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Ver 17 May 2023

# Ecosystem Restoration Verification

Report for:

## WeForest

in the project

## Nurturing a sustainable forest management culture in northern Ethiopia to benefit local communities and the landscapes

| | |
|---|---|
| Report Finalised: | May 13 2024 |
| Audit Dates: | 29 January-2 February 2024 |
| Audit Team: | Hernán Zaldívar Schrader (lead auditor), Eyerusalem Tesfaye (auditor) Mateo Cariño Fraisse (Quality reviewer) |
| Certificate issued/expiry: | May 14 2024– May 13 2029 |
| Organisation Contact: | Cristina Yuri Vidal |
| Contact details: | Lead Forestry and Agroforestry Program Advisor cristina.yuri@weforest.org |

# INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of an independent audit conducted by a team of specialists representing Preferred by Nature. The audit aimed to evaluate the ecological, economic and social performance of the WeForest restoration initiative (Desa´a Project) as defined by the established Ecosystem Restoration Standard Version 3.1 by Preferred by Nature.

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https://preferredbynature.org/impartiality-policy

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Project description

The project "Nurturing a sustainable forest management culture in Northern Ethiopia to benefit local communities and the Landscapes – ETH-DES" is in the Tigray region in the Desa´a State Forest. Desa'a forest is classified as a dry single-dominant Afromontane Forest with *Juniperus procera* in the canopy and *Olea europaea ssp. cuspidata* in the understory as dominant species, this forest is considered a national priority area. Still, during the last decades, many threats have been faced by the ecosystem, in particular, the expansion of the agriculture border, free grazing and the lack of resources of the surrounding communities that use the forest as a source of energy. The agricultural productivity is low due to the poor quality of soils and the lack of rain during the year. This situation is led to the deforestation and habitat fragmentation of the Desa´a Forest.

WeForest Ethiopia's ETH-DES project is built on evidence and past successes from within Ethiopia and across WeForest's global projects. The forest landscape restoration model combines ecological restoration with livelihood resilience, rooted in communities' restoration decisions. Ecological function and integrity are being restored in Desa'a forest through an integrated, community-based programme of forest restoration, conservation, and natural resource management, securing sustainable livelihoods and alleviating poverty in Tigray Region by:

- Introducing and improving local forest governance.
- Restoring, conserving, and protecting forests and biodiversity.
- Generating benefits and improving the livelihood of the people and communities.
- Reducing soil loss and improving water availability.
- Enhance efficient energy source utilisation through the introduction of improved technologies.

The project has been divided into three management zones: The **core zone** is an area of dense forest with a canopy cover of ≥40%. The **Buffer zone** includes areas categorised as open or degraded forest areas. The buffer area is further classified as Buffer I, where vegetation cover is greater than 10% but less than 40%. **Buffer II** denotes areas that are communally owned and comprised of fragmented open forests and grazing lands where vegetation cover is ≤10%. **Development zones** denote areas covered by community settlements.

In the different zones, the project has implemented different types of interventions:

- Forest governance.
- Conservation of Natural Forest
- Assisted natural regeneration.
- Tree planting.
- Agroforestry development.
- Soil and water conservation.
- Water harvesting structures.

Livelihoods & enterprise development:

- Apiculture development (honey and wax production).
- Poultry and small ruminant production.
- Small-scale irrigation and high-value fruit trees.

The main issues identified in the ETH-DES project are:

1. The monitoring plan is not appropriate for the scale and impact of the project.
2. Boundaries of the restoration project aren´t marked in the field. Considering that the boundaries on the entire Desa´a forest are unclear would threaten the project.
3. Accuracy regarding the carbon project quantification, governance and benefit sharing.

## Project scale and risk

The project's scale and risk defines how frequently desk and field audits must be performed during the 5-year duration of the verification.

| Scale and risk | Justification |
|---|---|
| ☐ Small | |
| ☐ Medium | |
| ☒ Large | The project is 38.365,45 ha |
| Comments: | |

# 1 AUDIT CONCLUSIONS

## Audit Recommendation and Decision

Based on Organisation's conformance with the requirements, the following recommendation is made:

| | |
|---|---|
| ☒ | Verification approved:<br>Upon acceptance of NCR(s) issued below |
| ☐ | Verification not approved:<br>Conformance with MAJOR NCR(s) required |

Additional comments, including issues identified as controversial or hard to evaluate and explanation of the conclusion reached: The Climate Module is optional, so not meeting these requirements does not preclude the project to be verified for the core part of the standard

## Non-conformity Reports (NCRs)

*Note: NCRs refer to non-fulfilment of a requirement. In simpler terms this means that some part of the standard has not been correctly fulfilled and need to be corrected in order to maintain the verified/validated status.*

☐ **No NCR(s) issued**

| **NCR: 01/24** | **MINOR** |
|---|---|
| **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 1.7, 4.5 |
| **Report Section:** | Annex I |
| **Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence:** | |
| A monitoring plan is in place, but it may not be suitable for the scale and impact of the project. The main documents for monitoring are the LogFrame and Workplan. However, there are some misunderstandings between the documents, making it difficult to monitor the project's indicators effectively. | |
| **Corrective action request:** | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |

| | |
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| **Timeline for Conformance:** | By the next surveillance audit. |
| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

| **NCR: 02/24** | **MINOR** |
|---|---|
| **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1 1.7; 2.4.1 |
| **Report Section:** | Annex I |
| **Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence:** | |
| The audit process has acknowledged the organisation's commitment to improving inclusion, social equity, and community engagement. The organisation respects the social settings and culture of the targeted landscape while simultaneously encouraging and motivating women's participation in activities and the decision-making process. The organisation prioritises women in livelihood programs such as sheep and poultry initiatives, and special attention is given to vulnerable households led by women in activities like beekeeping and agroforestry. However, the audit process has identified that more attention is needed to ensure that women are transparently and effectively consulted and engaged in an inclusive manner. This is because women are the primary participants in this restoration effort. | |
| **Corrective action request:** | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| **Timeline for Conformance:** | By the next surveillance audit. |
| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

| NCR: 03/24 | MINOR |
|---|---|
| Standard & Requirement: | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 3.3.3 |
| Report Section: | Annex I |
| Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence: | |
| During the audit team's visit to the two government-owned nurseries that had temporary agreements with the organization, it was discovered that there were no bathrooms provided for the workers. Furthermore, it was observed that the guard at both locations was sleeping in the storage area. The organization faced difficulties in terms of limited mobility and material availability due to the two-year conflict in the area. However, they mentioned that they would negotiate with the government to approve the necessary improvements. | |
| Corrective action request: | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| Timeline for Conformance: | By the next surveillance audit. |
| Evidence Provided by Organisation: | PENDING |
| Findings for Evaluation of Evidence: | PENDING |
| NCR Status: | OPEN |
| Comments (optional): | |

| NCR: 04/24 | MINOR |
|---|---|
| Standard & Requirement: | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 3.3.4 |
| Report Section: | Annex I |
| Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence: | |
| During the interview, the workers mentioned that the clothes were fine, but they suggested that wearing boots would be beneficial. However, no workers were observed wearing boots. Wearing boots is important to prevent injuries caused by exposure of the workers' feet to the ground (cuts, insect bites, etc.). Additionally, during the nursery visit, a fire extinguisher was not observed. The nursery storage contains flammable materials (plastic), which poses a risk. The organization faced difficulties in terms of limited goods availability due to the two-year conflict in the area. However, they mentioned that they would continue their efforts to improve the health and safety conditions of the workers. | |
| Corrective action request: | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as |

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| | the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| **Timeline for Conformance:** | By the next surveillance audit. |
| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

| **NCR: 05/24** | **MINOR** |
|---|---|
| **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 3.3.6.1 |
| **Report Section:** | Annex I |
| **Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence:** | |
| During the interview, the project staff and stakeholders discussed the potential benefits that the local communities could receive from the sales of carbon credits. However, it is currently unclear how the communities will benefit from these sales. At the moment, there is no definition of who will manage the revenue generated from the carbon credits and what percentage will be allocated to the communities. This situation arises because the government is still discussing policies and regulations related to payment for ecosystem services, including benefit-sharing issues. These policies and regulations have not yet been issued and endorsed. The organisation is closely monitoring the development of these regulations and waiting for their publication to update the carbon PDD for Desa'a. Once the regulations are published, the organization will clarify with the communities about the topic of benefit-sharing. | |
| **Corrective action request:** | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| **Timeline for Conformance:** | By the next surveillance audit. |
| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

| NCR: 06/24 | MINOR |
|---|---|
| Standard & Requirement: | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 5.3 |
| Report Section: | Annex I |
| Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence: | |
| In the PDD review, it was stated that the leakage is zero. However, in the review of the 20200714_Desa_RemovalsQuantification document, the calculation shows a leakage corresponding to 10% of the sum of Stock change in AGB+BGB in the planting area (tCO2), Stock change in AGB+BGB in the remnant forest (tCO2), and Stock change in SOC (tCO2). This results in a cumulative amount of 635,504 tCO2 by the year 2067. Therefore, the rationale about the estimation of leakage presented in the PDD is not correct. The organization mentions that carbon PDD for the project is in the process of transitioning to the new VCS ARR methodology, which will include a new assessment of leakage. | |
| Corrective action request: | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| Timeline for Conformance: | By the next surveillance audit. |
| Evidence Provided by Organisation: | PENDING |
| Findings for Evaluation of Evidence: | PENDING |
| NCR Status: | OPEN |
| Comments (optional): | |

| NCR: 07/24 | MINOR |
|---|---|
| Standard & Requirement: | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 5.4 |
| Report Section: | Annex I |
| Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence: | |
| During the review of the quantification of net GHG emissions, the evidence to demonstrate that the net climate impact of the project is positive is not clear in terms of the calculations performed. The organization mentions that carbon PDD for the project is in the process of transitioning to the new VCS ARR methodology, and the calculations will be redone, and the text rewritten to adhere to this new methodology. | |
| Corrective action request: | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as |

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| | the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| **Timeline for Conformance:** | By the next surveillance audit. |
| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

| **NCR: 08/24** | **MINOR** |
|---|---|
| **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 5.6 |
| **Report Section:** | Annex I |
| **Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence:** | |
| In the past, regions had the same level of authority as the federal government in managing natural resources. However, recent policies have transferred ownership of transboundary forests like Tigray/Afar to the federal government. This has led to confusion regarding roles and responsibilities in natural resource management. Despite the revision of the PDD, the signing of an MoU between TBoARD and WeForest, and interviews with stakeholders and project staff, it is still unclear who has the right to control and manage GHG removals. This situation has arisen because the government is still discussing policies and regulations related to payment for ecosystem services, including carbon management rights. These policies and regulations have not yet been issued and endorsed. The organisation is keeping a close eye on the development of these regulations and waiting for their publication to update the carbon PDD for Desa'a. | |
| **Corrective action request:** | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| **Timeline for Conformance:** | By the next surveillance audit. |
| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

| NCR: 09/24 | MINOR |
|---|---|
| Standard & Requirement: | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 5.7 |
| Report Section: | Annex I |
| Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence: | |
| No information regarding the buffer pool and non-permanence risk assessment was provided. The organization mentions that carbon PDD for the project is in the process of transitioning to the new VCS ARR methodology, which will include the new VCS Non-Permanence Risk Tool. This transition will result in a new buffer pool calculation and risk assessment. | |
| Corrective action request: | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| Timeline for Conformance: | By the next surveillance audit. |
| Evidence Provided by Organisation: | PENDING |
| Findings for Evaluation of Evidence: | PENDING |
| NCR Status: | OPEN |
| Comments (optional): | |

| NCR: 10/24 | MINOR |
|---|---|
| Standard & Requirement: | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 5.8 |
| Report Section: | Annex I |
| Description of Non-conformance and Related Evidence: | |
| No carbon monitoring plan or report was found by the audit team during the audit. In interviews with the project staff, it was mentioned that the monitoring plan would be the same as that used for the restoration project. However, it was not possible to confirm the monitoring activities regarding the carbon pools or justify the indicators 5.1 to 5.4. The organization mentions that carbon PDD for the project is in the process of transitioning to the new VCS ARR methodology, the carbon monitoring plans are still under development and will align with the shift to the new VCS ARR methodology. | |
| Corrective action request: | Organisation shall implement corrective actions to demonstrate conformance with the requirement(s) referenced above.<br>Note: Effective corrective actions focus on addressing the specific occurrence described in evidence above, as well as the root cause to eliminate and prevent recurrence of the non-conformance. |
| Timeline for Conformance: | By the next surveillance audit. |

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| **Evidence Provided by Organisation:** | PENDING |
| **Findings for Evaluation of Evidence:** | PENDING |
| **NCR Status:** | **OPEN** |
| **Comments (optional):** | |

## Observations

*Note: Observations are issued for the early stages of a problem which does not of itself constitute a non-conformance, but which the auditor considers may lead to a future non-conformance if not addressed by the organisation; observations may lead to direct non-conformances if not addressed.*

☐ **No observation(s) issued**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 01/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 1.4.7 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | It wasn't possible to track the source of specific practices, which may be important to leverage this effort in the future through a MEL process. | |
| **Observation:** | The organization should clearly define and organize the traditional knowledge utilized in the project. It is important to document the source of these practices to ensure that the knowledge can be preserved in written form and utilized in the future. | |

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|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 02/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 1.5.4 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | The lessons learned are not documented, being in risk of lost and not capitalized when e.g. the people involved change their roles in the project. | |

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|---|---|
| **Observation:** | The Organisation should ensure that all the lessons learned from the analysis of restoration projects in nearby or similar settings and conditions will be documented in the Restoration Plan. |

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|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 03/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 2.2 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | The document review highlighted that the boundaries of the Desa'a forest are unclear, particularly in the socioeconomic survey of the forest management plan. This, along with the fact that free grazing and illegal agriculture are the main causes of degradation, emphasizes the importance of clearly defining the project boundaries to prevent encroachment. | |
| **Observation:** | The Organisation should mark the boundaries of the intervention areas. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 04/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 2.5.1 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | The use of mailboxes could difficult the collection of any grievance by part of members that not have the ability to write. | |
| **Observation:** | The Organisation should ensure an easy way to collect any complaint or grievance. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 05/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 3.2.2 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | In the staff interview, it was evident that the pollination and propagation species are generally well-known and their importance is recognized. Due to the low intensity of the restoration, these species are not harmed by the restoration activities. However, it might be useful to further identify | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | potential impacts and to provide specific protection for these species. |
| **Observation:** | The Organisation should ensure the identification and protection of these species. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 06/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 3.2.2 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | During the document review of the Planting Manual, a wide number of protective practices for pest and disease management in the nursery were found, including the use of chemicals for seedling propagation: Primicarb, Dimethate, Nicotine. Nevertheless, during the field visit and interviews with the field staff, no evidence of the use of chemicals was found. | |
| **Observation:** | The Organisation should ensure that all the staff involved in the seedling production have information about the use of chemicals in case any pest of disease appears. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **OBS: 07/24** | **Standard & Requirement:** | Preferred by Nature Ecosystem Restoration Standard vs. 3.1, 3.2.4 |
| | **Report Section** | Annex I |
| **Description of findings leading to observation:** | During the field visit to Haresaw Nursery a pile of waste weed on fire was found. | |
| **Observation:** | The organization must ensure that waste management at the project facilities follows best practices to avoid harming health and ecosystems. | |

## Stakeholder consultation

The stakeholder consultation strategy had three main goals:

- To make sure that the public is aware of and informed about the assessment process and its objectives
- To help the field assessment team identify potential issues

- To offer various opportunities for the public to discuss and take action based on the assessment findings.

This process is not just stakeholder notification, but to the maximum extent possible, detailed and meaningful stakeholder interaction. The process of stakeholder interaction does not stop after the field visits, or for that matter, after even a verification decision is made. Preferred by Nature welcomes, at any time, comments on verified projects and such comments often provide a basis for field assessment.

The majority of the meetings were held on site, either at the capital city or in the restoration sites and neighbouring communities.

| Stakeholder Type (NGO, government bodies, local inhabitant, contractor etc.) | Stakeholders Notified (#)¶ | Stakeholders consulted directly or provided input (#) |
|---|---|---|
| National/International NGOs | X | X |
| Local/Regional NGOs | X | X |
| Local Community members | X | 15 |
| Government Agency | X | 3 |
| University | 1 | 1 |

The table below summarises the issues identified by the assessment team with a brief discussion of each based upon specific interview and/or public meeting comments.

| 1: Planning | |
|---|---|
| **Stakeholder comment** | **Preferred by Nature response** |
| The Weforest Desa'a project maintains effective communication with government organizations, local and international NGOs, as well as the local community. Prior to the project planning, they held a meeting with the management, who were receptive to our ideas and experiences, and inquired about any previous practices we had implemented. | The project adheres to best practices for engaging stakeholders and rights holders during the planning process, taking into account customary rights and traditional knowledge. |
| **2: Tenure, Rights & Engagement** | |
| **Stakeholder comment** | **Preferred by Nature response** |
| The Weforest Desa'a project is located in a protected area, and it has already been protected by the government. | The project is indeed located in a state forest, the stakeholders are clear about this condition and respect it. |

| | |
|---|---|
| We are aware of the advantages of forests and tree planting in our area, as well as the steps involved in creating jobs to support the tree-planting and tree-maintenance initiative. | NA |
| They engaged us in every aspect of their activities, especially working with the regional agriculture office, Mekelle University, and Mekelle Research Center, and they are very open to working with us. They value our participation in the project, and we even use their report as the main informant | NA |
| **3: Implementation** | |
| **Stakeholder comment** | **Preferred by Nature response** |
| We are working with the project to mobilize the community to restore our forest and soil, focus on the area of regeneration, and plant new species to change our climate by planting indigenous or native species. | NA |
| Our community has a better understanding of the benefits of plants, so they are not disturbing the protected area, but they showed their support by mobilizing their community during plantation and watering of the plants and by engaging in the necessary activities. | NA |
| **4: Monitoring and Reporting** | |
| **Stakeholder comment** | **Preferred by Nature response** |
| Throughout the project, they consistently monitored our work, even during wartime. They provided valuable reports and updates, which we relied on as our primary source of information. | The monitoring process is very important for the project. Although the audit team has seen a lot of work on the part of the project in obtaining indicators and metrics, the monitoring plan has some improvements to be made. **See NCR 01/24** |

## Actions taken by Organisation Prior to Report Finalisation

# 2 AUDIT PROCESS

## Standard Used

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|---|---|
| **Standards Used (including version):** | PbN Ecosystem Restoration Standard – A Social and Environmental Standard for Field Verification of Restoration Initiatives version 3.1 |

## Audit Team and accompanying persons

| Name | Role and qualifications |
|---|---|
| Hernán Zaldívar Schrader - HZS | Lead Auditor. Hernán has a background in forestry with more than 15 years of experience in forest management, agribusiness and restoration. He was FSC's Market Development Manager in the Latin America Regional Office and leader of Climate-Smart Agriculture at Solidaridad Network. Hernán also has a master's degree in Agribusiness from the Tropical Agronomic Research and Higher Education Centre – CATIE in Costa Rica and coordinates the Monitoring and Transparency Working Group of the 20x20 Initiative. |
| Eyerusalem Tesfaye - ET | Auditor. Eyeusalem has over 5 years of experience in sustainable agriculture standard audits and is currently auditing experience in EUDR and SFP audits. Eyerusalem works at preferred by Nature as an agriculture specialist responsible for auditing and task management. |
| Mateo Cariño Fraisse - MCF | Report reviewer. The expert has over 20 years' experience in forestry, ecosystem services, stakeholder engagement, social issues, ecosystem restoration, training, and certification in Europe, Africa, and America, and Asia. Mateo speaks Spanish, French, English, and Portuguese, and is currently responsible for the PbN Ecosystem Restoration Program. |
| Pablo Rodriguez Noriega - PRN | Carbon expert. Pablo Rodríquez-Noriega has a background in forestry with more than 15 years of experience in forest management planning. For more than ten years he has been working in the Forest Carbon sector. He has led the development of carbon footprint and forest carbon projects in several countries (Africa, Asia, LATAM and Europe). Pablo works at Preferred by Nature as Carbon Project Manager, responsible for Validation and Verification services for Nature based solution carbon projects. |

## Audit Overview

*Note: The table below provides an overview of the audit scope and auditors. See standard checklist annex for specific details on people interviewed and audit findings per site audited.*

| Location / Main sites | Date | Main activities | Auditors |
|---|---|---|---|
| Project office - Mekelle | January 29, 2024 | Opening meeting, staff interview | HZS, ET |
| Kalamin Core area | January 30, 2024 | Visit Corea area, reference site, forest patrol interview | HZS, ET |
| Kalamin buffer area - 2018 | January 30, 2024 | Visit Planting area, Control erosion activities, community leader interview | HZS, ET |
| Kalamin buffer area - 2019 | January 30, 2024 | Visit Planting area, Control erosion activities community leader interview | HZS, ET |
| Kalamin nursery | January 30, 2024 | Visit Seedling production, nursery staff interview | HZS, ET |
| Kalamin Queen rearing hub | January 30, 2024 | Visit Livelihood knowledge hub | HZS, ET |
| Rubefeleg buffer area | January 31, 2024 | Visit 2023 planting area, water harvesting structures and erosion col. Interview community leaders | HZS, ET |
| Felegewoyni development zone | January 31, 2024 | Visit apple production plot and beneficiary interview | HZS, ET |
| Felegewoyni buffer zone | January 31, 2024 | Visit 2020 – 2021 planting, water harvesting structure, control erosion | HZS, ET |
| Golgolnaele buffer zone | January 31, 2024 | Visit 2020 – 2021 planting, water harvesting structure, control erosion, pruning | HZS, ET |
| ATSBI Bureau of Agriculture | January 31, 2024 | Interview Agriculture Bureau led | HZS, ET |
| Atsbi project office | February 1, 2024 | Interview project assistant, project technicians, Monitoring technical expert | HZS |
| Haresaw tree nursery | February 1, 2024 | Visit Seedling production, nursery staff interview | HZS |

| Location / Main sites | Date | Main activities | Auditors |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hawile | February 1, 2024 | Visit livelihood beneficiaries, interviews | ET |

## Description of Overall Audit Process

### 2.1.1 List of sites selected for evaluation.

| Area | Logic used for selection |
|---|---|
| Kalamin Core area | Verification of the state of the Core zone and verification of the refence site, interaction with forest guards. Monitoring plot. |
| Kalamin buffer area - 2018 | Verification of fieldwork and interaction with the community. |
| Kalamin buffer area - 2019 | Verification of fieldwork and interaction with the community. |
| Kalamin nursery | Verification of fieldwork, working conditions, and interaction with the nursery staff |
| Kalamin Queen rearing hub | Verification of livelihoods activities |
| Rubefeleg buffer area | Verification of fieldwork and interaction with the community. |
| Felegewoyni development zone | Verification of livelihoods activities and interaction with the beneficiaries. |
| Felegewoyni buffer zone | Verification of fieldwork and interaction with the community |
| Golgolnaele buffer zone | Verification of fieldwork and interaction with the community |
| ATSBI Bureau of Agriculture | Interview with key stakeholder |
| Atsbi project office | Interview with field staff members and monitoring experts, check documents and traceability of the information. |
| Haresaw tree nursery | Verification of fieldwork, working conditions, and interaction with the nursery staff |
| Hawile | Verification of livelihoods activities and interaction with the beneficiaries. |

### 2.1.2 List of management aspects reviewed by the assessment team.

| Type of site | Sites visited | Type of site | Sites visited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Road construction | | Illegal settlement | |
| Soil drainage | | Bridges/stream crossing | |
| Workshop | | Chemical storage | |
| Tree nursery | 2 | Wetland | |
| Planned harvest site | | Erosion control | 5 |
| Ongoing harvest site | | Riparian zone | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Completed logging | | Permanent Monitoring Plot | 2 |
| Soil scarification | | Direct seeding | |
| Planting site | 6 | Weed control | |
| Felling by harvester | | Natural regeneration | 1 |
| Felling by forest worker | | Endangered species | |
| Skidding/Forwarding | | Wildlife management | |
| Clearfelling/Clearcut | | Nature Reserve | |
| Shelterwood management | | Key Biotope | |
| Selective felling | | Special management area | |
| Sanitation cutting | | Historical site | |
| Pruning | 2 | Recreational site | |
| Thinning | | Buffer zone | |
| Logging camp | | Livelihood activities | 3 |
| Native reference sites | 1 | | |

# 3 ORGANISATION DETAILS

## Organisation specific background information

| Ownership and land tenure description (legal and customary) |
|---|
| The ETH-DES is located in the Desa´a State Forest managed for the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change at national level and by the Tigray Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development at regional level. In Ethiopia, all land is formally state land, and households have been allocated land on which they are granted limited tenure rights in the form of use rights for the purpose of sustaining a livelihood. The national rural land administration and land use proclamation 456/250 article 5 (1) (a); farmers/pastoralists engaged in agriculture for a living shall be given rural land free of charge. Also, article 5 (2) states that any individual who is a member in the farming/pastoral community having the right to use rural land may get rural land from his family by donation, inheritance or from the respective authority. Accordingly, the land tenure in the Desa'a landscape is managed with the same system. Regarding the customary use of follows their customary law/Bylaws. There are no cultural heritage sites in the area; there are churches and a monastery in which communities practice their religion freely. |
| **Legislative and government regulatory context** |
| The project is implemented for WeForest in collaboration with Tigray Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development, formalized through the Memorandum of Understanding signed March 8th 2019. In the region exists two types of regulatory systems, formal rules developed by the government (mainly federal) to protect governmental/state-owned forests and (b) by-laws (non-formal rules) developed by the community for protecting communal natural forests and protected areas. |
| **Environmental Context** |
| Desa´a forest is a Dry Afromontane Forest, a type of forest ecosystem found in high-elevation areas of Africa, a distinct vegetation characterized by cooler temperatures and specific adaptations to drier conditions. Specifically, at the country level the forest is found under the Dry Afromontane Forest biome. Dry evergreen montane forest is a very complex vegetation type occurring within an altitudinal range of 1,500-3,400 meters above sea level in the central, eastern, south-eastern, and northern highlands of the country A forest inventory for the whole Desa'a State Forest was carried out in 2016 and 2017. In total, 90 woody species (shrubs and trees), 75 saplings, and 57 woody species seedlings were recorded in 303 plots (see FMP 2018) for more details. Based on floristic information and distribution, *Juniperus procera* Hochst. ex Endl., *Olea europaea* L. *ssp. cuspidata* (Wall. ex G. Don) Cif, *Vachellia etbaica* Schweinf., *Cadia purpurea* Ait., *Tarchonanthus camphorantus*, *Rhus spp*. and *Dodonaea angustifolia* appear as ecologically important woody species for Desa'a Forest. *Juniperus procera* and *Olea europaea* are more dominant in the highlands, while *Vachellia etbaica* is found in all agroecology zones and *Cadia purpurea* and *Tarchonanthus camphorantus* are very common in the midland and lowland parts. Desa´a forest is part of the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot, About 1,300 bird species are found in the hotspot, as are nearly 500 mammal species, some of the fauna key species of the forest are: *Emberiza cineracea* (The yellow-black bird) (NT) (decreasing), *Papio hamadryas* (Hamadryas baboon), *Crocuta crocuta* (spotted hyena), *Felis lybica* (wild cat), |

*Leptailurus serval* (serval cat), *Lepus starcki* (Ethiopian highland hare),*Lepus habessinicus* (Abyssinian hare) *Madoqua* (dik-dik), *Potamochoerus larvatus* (bushpig), *Cephalophinae* (duiker), *Xerus erythropus* (striped squirrel), *Serinus nigriceps* (Ethiopian siskin).

**Socioeconomic Context**

The Desa'a forest provides different benefits, including protection of the farmlands from runoff damage and recharging the groundwater aquifer and sustaining the springs in which most of the community utilize as a source of water. Based on the socioeconomic survey conducted as part of the Desa´a Forest Management Plan, indicated that 38% of the interviewed household heads are illiterate, 41% started elementary school and a mere 2% started preparatory school. On average, individual household own almost 0,7 ha of land (excluding rented land) while the Ethiopian average is 1.37 ha. Around 7% of sample households are landless (no owned, neither rented land). Most respondents (almost 44%) rent in additional land to be able to feed their family. On this land, primarily wheat and barley are cultivated, for subsistence consumption and sale. The majority of households own livestock (primarily cattle, donkeys and chicken). The average annual income is approximately 22,600 ETB/year or an equivalent of USD 837/year (almost USD 2.3 per day with current exchange rate), which is slightly above the internationally agreed poverty line of 1.95 USD/day. Out of the total sample households, over 56% of the sample households live below the internationally agreed poverty threshold level. Families are highly dependent on the extraction of forest resources for their livelihoods in terms of livestock fodder, firewood, timber, medicine... Almost a quarter of the households around Desa'a forest are involved in the generation of forest environmental income by selling forest products, with honey being the highest cash income generator. Other finding of the survey states that:" results suggest that forest ownership remains unclear. For instance, even though respondents live close to or even in the forest, half of them argue to not know Desa'a forest". Only 3% of the sample households own formal forest-related businesses (honey production, woodlots, timber and fodder sales, etc.) where even some of the businesses are illegal. More than half of the sample households own a bank account and support saving practices.

## General overview of the organisation and scope

WeForest Ethiopia aims to rehabilitate and conserve indigenous forests, as well as restore degraded landscapes to improve the livelihoods of rural communities, achieve food security, mitigate the effects of climate change, and build resilience in the ecosystem. By 2030, the organization plans to restore up to 38,365.45 hectares of degraded forest landscapes and involve over 40,000 households in sustainable income-earning businesses, with an approximate budget of $30 million. WeForest, in partnership with government institutions (TBoARD, Ethiopian Forestry Department, Forest Research Institute), local NGOs, and communities, began restoration efforts in 2018 to bring socio-economic transformation and resilience to the rural community that directly depends on the Desa'a forest. These collaborative efforts include conserving indigenous forests, afforesting degraded areas, building rural capacity, and diversifying income schemes to improve the ecosystem and achieve food security, while mitigating the adverse effects of climate change and building a resilient society and ecosystem.