification to consist of 15 members with a total forest area of 1,462ha consisting of 86% plantation and 14% natural forests.
Assessment date:	17-19 December 2002
Certificate Number:	SGS-FM/COC-1330
Date of Issue:	March 25, 2002
Duration:	5 years
Forest type:	Mixed indigenous species plantation
Forest composition:	Mixed coniferous dominant – multi-story planting system
Species composition:	87% Japanese cypress, 13% Japanese cedar
Land Tenure:	Private owned
Biome type:	Temperate forest
Annual production	2,700 m ³ /yr
Forest products:	Logs
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2. Report approved by	Initials	GM	Date	10 April 2003
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QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I - PUBLIC SUMMARY REPORT.....	4
1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE.....	4
2. COMPANY BACKGROUND	4
3. FOREST MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	5
3.1. Bio-physical setting.....	5
3.2. History of use.....	5
3.3. Planning process	5
3.4. Harvest and regeneration	6
3.5. Silviculture.....	6
3.6. Monitoring processes.....	6
4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT	6
4.1. Social aspects.....	6
4.2. Environmental aspects.....	6
4.3. Regulations	6
5. LOCAL STANDARDS	7
6. THE ASSESSMENT.....	7
6.1. Schedule	7
6.2. Team.....	7
6.3. Peer Reviewers.....	7
6.4. Process	8
6.5. Sampling	8
7. ASSESSMENT RESULTS	9
7.1. Findings related to the general QUALIFOR Programme	9
7.2. Issues related to the QUALIFOR Group Certification Programme	19
7.3. Issues raised by Stakeholders	20
7.4. Issues raised by Peer Reviewers.....	20
8. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES	21
8.1. Strengths.....	21
8.2. Weaknesses	21
9. CLOSE-OUT DETAILS FOR MAJOR CARs.....	22
10. CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION	22

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

SECTION II - DETAILED ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

QUALIFOR CHECKLIST

APPENDICES

- I. ITINERARY**
- II. ATTENDANCE SHEETS**
- III. ASSESSMENT TEAM CVs**
- IV. CORRECTIVE ACTION REQUESTS**
- V. LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS CONTACTED**

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

SECTION I - PUBLIC SUMMARY REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

This report presents the results of an assessment of Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative forest management operations, at Higashishirakawa village in Gifu Prefecture, Japan, carried out by SGS QUALIFOR during the period 17-19 December 2002.

The purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the operations against the requirements of the QUALIFOR Programme, the SGS Group's forest certification programme accredited by Forest Stewardship Council. The Assessment covered all forest management operations on Group certification with an initial membership of 15 members (1462.39 ha) consisting of 87% Japanese cypress, 13% Japanese cedar within a multi-storey planting system. The Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative consists of 571 families with a total forest of area 7,861ha and a planted area of 5,392ha that is planned to be included into the group system.

Member Name	Forest type *	Production area (ha)	Conservation area (ha)	Forest composition**	Annual Production (m ³)
Higashishirakawa Forest	Natural	0 ha	204 ha		Not cutting conservation
Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative	Plantation	1,462.39 ha	0 ha	Japanese Cypress, Japanese cedar	2,751m ³
Total		1,462.39 ha	204 ha		2,751m ³

2. COMPANY BACKGROUND

Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative is located at Higashishirakawa village; Gifu prefecture in Japan and its members are 571 families who own forests in the village. The Forest Owners Co-op. was established in 1952. Total current membership is 571 family forest owners with a total forest of area 7,861ha with a planted area of 5,392ha consisting of 87% Japanese cypress, 13% Japanese cedar. The Forest Co-op sells logs from members to the local market. There is limited production of charcoal no secondary processing. The Co-op charges members a percentage commission for harvesting and sale of logs.

Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative has developed a group certification programme with 15 of the current 571 families. The 15 members have a total of 1462.39ha. The co-operative has decided to embark on forest certification due to the poor economy of Japanese forestry. By forest certification, the co-operative expects to bring confidence to the members and to have some premium for their timber in the local market.

The Forest Owner Co-operative is legally registered with the national government. The organisation structure for the group management has been developed based on the existing organisation structure of the co-op, with the president as Group Manager – Mr. Noaki Murakumo – president of Forest Owners Co-operative Higashishirakawa. The co-op has 31 employees including management staff and staff of timber market and uses 27 forest workers.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

The Forest Owners Co-op was established in 1952, according to the revision of the forest law in Japan. Until early 1980s, the co-op had established Japanese cypress and Japanese cedar plantation on degraded forests used by local community for fuel wood collection in the village during the World War II. Since the middle of 1970s, the co-op has carried out some marketing activities of produced timbers from its member's forests, establishing the log market and the forestry centre. The region is now one of the major forestry areas in Japan and Japanese Cypress produced in the region is called "Tohnoh Cypress" and famous for its high timber quality. Through its management history for over 50 years, the co-op aims to develop timber markets, especially for Japanese Cypress in order to support its members and local economy.

3. FOREST MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

3.1. Bio-physical setting

Higashishirakawa village is located in the eastern part of Gifu Prefecture and surrounded by many mountains. The village is located between 260m and 1132 m altitude on the slopes. Commonly, volcanic type rocks are found in the village as parent rocks and the forest of the village is covered with brown forest soil, which is suitable for tree growth. The annual rainfall is relatively high (1500 mm – 2500mm). Climatic vegetation is temperate deciduous in higher elevation area, mixed with deciduous and conifer in middle elevation area and evergreen broadleaves in lower elevation area.

3.2. History of use

Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative is located at Higashishirakawa village; Gifu prefecture in Japan and its members are 571 families who own the forest areas in the village. The Forest Owners Co-op of Higashishirakawa was established in 1952. Total current membership is 571 family forest owners with a total forest of area 7,861ha with a planted area of 5,392ha consisting of 87% Japanese Cypress, 13% Japanese cedar.

Higashishirakawa Co-op system is based on smallholder group system with planning based on sub-blocks within compartments. Landowners own sub-blocks that are normally below 5 ha and fragmented across several compartments. The smallholder areas tend to be fragmented across the landscape with one landowner having several patches of forest areas of various species planted at different time's scatter over several compartments. In addition the Forest Co-op has planted dual story areas where seedling are planted under trees planted 50 to 60 years ago.

3.3. Planning process

The concept is to maintain a mixed story canopy and ground cover even during harvesting. Only mature trees will be harvested when they reach 90 years old. Inter-planting is conducted along with initial fertilization of seedlings to maintain productivity and provide some ecological benefits (soil conservation) from not clear cutting areas. The planning cycle for Higashishirakawa Co-op is based on planting of Japanese Cypress or Japanese Cedar thinning at 10-15 years, 20-25 years 40-50 years and harvesting at 90 years. Interplanting with native conifer or broadleaf species usually occurs after the 40 or 50-year thinning

Higashishirakawa Co-op system is based on smallholder group system with planning based on sub-blocks within compartments. Landowners own sub-blocks that are normally below 5 ha and fragmented across several compartments. The small scale of operation and the fragmentation of land holdings limit the impact of operations. The policy and objectives of Higashishirakawa Co-op is to have all existing Co-op members join the FSC group certification system. The Co-op will need time to evaluate the members' holdings and update records to meet the new procedures and requirements for FSC members.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

3.4. Harvest and regeneration

The system for harvesting and thinning is based on small-scale operations within sub-blocks of compartments owned by each landowner. Reduced Impact Logging is being practised through use of a Shura (plastic slide), small tractors and skyline systems to minimize impact to the forest. Guidelines exist for all key operations such as thinning, site preparation, planting, use of chemical, herbicides, and fertilizers, etc. Road engineering is based on Gifu prefecture guidelines, which mostly consists of small operational roads that are approximately 2.2 m wide and gradients along contours usually below 20% slope (e.g., compartment 142 and 89). Maintenance – includes guidelines for weeding and pruning.

Multi-story plantations are relatively new concept and the technology is not completely established in Japan. Harvesting of trees that reach 90 years that are interplanted with younger immature trees need clear procedures to minimize damage to the trees not harvested.

3.5. Silviculture

The planted areas are normally within a multi-story system with several species interplanted within a sub-block of a compartment. Silvicultural thinning and interplanting with multiple species and age structure provides greater diversity within each member's landholding and across the landscape. All plantings use native species.

3.6. Monitoring processes

Monitoring activities are conducted basically after operations. The co-op has prepared the procedure and checklist for the monitoring. The checklist covers all operation in forest and some environmental safeguards. However, the monitoring activities using the checklist have just started.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

4.1. Social aspects

Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative is comprised of 571 families with a total forest of area 7,861ha with a planted area of 5,392ha consisting of 87% Cypress, 13% Japanese cedar. The main assessment was conducted with an initial membership of 15 families with 1462.39 ha of planted forest area. The community and members are not dependent on the forest area for subsistence but more as a long-term investment. The forest areas are important to the local economy in respect to the wood resources, employment and recreational values.

4.2. Environmental aspects

There are many stands located on steep slopes and numerous small watercourses run through the forest. Harvesting and other operations on steep slopes need to have special attention to prevent soil damage and accidents.

Over 85% of the total area is covered by coniferous plantation and landscape and species diversity depends on the remaining 15 % of natural (secondary) forest. One stand of *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*) in the area is registered as a national natural monument and the education department of the village is conducting monitoring activities within the stand.

4.3. Regulations

Following regulations and laws are relevant to forest management in Japan. All copies or books of these are kept at the office of the co-op and staff met at the assessment are aware of these requirements.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- Forest and forestry basic law
- Forest co-operative law
- Forest pest and disease control law
- Erosion control law
- Law concerning wildlife, hunting and natural environmental preservation
- Natural environment preservation law
- Endangered species protection law
- Forest road construction regulation.

5. LOCAL STANDARDS AND KEY LEGISLATION

There is no FSC-endorsed national or regional forest management standard as such the generic QUALIFOR checklist has been modified to include local indicators to better evaluate the management system used in Japan. Local indicators take into account government regulations and local NGO concerns in plantation management.

6. THE ASSESSMENT

6.1. Schedule

The Assessment was preceded by a pre-assessment by SGS QUALIFOR during 1-2 July 2002. This examined the management systems and identified any gaps that might preclude certification. Information gathered was used to plan the main assessment. Key stakeholders were identified.

The main assessment was carried out during 17-19 December 2002. A detailed itinerary is shown in [Appendix I](#) of the full report.

6.2. Team

- Lead Assessor and Team Leader: Has a doctorate degree in forest ecology and agro-forestry, 20 years experience in forestry and wildlife management in USA, Asia and Latin America.
- Local Auditor: Has a degree in forestry from a Japanese University, 2 years experience forestry and CoC auditing. MSc in forestry.
- Local Auditor: Has a qualification of forest instructor from All Japan Forest Recreation Association and is a lead auditor for environmental management systems under ISO 14001.
- Local Specialist: Has a degree in forestry from a Japanese University and 30 years experience in forestry administration and research field in Gifu Prefecture, Japan.

Curricula vitae are provided in [Appendix III](#) of the full report.

6.3. Peer Reviewers

Two independent specialists have been selected to review this report.

Peer Reviewer 1 has a doctorate degree in forest management, over 20 years professional experience in science research field in Japan and abroad and currently works in academia.

Peer Reviewer 2 has a doctorate degree in forest protection, over 30 years professional experience in forest science research field in Japan and currently works in academia and as a forest manager.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

6.4. Process

The Main Assessment was conducted in the steps outlined below.

Preparation

A checklist was prepared by adapting the QUALIFOR generic forest management checklist.

Stakeholder notification

A wide range of stakeholders were contacted to inform them of the planned assessment and ask for their views on relevant forest management issues, These included environmental interest groups, local government agencies and forestry authorities, forest user groups, and workers' unions (see [Appendix V](#) of full report).

Opening meeting

An opening meeting was held at Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative. The scope of the assessment was explained and schedules were determined (see [Appendix II](#) of full report for attendance sheets).

Document review

A review of the main forest management documentation was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of coverage of the QUALIFOR Programme requirements. This involved examination of policies, management plans, systems, procedures, instructions and controls.

Field assessments

Field assessments aimed to determine how closely activities in the field complied with documented management systems and QUALIFOR Programme requirements. Interviews with staff, operators and contractors were conducted to determine their familiarity with and their application of policies, procedures and practices that are relevant to their activities. A sample of 6 sites was visited to evaluate whether practices met the required performance levels.

Stakeholder interviews

Meetings or telephone interviews were held with stakeholders as determined by the responses to notification letters. These aimed to clarify any issues raised and the company's responses to them.

Summing up and closing meeting

At the conclusion of the field assessment, findings were presented to company management at a closing meeting. Any areas of non-conformance with the QUALIFOR Programme were raised as one of two types of Corrective Action Request (CAR):

- **Major CARs** - which must be addressed and re-assessed before certification can proceed
- **Minor CARs** - which do not preclude certification, but must be addressed within an agreed time frame, and will be checked at the first surveillance visit

6.5. Sampling

The following forest areas were visited during the assessment:

Sites for field assessment were chosen based on activities being conducted across the different areas within the area. The sites were selected to verify planting, felling, site preparation, etc among the initial membership within the newly formed group.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

Field sites visited during the assessment were as follows:

Ongoing operations

Compartment # 89, sub-block # I-70, 71, 72, and 73: Owned by Mr Murakumo Naoki

92 and 45 years old Japanese Cypress and Cedar mixed plantation. Thinning operation is conducted.

Completed operations

Compartment # 142, sub-block # Ro-8, 9,10: Owned by Mr Imai Kazuo

42 years old Japanese Cypress and Cedar plantation. Thinned in 2001

Compartment # 67, sub-block # Ha-56: Owned by Mr Murakumo Naoki

85 years old Japanese Cypress and Cedar plantation. Thinned in 2002

Compartment # 52, sub-block # I-52: Owned by Mr Yasue Masahiro

19-45 years old patchy planted Japanese Cypress and Cedar. Thinned in 2002.

Compartment # 62, sub-block # Ro-60: Owned by Mr Inagaki Akira

Broadleaf trees (*Zelkova serrata*: Keyaki) are planted under 80 years old Japanese Cypress in 2002.

Other sites

National natural monument located at Matsuo 1817-2. Northern limit of wild *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*). HCVF. Owned by Higashishirakawa village.

The office of Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative

A log yard where certified logs will be sold to local processors.

7. ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Detailed assessment findings are included in the full report. For each QUALIFOR requirement, these show the related findings, and any observations or corrective actions raised. The main issues are discussed below.

7.1. Findings related to the general QUALIFOR Programme

PRINCIPLE 1 Compliance with law and FSC Principles

- **Respect for national and local laws and administrative requirements**

Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative has a list of all regulations relevant to the organization's operations. The list includes both national and Gifu Prefecture regulations. The Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative has a copy of the village forest management plan that is fairly general and lacks specifics required for management. The management plan is policy based with very little detail on management that can be used by individual landowners. The Co-op has a separate management plan that contains greater detail than the government village management plans. The Co-op management plan met the government requirements.

- **Payment of legally prescribed fees, royalties, taxes and other charges**

Demonstrated payment of corporate tax for national government (# 00520071) and for the Gifu prefecture (#003276031).

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- Respect for provisions of international agreements**
Higashishirakawa Co-op has a list of internationally binding agreements relevant to forestry. The list was submitted to SGS at the main assessment that includes CITIES, ILO, Convention on biological diversity, Convention on wetlands, ITTA and Convention on protection of migration birds.
- Conflicts between laws and regulations, and the FSC P&C**
No conflicts between Japanese regulations and FSC P&C were identified during the main assessment.
- Protection of forests from illegal activities**
There was no evidence of illegal harvesting in the Higashishirakawa Co-op members' areas. Higashishirakawa Co-op staff along with landowners will monitor the forest areas for illegal activities.
- Demonstration of a long-term commitment to the FSC P&C**
Higashishirakawa Co-op has published a policy statement that includes a reference to comply with FSC requirements for all members. The policy statement is published on the website thus is publicly available. (www.rd.mmtr.or.jp/~hinoki/) Policy does not state the concept of protection of all natural forest areas for biodiversity, habitat, etc See 7.4 (**CAR-001 minor**). The policy has been communicated to staff and has had posters made of the policy statement for display in the office. The policy statement by Higashishirakawa Co-op includes a reference to comply with FSC requirements for all 571 members. Only 15 of the members have formally signed the agreement to be under the FSC programme.

PRINCIPLE 2 Tenure and use rights and responsibilities

- Demonstration of land tenure and forest use rights**
Higashishirakawa Co-op has a list of all members that includes legal land ownership based on government records. The records were developed following the initial FSC pre-assessment.
- Local communities' legal or customary tenure or use rights**
The local community does not have legal rights to access the forest without permission, although the Co-op staff states that people can enter the forest to collect flowers and some wild vegetables. The landowners retain use rights of the land even under the Higashishirakawa Co-op. The members under the FSC group system are under voluntary agreement to follow the Co-op's policy and procedures for FSC group participation.

There is no formal policy regarding access to the forest areas for recreation, collection, etc (**Observation**). The audit team held a meeting with the Tourism Association of Higashishirakawa on 18 Dec 2002, which mainly focused on the increasing biodiversity, and minimizing erosion from planted areas. There were no issues raised on tenure or use rights.

- Disputes over tenure claims and use rights**
Higashishirakawa Co-op has taken measures to resolve disputes through fair consultation aimed at achieving agreement and consent. Higashishirakawa Co-op has procedures for resolving disputes under consultation procedure for stakeholders (3.1) and boundaries (# 3.2). No disputes have been identified in 2002.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

PRINCIPLE 3 Indigenous peoples' rights

This principle is not applicable in Japan.

PRINCIPLE 4 Community relations and workers rights

• **Employment, training, and other services for local communities**

The Co-op uses 7 local contractors for various operations such as thinning, planting road construction, etc. No external contractors are used. Higashishirakawa Co-op has a complete list of qualifications for each staff for all levels of work within the Co-op (management, field work, marketing, etc). Payment for work conducted in Japan for the Co-op is competitive market rates and meet legal requirements. Japan respects ILO requirements and there is no evidence of child labour in the Higashishirakawa Co-op members' forest areas.

Local infrastructure is well developed in Japan thus is not required to be supplied by the Co-op for the general public. The Co-op does occasionally build small roads for access to forest areas but not as infrastructure for village uses. Local communities are allowed to collect NTFP, usually wild vegetables.

• **Compliance with health and safety regulations**

Higashishirakawa Co-op has a safety plan that includes 5 principles of worker safety. The co-operative has a "worker's health and safety committee" that holds bi-monthly meetings, and maintains records of meetings.

The Co-op also provides internal monitoring for safety of field workers using a formal checklist. Non-compliance to requirements was noted on the checklist observed by the assessment team. The Co-op requires use of PPE for all forest workers. The Co-op monitors the use of the equipment by field staff and subcontractors. The audit team observed 3 workers in compartment 89 all wearing appropriate PPE that included: helmet, gloves, protective pants, boots, etc. The workers had a first aid kit on site but it was not well stocked (**Observation**).

Only one accident (with hand grass cutter) was recorded in 2002. The accident was not serious and no hospitalization was required. Health and safety records maintained. The accident that was described occurred 29 August 2002. Records have been maintained since 1999. Medical facilities are well developed in Japan with all villages having adequate clinics and access to emergency facilities at local hospitals. Higashishirakawa Co-op has 10 people with formal training on first aid with certificates issued by the local fire station.

• **Workers' rights to organise and negotiate with employers**

Workers in Japan are free to organize into labour unions. No staff of the Co-op are currently under a labor union. The staff of the Co-op and subcontractors have input into the Health and safety committee. The staff can voice their concerns within the bi-monthly meetings. Issues raised by workers are considered by the H&S committee. Conflicts that arise with workers are settled individually with the affected staff. Staff interviewed during the assessment did not point out any claims to the coop's management.

• **Social impact evaluations and consultation**

There are some shrines in the forest areas within the Co-op but not in the current FSC members' areas. The cultural sites are identified by the educational authority of the Higashishirakawa village and protected by the Co-op even though they are outside the FSC project area. There is a social impact assessment as part of the application procedure (# 3.12) to identify and evaluate possible social impacts of operations, e.g. Village forests are identified for recreation and

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

education of school children. Village forest areas that have been identified with recreation values are planned for being maintained, e.g. 3.55 ha in compartment # 100 sub-block # 24.

The Co-op is not consistent in identification of management planning between the long term planning detailed the master list and summary descriptions. Objective evidence is that area for conservation in the summary description was identified for production in the master list (See also 7.1) (**CAR-002 minor**). Higashishirakawa Co-op has submitted an up to date list of stakeholders to the SGS assessment team.

The audit team held a meeting with the Tourism Association of Higashishirakawa on 18 Dec 2002 which main focused on the increasing biodiversity and minimizing erosion from planted areas. The concerns of the Tourist Association was that the forest roads detracted from the landscape views and the plantation areas were contributing to the situation of the Shirakawa River that flows by the village. The Tourist Association commented that the Forest Co-op should increase biodiversity and minimize road construction. The village has general meetings (7-8 times/yr) concerning various issues such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, etc. Co-op representatives attend the meetings to address forestry issues.

Higashishirakawa Co-op system is based on smallholder group system with planning based on sub-blocks within compartments. Landowners own sub-blocks that are normally below 5 ha and fragmented across several compartments. The small scale of operation and the fragmentation of land holdings limit the impact of operations. The policy and objectives of Higashishirakawa Co-op is to all have existing Co-op members join the FSC group certification system. The Co-op will need time to evaluate the members' holdings and update records to meet the new procedures and requirements for FSC members.

- ***Resolution of grievances and settlement of compensation claims***

Higashishirakawa Co-op has procedures for resolving disputes under consultation procedure for stakeholders (3.1) and boundaries (# 3.2). No disputes were raised in 2002.

PRINCIPLE 5 *Benefits from the forest*

- ***Economic viability taking full environmental, social, and operational costs into account***

Higashishirakawa Co-op has amended its procedure to include provisions for social and environmental aspects and associated costs based on the FSC group requirements. The Co-op budget is mainly based on a harvest and replanting schedule but actually all operations are conducting thinning with limited replanting under the multi-story system.

The smallholder areas tend to be fragmented across the landscape with one landowner having several patches of forest areas of various species planted at different time's scatter over several compartments. In addition, the Forest Co-op has planted dual story areas where seedling are planted under trees planted 50 to 60 years ago. The concept is to maintain a mixed story canopy and ground cover even during harvesting. Only mature trees will be harvested when they reach 90 years of age. Inter planting is conducted along with initial fertilization of seedlings to maintain productivity. Inter planting also provides some ecological benefits such as soil conservation as there are no large clear cutting areas and soil exposure.

- ***Optimal use and local processing of forest products***

Higashishirakawa Co-op focuses on plantation management that includes multi-story planting of different tree species following 50-60 years. Resource inventory of harvest plots is conducted and each tree for felling is marked with flagging for both thinning and harvesting. 203.97 ha of natural secondary forests have been included in the FSC group system. These areas are not

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

being managed for production, but preserved as conservation areas for biological diversity, habitat, recreation, etc.

The assessment team interviewed the mill association in the village that only produces sawn timber and sells 99% Japanese Cypress and obtains about 15% of the material from the Higashishirakawa Co-op. The mill association is planning on getting FSC COC certified and looking to develop trade in certified products.

- **Waste minimisation and avoidance of damage to forest resources**

Several sites visited had significant waste associated with thinning. There is no evidence of monitoring and minimizing the waste. Lack of a system for monitoring and minimizing waste associated with thinning activities (**CAR-003 minor**). No on-site processing by members of Higashishirakawa Co-op.

- **Forest management and the local economy**

Higashishirakawa Co-op also produces a small amount of charcoal for local market. Annual production of charcoal is approximately 3,000 kg.

- **Maintenance of the value of forest services and resources**

Individual members of the Higashishirakawa Co-op are concerned with maintaining the ecology of their areas and have instituted multi-story plantings and have preserved areas under natural forest. The areas owned are on a small scale and often scattered across several different compartments the scale of the system is not appropriate to provide for landscape level forestry services such as watershed management. However, the use of multi-story planting, reduced impact logging and establishment of buffer zones by the Higashishirakawa Co-op does provide a system to maintain and protect forest services and resources.

- **Harvest levels**

Since the areas are planted and thinned on a schedule that provides for a harvest of the trees that attain 90 years. The planted immature trees will remain in the compartment until they reach 90 years. Additional in planting can occur to replace the lines of 90-year-old trees that were harvested. Sustainability is based on replanting along the lines harvested. No evidence of reduction in productivity since the area is on a long-term rotation. Higashishirakawa Co-op measures growth on selected member's areas. The analysis of the data was not available during the assessment to verify growth relevant to site quality or soil type. NTFPs are not measured except for hunting of game species that is regulated by the wildlife department.

PRINCIPLE 6 Environmental impact

- **Environmental impacts assessment**

Assessment for environmental impacts is conducted prior to thinning or harvesting activities according to procedure # 3.3. The assessment includes identification of buffer zones for permanent streams, rare plants and habitat for animals. Steep slopes are not considered as environmental problems and are included as production zones. Observed steep slope (50°+) with adjacent permanent stream that was marked for production (Comp 142 sub-block 8,9,10) that owner stated will be protected. Inadequate identification of protection for steep slopes associated with streams on member management plans (**CAR-004 minor**).

All natural forest areas are being preserved as conservation areas for bio-diversity, habitat, watershed, recreation, etc. All planted trees (Japanese Cypress, Japanese cedar) are native to the Gifu region of Japan.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- ***Protection of rare, threatened and endangered species***

Higashishirakawa Co-op has designated all natural forest areas as protection areas for biodiversity and habitat for RTE, e.g. site visit to village natural forest area of 1.70 ha at Matsuo 1907-2 identified a fairly rare tree species (*Acer pycnanthum*) that is now protected. The objectives of the Co-op and the Education Dept of the village are to preserve the site as natural. There is no plan for additional propagation of the species.

There is a policy to establish buffer zones by thinning conifers and using broadleaf species in the buffer area. This policy has been established by the Higashishirakawa Co-op to provide a clear means for stream protection since broad leaf trees are preserved.

Higashishirakawa Co-op uses a Red Data List of Gifu Prefecture that includes the following species that are identified to potentially occur in the village.

Flora:

Cirisium Grandirosuliferum Kadota (herb)
Sarcochilus japonicus (Riechb. f.) (orchid)

Fauna :

Pteromys momonga Temminck (flying squirrel)
Lametra mitsukurii Hatta (lamprey)
Luehdorfia japonica Leech (butterfly)
Spindasis takanonis (butterfly)

The co-op has prepared the procedure of rare species protection. According to the procedure, forest workers report to the co-op when they see such species. The small scale of the group landowners limits the ability for each individual member to provide for protection of endangered species. The main element to protection of endangered species is through the protection of natural forests and broadleaf trees, which would include the area with (*Acer pycnanthum*) to provide habitat and bio-diversity.

Authorized hunting and fishing are licensed and regulated by Gifu Prefecture government not the Co-op. The issue of protection of natural forest areas for conservation purposes has not been formally identified in the Co-op policy and management planning (**Observation**)

- ***Maintenance of ecological functions and values***

Higashishirakawa Co-op has a policy and procedures for development of multi-story plantation system with several species interplanted on each member's landholdings. This policy promotes diversity to provide for maintaining ecological functions. Silvicultural thinning and interplanting is appropriate for the ecology and resources. All plantings use native species.

- ***Protection of representative samples of existing ecosystems***

Higashishirakawa Co-op has designated all natural forest areas as protection areas for biodiversity and habitat for RTE. The natural forest area comprises 204 ha of the 1462 ha, which is about 14% of the total area currently under the FSC group system.

According to the forest practice guidelines procedure #2.2 the Co-op does leave broadleaf trees in the planted areas undisturbed. The Co-op also has a formal procedure to establish broadleaf trees in buffer zones of planted conifer areas. The Co-op has planted broadleaf seedlings under 80-year old-planted Cypress in Compartment 92 sub-block 60 as a trial. Due to these existing practices to promote, biodiversity there is no additional long term plans to restore planted areas to natural forest.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- **Protection against damage to soils, residual forest and water resources during operations**

Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) is being practiced through logging by Shura (plastic slide) small tractors and skyline systems however; the systems used are not adequately described in guidelines. Thinning guidelines exist – but do not clearly define objectives of volume and density, scheduling, etc. Planting guidelines require manual planting but lack reference to use of chemicals, herbicides, and fertilizers. Site preparation consists of formal guidelines that exclude use of heavy machinery, maintaining existing broadleaf trees, protecting stream from debris, etc. Current systems for reduced impact logging, thinning, planting, are not adequately described in the guidelines. (**CAR-005, minor**).

Road engineering is based on Gifu prefecture guidelines, which does not adequately address cutting of hillsides and minimizing impacts of construction (**Observation**). Roads mostly consist of small operational roads that are approximately 2.2 m wide and gradients along contours usually below 20% slope (e.g., compartment 142 and 89). Maintenance – includes several guidelines for weeding and pruning.

Buffer zones are to be established for permanent streams based on procedure # 2.4. Minimum width of buffer zone is 5 m made up of under-story species. However, buffer zones are not consistent as observed in compartment 142 where one non-group member which cut trees adjacent to a small stream (**Observation – partial certification**).

- **Chemical pest management**

Higashishirakawa Co-op maintains a list of chemicals used by the members, which are all licensed for use in Japan. No prohibited chemicals were observed. No chemicals on the WHO 1a or 1b are used. There is very limited use of chemicals or oil in operations by Higashishirakawa Co-op and is clearly defined under procedure #2.6. The procedure details methods for handling chemicals according to instructions and using personal protection equipment (PPE).

- **Use and disposal of chemicals, containers, liquid and solid non-organic wastes**

Higashishirakawa Co-op has procedures for disposal of wastes and chemical containers under procedure # 3.9. The agricultural co-operative collects chemical containers, empty bottles and bags as well as surplus chemicals. The agricultural co-operative collects chemical containers, empty bottles and bags as well as surplus chemicals. The agricultural co-operative complies with Japan regulations for such activities.

- **Use of biological control agents and genetically modified organisms**

No bio-control methods or GMOs are used.

- **The use of exotic species**

No exotic species are planted all species are native to Gifu Prefecture

- **Forest conversion to plantations or non-forest land uses**

No forest conversion is taking place in the Higashishirakawa Co-op members.

PRINCIPLE 7 Management plan

- **Management plan requirements**

There is an overall management plan for the Co-op consisting of a list of Group members land areas and schedule of activities. However, the plan does not clearly state the policy for preservation of natural forest areas (**CAR 001 minor**). 203.97 ha of natural secondary forests

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

have been included in the FSC group system. The areas are not being managed for production but preserved as conservation areas for biological diversity, habitat, recreation, etc. Broadleaf trees are maintained in all planted areas to promote biodiversity. The Co-op is not consistent in identification of management planning between the long term planning detailed the master list and summary descriptions. The area for conservation in the summary description was identified for production in the master list (**CAR-002 minor**).

Currently using sample plots to monitor density and stand volume following thinning. Lack of clear system to monitor dynamics of planted forest areas through permanent sample plots (**CAR-006 minor**).

Steep slopes are not considered as environmental problems and are included as production zones. Inadequate identification of protection for steep slopes that are associated with permanent streams with buffer zones. Observed steep slope (50°+) with adjacent permanent stream that was marked for production (Comp 142 sub-block 8,9,10) that owner stated will be protected (**CAR-004 minor**).

Maps of several members' areas (comp 142, 89) were found to differ from actual ground conditions in respect to operational roads and identification of buffer zones for protection. There was an inconsistency of mapping of sub-blocks in respect to operational roads and buffer zones. Management plans of sub-blocks do not clearly and consistently identify features for protection or system to minimize impact (**CAR-007 minor**).

- **Management plan revision**

The management plan for group system has just been prepared. It was stated that the management plan would be revised continuously as the membership under the certification programme grows.

- **Training and supervision of forest workers**

Higashishirakawa Co-op has a complete list of qualifications for each staff for all levels of work within the Co-op (management, field work, marketing, etc). The co-op provide the workers costs for public training course. The co-op has senior staff that are qualified forestry specialists, managers, etc and with over ten years on site experience.

- **Public availability of the management plan elements**

Management plan and monitoring records were not made available to the public. Lack of publicly available summary of the management plan that includes the Co-op's policies objectives, description of group system, net production area, conservation areas, annual production, species, monitoring results, etc (**CAR-008 minor**).

PRINCIPLE 8 Monitoring and assessment

- **Frequency, intensity and consistency of monitoring**

The co-op prepared monitoring checklist covering harvesting, thinning, planting, silvicultural activities, extraction, road building. However, it does not adequately describe integrity of buffer zones and stream quality. Lack of clear system to monitor dynamics of planted forest areas through permanent sample plots (**CAR-009 minor**).

The co-op has monitoring procedure for the group forest (#1.4.). The monitoring is conducted after site operation. The co-op has just started the monitoring activity based on the procedure #1.4 and using checklist. Monitoring records are maintained in group members documents.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- **Research and data collection for monitoring**

Harvested volume are counted roughly at the site and calculated precisely at the time of sales. All the records are available. Lack of clear system to monitor dynamics of planted forest areas through permanent sample plots (**CAR-006 minor**). The checklist covering harvesting, thinning, planting, silvicultural activities, extraction, road building does not adequately describe integrity of buffer zones and stream quality (**CAR-009 minor**).

- **Chain of custody**

Procedure # 3.5 has been prepared for CoC control. All certified logs are put a seal on at the harvested site for identification and transported by Co-op vehicles to the Co-op log yard. At log yard in the Higashishirakawa Co-op office (log market), tickets are attached to logs. Origin of all logs is described on ticket attached to logs and operation records. Sales invoices and sales records are kept at the co-op office. Ledger note (Document #11) records all produced and sold certified logs.

- **Incorporation of monitoring results into the management plan**

The monitoring checklists are kept as the records. Lack of clear system to monitor dynamics of planted forest areas through permanent sample plots. See minor CAR 006. The management plan is new and has not yet been revised. Monitoring activities are reported to FSC committee. The committee is responsible for group system and management policy revision and held annually.

- **Publicly available summary of monitoring**

Lack of publicly available summary of the management plan that includes the Co-op's policies objectives, description of group system, net production area, conservation areas, annual production, species, monitoring results, etc (**CAR-008 minor**).

PRINCIPLE 9 High Conservation Value Forests

- **Assessment to determine high conservation value attributes**

In general, this principle is not applicable to smallholder planted forests. However, a small area (1.7 ha) consisting of wild *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*) broad leaf stand (located at Matsuo 1817-2) has been identified for protection. The stand is famous for northern limit of wild *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*) stand and registered as a national natural monument in 1922. The 1.7 ha *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*) stand is owned by the Higashishirakawa Village and monitored by the education department of the village. At present, the education department is carrying out periodical patrol and maintenance of trails.

In addition there is 203.97 ha of natural secondary forests have been included in the FSC group system. The areas are not being managed for production but preserved as conservation areas for biological diversity, habitat, recreation, etc. Broadleaf trees are maintained in all planted areas to promote biodiversity.

- **Consultation process**

Consultation with members and the local community happen regularly. The stand of wild *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*) has been registered, as a national natural monument in 1922, so the village has long history of its monitoring and people in the village are aware of the value of the stand. At present, the village is carrying out periodical patrol and maintenance of trails.

- **Measures to maintain and enhance high conservation value attributes**

Areas that are identified for protection is not actively managed but are protected as conservation areas.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- **Monitoring to assess effectiveness**

Not applicable to planted forests but the small stand of wild *Acer pycnanthum* (*Hananoki*) has been protected since 1922 as a national natural monument, so the village has long history of its monitoring.

PRINCIPLE 10 Plantation

- **Statement of objectives in the management plan**

Management plan has objective of plantation management. Rotation is 90 years (cypress) to produce timber with high quality mostly used for house production. The Forest Owners Co-op of Higashishirakawa was established in 1952. Total current membership is 571 family forest owners with a total forest of area 7,861ha with a planted area of 5,392ha consisting of 87% Japanese Cypress, 13% Japanese cedar.

- **Plantation design and layout**

Forest areas have been planted according to Forestry Department regulations based on small landowner's holdings scattered through the Higashishirakawa village district. The Higashishirakawa Co-op has data sets of each individual sub-block with the site information (planted or natural) that are linked to maps.

The Co-op has planted broadleaf seedling as a trial. According to the forest practice guidelines procedure #2.2 the Co-op does leave broadleaf trees in the planted areas undisturbed. The Co-op has a formal procedure to establish broadleaf trees in buffer zones of planted conifer areas.

- **Diversity in composition**

Japanese cypress has been widely planted. One stakeholder mentioned that the widely planted cypress decreases landscape diversity. The co-op does leave broadleaf trees in the planted areas undisturbed and create broadleaf stand in buffer zones of plantation areas. Areas of natural forest are maintained as conservation areas and provide a significant proportion of the bio-diversity.

- **Species selection**

The planted species consist of 87% Japanese Cypress and 13% Japanese cedar, which are both native to Gifu prefecture Japan. The Higashishirakawa Co-op members do not plant exotic tree species.

- **Restoration of natural forest**

There is no plan for restoration of natural forests, however, the co-op does leave broadleaf trees in the planted areas undisturbed and create broadleaf stand in buffer zones of plantation areas. Areas of natural forest are maintained as conservation areas and provide a significant proportion of the bio-diversity.

- **Impacts on soil and water**

Buffer zones are to be established for permanent streams based on procedure # 2.4. Minimum width of buffer zone is 5 m made up of under-story species. Visited compartment 52 sub-block 14-17, the co-op carried out thinning in November, 2002. Japanese Cypress trees along a small stream were cut to create gap for broad leaf trees. The co-op has committed to preserve all natural forest in the area. The natural forest area comprises 204 ha of the 1462 ha which is about 14% of the total area currently under the FSC group system.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

- ***Pests and diseases***

No serious pests and diseases are identified in the region. Monitoring activities are conducted according to the procedure #1.4.

- ***Monitoring of impacts, species testing and tenure rights***

Operation size of each member's is small based on sub-blocks within compartments as such the site impact is not significant. Steep slopes are not considered as environmental problem as the Co-op uses RIL systems for harvesting and thinning.

- ***Plantations established in areas converted from natural forests after November 1994***

No conversion since 1994. The co-op has committed to preserve all natural forest in the group forest.

7.2. Issues related to the QUALIFOR Group Certification Programme

Section 1: Management Responsibilities

The Forest Owner Co-operative is legally registered with the national government. The organisational structure for the group management has been developed based on the existing organisational structure of the co-op, with the president as Group Manager president of Forest Owners Co-operative Higashishirakawa. The co-op has developed the forest management policy for all forests under its management. The commitment to FSC P&C is clearly described in the policy.

The group management responsibility and job description are described in Code of Practice of Forest Certification Management issued on June 20, 2002 (document # 1.1).

Section 2: Group Management System

FSC promotion committee is held annually and the chairman is the Group Manager. The committee is responsible for revision of policy, follow up of CARs raised at monitoring and change of group membership.

The co-op has developed procedures for monitoring of group members and internal audit (document # 1.4.).

Section 3: Membership of the Group

The co-op has 571 members in total and 15 members have signed the group membership agreement. The agreement form (form group # 2-1) describes the requirement of group membership and refers to relevant group documents. The initial group member includes individuals and the village. The co-op has developed formal procedure for application (document # 1.2.) and expulsion/resignation (document # 1.3.) The initial assessment for each group member has been conducted according to the procedure for initial assessment (document # 3.12.) and initial assessment checklist (form group # 2-2). All records of the initial assessment are kept at the office of the co-op.

Section 4: Monitoring of Group Members

The co-op has developed procedures for monitoring of group members and internal audit (document # 1.4.). The monitoring is conducted after site operation. The co-op has just started the monitoring activity based on the procedure #1.4 and using checklist. Monitoring records are maintained in group members documents.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

Section 5: Document Control

The co-op keeps all documents related to group certification system and its forest management in the office. The group system documents are relatively new and has not yet revised. Document revision based on the group membership change should be checked at the following surveillance visits.

Section 6: Internal Chain of Custody

Procedure # 3.5 has been prepared for CoC control. All certified logs are put a seal on at the harvested site for identification and transported by Co-op vehicles to the Co-op log yard. At log yard in the Higashishirakawa Co-op office (log market), tickets are attached to logs. Origin of all logs is described on ticket attached to logs and operation records. Sales invoices and sales records are kept at the co-op office. Ledger note (Document no.11) records all produced and sold certified logs.

Recommended sampling strategy for surveillances

The co-op has a plan to increase the group members after it got the certification, therefore the assessment team should visit and monitor new members at each surveillance visit.

7.3. Issues raised by Stakeholders

The following points have contributed to observations and resulting actions taken by the company should be followed up at the next surveillance visit:

Issue Raised	Response
Coniferous plantation and road construction cause problems with water conservation, landscape.	The assessment team interviewed with the stakeholder and the forest manager and found there is on-going consultation between the co-op and the stakeholder.
Waste control is not adequate.	CAR 003 was raised to require monitoring and minimising waste during thinning operation.

7.4. Issues raised by Peer Reviewers

This report was reviewed by two independent peer reviewers. The following points were raised.

Issue Raised	Response
According to the guidelines of FSC, the group entity should be incorporated. The main assessment report does not refer enough to this point.	The assessment team inspected the registration of the co-op at the pre-assessment and found the co-op is legally registered by the Japanese Government.
Only three days are not sufficient to assess the management body, because Higashishirakawa Co-op consists of individual private forest owners. They are not always uniform in the way of doing. Only for owners land out of 15 members were samples, which also in not sufficient.	The coop has developed group management system based on clear formalised procedures. The assessment team sampled over 25% of the initial members. The system was uniformly implemented so the sampling of the group members was felt to be sufficient to evaluate the management system.
CAR 004 was raised related to steep slopes. In	FSC requires conservation of soil and

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

Japan, forest practice on steep slopes is very common because of geography. Therefore, CAR 004 seems to be too strict in Japan.	maintenance of stream quality, which is directly influenced by topography. The assessment team considered additional action was needed in respect to steep slopes to protect water quality. The rotation age of 90 years will result in harvesting larger trees on steep slopes that need to be addressed through adequate logging techniques and buffer zones.
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8. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

8.1. Strengths

Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-op was established in 1952 has developed the small holder group system in line with FSC requirements that is based on:

- Formalised procedures and guidelines for most key activities that are agreed by the members. Most all activities are conducted by the Co-op staff in consultation with the landowners.
- Inclusion of local stakeholder views through consistent communication at the village level.
- Maintenance of natural forest areas as conservation and promotion of broadleaf species and multi-story planting within plantation areas.
- Use of RIL systems and establishment of buffer zones to minimize impacts, erosion and protect water quality. Use of small operational roads for extraction of timber.

8.2. Weaknesses

Nine Minor Corrective Action Requests (CARs), as described below, were raised. In the following table the requirement number refers to the indicator used in the QUALIFOR Programme to test each criterion from either the FSC P&C.

CAR No	QUALIFOR requirement	Description
001	1.6, 7.4	Policy and long term management plan does not state the concept of protection of all natural forest areas for biodiversity, habitat, etc
002	4.4.2, 7.1.8	The Co-op is not consistent in identification of management planning between the long term planning detailed the master list and summary descriptions
003	5.3	Lack of a system for monitoring and minimizing waste associated with thinning activities
004	6.1, 7.1	Steep slopes are not considered as environmental problems and are included as production zones. Inconsistent identification of protection for steep slopes that are associated with permanent streams with buffer zones.
005	6.5	Current systems for reduced impact logging, thinning, planting, are not adequately described in the guidelines.
006	7.1.5, 8.2	Lack of clear system to monitor dynamics of planted forest areas through permanent sample plots.
007	7.1.8, 7.1.11	Inconsistency of mapping of sub-blocks in respect to operational roads and buffer zones. Management plans of sub-blocks do not clearly and consistently identify features for protection or system to minimize impact.

QUALIFOR Programme	Project #s	7688 JP / F239_009
FOREST MANAGEMENT MAIN ASSESSMENT REPORT	Company	Higashishirakawa Forest Owners Co-operative

CAR No	QUALIFOR requirement	Description
008	7.4, 8.4	Lack of publicly available summary of the management plan that includes the Co-op's policies objectives, description of group system, net production area, conservation areas, annual production, species, monitoring results, etc.
009	8.1, 8.2	Checklist to monitor environmental performance does not adequately describe integrity of buffer zones and stream quality

9. CLOSE-OUT DETAILS FOR MAJOR CARs

No major CARs raised in the main assessment.

10. CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

There being no Major Corrective Action Requests, the assessment team recommends certification of Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative's forest management of the group planted forest areas in Higashishirakawa village district, Gifu Prefecture, Japan.

The outstanding Minor Corrective Action Requests do not preclude certification, but Higashishirakawa Forest Owner's Co-operative is required to take the agreed actions before **August 2003**. SGS QUALIFOR will verify these at the first surveillance to be carried out about 6 months from the date of the issuance of the certificate. If satisfactory actions have been taken the CARs will be 'closed out'; otherwise Minor CARs will be raised to Major CARs.