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Natural Forest Standard

Last updated: 8 March, 2016

Category [Voluntary Carbon Standards](#) [10]

Type:

Carbon accounting and reporting

Scale:

Project level

Scope:

Deforestation

Forest Degradation

Conservation

Date created 2011

Geographical Eligibility:

Global

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The Natural Forest Standard offers an integrated framework that recognises the importance of natural capital protection and combines the carbon, social and biodiversity values of avoided deforestation projects into one all-encompassing and streamlined certification process.

Introduction

The Natural Forest Standard was initially developed in 2011 by Ecosystem Certification Organisation (ECO), a not-for-profit organisation registered in the UK, in conjunction with Ecometrica, an independent scientific analytical services organisation. The aim was to create a standard specifically designed for REDD+ projects, whose framework allowed for the integrated certification of carbon benefits, social enhancements and positive biodiversity impacts of projects that protect areas of natural forests at risk of deforestation and degradation.

The standard was created through reviewing existing standards, initiatives and literature and identifying the key indicators for developing an effective approach to REDD+ projects that is comprehensively inclusive of emissions reductions, livelihood benefits and ecosystem protection. The Natural Forest Standard aims to enable project developers to take a holistic approach to the conservation of natural capital within REDD+ project areas and help to conserve those forests that are ecologically and culturally significant.

The initial stages of standard development through 2011/12 included independent expert reviews and consultation processes, with v1.0 of the standard published in June 2012 and the initial approved NFS methodology being published in January 2013.

The standard provides worldwide applicability and is currently applied in the Brazilian Amazon, with pipeline projects located in Honduras and Mexico.

Design Features

[Scope](#) [11]

The requirements of the Natural Forest Standard specifically apply to avoided deforestation projects that protect and conserve areas of natural forests at risk of deforestation and forest degradation. The standard is specific to natural forest projects and excludes commercial resource extraction. It focuses equally on the biodiversity and social values of these projects, and carbon.

[Scale](#) [12]

Project-level. The Natural Forest Standard is aimed at medium to large scale projects, with a proposed minimum project area of 20,000 hectares.

[Reference Levels](#) [13]

The Natural Forest Standard requires projects to apply a risk-based approach to baseline quantification. This risk-based method has been designed to protect large areas of forest over relatively long periods of time and involves using performance benchmarks instead of predictive temporal analysis, offering a performance metric that reflects the on-going conservation of carbon at

risk within natural forests.

The Natural Forest Standard requires projects use Ecometrica's Normative Biodiversity Metric (NBM) to provide quantified information on the biodiversity value of the project area. The NBM is designed to assess the habitat quality of all the land within the project area. This assessment may also be used to verify the no net loss of biodiversity commitment of NFS projects.

[Additionality](#) [14]

The Natural Forest Standard requires projects to demonstrate that the proposed activities and resulting outcomes are additional as the consequence of the application of the Natural Forest Standard and would not have occurred in the absence of this intervention. This includes demonstrating that the project is not the result of existing policies, laws or regulations unless it can be shown that these are not enforced or are insufficient in practice and that the forests are at risk of deforestation and degradation.

[Leakage / displacements](#) [15]

The Natural Forest Standard recommends that a buffer zone of 10km from the boundaries of the project is established. If leakage is identified within the buffer zone, measures should be taken to reduce or minimise the activities contributing to the leakage. The project management plan and monitoring system should be designed with this in mind and project developers should aim to reduce leakage through improved project management and the encouragement of sustainable economic activities within the project area, thereby dis-incentivising the displacement of deforestation activities.

Emissions from land use change within the buffer areas are assumed to result from the displacement of activities from within the project area unless they can be shown to be externally driven. Emissions from deforestation occurring in the buffer area should therefore be counted as project emissions and quantified using methods consistent with those used for estimating changes to carbon stocks within the project areas, unless the project can demonstrate the emissions are caused by external pressures. Annual reports from project developers to the NFS Secretariat should include details of any leakage identified and demonstrate the measures being taken to counteract this.

The standard does not require projects to estimate the potential impacts of project activities on national or international markets.

[Permanence / reversals](#) [16]

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 Natural Forest Standard requires a fixed 10% risk buffer contribution to be allocated to the Natural Forest Standard Risk Buffer Reserve. This contribution is subject to annual performance-based review to ensure the appropriateness of the contribution level over time and to apply any adjustments deemed appropriate based on the nature of the risk of non-permanence in the project area. 10% is the minimum contribution for project years 1-5.

In the event of unintentional or catastrophic reversals, the Risk Buffer Reserve will be used to compensate for these occurrences. However, the project developer must compensate for intentional reversals (e.g. land clearing) and these shall not be replaced from the Risk Buffer Reserve. These reversals will be deducted from the annual project carbon quantifications prior to credit issuance.

[Social measures or requirements](#) [17]

The Natural Forest Standard requires that project activities provide positive impacts to local communities and indigenous people and enable such stakeholders to engage in a participatory manner and receive benefits associated with the implementation of the project. Project developers are required to ensure their needs, rights and interests are recognised, and that projects take into account relevant social, cultural and environmental factors in the proposed project area. They must also adhere to the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) according to which the consent of stakeholders impacted by the project should be obtained prior to the commencement of project activities. FPIC should be considered as a process throughout the duration of the project rather than a one-time decision, to take account of any appropriate changes.

Project developers are required to hold evidence of necessary use rights to the project area; this includes the carbon rights and/or ownership of the land for the project area.

The standard requires projects to establish a relevant Benefit Distribution Mechanism (BDM) in order for the people within the project area or who have rights over the land or resources to receive benefits from the project. The BDM should be designed in consultation with local communities and relevant organisations, including as appropriate, government bodies. The development of the mechanism should also be guided by the principles of FPIC. The standard is flexible in allowing for different approaches that projects may take to implementing the benefit mechanism and recognises that the design, implementation and governance of this mechanism will be specific to individual projects, however it should reflect the eligibility of stakeholders within the project area to make claims regarding the scale, timing and type of benefits accrued.

[Environmental measures or requirements](#) [18]

All projects are required to ensure that there is no net loss of biodiversity arising from the project's existence in comparison with a baseline situation. To achieve this, the standard requires projects to take appropriate measures to protect existing biodiversity within the project area. The biodiversity policy of the project 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.

To assess the biodiversity value of the project area, verify the 'no net loss of biodiversity' commitment of NFS projects, and to provide some consistency and comparability of biodiversity measures between projects, the Natural Forest Standard requires projects use the Normative Biodiversity Metric (NBM). The NBM is designed to assess the habitat quality of all land within the project area, including a quantified rating of the biodiversity value of the project. This biodiversity assessment takes account of the pristineness of the land within the project area. The NBM allows the project area to be mapped and divided into categories according to the level of human influence and degradation on the ecosystem. The NBM also takes account of the presence of endangered mammals within the project area in order to more accurately represent the biodiversity significance of the area.

[Procedural measures or requirements](#) [19]

The Natural Forest Standard requires projects to be in compliance with all requirements and procedures of the standard and with all applicable laws, regulations or nationally ratified international treaties, conventions and agreements.

Project developers should design an appropriate Dispute Resolution Mechanism to address any conflicts or grievances that may arise during the development or implementation of the project. This

mechanism should seek to address any issues in a timely and transparent manner and projects should ensure that all stakeholders are aware of, and can use the mechanism. Conflict resolution occurrences and outcomes shall be included in the projects' annual implementation report.

[Registry](#) [20]

The Natural Forest Standard Registry is the independently operated tracking platform that ensures transparency, traceability and integrity for all Natural Capital Credits (NCCs) issued to projects verified under the Natural Forest Standard. The Registry enables registered users to receive, transfer and retire NCCs using unique serial number tracking that provides traceability for the lifespan of the credits. The Registry also ensures singularity of issued NCCs through an auditable transaction process and provides links to source project information, to give registry users transparency as to the origin and provenance of all NCCs.

[Process](#) [21]

Natural Forest Standard projects submit a Project Idea Note (PIN) which is reviewed by the NFS Secretariat and if accepted is listed on the project index page of the NFS website as "PIN submitted". The project must then develop a Project Design Document (PDD), a detailed document including all the information necessary for the independent validation of the proposed project against the Natural Forest Standard requirements, including a management plan and methods for quantifying and monitoring the proposed project.

Independent validation is required to determine that the project conforms to the Natural Forest Standard requirements and the project proponent shall select an appropriate independent Validation/Verification Body (VVB) to carry out the validation of the project. VVBs must be accredited under ISO 14065 to validate/verify under ISO 14064-3. The PDD, along with any other appropriate documentation is submitted to the selected VVB for commencement of validation. Following successful completion of this stage, the project is registered as an "Active NFS project".

Verification must be completed, prior to credit issuance and requires a site visit by the VVB. Project implementation is verified by an independent VVB under ISO14064-3 guidelines. Project developers must produce a Project Implementation Report (PIR) annually that describes the project and monitoring activities that have been implemented and the outcomes of such activities. For verification purposes the PIR must include the quantification of carbon benefits, the biodiversity rating, social impact information and general progress of the project since the start of the project. The PIR and all other relevant documentation applicable to the verification of the project are then submitted to the VVB.

The standard requires periodic verification of carbon assertions to be carried out as a desk-based audit on an annual basis, prior to credit issuance. Full verifications including a site visit are required at the initial verification stage and at intervals no greater than 5 years. The standard also requires the PIR to be submitted for publication on the project index page of the NFS website. NCC issuance is dependent on an annual report being submitted for the time frame corresponding to the quantification time period. NCC issuance is ex-post and shall only follow the successful completion and acceptance of all verification documentation and upon credit issuance, the project will be listed as "Verification approved, NCCs issued" on the NFS project index.

The project shall develop and maintain a management plan describing the measures to be taken to reduce deforestation and degradation of natural forests. The plan shall include appropriate leakage mitigation measures, and measures planned to benefit biodiversity and local communities. Projects shall also establish and maintain a monitoring system describing the activities to be undertaken to

monitor carbon stocks, and the impacts on local communities and biodiversity.

All standards in

Voluntary Carbon Standards ▼

Apply

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[Plan Vivo Standard](#) [23]

[The Gold Standard Land Use and Forests Framework](#) [24]

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