Liberia

Last updated: May 2024

Liberia has an equatorial climate and is a major producer of timber. In the aftermath of civil war during the early 2000s, the Government of Liberia aimed to revise its primary forestry laws to create a sustainable forest sector. Amending and passing several key pieces of legislation in 2006 and 2007, the Government attempted to avoid repeating **President Charles Taylor's actions**: funding civil wars through illegal forestry activities and trade. In 2013, Liberia ratified the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union to promote transparency and traceability throughout the forestry sector. Despite these early efforts, in recent years, Liberia's forestry sector has become the focus of several investigations on **weak forest governance**, **illegal logging** and uncovering **loopholes** and **non-compliance** among logging companies. In efforts to combat illegal logging, civil society-led independent forest monitoring organizations continue to investigate and publish about illegal forestry activities throughout Liberia.

Forest Management

Forest Governance

According to the **National Forestry Reform Law (2006)**, all of Liberia's forest resources are owned by the government, except for communal and privately-owned plantations. Timber in Liberia can be commercially harvested from native forests and plantations.

The following agencies/ministries oversee regulation and management of forest lands and products in Liberia:

- **Forestry Development Authority (FDA)**: A semi-public autonomous corporation responsible for the sustainable management and conservation of forests and natural resources. In addition to enforcing the forest law(s) enacted by the Liberian Legislature, the FDA creates forest regulations, monitors concessions, provides technical assistance within the forestry sector and promotes forestry projects. It is the sole agency responsible for managing forest resources.
- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**: The principal authority for implementing the national environmental policy and sustainable management law for the protection of natural resources in Liberia.

Transparency

For information regarding transparency and risk scores in Liberia, head to these links:

- Transparency International's **Corruption Perceptions Index**
- The World Bank's **Worldwide Governance Indicator Data**

Laws and Regulations

Forest Laws

- **National Forestry Reform Law of 2006**: Provides provisions on the management of forest lands and requirements to legally carry out forestry activities. All commercial forestry activities and uses require permission from the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) (Section 5.1). There are four commercial use contracts or forest resources licenses, as outlined below. For each forest management contract or permit, the FDA must conduct annual audits and create reports to ensure compliance with the management contracts and Liberian laws and regulations (Section 3.4). There are no restrictions on the extension and/or renewal of forest resources licenses.
    - **Forest Management Contracts (FMC)** (Section 5.3): Issued for concessions of at least 50,000 hectares and a maximum of 400,00 hectares on public land that must include inventories, management plans and annual operation plans. A Forest Management Contract can be awarded ONLY after the contract holder has completed an environmental impact assessment, submitted a business plan, and entered into a social agreement with local forest communities. The contract holder must have a valid Annual Harvesting Certificate, which is granted after having an approved annual operations plan, approved forest management plan and has met the previous logging period annual audit requirements. Holders of this contract must provide a notice in a newspaper detailing the holder's name, a description of the area under the contract and a list of payments and their dates provided by the holder (Section 5.8). Forest Management Contracts require legislative approval or ratification.
        - Forest Management Contracts for areas between 50,000 to 99,999 hectares: The Government only accepts bids from bidders that demonstrate at least 51% ownership by Liberian citizens.
        - Forest Management Contracts for areas between 100,000 to 400,000 hectares: The Government accepts bids from all Liberian bidders and international investors.
    - **Timber Sale Contracts (TSC)** (Section 5.4): Issued for concessions of no more than 5,000 hectares on public land for a maximum of three years. This contract can be used for clearing Forest Land for agriculture or for establishing plantations. Contract holders must have an annual operations plan and hold an Annual Harvesting Certificate. The Government only accepts bids from bidders that demonstrate at least 51% ownership by Liberian citizens. Twice a year, holders of this contract must provide a notice in a newspaper detailing the holder's name, a description of the area under the contract and a list of payments and their dates provided by the holder (Section 5.8).
    - **Forest Use Permits** (Section 5.5): Issued through a concessions process for public land or on private land with land holder's permission for specific commercial uses, including charcoal production, tourism, research and education, wildlife activities, small amounts of timber harvesting for local use, and the harvest or use of non-timber forest products. Forest Use Permits are issued to specific groups of people, like subsistence farmers, forest-dependent communities, residents of particular counties or districts, researchers, artisans, and those involved in tourism, eco-tourism or conservation-based activities. There are two categories of Forest Use Permits.
        - Single permits: Issued upon application by the individual for a maximum of two years.

        - General permits: Issued in a Regulation that any individual may use, but the terms of the permit may require the individual to register, give notice or take additional steps to use the permit.

    - **Private Use Permit (PUP)** (and other commercial use on private land) (Section 5.6): Required for any individual involved in the commercial use of forest resources on private land. The permit's duration is limited to the specified period established in the management plan. To obtain a Private Use Permit, the applicant must be the landowner or have written permission of the landowner. A business plan, a five-year management plan, an environmental impact assessment and a social agreement with the local forest-dependent communities are required to receive a Private Use Permit. Additionally, an annual operations plan and Annual Harvesting Certificate must be issued for the Private Use Permit. In accordance with this law, the **FDA Regulation No. 102-21 (Standard Qualifications and Associated Requirements for Private Use Permits) (2021)** provides additional requirements for obtaining Private Use Permits.

- **Ten Core Regulations (Regulations 101-01 - 110-07) (2007)**: Includes ten regulations issued after the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006 entered into force that advance its efforts of providing guidance on the use, management and protection of forests that consider the commercial, community and conservation priorities of Liberia. These regulations address public participation, forest land-use planning, pre-qualification; tender, award and administration for contract bids; pre-felling rules, benefit sharing, forest fees, chain of custody, rights of private land holders, and penalties.
- **Regulation No. 105-07 (Regulation on Major Pre-Felling Operations under Forest Resources Licenses) (2007)**: Provides and describes the social, environmental and forest management planning obligations that a holder of a forest resource license must satisfy prior to felling trees. Those obligations include execution of a Social Agreement between the license holder and the affected community/communities, the conduct of an environmental impact assessment and the issuance of an approval by the EPA as well as the submission and subsequent approval of a forest management plan. Additional guidance on the requirements to obtain forest resource licenses, as established in the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006. The guidance pertains to social agreements, environmental impact assessments, and forest management plans (Section 24).
- **National Forest Management Strategy (2007)**: Establishes a guide detailing the Forestry Development Authority (FDA)'s responsibilities and objectives to sustainably manage Liberia's forest resources. This document provides context on forest resources in Liberia, as well as social and economic considerations for forests, and includes a Suitability Study which details opportunities for various forest management strategies.
- **National Forestry Policy and Implementation Strategy (2006):** Focuses on developing an integrated and balanced approach to the commercial, community and conservation uses of Liberia's forests. This policy provides national objectives that center around social, economic and nature considerations. An implementation strategy is included which promotes different activities related to conserving forests while promoting their commercial and community values.
- **Code of Forest Harvesting Practices 2nd Edition (2017)**: Establishes practices and standards for forest operators to adhere to sustainable and responsible forest management during logging and harvesting activities. The first edition can be found here: **Code of Harvesting Practices (2007)**.

- **Community Rights Law of 2009**: Establishes the rights and responsibilities of communities to sustainably manage forest resources. This law outlines commercial opportunities on Community Forest Lands, especially allowing communities to enter Community Forest Management Contracts with small, medium and large-scale enterprises (Chapter 6).
    - **Regulation to the Community Rights Law of 2009 with Respect to Forest Lands, as Amended (2017)**: Specifies the rules and procedures for communities to manage Forest Lands under Community Forest Management Agreements (CFMA) (Chapter 7: *Community Forest Management Agreement*), as well as the processes to engage in commercial activities with different sized enterprises (Chapter 10: *Commercial Activities*).

Processing/Manufacturing Laws

- **National Forestry Reform Law of 2006**: Under Forest Management Contracts and Timber Sale Contracts, holders are permitted to establish mills and processing plants for timber and other forest products (Section 18.6a). All Forest Management Contracts must have a business plan that outlines a strategy for promoting domestic processing and increasing value-added industries (Section 18.6c).
- **Ten Core Regulations (Regulation 107-07 Regulation on Certain Forest Fees) (2007)**: Provides for three classes of fees required for forest sector activities which directly benefit local communities and the government and also help to fund the nation's conservation goals: (a) Stumpage Fees (b) Land Rental Fees and (c) Forest Product Fees. The regulation also mandates that all sawmills and processing plants have a permit prior to operating. Proof of payment of fees (more details can be found under the Tax Laws section) is required before issuing or renewing a permit. There are three classes of operating permits, outlined below (Section 46):
    - Class A annual operator's permit: Required for sawmills that process 1500 cubic meters or more of wood annually.
    - Class B annual operator's permit: Required for sawmills that process at least 750 but no more than 1500 cubic meters of wood annually.
    - Class C annual operator's permit: Required for sawmills that process less than 750 cubic meters of wood annually.
- **FDA 2019 Revised Regulation No. 115-2018 (Regulations on Chainsaw Milling) (2019)**: Establishes a chainsaw milling permitting regime that is consistent with TSC, CFMA, and PUP and prohibits chainsaw milling from being undertaken in areas or forest land suitable for or covered by FMCs, FUPs and/or designated as protected areas and proposed protected areas. The regulation provides requirements for obtaining a Chainsaw Milling Permit for timber harvesting under Forest Resource Licenses (TSC, CFMA and PUP). Timber harvested with a Chainsaw Milling Permit is prohibited from being exported and must remain on the domestic market (Section 3). Timber harvested under a Chainsaw Milling Permit is subject to stumpage and land rental fees, as established in Part Seven: *Fiscal Provisions*.
- Legality Verification Department (LVD) Manual of Procedure for Forestry Operators (2018): Contains binding instructions, rules and procedures for operators to implement the Timber Chain of Custody Information System, Legality Verification System and FLEGT Licensing System. This manual is made up of 16 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and their

Work Instructions (WI). *The Manual of Procedure is not publicly available online.*

Transport Laws

- **Ten Core Regulation (Regulation No. 108-07 Regulation on Establishing a Chain of Custody System) (2007)**: To transport forest products, logs or timber, the transporter must have a valid transporter registration that is renewed annually and possess a waybill for the products (Section 31). For more information on the required information to include on a waybill, see Section 32. There must be four copies of the waybill in addition to the original, which is provided to the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) (Section 33). The transport of forest products, logs and timber is prohibited during the night (fifteen minutes after sunset until fifteen minutes before sunrise) unless granted prior authorization from the FDA (Section 35).

Tax Laws

- **National Forestry Reform Law of 2006**: The Ministry of Finance and Forestry Development Authority (FDA) may establish the following forestry fees (Section 14.2b):
    - Stumpage fees: Associated with the harvest of forest resources and determined by the kind and volume of harvested forest resources.
    - Land rental fees: Associated with administrative and area-based fees for Forest Land use.
    - Forest product fees: Associated with the production, registration, transport, use, transfer of ownership and export of forest products.
- Additionally, each commercial use of forest resource contracts has individual fees and taxes, specified below:
    - **Forest Management Contracts**: Holders of this contract must pay the Government the fee that was bid in the concession process and other applicable taxes and fees for harvesting and using forest resources (Section 5.3).
    - **Timber Sale Contracts**: Holder must pay the concession fee to the Government for contracted area. Additional harvesting and forest resource use fees and taxes may apply (Section 5.4b).
    - **Forest Use Permits**: These permits are free, at a price established by Regulation, or at a rate established in Regulation depending on the amount of forest resources harvested or used. If the value of the forest resources exceeds ten thousand USD, the permit is awarded through a concessions process (Section 5.5d).
    - **Private Use Permits**: The rates of forest product fees harvested on private lands are the same rates as those harvested on public lands. Stumpage fees for plantations on private land are reduced by fifty percent. For all other forest resources on private land, the stumpage fee rates are the same as those on public land. Land rental fees are only applied if there is a service tied to the permit, such as permit administration (there are no area-based fees). Failure to pay stumpage or forest product fees results in the Government seeking payment from the landowner (Section 5.7).
- **Ten Core Regulations (2007) (Regulation No. 107-07 Regulation on Certain Forest Fees)**: Establishes the rates of stumpage, forest products and land rental fees referenced in the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006. Under this regulation, forest activities and users

are subject to the following fees:
    - Stumpage fee: See Part Two: *Stumpage Fees* for specific rates and Schedule I for the fees associated with various tree species.
    - Forest product fee: Consists of a waybill fee, timber export license fee, log export fee, wood product export fee and sawmill permit fee. See Part Four: *Forest Product Fees* for specific rates for each fee.
    - Land rental fee: Consists of bid document fees, contract administration fee, area fee and an annual coupe inspection fee. See Part Three: *Land Rental Fees* for specific rates for each fee.

- **An Act to abolish the payment of Annual Land Rental Bid Premium on contract area and merging of export taxes into stumpage/production fee in the forestry sector of the Liberian economy (2013)**: This act eliminates the Annual Land Rental Bid Premium paid on Contract areas. In its place, a special production-based fee (stumpage premium) is established (Section II). Export fees for logs and processed wood products are merged into stumpage/production fee (Section I).

Trade Laws

- **National Forestry Reform Law of 2006**: To export timber and other forest products, the exporter is required to obtain an Export Permit. Export Permits are granted by the FDA and the Ministries of Finance and Commerce (Section 13.8). Under the Chain of Custody System, the import, export, transport or processing of timber is prohibited unless the timber is registered in the System (Section 13.5). Timber exporters must maintain main offices in Liberian cities, and sub-offices in areas of operation (Section 13.3). Timber producers must also market at least five to ten percent of their forest production locally to promote domestic markets (Section 12.5). Timber intended for export must be graded according to Liberian regulations and the international market (Section 13.6).
- **Ten Core Regulations (2007) (Regulation No. 107-07 Regulation on Certain Forest Fees)**: Prohibits the harvest, processing or trade of all forest products without all log stumpage fees, penalties and interest paid. Exporting forest products without paying the applicable fees may result in the suspension and termination of the forest resource license (contract or permit) (Section 64).
- **Ten Core Regulations (Regulation No. 108-07 Regulation on Establishing a Chain of Custody System) (2007)**: Establishes the national chain of custody system to promote the legal harvest and trade of forest products, certify the legal origin of forest products and ensure compliance with existing forestry legislation. All timber and forest products must be registered with the appropriate identification in the Chain of Custody System (Section 22).
    - For exporting forest products, logs and timber: Exporters of forest products, logs or timber must be registered as an exporter with the FDA and renew the registration annually (Section 41). Prior to export, all forest products must be entered into the chain of custody system, all fees must be paid, and the System must confirm the products intended for export have not already been exported (Section 42).
    - For importing forest products, logs and timber: Importers of forest products, logs or timber must be registered as an importer with the FDA and renew the registration annually. All forest products intended for import must be scaled at their entry port and entered in the chain of custody system, have an appropriate waybill and the importer must possess credible information on the products' legal origin (Section 44).

- **Verification of documentation before issuance of Export Permit (2016)**: Aligned with the requirements to export forest products established in the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006, the Ten Core Regulations and existing legislation, this document provides the requirements that must be met before obtaining an Export Permit.

Criminal Laws

- **National Forestry Reform Law of 2006**: Conducting any forestry activities or forest use without obtaining authorization is prohibited. Section 18.9 establishes punishable offenses considered economic sabotage. Sections 20.1, 20.7 and 20.9 provide the offenses and penalties for violations to this law.
- **Ten Core Regulations (Regulation 109-07 Regulation on Penalties) (2007)**: Implements the offenses and violations outlined in Section 20 of the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006. This regulation provides the process for assessing an offense or violation, the penalties associated with the offense and the appeal process.

Bilateral Agreements

- **Liberia-EU Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) (2013)**: Aims to ensure timber exported to the EU has been produced according to Liberian laws and regulations. The VPA is a bilateral agreement that promotes improved forest governance, traceability and transparency within forestry supply chains. In 2013, Liberia ratified the VPA, entering it into force. In 2019, the Liberia-EU Joint Implementation Committee held its seventh meeting.
    - Under the VPA, Liberia established the Liberia Timber Legality Assurance System (based upon the country's existing national timber legality verification system, **LiberTrace**) and created a new department, the Legality Verification Department, within the Forestry Development Authority (FDA). As of 2021, Liberia is in the process of implementing the LTLAS. For more information on Liberia's VPA and access to the document's full text, see the FDA's VPA webpage **here**.

CITES

The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)** is an international agreement among governments whose purpose is to ensure that the international trade of wild animals and plant species does not threaten the survival of these species. It is up to each country to draft their own domestic legislation to comply with its CITES obligations. Liberia signed onto the Convention in 1981.

Species under the protection of CITES are listed under three Appendices based on how threatened they are by international trade. The species listed in Appendix I are the most endangered and international trade of these species is prohibited unless the purpose of import is noncommercial. The species listed in Appendix II are tightly controlled in international trade and may be authorized with an export permit or re-export certificate. Appendix III lists species at the request of a Party that needs other countries' cooperation to regulate the trade in the species. International trade in Appendix III is allowed with appropriate permits or certificates.

If you don't know if the species you are interested in sourcing from this country is CITES listed, please check this **link**. If the species is listed, please use this **database** to identify the National

CITES Authority. In Liberia, the CITES managing authority is the Forestry Development Authority (FDA). However, the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) is also listed as another Management Authority competent to grant permits.

Forest Resources

Resources Overview

In 2010, Liberia had **9.16 Mha of natural forest**, extending over 97% of its land area.

According to the **National Forest Management Strategy (2007)**, Liberia divides forest resources into two categories:

- **Permanent Forest**: Areas that will always maintain forest cover and is divided into two additional categories:
  - **Protected area network**: Consists of national parks, nature reserves, and conservation areas.
  - **Multiple sustainable use zones**: Consists of all forest areas outside of the protected area network. These areas are managed as community forest areas or under forest resources licenses (Forest Management Contracts and Timber Sale Contracts, for example).
- **Non-permanent Forest:** Areas that may be converted to other land uses, like agriculture.

Contacts

Below are incomplete lists of government ministries, industry associations, civil society groups, and research institutes involved with forestry, trade, and efforts to combat illegal logging and associated trade.

Industry Associations

- **Liberia Timber Association (LibTA)**
- Liberia Chainsaw and Timber Dealers Union (LICSATDUN)
- Association of Logging Engineers Liberia
- Loggers Association of Liberia
- Pit Sawyers Association
- National Charcoal Union of Liberia (NACUL)
- **Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (LEITI)**

Civil Society Organizations

- **Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)**
- **The Nature Compact (TNC)**
- **Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI)**

- Civil Society Independent Forest Monitoring (CS-IFM)
- Independent Forest Monitoring Coordination Mechanism (IFMCM)
- **Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI)**
- **Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL)**
- National Union of Community Forestry Development Committees (NUCFDC)
- **Fauna & Flora International - Liberia**
- **Centre for Environment, Forest Conservation and Research (CENFOR)**

Government Ministries

- **Forestry Development Authority (FDA)**
- **Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)**
- **Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI)**
- **Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)**
- **Ministry of Mines & Energy (MME)**
- **National Investment Commission (NIC)**
- **Liberia Land Authority (LLA)**

Research Institutes

- **Forestry Training Institute (FTI)**
- Sapo Conservation Centre (SCC)
- **University of Liberia (William R. Tolbert, Jr. College of Agriculture and Forestry)**
- **Forestry Research Network for Sub-Saharan Africa (FORNESSA)**

References and Resources

For more information regarding forest legality in Liberia, see these links from our partners:

- **Global Forest Watch (GFW) Country Profiles**
- **Timber Trade Portal: Liberia**
- **BVRio (2017) Practical Guide to Conducting Due Diligence: Liberia**
- **Preferred by Nature - Timber Sourcing Hub: Liberia**
- **FAO (2020) Global Forest Resources Assessment: Liberia**
- **Forest Trends Illegal Deforestation and Associated Trade (IDAT) Risk: Liberia**
- **FLEGT Independent Market Monitor (IMM): Liberia**
- **Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in Liberia - The 4Cs Approach (2022)**
- **FAO TimberLex**