



NEWS

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## Forest Stewardship

# BOLIVIA LAUNCHES AN INNOVATIVE FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 2014.

On November 14th, the Bolivian Forests and Lands Authority (ABT, Autoridad Nacional de Bosques y Tierras) organized a high-level event to launch a national forest certification system, conceived and developed from the beginning with WWF Bolivia's technical and financial support.

The lack of effective instruments, appropriate legislation and enforcement capacity are among the main factors that impede stopping illegal timber practices and therefore reducing deforestation and environmental degradation. The ABT concluded that traditional voluntary certification schemes did not prove to be effective due to its high costs, technical capacity requirements and low return rates among other implementation problems.

Voluntary certification reached its greatest area coverage with 2.2 million hectares in 2006, representing 25% of 9 million hectares of forest under permanent production. Today, that number has dropped to 890,000 hectares, which means that only 40% remains under certification standards.

### Bolivian Forest Certification and Incentives System (SBCBi).

"We wanted to create a certification mechanism based on our current national regulations, laws and policies. We developed the system based on our local realities, because it was difficult for Bolivia to continue to fully respond to external criteria."- Neil Aponte Alvarez, Coordinator for the Bolivian Forest Certification and Incentives System (SBCBi).

This new forest certification system (SBCBi) has two additional features, which makes it attractive and widely accepted. On one hand, it contemplates financial and economic incentives aimed at motivating forest users to comply with legality and to promote substantial improvement in sustainable forest management and trade. A second feature is a modern tracking tool, which uses accessible technology, such as smartphones, to track the timber supply chain from the forest to the market. The SBCBi also counts with an online platform, which facilitates access to effective, timely and transparent information regarding the status of forest management in Bolivia.

A recent field assessment proved that the SBCBi and its components increased productivity significantly, saving time and money to forest users. Pilot testing was conducted with 40 forest users among forest concessioners, indigenous and community-based organizations and local logging associations.



It was important to ensure that the SBCBi include standards that are consistent with those required by international markets and regulations, such as FSC (Forest Stewardship Council), Lacey Act and others. In fact, the project initially started as a step towards compliance with the European FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) regulations on legal timber trade.

The adoption of the SBCBi will be mandatory, regulated by national legislation and enforced by the Bolivian Forests and Lands Authority (ABT). Although the implementation process will have very low costs for forest users, it is expected that the beneficial outcomes will motivate them to adopt certification as a responsible management measure.

It's worth mentioning that this project financed by WWF Germany since its inception, also benefited from technical exchange visits promoted by WWF Bolivia and WWF Brazil to Acre, where WWF supported an interesting project on local systems of incentives for environmental services which has been under implementation by the Acre Federal State Government, since 2013.

The contribution of this project to sustainable forest management and legality is already transcending Bolivian borders. While still in development, the project was presented at an international workshop, where environmental authorities from Colombia and Panamá showed much interest in its potential to stimulate sustainable use of forest resources. Both countries are currently working towards future technical exchange visits with Bolivian counterparts, to share and strengthen forest governance policies.

The strong inter-institutional coordination among WWF Bolivia and the Bolivian Forests and Lands Authority (ABT) has been pivotal in order to attain these results in record time. The trust relationship established between both institutions cannot end here, but should rather deepen and strengthen the collaborative work during the implementation process that starts immediately, in 2015.

### Forest Facts:

- Bolivia boasts the sixth largest tropical forest area in the world.
- 53 million hectares of forest, covering 52.2 % of the national territory.
- Twenty million hectares of forest owned and controlled by indigenous peoples.
- The forestry sector generates 4 % of national employment.
- 1300 registered forest companies.
- 6000 forest production units (mills and transformation).



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To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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### For more information

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