



**NFS Guidance for  
Standard Requirements  
Version 1.4  
October 2024**



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## About the Natural Forest Standard

Natural Forest Standard (NFS) is an independent, voluntary carbon market crediting program for REDD+ carbon projects. Ecosystem Certification Organisation is the governing body of the Natural Forest Standard (NFS) providing the overall responsibility, oversight and management of the program, in operation since 2011.

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## i. Introduction

The Natural Forest Standard is a global Standard for the quantification of carbon and associated ecosystem benefits resulting from the conservation and restoration of natural forests at risk from deforestation and degradation. It is aimed at certifying the carbon benefits, and biodiversity impacts of medium to large-scale projects, within the context of appropriate social safeguards and economic development.

The Natural Forest Standard (NFS) enables projects that effectively conserve or restore natural forests at risk of deforestation and degradation to be issued with Natural Capital Credits, denominated in tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e (tCO<sub>2</sub>e) of avoided GHG emissions and rated in terms of biodiversity. NCCs are only issued ex-post and following independent, third-party verification.

This Guidance document is designed as a guide for developing a Natural Forest Standard project and is provided to assist project developers in meeting the normative requirements of the Standard and for validators and verifiers to assess the conformity of projects to the Natural Forest Standard.

The guidance is divided into the following sections:

1. Project Eligibility
2. Governance, Social and Biodiversity Impacts
3. Project Management and Monitoring
4. Methodologies for Quantification of Natural Capital Credits
5. Biodiversity Assessment

Users of this document should also ensure that they consult and apply any published Addenda in accordance with the provisions of this guidance document. Addenda shall be made available in the Documentation Download section of the NFS website.

The guidance and published Addenda should be interpreted in a pragmatic, professional and balanced manner to address aspects of project design and management that are important for achieving effective forest conservation and restoration in ways that benefit local and indigenous people.

This Guidance document will be reviewed as part of an on-going process to reflect any clarifications made to the Standard, incorporating lessons learned and good practice developed by NFS projects, and to reflect developments in good practice used by other forest conservation and restoration initiatives.

There are further guidance tools on the NFS website. These documents are designed to assist project developers in completing the documentation for presentation within the NFS process.



## ii. Definitions

All relevant definitions, acronyms and terms are set out in the NFS Glossary of Terms.

## iii. Project Process

This section describes the required process for projects engaging with the Natural Forest Standard, from submission of the Project Idea Note through to Natural Capital Credit (NCC) Issuance.

### Stage 1: Project Idea Note

The initial stage of registering a project with the Natural Forest Standard is to submit a Project Idea Note (PIN). This is a short document that provides a brief summary of the intended project and identifies and determines the main features and objectives of the project, the parties involved and the proposed project activities. The purpose of submitting a PIN is to confirm that the project is suitable for the Natural Forest Standard, that it meets the eligibility criteria of the standard and that the aims and activities of the project are feasible. A PIN template is available on the NFS website.

PIN documents should be submitted to the NFS Secretariat, who will carry out a desk-based review based on the information provided in the PIN document. The review will provide feedback to the Project Developer on the eligibility of the project for the Natural Forest Standard. Once accepted, a PIN will be listed in the Project Index section of the NFS website.

### Stage 2: Project Design Document

The next stage is the submission of a Project Design Document (PDD). A PDD is a detailed description of the proposed project explaining how it has been designed, how it will be implemented and how the project conforms to the Natural Forest Standard.

The PDD shall include all appropriate, relevant and required data, documentation and materials necessary for the validation of the proposed project against the Natural Forest Standard requirements, including a management plan and methods for quantifying and monitoring the proposed project. The PDD shall be prepared in a way that facilitates the validation assessment; there is not a mandatory format for the PDD, however a suggested PDD template is available on the NFS website.

The PDD should include detailed summaries that address each of the NFS normative requirements, together with supporting documentation being provided where necessary.

A fully completed PDD should be submitted to the NFS Secretariat, which should be made publicly available in an accessible form, at least 30 days prior to the completion of validation.



### **Stage 3: Engagement of the Validation/Verification Body (VVB)**

The project proponent shall select an appropriate independent third-party validation/verification organisation to carry out the validation/verification process. Validation/verification shall be undertaken by a VVB that is accredited by a national accreditation body and eligible to validate/verify projects under ISO 14064-3. Once the VVB has been appointed, the PDD, as well as any other appropriate documentation shall be submitted to the VVB for commencement of validation/verification.

### **Stage 4: Validation**

Projects shall be validated to determine that the project design conforms to the Natural Forest Standard requirements. Validation shall be carried out by an independent third-party validation/verification body (VVB) and shall assess whether the project conforms to the Natural Forest Standard requirements. The validation shall be carried out to a limited level of assurance according to the ISO 14064-3. A guidance document is available outlining the expectations and requirements of the validation and verification process.

The objective of the independent third-party validation process is to ensure that the proposed project meets the requirements set out by the Natural Forest Standard. The validator shall confirm that the project design document and supporting documentation meet the relevant criteria.

The validation process shall result in a final validation report being produced, describing the findings related to the conformance of the project and identifying any non-conformities or clarification requests, together with a final validation statement confirming the outcome of the validation.

### **Stage 5: Registration**

Upon the finalised validation report and statement being submitted and accepted by the Governance Board and Technical Panel, the project shall be registered as active by the NFS Secretariat on the NFS Project Index.

### **Stage 6: Verification**

Project implementation shall be verified by an independent third-party verification organisation according to the validated PDD and the criteria outlined in the Natural Forest Standard requirements and NFS approved methodology. A separate guidance document is available outlining the expectations and requirements of the periodic verification process.

Project proponents shall select an appropriate independent third-party VVB to undertake the verification process, as per the process for validation, set out in Stage 3. The same VVB may be engaged for



verification that carried out validation, or it can be carried out by an alternative independent third-party organisation that is appropriately accredited.

Once the VVB has been appointed, the PIR, as well as any other appropriate documentation shall be submitted to the VVB for commencement of verification.

The assertion of carbon benefits shall be independently verified to a reasonable level of assurance, according to ISO 14064-3 prior to credit issuance. Initial verification shall involve a site visit to the project area and subsequent verification audits shall involve a site visit to the project area at intervals no greater than 5 years. Periodic verification of carbon assertions shall be carried out as a desk-based audit, prior to credit issuance. A separate guidance document is available outlining the expectations and requirements of the periodic verification process.

Major discrepancies identified by the verifier shall be addressed prior to credit issuance. Minor discrepancies identified by the verifier shall be addressed within a timescale agreed with the verifier. Verifiers shall have discretion to raise minor discrepancies to the status of major discrepancies if they are not adequately addressed within the agreed time frame.

The verification process shall result in a verification report and statement which should confirm that the PDD, PIR and internal Management Plan meet the requirements of the NFS and should confirm the carbon assertions of the quantification period.

### **Stage 7: Credit Issuance**

All NCC issuance is ex-post. Following the submission of the final verification report and statement, and subsequent acceptance by the Governance Board and Technical Panel, the corresponding number of Natural Capital Credits shall be issued by the NFS Secretariat to the project's account on the NFS Registry within 30 days of completion of verification. Credit issuance is dependent on an annual report being submitted for the time frame corresponding to the quantification time period.

A fixed 10% risk buffer contribution shall be deducted from the total Natural Capital Credits issued to a project for the initial crediting period. The risk buffer contribution shall be retained and maintained in a reserve account on the NFS Registry. This contribution is subject to increase during this period if deemed appropriate by the independent Risk Panel, through carrying out their annual review process.

Following the initial contribution of 10% in Year 1, all subsequent Risk Buffer contributions from Year 2 onwards shall be subject to review by the NFS Risk Panel, and based on the project performance over time.



### **Stage 8: Project Implementation Reporting**

Active NFS projects shall publish clear and accessible project implementation reports (PIR) quantifying the carbon benefits and biodiversity rating and describing monitoring and implementation activities, social impacts and general progress of the project. PIRs should describe the progression that a project has made while also demonstrating that the project remains active. All active NFS projects must submit PIRs corresponding to the respective verification period. Project Implementation Reports shall be made publicly available on the NFS Project Index.

The NFS Guidance for Annual Reporting document provides further details regarding the submission requirements for project reporting and is available on the NFS website. A recommended annual report template is also available to download from the NFS website.

### **Disclosure of Project Stage**

The NFS will clearly indicate the stage each project has reached within the Project Index on the Natural Forest Standard website.

## **iv. Publicly Available Project Documentation**

All relevant project documentation shall be transparently published and made readily accessible on the Natural Forest Standard website. Each project's documentation can be found within the Project Index for easy reference. The documents required to be made publicly available for each NFS project are:

- Project Idea Note (PIN)
- Project Design Document (PDD)
- Validation Report
- Validation Statement
- Verification Report for each verification period
- Verification Statement for each verification period
- Project Implementation Reports for each verification period





# GUIDANCE FOR NATURAL FOREST STANDARD REQUIREMENTS

## 1. PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

### 1.1 Defining the Project

Prior to developing a project under the Natural Forest Standard (NFS) the project proponent should understand the requirements of the Standard and ensure the project meets the eligibility criteria.

To assess whether a project is eligible under the NFS requirements, the project should first define the specific project area and scope of activities. It is recommended that the project area is mapped, and if appropriate for management purposes, divided into zones or strata. The project objectives, carbon rights ownership and management structures should be clearly described.

The project map-set should include:

- Project area and boundaries
- Vegetation types
- Where relevant to the objectives of the project, land use should be included
- Nearby population centres and settlements in and near the project
- Roads, tracks and rivers
- Ownership and tenure (including customary and relevant land use rights).

The fully defined project area should be provided in geospatial data files covering the spatial extent of the project area to enable project area check for double counting.

### 1.2 Project Activities

#### 1.2.1 Does the Project Conserve or Restore Natural Forest?

The first aspect of eligibility to assess is whether the forest designated by the project to be protected or restored is natural forest, as defined by the NFS (see box 1 below).

**DEFINITION: NATURAL FOREST<sup>i</sup>**

“Natural Forests are forest ecosystems with most of the principal characteristics and elements of native ecosystems such as complexity, structure and diversity. They include:

- Primary Forest - Naturally regenerated forest of native tree species, where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities, and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed (FAO 2020)
- Naturally Regenerating Forest - Forest predominantly composed of trees established through natural regeneration (FAO 2020)
- Managed Natural Forest - Forest in which sustainable timber and non-wood harvesting (e.g. through integrated harvesting and silvicultural treatments), wildlife management and other uses have resulted in changes of forest structure and species composition (UNFCCC 2001)
- Semi-Natural Forest - Managed forests modified by man through silviculture and assisted regeneration (ITTO 2002)
- Forest established through planting or seeding which at stand maturity resembles or will resemble naturally regenerating forest (FAO 2020).

They exclude:

- Plantation Forest - Forest predominantly composed of trees established through planting and/or deliberate seeding that is intensively managed and meets all the following criteria at planting and stand maturity: one or two species, even age class, and regular spacing (FAO 2020)..”

The project should provide evidence in the form of maps and vegetation surveys or descriptions to demonstrate that the project area conforms to the NFS definition of natural forest.

**1.2.2 Restoration Activities**

Project areas that are to be subject to restoration activities should be identified. Guidance on restoration should be obtained from organisations or individuals with relevant expertise, and restoration activities should be designed with the objective of restoring the original forest structure, which should be still present in other areas of the forest or local region.

**1.2.3 Minimum Project Area**

The minimum total project area of 10,000 hectares<sup>ii</sup> has been adopted by the NFS to allow a statistically valid risk assessment. This minimum requirement will be reviewed periodically by the Technical Advisory Panel.



#### 1.2.4 Commercial Timber Extraction

While commercial timber extraction is not permitted within the NFS project areas, this should not prevent the sustainable use of forest resources by local communities. Timber extraction is considered commercial when it exhibits any of the following characteristics:

- Conducted by a commercial business.
- Use of heavy machinery for extraction and transport.
- Use of contracted/hired labour.
- Construction of skid-tracks, extraction roads and landings.
- Logs taken to an industrial sawmill.

### 1.3 Legal Status

#### 1.3.1 Does the Project have a Legal Basis?

The project proponents should be able to demonstrate they have the necessary rights to carbon and land-use to implement the project, and transact Natural Capital Credits. Documents regarding the project area should be reviewed by legal advisors and a summary statement of this review should be presented in the Project Design Document.

The project proponents should hold the necessary legal rights to perform the project activities for the entire crediting period.

The directors of the project should warrant that the project and/or organisation is not in violation of any applicable laws, regulations and relevant environmental treaties and agreements. As such, it will be important for the project operators to demonstrate an understanding of the national and local regulatory requirements relevant and applicable to the project.

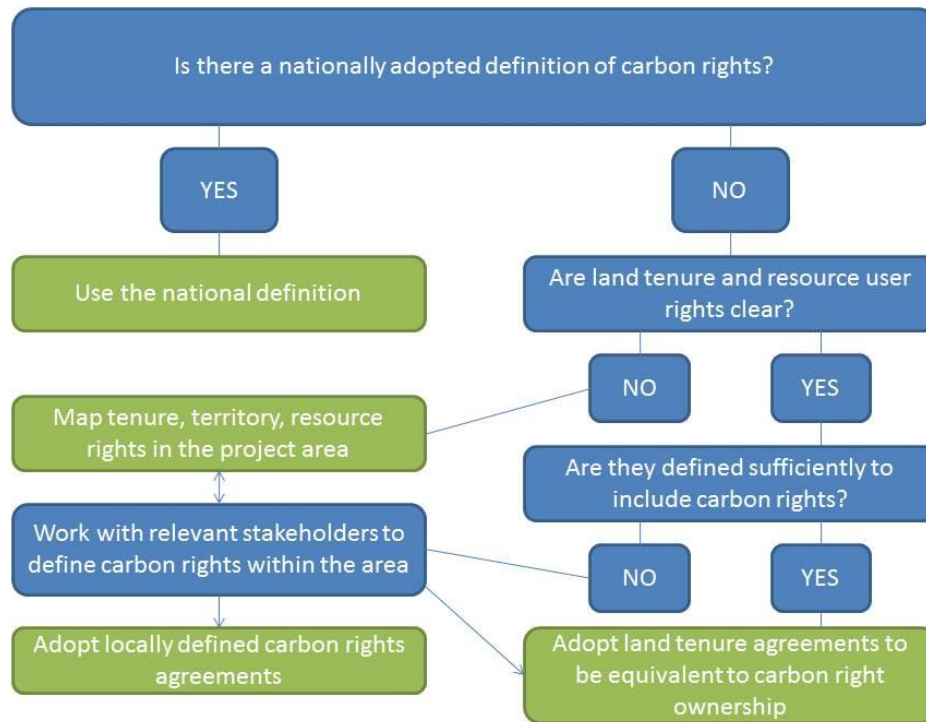
#### 1.3.2 Carbon Ownership

The Standard requires project developers to hold evidence of necessary use rights to the project area; this includes the carbon rights and/or ownership of land for the project area.

Carbon rights holders are: individuals, institutions, groups or communities that have rights to the benefits (and liabilities) associated with carbon sequestration within a defined area. Where the ownership of carbon benefits is not legally defined, contractual mechanisms apportioning benefits shall be acceptable. This can be established without a formal legal framework, although a formal legal framework defining rights is preferable. All activities should be informed by the principles of FPIC (see section 2.1 for FPIC guidance).



This will involve project developers determining who owns the carbon rights and if necessary determining the correct process for obtaining the carbon rights. Figure 1 is indicative of a process that a project might go through to determine how carbon rights might be allocated in the project area. In the first instance projects should determine if the host country has a nationally approved mechanism for the allocation of carbon rights.



**Figure 1: Example of how the process for determining carbon rights within a project area might work; carbon rights should be reviewed at intervals throughout the life of the project**

Where the law does not explicitly allocate carbon rights, applicable laws for the host country should be assessed to determine if the rights can belong to the person or government that holds the rights to land and forests in the project area. If this is not provided within the legal framework (including customary law) of the host country then private contractual agreements between the claimants can improve legal certainty. In this instance if tree or land ownership is not clear within the project area then the project will need to work with communities, using participatory processes, to establish clear maps of tenure, territory and resource use rights, and from this work with relevant stakeholders to define carbon rights within the area.

To address the possibility of multiple claims for carbon rights to be made within any area, projects should obtain explicit contractual agreements with all potential claimants. Paths to different understandings of



carbon rights for the project, through full and effective participation of those impacted by the project, are illustrated in USAID Working Paper on Carbon-Rights Framework pg. 6<sup>1</sup>. Further guidance on land tenure and carbon rights is provided in the section 2.

## 1.4 Additionality

### 1.4.1 Can the Project Demonstrate Additionality?

Projects activities should be considered additional if they are taking place as a consequence of the existence of the NFS standard or the possibility of obtaining carbon finance, and would not have taken place in its absence.

#### **DEFINITION: ADDITIONALITY**

Additionality describes the extent to which activities, and resulting outcomes, occur as a consequence of an intervention, such as the resource flows generated from carbon certificates, made possible by the existence of a standard and a market for certificates.

A proposed activity is additional if the activity occurs as a consequence of the application of the NFS<sup>2</sup>. The activity must be taking place as a result of the NFS, and would not have taken place in the baseline situation – defined as the absence of the Standard.

The definition of additionality often seen in other standards – ‘would the activities have taken place in the absence of the project?’ – is not sufficient; the activities of a project are indistinguishable from the existence of the project, so framing the question in this way produces a meaningless answer<sup>3</sup>.

In cases where forest is not legally protected the following indicators in Figure 2 may be used to demonstrate additionality, and the corresponding evidence should be provided to support each indicator.

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<sup>1</sup>United States Agency for International Development, 2011. *REDD + and Carbon Rights: Lessons from the field*. Property Rights and Resource Governance Project (PRRGP) Working Paper. Available at: [http://usaidlandtenure.net/events/usaid-events/redd-presentation/carbon-rights-framework-final.pdf/at\\_download/file](http://usaidlandtenure.net/events/usaid-events/redd-presentation/carbon-rights-framework-final.pdf/at_download/file)

<sup>2</sup>Gillenwater, 2012. What is additionality? Part 1: A Long Standing Problem: Greenhouse Gas Management Institute, Silver Spring, MD. Available at: [http://ghginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/content/GHGMI/AdditionalityPaper\\_Part-1\(ver3\)FINAL.pdf](http://ghginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/content/GHGMI/AdditionalityPaper_Part-1(ver3)FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>See footnote 2. Available at: [http://ghginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/content/GHGMI/AdditionalityPaper\\_Part-1\(ver3\)FINAL.pdf](http://ghginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/content/GHGMI/AdditionalityPaper_Part-1(ver3)FINAL.pdf)



INDICATORS OF ADDITIONALITY	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT INDICATORS
Land of similar type and situation within the state or local area is subject to deforestation and degradation	Maps/images of historic land use change
Social and economic pressures on forest are high and/or increasing	Data on population growth Market data on agriculture & forest products
Area is accessible and has extractable resources and/or is cultivable	Survey data or maps indicating extractable resources and suitability for agriculture/livestock

**Figure 2: Indicators of Additionality and Evidence to Support Indicators for non-legally protected forests**

In cases where forests are officially protected or subject to protective regulations, additionality may be demonstrated by showing that forests are inadequately protected and at risk of deforestation and degradation.

In cases where legal protections on forests exist, the following indicators and evidence in Figure 3 may be used to demonstrate that the existing protection measures are not sufficient to address the threats to forests, in addition to those included in Figure 2.

INDICATORS OF ADDITIONALITY	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT INDICATORS
Land of similar legal status subject to deforestation and degradation	History of land use change in relation to protection status
Limited enforcement of legal protection	Data showing few successful legal interventions, low risk of prosecution



Under-resourced enforcement relative to threat	Number of protection officers in relation to forest area, accessibility and capabilities
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**Figure 3: Indicators of Additionality and Evidence to Support Indicators for officially protected forests**

In addition to demonstrating current and future threats to forests, the project proponent should explain how the planned intervention of the project will mitigate the identified threats to the project area.

### 1.4.2 Forest Restoration

In the case of forest restoration activities, the project developer and verifier should confirm that these are not being undertaken to fulfil a legal requirement. Verifiers should be satisfied that the project developer has not manipulated local agents or institutions to increase the level of threat to any forest area in order to make a case for additionality.

### 1.5 Timescale

The Standard requires that projects shall have a minimum duration of 20 years and up to a maximum of 100 years. Project periods of less than 100 years can be renewed to cover a total period of up to 100 years. Projects should be designed to be consistent with permanent conservation and carbon storage.

### 1.6 Jurisdictional Design and Operation<sup>iii</sup>

The project management areas should include as much of the natural forest within the jurisdiction boundaries as is feasible, taking account of relevant land titles and laws, and reasons should be provided for exclusions of natural forest areas within the jurisdiction.

The roles and responsibilities of the project operator, jurisdictional authorities and any other organisations involved in the project should be documented within a project framework agreement. The project framework agreement should be reviewed and kept up to date to reflect any changes to roles and responsibilities.

## 2. GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL AND BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

### 2.1 Overview

The NFS aims to conserve and restore natural forests through actions of projects that benefit both local communities and indigenous people while maintaining the biodiversity present in the project area.



The social and governance guidelines of the NFS draw upon the reporting requirements of the UN REDD Draft Guidance on Rights Holder Engagement, REDD+ Social & Environmental Standards<sup>4</sup>, the draft UN-REDD Programme Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent<sup>5</sup>, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>6</sup>, alongside practices and experiences of other carbon standards. Although not all of these documents are designed for projects at an equivalent scale to the NFS projects, the way issues applicable to NFS projects are framed within these documents is relevant.

The NFS is designed for use by projects in publicly owned areas of natural forest ranging from municipalities to state-owned concessions. There is a high chance that these areas will be inhabited by local communities, including indigenous groups, as the majority of the world's remaining natural forests in developing countries are located in ancestral and customary lands<sup>7</sup>. To ensure that projects do not have negative impacts on people living within project areas or on those that have land use rights, and that the needs, rights and interest of these people are recognised by the project developments, projects should apply to the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent, and have an effective benefit distribution mechanism. All relevant documentation and communication should be prepared and presented in the preferred language(s) of the project participants.

The project design document (PDD) and management plan should describe how the following social safeguards and benefit mechanisms will be put into practice.

Please refer to Addenda documents for additional guidance for Social and Environmental Safeguards, Sustainable Development Goals and alignment with Cancun Safeguards.

## 2.2 Free Prior and Informed Consent

To fulfil the NFS requirement for FPIC of carbon rights holders, project developers and verifiers should consider how the definition of carbon rights holders and FPIC apply within the project area (see section 1.2.2 for further guidance on carbon ownership).

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<sup>4</sup>REDD+ Social & Environmental Standards Version 2. Available at: <http://www.redd-standards.org/>

<sup>5</sup>United Nations, 2011. UN-REDD Programme Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent. Available at: [http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=1333&Itemid=53](http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=1333&Itemid=53)

<sup>6</sup>United Nations, 2008. UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Available at: [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>United Nations, 2012. UN REDD Programme SEPC: Supporting Document. Available at: [http://www.google.co.uk/#hl=en&sa=X&ei=MHvft\\_LPBK6o0AWs3djiCg&ved=0CAYQvwUoAQ&q=UN-REDD+Programme+SPEC%3A+Supporting+Documents&spell=1&bav=on.2,or.r\\_gc.r\\_pw.r\\_qf.,cf.osb&fp=b244e88b8bc79e49&biw=942&bih=917](http://www.google.co.uk/#hl=en&sa=X&ei=MHvft_LPBK6o0AWs3djiCg&ved=0CAYQvwUoAQ&q=UN-REDD+Programme+SPEC%3A+Supporting+Documents&spell=1&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_qf.,cf.osb&fp=b244e88b8bc79e49&biw=942&bih=917)



**DEFINITION: CARBON RIGHTS HOLDERS**

Rights holders to carbon are individuals, institutions, groups or communities that have rights to the benefits (and liabilities) associated with carbon sequestration within a defined area. Where the ownership of carbon benefits is not legally defined, contractual mechanisms apportioning benefits shall be acceptable. This can be established without a formal legal framework, although a formal legal framework defining rights is preferable.

FPIC should be considered as a process rather than a one-time decision and projects should consider appropriate timeframes throughout the duration of the project for the review of any decisions or agreements to take account of any appropriate changes. Projects should also consult local stakeholders throughout the duration of the project, in alignment with the Cancun Safeguards<sup>8</sup>.

**DEFINITION: FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT**

FPIC is the right of indigenous peoples and communities to give or withhold their consent to developments that affect part of their territory. It describes the establishment of conditions under which indigenous people and communities can exercise their fundamental rights to “negotiate the terms of externally imposed policies, programs, and activities that directly affect their livelihoods or wellbeing, and to give or withhold their consent to them.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 71 of decision 1/CP.16 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change:

<https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> RECOFTC & GIZ, 2011. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in REDD+: Principles and Approaches for Policy and Project Development. RECOFTC, Bangkok. Page 15. Available at:

[http://www.recoftc.org/site/uploads/content/pdf/FPICinREDDManual\\_127.pdf](http://www.recoftc.org/site/uploads/content/pdf/FPICinREDDManual_127.pdf)



Consent should be obtained prior to the commencement of project activities. In adhering to the principles of FPIC, project developers should consider the relevant social, cultural and environmental factors in the proposed project area. Relevant factors should include:

- **Identification and Communication:** It's essential to identify and establish communication with the communities and indigenous groups that will be affected by the proposed project or its activities.
- **Understanding Decision-making Structures:** The project planners need to identify and understand the decision-making institutions and processes utilized by these groups to ensure that their governance systems are respected.
- **Land and Resource Considerations:** Understanding the land tenure, identifying the users of local resources, and recognizing the methods and extent of resource extraction (off-take) are crucial. This involves knowing who uses the land and resources and how they use them, which is vital for planning and gaining the support of local stakeholders.

Consideration of any constraints that proposed project activities may have on such resource use should be made. Projects should not enforce physical or economic displacement of any rights holders, unless agreed during the FPIC process.

The project should assess the ability and capacity of rights holders to engage effectively in the negotiation of project development and benefit sharing activities. If the assessment finds that rights holders have insufficient capacity to engage effectively in the negotiation of project development and benefits sharing activities, the project should consider how to assist rights holders to develop this capacity.

### 2.2.1 Adhering to the principles of FPIC

The following points provide guidance on how projects can adhere to the principles of FPIC during the stages of project development:

#### (i) Preparation of negotiations with the carbon rights holders, and affected communities:

- Ensure that projects are developed in consultation with local stakeholders and communities from the earliest planning stages and encourage community participation in project design and implementation.
- Communicate transparently with local communities, making clear the steps in the process of project development at which community involvement and consent will be sought.
- Ensure that any proposed changes in land use or management as a result of the project are clearly explained to the community/communities, including potential benefits and costs for forgoing existing or potential benefits from alternative management and use.
- Seek to establish a climate of mutual respect, openness and trust in order to ensure that the process of seeking and obtaining consent is understood by all parties.



- Ensure that relevant government agencies are informed about the project design phase and given details of how communities are involved.

**(ii) The completion of negotiations:**

- Be sensitive of the right of indigenous people to use their own decision-making institutions and processes.
- Ensure that consent is free from coercion and manipulation.
- Work alongside communities, providing the skills necessary to engage effectively with the project, and assist them in make informed decisions about project activities, ensuring any potential displacement is discussed and only implemented if agreed with the affected communities.
- Be alert to potential problems such as internal community divisions, the capture of resources by local elites or gatekeepers and unintentional negative consequences of access to new resources and technology.

**(iii) The delivery of agreed terms:**

- Ensure that there is a sufficient time period incorporated into negotiations and agreements for consideration and “cooling-off”.
- Ensure that there is a mechanism in place for dispute resolution.
- Ensure that adequate timeframes are imposed.

## 2.3 Benefit Distribution Mechanism

The Standard requires projects to establish a mechanism that benefits local communities and that contributes to the sustainable management of ecosystems within the project area. The benefit mechanism should be designed in consultation with local communities and relevant organisations, including as appropriate, government bodies, and should be incorporated into Project Agreements where possible and appropriate.

The Standard recognises that the design, implementation and governance of this mechanism will be specific to projects, and will reflect the eligibility of stakeholders within the project area to make claims regarding the scale, timing and type of benefits accrued. The Standard is flexible in allowing for different approaches that projects may take to a benefit mechanism.

The development of a mechanism should be guided by the principles of FPIC. It should also be transparently and effectively administered to ensure that outputs are delivered on time and in appropriate quality; details of which shall be outlined in the project management plan.



The benefit mechanism should be subject to periodic review and evaluation to assess the following<sup>10</sup>:

- **RELEVANCE** - does it provide resources or inputs that are relevant to local needs and compatible with the conservation and restoration objectives of the project?
- **EFFECTIVENESS** - did the deliverables arrive, were they satisfactory, did the benefits materialise?
- **EFFICIENCY** - is the benefit mechanism operating efficiently?

An example process of developing a benefit mechanism may involve negotiation and agreement between the municipality, project stakeholders and the project developer, carried out to set the appropriate and proportional levels for the following criteria:

- Portion of funds for developing a mechanism and proportion of funds going to create "benefit".
- Type of "mechanism" e.g. fund or funds, projects or programs.
- Type of "benefits" e.g. cash, resources in kind, social infrastructure, training.
- Ties to project activities e.g. activities that help the project to meet project objectives e.g. REDD.
- National scale agreements on REDD and processes or systems adopted within the host country or local area.
- Structures for the management, development and distribution of benefits, including actors involved and rules regulating benefit mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation systems and processes and processes for complaints and disputes.

## 2.4 Communication

Good communication is important to help avoid minor issues escalating into serious problems. The project should consider how to establish and maintain appropriate communication channels and methods to ensure that project stakeholders are made aware of, and have access to the project process. The communication channels should include appropriate mechanisms allowing for the exchange of project information and data, incorporate reporting on project progress, monitoring updates, and meetings to discuss satisfaction and hear grievances.

## 2.5 Dispute Resolution

### 2.5.1 Process for Complaints and Disputes

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<sup>10</sup>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. DAC Evaluation Quality Standards. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/7/38686953.pdf>



To assist compliance with the NFS requirements on disputes, projects should establish a mechanism that ensures that issues are aired openly and transparently and that there is a go-to procedure, before communication becomes difficult or breaks down.

The mechanism, developed by the project, should seek to address concerns or complaints in a timely and transparent manner. Project level grievance mechanisms offer an alternative to dispute resolution processes but should include the possibility of independent arbitration, and recourse to legal or administrative remedies if negotiations do break down.

The project should ensure that stakeholders are made aware of, and have access to the process. The process should consider including grievance tracking and response systems, incorporating reporting on project progress at monitoring meetings to discuss satisfaction and hear grievances. If necessary the project should consider ensuring communities are informed about government adjudication channels and processes, and access to justice (provision of legal aid), if a situation arises and grievances cannot be resolved by the two parties without outside assistance.

Projects may draw upon already existing project level grievance processes. For example, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Dispute Resolution System<sup>11</sup> gives a well-structured example of an established grievance mechanism including process for appeal, formal and informal dispute recourse. The example below highlights some of the principles projects may wish to consider when designing a grievance mechanism.

#### Five Principles in Designing a Grievance Mechanism<sup>12</sup>

- i. **Proportionality** - scaled to risk and adverse impact on affected communities.
- ii. **Cultural Appropriateness** - designed taking into account culturally appropriate ways of handling community concerns.
- iii. **Accessibility**- clear and understandable mechanism that is accessible to all segments of the affected communities at no cost.
- iv. **Transparency and Accountability** - for all stakeholders.
- v. **Appropriate Protection** - a mechanism that prevents retribution and does not impede access to other remedies.

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<sup>11</sup>Forest Stewardship Council, 2009. *FSC Dispute Resolution System*. Available at: <http://www.fsc.org/resources.10.htm>

<sup>12</sup>International Finance Corporation, 2009. *Good Practice Note Addressing Grievances from Project-Affected Communities: Guidance for projects and companies on designing grievance mechanisms*. Available at: <http://www1.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/cbe7b18048855348ae6cfe6a6515bb18/IFC%2BGrievance%2BMechanisms.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=cbe7b18048855348ae6cfe6a6515bb18>



## 2.6 Biodiversity Impacts

The Natural Forest Standard is designed to be used in large areas of natural forest which are at risk from deforestation and degradation. Because these forests are likely to have high ecological significance, the biodiversity management element of the project is vital in ensuring the project has a positive impact.

The biodiversity section of the management plan should be consistent with good practice for the project region and project developers should consider the applicability of guidance issued by the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>13</sup> and the Global Invasive Species Programme.

The project should ensure that there is 'no net loss of biodiversity' arising from the project's existence in comparison with a baseline situation without the project. To achieve this, the Standard requires projects to take appropriate measures to protect existing biodiversity within the project zone. The biodiversity policy of the project management shall be informed by an understanding of the ecosystems and species present within and around the project area, and the likely causes of biodiversity loss.

The Standard requires that project proponents should provide:

- A descriptive summary of important endemic flora and fauna within the project area.
- A summary of the threats facing the endemic species of the project area.
- A description of the habitat loss mitigation activities of the project designed to mitigate these threats to the biodiversity.

The project's biodiversity impacts should be assessed using the Normative Biodiversity Metric<sup>14</sup>. Guidance on this can be found in the Biodiversity Assessment section of this document.

### 2.6.1 Threats to Biodiversity

Threats to biodiversity within the project area should be documented. This section provides some guidance examples for how the project may mitigate identified threats to biodiversity. There are three example mitigation activities outlined below. There may be other threats within the project area and these should be identified, documented and addressed where appropriate.

The information gathered in these categories, and the extent of the measures implemented by the project to mitigate potential threats should be recorded in the project management plan.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cbd.int/>

<sup>14</sup> Jarrett, D, 2011. Assessing Organisational Biodiversity Performance. Available at:  
[http://ecometrica-cms-media.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/media/pdf/assessing\\_organisational\\_performance.pdf](http://ecometrica-cms-media.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/media/pdf/assessing_organisational_performance.pdf)



### **i. Habitat loss**

Habitat loss is generally agreed to be the biggest driver of global biodiversity loss<sup>15</sup> and may be covered by descriptions of deforestation risk used in relation to the carbon benefits.

### **ii. Invasive species**

Invasive alien species are considered to be a globally significant threat to biodiversity, according to the Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG)<sup>16</sup> and the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP). With regards to invasive species, the project should consider following the three management stages of the GISP Invasive Alien Species toolkit<sup>17</sup>:

- Prevent the release and spread of non-native animal and plant species into areas where they can cause damage to native species and habitats and to economic interests.
- Ensure a rapid response to new populations can be undertaken.
- Ensure effective control and eradication measures can be carried out when problem situations arise.

For more guidance on invasive species management review, the referenced GISP publication and the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD)<sup>18</sup> whose research in this area may guide the project approach.

### **iii. Hunting and Bushmeat**

Bushmeat in tropical and sub-tropical forests is often an important source of food for forest communities<sup>19</sup>. The disappearance of wildlife, as a consequence of over-harvesting, can have a serious impact on the well-being of forest communities. The Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>20</sup> recommends

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<sup>15</sup> Slingenberg, A et. al. 2009. Study on understanding the causes of biodiversity loss and the policy assessment framework. European Commission. Available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/biodiversity/pdf/causes\\_biodiv\\_loss.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/biodiversity/pdf/causes_biodiv_loss.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Invasive Species Specialist Group Available at: <http://www.issg.org/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP) Invasive Alien Species: A Toolkit of Best Prevention and Management Practices. Available at:

[http://www.issg.org/pdf/publications/GISP/Guidelines\\_Toolkits\\_BestPractice/Wittenberg&Cock\\_2001\\_EN.pdf](http://www.issg.org/pdf/publications/GISP/Guidelines_Toolkits_BestPractice/Wittenberg&Cock_2001_EN.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Global Invasive Species Database. Available at: <http://www.issg.org/database/welcome/>

<sup>19</sup> Nasi, R., Brown, D., Wilkie, D., Bennett, E., Tutin, C., van Tol, G., and Christophersen, T. (2008). Conservation and use of wildlife-based resources: the bushmeat crisis. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, and Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Bogor. Technical Series no. 33, 50 pages.

<sup>20</sup> Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011. *Livelihood Alternatives for the Unsustainable use of Bushmeat*. Technical Series No. 60, Montreal, SCBD. Available at: <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-60-en.pdf>



that the key to mitigating the over-harvesting of bushmeat is to focus on the trade of bushmeat, not subsistence consumption.

The majority of NFS projects are likely to be based in developing countries located in tropical and sub-tropical areas, which means managing and mitigating bushmeat trade within project areas will be critical to ensuring that the project achieves a 'no net loss' of biodiversity.

The diversification of income sources within local communities has been found to be the most successful way to reduce bushmeat trade and over-hunting. The hypothesis being that hunters will stop hunting only if a more lucrative activity is available; this has been applied in a number of different projects.

Examples include:

- Bee-keeping initiatives in Cameroon.
- Bead-making in Kenya.
- Fair trade agriculture in Ecuador.
- Improving domestic livestock productivity.
- Community-based wildlife management and tourism.
- Working together with local farmers to minimise the burning of crop residues or natural areas.

Where the project seeks to enable alternative livelihood activities, this shall be with the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the community involved in the project, and it should consider potential negative impacts on certain groups within the area (e.g. women, non-landowning groups or minorities) and aim to avoid negative social impacts.

#### **iv. Project Development 'Halo Effect'**

Where there are development projects planned for local communities, or there is anticipated to be a large inflow of resources into the project area as a consequence of the project, the project shall assess what effects this will have on biodiversity within and around the project area.

For example, the building of new transport infrastructure could have negative effects on biodiversity as new areas become accessible to hunters and loggers. The project shall seek to ensure that the effect on biodiversity is minimised. Where a development project is expected to impact significantly on biodiversity, a biodiversity impact assessment should be carried out. For more guidance on this process, see Forest Trends guidance on biodiversity impact assessment<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup>Richards, M. and Panfil, S.N., 2011. Social and Biodiversity Impact Assessment (SBIA) Manual for REDD+ Projects: Part 1 – Core Guidance for Project Proponents available at:





## 2.7 Leakage<sup>iv</sup>

The project should minimise constraints on local resource use activities such as firewood collection, hunting, plant and fruit collection, and should seek to apply any use constraints agreements on a consensual basis, identifying affected people and working with them to minimise any negative social impacts. For example, by assisting with the development of more productive and sustainable sources of materials outside of core protected areas.

The project should minimise activity shifting by working with commodity and other crop producers and should seek to maintain or improve production within the constraints of forest protection and restoration plans.<sup>v</sup>

When indicators of leakage are identified, they should be investigated and, if possible, a negotiation to reduce or minimise these activities should occur. The project managers should, where possible, reduce leakage through improved project management and the encouragement of sustainable economic activities within the project area.

## 2.8 Permanence

### 2.8.1 General

NFS projects should be designed and implemented to promote permanent conservation of carbon stocks and biodiversity. The aim is to build resilient conservation areas that are well governed, locally supported and aligned to economic development.

The NFS Risk Buffer Policy outlines the NFS approach to defining permanence and identifies permanence to be Project Duration plus 20 years. As the NFS requires a project to have a minimum duration of 20 years permanence is set at a minimum of 40 years.

### 2.8.2 Measures of Ensuring Permanence

The relevance and appropriateness of specific measures to deliver permanence varies between project locations, so the NFS is not prescriptive about the measures to be implemented. This section provides some general guidance on how permanence can be promoted and how verifiers and risk assessors may evaluate the adequacy of these measures.

#### i. Understanding the Nature of the Threats

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[http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc\\_2981.pdf](http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc_2981.pdf) and Part 3 – Biodiversity Impact Assessment Toolbox available at: [http://www.forest-trends.org/publication\\_details.php?publicationID=2998](http://www.forest-trends.org/publication_details.php?publicationID=2998)



Projects should seek to understand the nature of threats to the forest within the project area. Specifically, projects should seek to understand the behaviour and motives of groups that present threats. Projects should consider whether the planned protection measures are likely to provide temporary respite or a long-term solution to the issues affecting these groups. Projects should consider the extent to which underlying problems such as income security and access to resources may be resolved in a way that provides a stable long-term relationship between these groups and the forest area.

**ii. Strengthening of Legal Frameworks Protecting Natural Forests**

Projects should consider the potential for using and strengthening local legal frameworks for protecting Natural Forests. The establishment of areas protected by local laws can, in some places, be an effective protection measure.

**iii. Sustainable Financial Models for Implementation**

Projects should consider what the requirements will be for monitoring and enforcement of protection measures over the long term. Sustainable funding models for monitoring and enforcement should be created so that monitoring and protection can continue beyond the timeline of carbon credit sales.

**iv. Effective, Durable Governance Structures**

Projects should consider establishing effective, durable governance structures that can continue beyond the timeline of carbon credit sales. Governance structures need to have sufficient buy-in and authority to be sustainable. The FAO's "framework for assessing and monitoring forest governance"<sup>22</sup>, while aimed at national level, provides a useful guide for assessing areas of weakness that may require attention.

**v. Alignment of Conservation with Economic Development**

Projects should seek to develop an alignment between conservation of natural forests and economic development. Projects should consider how revenues from carbon credit sales can be invested in economic activities that are consistent with forest conservation.

### **3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND REPORTING**

#### **3.1 Project Management Plan**

A project management plan is a key document that provides up to date information on how the project will address the identified threats to forest carbon and biodiversity and, where appropriate, recover carbon stocks and biodiversity through restoration activities.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.fao.org/climatechange/27526-0cc61ecc084048c7a9425f64942df70a8.pdf>



A management plan should be a 'living document' aligned with the PDD but kept up to date to reflect any changes that may be required, and lessons learned in the course of the project. The NFS does not expect rigid adherence to a management plan, however, where significant non-planned events occur, these should be reflected in reports or changes to the plan.

The management plan and supporting documents should where relevant, contain information on the following:

- Maps of the project areas, showing:
  - areas under protection;
  - areas to be restored;
  - leakage minimisation measures;
  - land ownership or use rights (as appropriate);
  - vegetation types;
  - other relevant characteristics.
- The main activities that will be undertaken by the project (including locations and timing).
- The expected outputs of activities and anticipated outcomes.
- The main functions and responsibilities of key staff.
- The structures and arrangements for collaboration, partnership or sub-contracting with local organisations, government bodies and sub-contractors.
- The process for interacting with local organisations and communities to ensure FPIC is achieved and maintained.
- The budgets for activities, and intended sources and recipients of project funds.
- The mechanism by which benefit distribution will operate.
- The process for dealing with complaints or grievances.
- The process by which progress will be monitored reviewed and evaluated.

The management plan is expected to be an internal document, agreed by the senior project staff and maintained as a living document, adapting and adjusting to developments over the course of the project.

The management plan should address relevant governance, social and biodiversity issues, as described in the previous section.

## 3.2 Project Monitoring System

A Project Monitoring System (PMS) should be used to maintain records of all relevant conservation and restoration activities, observations and measurements made to quantify the environmental impacts and progress with achieving social benefits. Project monitoring should be viewed as an integral part of good



governance and effective management and should be implemented for the duration of the project period.

All projects are required to constantly monitor the project area(s); measure and report the carbon stocks and any project area emissions that have occurred in each crediting period; and report all project activities and emissions reductions for each year of the project, for the duration of the project period.

Records in the PMS may include:

- Field patrols, observations, interventions and plans for follow-up.
- Incident reports – records on actions being taken when deforestation activity is detected.
- Measurements taken for the purposes of quantifying carbon stock changes or risk factors (e.g. sample plots, mapping of roads and tracks, etc.).
- Measurements and observations taken for the purposes of biodiversity monitoring.
- Monitoring of progress on agreed development activities.
- Records of staff training and capabilities.

To enable auditing, data collected within the PMS should include:

- Dates, times, locations and identity of observations and measurements.
- Identities of relevant people and places.
- Relevant measurement units.

### 3.2.1 Training and Equipment

The personnel involved in quantification of carbon and biodiversity metrics should have sufficient training and be properly equipped to carry out the tasks assigned to them.

## 3.3 Project Reporting

The standard requires the project to make clear and accessible Project Implementation Reports publicly available. These reports should describe the progress of the project, and include social performance indicators, any conflict resolution occurrence and outcomes, carbon stock monitoring activities, biodiversity monitoring activities, monitoring reports, resources deployed into the project, the number of Natural Capital Credits issued and should also include identifying any negative impacts and/or identify risks and plans to mitigate these risks.<sup>vi</sup>

A recommended annual report template is available on the NFS website. The NFS Guidance for Annual Reporting document provides further guidance for projects regarding the submission requirements for project reporting.



## 4. METHODOLOGIES FOR QUANTIFICATION OF NATURAL CAPITAL CREDITS

### 4.1 Introduction

The NFS requires projects to quantify carbon and other ecosystem benefits using approved methods. The following guidance is provided to assist the development of methods that can gain approval by the Technical Advisory Panel.

Methodologies should cover the following steps:

1. Mapping of vegetation to be conserved and restored within the project area.
2. Estimation of carbon stocks within the project area at the start of the project.
3. Stratification of the project area according to the risk of deforestation into the NFS risk categories, using an approved risk methodology.
4. Calculation of emissions expected under the baseline scenario.
5. Monitoring of carbon stocks over the course of the project in the project area.
6. Calculation of net annual carbon benefits.

#### 4.1.1 Transparency of Evidence and Assumptions

Methodologies should be based on transparent and relevant evidence and assumptions, and should take account of best available evidence.

#### 4.1.2 Methods for Monitoring of Changes in Carbon Stocks

Monitoring methods should be consistent with good practices set out in GOF-C-GOLD<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4.1.3 Carbon Quantification Units

Methodologies should quantify the NCC's that can be issued to a project or project area.

Projects may, but are not required to, quantify non-CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gas benefits, such as avoided emissions of methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) or nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). Where project do quantify non-CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gas

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<sup>23</sup> GOF-C-GOLD, The Global Forest Observation Initiative Methods and Guidance, GOF-C-GOLD REDD Sourcebook; a sourcebook of methods and procedures for monitoring and reporting anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and removals associated with deforestation, gains and losses of carbon stocks in forests remaining forests, and forestation. GOF-C-GOLD Report version COP19-2, (GOF-C-GOLD Land Cover Project Office, Wageningen University, The Netherlands). Available at: [http://www.gofcgold.wur.nl/redd/sourcebook/GOF-C-GOLD\\_Sourcebook.pdf](http://www.gofcgold.wur.nl/redd/sourcebook/GOF-C-GOLD_Sourcebook.pdf)



benefits, the IPCC Global Warming Potential (GWP) 100-year values relative to CO<sub>2</sub> (Sixth Assessment Report AR6) should be used<sup>24</sup>.

**NFS Approved Methodologies**  
**A list of approved methodologies can be found on the NFS website**

#### 4.2 Leakage Adjustment<sup>vii</sup>

A -5% leakage adjustment shall be applied to take account of any residual leakage impacts.

#### 4.3 Tiers of Forest Carbon Data

Quantification of carbon stocks may be carried out using Approved Tier 1 or 2 Maps, or Tier 3 Inventory methods combined with remote sensing, where Tier 1 or 2 are unavailable. See figure 5 below:

	SCALE	DATA
Tier 1	Global	Global carbon data sets
Tier 2	Regional	Regional carbon data sets
Tier 3	Local	Local, based on measurements from within the project area combined with remote sensing

Figure 4: Characteristics of Tiers of data sources

##### 4.3.1 Tier 3 Inventory Methods

The carbon stock values adopted should provide a conservative estimate of carbon stocks at the start of the project. The maps should therefore be recent and have a known error. Carbon stock maps can be derived from a combination of remote sensing data and ground-based survey or default values of carbon stocks.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Global-Warming-Potential-Values%20%28August%202024%29.pdf>



The validity of the carbon stock map will be assessed by the NFS Technical Advisory Panel, who will consider an appropriate, conservative factor to apply on the level of uncertainty.

#### 4.4 Baseline Assessment

To be approved, methods should provide a credible, conservative, baseline scenario of emissions from deforestation and/or degradation in the absence of the project activities. The Standard recommends risk-based approaches to provide baseline emissions scenarios, such as the ACEU method described in Grace et al 2010<sup>25</sup>.

##### 4.4.1 Outputs of Risk Assessment

The outputs of both Tier 2 and Tier 3 Risk Assessments should be a map of the project area zones, with areas categorised into the following classes:

RISK CATEGORY	EXPECTED % BIOCARBON LOSS OVER 20 YEARS	CLAIMABLE CARBON LOSS
Very High	>80%	0.80
High	60 to 80%	0.60
Medium	40 to 60%	0.40
Low	20 to 40%	0.20
Very Low	0 to 20%	0

Figure 5: Risk Category Model

##### 4.4.2 Baseline Review

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<sup>25</sup> Grace, J., Ryan, CM., Williams, M., P Powell, P., Goodman, L., & Tipper, R., 2010. A pilot project to store carbon as biomass in African Woodlands. *Carbon Management* 1, (2)



The project baseline and underlying assumptions shall be reviewed every 5 years throughout the project period, and when renewing the project period. The baseline review should follow the approved NFS methodologies.

## 5. BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

### 5.1 Consistent Approach

To provide some consistency and comparability of biodiversity measures between projects, the NFS recommends use of Ecometrica's Normative Biodiversity Metric (NBM)<sup>26</sup> in addition to any other methods that a project wishes to use. An NBM map, as described below should be developed and improved over the course of the project. In the early stages of project development a broad overview of the biodiversity status of the project area should be achieved from available vegetation maps, satellite images and local information. As the project progresses the project should improve the quality of biodiversity information to identify areas where biodiversity is under threat. This is likely to be closely related to threats to carbon stocks.

### 5.2 Transparency of Evidence and Assumptions

To maintain a transparent account of the evidence and assumptions used throughout the quantification of biodiversity, methods, dates, locations and identities of people undertaking measurements and estimates should be recorded.

### 5.3 Normative Biodiversity Metric

The Normative Biodiversity Metric (NBM)<sup>27</sup> is a practical method used to provide an assessment of the biodiversity value of any given area under ownership or management control. The NBM is similar to the concepts of habitat hectares<sup>28</sup> and mean species abundance<sup>29</sup> which are also designed to provide quantified information on the biodiversity value of an area.

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<sup>26</sup>Jarrett, D, 2011. Assessing Organisational Biodiversity Performance. Available at:

[http://ecometrica-cms-media.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/media/pdf/assessing\\_organisational\\_performance.pdf](http://ecometrica-cms-media.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/media/pdf/assessing_organisational_performance.pdf)

<sup>27</sup>Jarrett, D, 2011. Assessing Organisational Biodiversity Performance. Available at:

[http://ecometrica-cms-media.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/media/pdf/assessing\\_organisational\\_performance.pdf](http://ecometrica-cms-media.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/media/pdf/assessing_organisational_performance.pdf)

<sup>28</sup>Parkes, D et al., 2003. Assessing the quality of native vegetation: The 'habitat hectares' approach. *Ecological Management & Restoration*, 4 Available at: [http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc\\_578.pdf](http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc_578.pdf)

<sup>29</sup>Alkemade, R et al. 2009. Globio3: A Framework to Investigate Options for Reducing Global Terrestrial Biodiversity Loss. *Ecosystems* 12(3), pp. 374-390. Available at:

<http://www.globio.info/downloads/14/fulltext%20%28artikel%20GLOBIO%29.pdf>





The NBM is designed to assess the habitat quality of all the land within the project zone, providing a quantified rating of the biodiversity value of the Natural Capital Credits. When these credits are sold on the NFS Registry, potential buyers will be able to use this information on the NBM score of the Natural Capital Credits to inform their buying decision. This assessment process may be used to verify that the project is meeting the ‘no net loss’ biodiversity commitment of NFS projects.

### **Step 1: Identifying Eco-Floristic Zones**

The metric is based on a scale of ecosystem intactness, specific to the ecosystems within the project area. The first step in the assessment process is therefore to define the eco-floristic zones in which the project is taking place and to identify examples of pristine habitats.

The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) eco-floristic zones<sup>30</sup> definitions are a useful source with which to identify the different habitats present within each eco-floristic zone. Other sources which provide similar information are the ‘Bailey Eco-regions of the continent’ map<sup>31</sup>, or the WWF’s terrestrial eco-regions map<sup>32</sup>.

This step may also be done in conjunction with local or regional ecological knowledge. For example, within the tropical rainforest eco-zone, the FAO analysis suggests 6 different habitats which may be typical to this eco-floristic zone as a result of variations in the meteorology, hydrology or altitude within the zone.

### **Step 2: Defining the NBM Scale**

Having characterised examples of pristine habitats within the project area, the NBM assessment scale should be produced to characterise intermediate levels of impact, down to “Artificial surface”, which is given zero in the NBM classification system. Using the generic descriptors of each category, the eco-floristic zone specific scale should be produced. Identifying the likely occurrences of habitats within the eco-floristic zone is important for simplifying the classification process.

Below is an example of a completed pristineness scale for a project operating in the ‘tropical rainforest’ eco-floristic zone:

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<sup>30</sup>Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2000. *Global Ecological Zones*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/geonetwork/srv/en/metadata.show?id=1255>

<sup>31</sup> Bailey, R.G. and H.C. Hogg, 1986. A World Eco-Regions Map for Resource Reporting. *Environmental Conservation*, 13,(3) pp. 195-202 Available at:

[ftp://ftp.ngdc.noaa.gov/Solid\\_Earth/Ecosystems/CEOS\\_Ecoregions/datasets/b03/reprints/bec1.htm#top](ftp://ftp.ngdc.noaa.gov/Solid_Earth/Ecosystems/CEOS_Ecoregions/datasets/b03/reprints/bec1.htm#top)

<sup>32</sup>Olson, D et al., 2001. Terrestrial Ecoregions of the World: A New Map of Life on Earth. *Bioscience*, 51, (11). Available at: <http://www.worldwildlife.org/science/ecoregions/WWFBinaryitem6498.pdf>



CATEGORY	GENERIC DESCRIPTORS	LIKELY OCCURRENCES IN TROPICAL RAINFOREST ECO-FLORISTIC ZONE
<p><b>5</b> <b>PRISTINE</b></p>	<p>Land is inaccessible, no roads or navigable rivers. Can be small, indigenous communities present.</p>	<p><b>Tropical Rainforest</b> Areas of primary rainforest where there are only small indigenous communities present. The inaccessibility of the forest precludes the possibility of access from loggers or commercial hunters, or tourists. The indigenous communities may use forest resources but species populations are stable.</p>
<p><b>4</b> <b>MINIMAL USE</b></p>	<p>Original habitat and species distributions mostly intact; however, the area is subject to minor human activity which has a small impact on ecosystem functions.</p>	<p><b>Disturbed Rainforest</b> Areas of primary rainforest which have been impacted on in relatively minor ways by human activity. Hunting, harvesting of non-timber forest products, evidence of selective logging, or high levels of tourist activity in the area.</p>
<p><b>3</b> <b>IMPACTED</b></p>	<p>These areas are notionally still natural areas, but degraded such that many indigenous species are not present.</p>	<p><b>Rainforest fragments, degraded forest</b> In vicinities or roads and towns, strips of original forest will remain, but cut-off from main areas of habitat. Areas subject to high levels of hunting, such that many species and ecological functions are absent.</p>
<p><b>2</b> <b>CONVERTED</b></p>	<p>Areas of habitat which have been converted to a different type of land cover. Gardens, parklands, grazing areas, low-intensive farmlands for example.</p>	<p><b>Low secondary vegetation</b> Secondary vegetation such as scrub, thicket, brush which occurs when the original rainforest is removed/burned/destroyed and the soil does not recover its potential for regrowth of the rainforest.</p> <p><b>Grazing grasslands</b> Former rainforest land now bearing grasses and possibly undergoing periodic burning and grazing, e.g. Imperata grasslands. Some of these grasslands provide useful environmental functions such as ing water regimes and soil stability, but only provide habitat for a small number of generalist species.</p>
<p><b>1</b> <b>MONO-CULTURE</b></p>	<p>High intensity production of one crop which causes the homogenisation of large areas of landscape.</p>	<p><b>Monocultures</b> Intensive agriculture areas, normally soybean production in the Amazon. These areas do not provide natural habitat for any species. Other monoculture plantations common in converted Amazon land include eucalyptus, sugar cane and corn.</p> <p><b>Barren unused land</b> Barren land devoid of plants or vegetation which can provide habitat for indigenous species. Following the closure of a mine, or the abandonment of some man-</p>



		made structure, this is the first step in the process of rehabilitation and natural reclamation of land.
<b>0</b> <b>ARTIFICIAL</b>	Areas which have been developed, built up areas, or areas where no organic vegetation remains.	<p><b>Roads</b> Tarmac roads which have been constructed through the rainforest.</p> <p><b>Active mines</b> Open-cast mines currently in operation.</p>

Figure 16: Example completed pristineness scale

### Step 3: Classifying Habitat Zones

The next step is to classify the habitat zones into the pristineness categories of the table above. Initially, remote sensed images may be used to identify the distinct habitat zones within the project area. Artificial areas (0) and monoculture areas (1) should be straightforward to identify from remote sensing in most cases, according to the designed scale.

As a project develops, the initial habitat map should be improved by infilling gaps and uncertainties, through field surveys:

- Surveys of areas which were identified as having a high degree of ecosystem intactness at the remote imaging stage, to establish whether there are any signs of hunting, or resource harvesting in the area which has affected the ecosystem function – if these are found the area should be considered a minimal impact area (4) – if these are not present, the area should be considered a pristine area (5).
- Surveys of areas initially thought to be impacted (3) and converted (2) to establish that the initial assessment was correct. For areas to be considered converted, the original land cover must have been removed and replaced with another land cover. An impacted area still retains the initial land cover, but human activities have significantly degraded the land – these areas should have restoration potential, whereas converted areas may be more difficult to restore, and take longer to return to a high degree of intactness.

### Step 4: Endangered Species Presence

The next stage is to assess and document presence of endangered species in project areas. The project will have more value for biodiversity if the conservation of natural forest also contributes to the protection of endangered species - the IUCN red list<sup>33</sup> classifications will be used to define what is and isn't an

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<sup>33</sup>International Union for the Conservation of Nature [online] Available at: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>



endangered species - initially mammals will be used, because the red list data is most complete for mammals.

For each endangered mammal species present within a distinct habitat zone, the NBM score for that area will be subject to an uplift of 0.5, up to a maximum uplift of 5. However, the NBM scores for ecosystem intactness and endangered species presence should be reported separately.

Initially, the NFS will only consider the distribution of endangered mammals (in very small project areas, the presence of amphibians may be more indicative of localised biodiversity value, because amphibians do not travel over large ranges, so can be more indicative of ecosystem function), although where a project wishes to use an alternative 'endangered species' indicator to mammals, justification for this can be given.

Information on which threatened, endangered, critically endangered species are present in the area may already be available if the area has been subject to regular ecological surveys from other organisations; if this data is considered reliable, it may be used to complete the NBM endangered species assessment. If such information is not available, it is recommended that the project first uses the IUCN red list species distribution maps to get an initial impression of which endangered species are likely to be present within the project area. However, if this data is imprecise and general, the project should then verify and evidence the presence of these endangered species within the project area. Where species which move over large areas are spotted within the project area, it can be assumed that they are present within all of the project area which is of a similar type of habitat. Only areas of degraded, converted, monoculture or artificial land should be excluded from the endangered species uplift to the NBM score in this case.

### **Step 5: Monitoring NBM Scores**

The project should provide information on the scores for both pristineness and endangered mammals. This information should be monitored over time with a report on progress included in the annual project report.

## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>i</sup> Revision applied from Technical Panel Recommendation 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024. Effective date 13<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

<sup>v</sup> Ibid

<sup>vi</sup> Direct revision to improve the description of expected reporting information.



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vii Revision applied from Technical Panel Recommendation 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024. Effective date 13<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

Please refer to the document “Summary of Revisions 10 2024” for full details for TAP recommendations.