

[Printer-friendly version](#) [1][PDF version](#) [2]

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-  [Google+](#) [4]
-  [Facebook](#) [5]
-  [LinkedIn](#) [6]
-  [Digg](#) [7]
-  [del.icio.us](#) [8]
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Verified Carbon Standard

Last updated: 8 March, 2016

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

Type:

Carbon accounting and reporting

Scale:

Project level

Scope:

Deforestation

Forest Degradation

Enhancement (Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation)

Forest Management (Improved Forest Management)

Date created 2005

Geographical Eligibility:

Global

Content

- [Scope](#)
- [Scale](#)
- [Reference Levels](#)
- [Additionality](#)
- [Leakage / displacements](#)
- [Permanence / reversals](#)
- [Social measures or requirements](#)
- [Environmental measures or requirements](#)
- [Procedural measures or requirements](#)
- [Monitoring and Reporting](#)
- [Registry](#)
- [Process](#)
- [References](#)

The Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) was founded to: provide a trusted, robust and user-friendly programme that brings quality assurance to voluntary carbon markets; pioneer innovative rules and

tools that open new avenues for carbon crediting to businesses, non-profits and government entities that engage in on-the-ground climate action; and share knowledge and encourage the uptake of best practice in carbon markets so that markets develop along coherent and compatible lines even as top-down regulations take shape.

Introduction

The VCS was founded in 2005 by The Climate Group, the International Emissions Trading Association, the World Economic Forum and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development to provide “greater quality assurance in voluntary markets.” It is an independent, non-profit organisation headquartered in Washington, DC. VCS provides a general standard comprised of project, methodology, and validation and verification requirements applied to all VCS projects across a number of sectors. Forest-related projects are subject to the additional Agriculture, Forestry, and other Land Use (AFOLU) Requirements. There are 13 approved VCS AFOLU methodologies and 14 under development. AFOLU projects may also use relevant CDM methodologies. To date, VCS is the most popular voluntary carbon standard comprising 58% of 2011 overall voluntary market share.

VCS can be used as a standalone carbon methodology or combined with other certifications such as SocialCarbon or the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards (CCBS). VCS has created a partnership with the latter to streamline registration and the use of common templates for project documentation, validation, monitoring and verification.

In October 2012, VCS released requirements for Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ (JNR) programmes, the first standard for accounting and crediting national and subnational jurisdictional REDD+ programmes and nested projects. This webpage focuses only on VCS project-based standards.

Design Features

[Scope](#) [11]

REDD+ projects fall into 3 categories: Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation (ARR), Improved Forest Management (IFM), Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD).

[Scale](#) [12]

Project level.

[Reference Levels](#) [13]

Reference levels are constructed as Business-As-Usual (BAU) baselines, and are revalidated every ten years. Baseline development and information inputs vary by the methodology applied, but in all cases alternative baseline scenarios must be identified and selection of the most plausible scenario justified.

[Additionality](#) [14]

The methodologies provide procedures for the demonstration and assessment of additionality. Methodologies use either a project method, performance method and/or activity method to determine additionality - they may refer to an appropriate additionality tool developed under the

VCS or an approved GHG programme, develop a full procedure within the methodology itself or develop a new separate tool.

For example, the Tool for the Demonstration and Assessment of Additionality in VCS AFOLU Project Activities (Version 3.0) is adapted from the CDM A/R Additionality Tool. This includes four steps, (i) identification of alternative land use scenarios, (ii) investment analysis, (iii) barriers analysis, and (iv) common practice analysis.

[Leakage / displacements](#) [15]

For VCS REDD+ projects, leakage may be addressed through leakage sharing agreements, a leakage belt, or simplified leakage deduction factors. The VCS requires monitoring of market leakage, activity-shifting leakage, and ecological leakage, where applicable. The VCS AFOLU Requirements provide significant guidance for monitoring leakage for REDD, IFM and ARR projects. For example, for avoided unplanned deforestation projects, this involves the establishment of a leakage belt. Activities to mitigate leakage such as leakage management zones outside the project area are encouraged to minimise displacement of land use activities.

[Permanence / reversals](#) [16]

VCS REDD+ project proponents are required to use the AFOLU Non-Permanence Risk Tool to determine the volume of buffer credits that must be deposited into the AFOLU pooled buffer account. This account holds non-tradable buffer credits which may be used to cover any reversals associated with AFOLU projects to ensure the permanence of credits issued. A 10-60% buffer is required, as determined through the application of the AFOLU Non-Permanence Risk Tool. The tool also allows projects to demonstrate where they have reduced risk by implementing risk mitigation strategies. Projects that demonstrate their longevity, sustainability and ability to mitigate risks are eligible for release of buffer credits from the AFOLU pooled buffer account.

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

The VCS requires project proponents to provide evidence of land use rights. Project proponents are required to identify and mitigate negative socio-economic impacts, and use of the CCB Standards is recommended to show additional benefits beyond carbon mitigation. Safeguards related to benefit sharing, avoided resettlement, Free, Prior and Informed Consent, vulnerable groups or gender are not explicitly mentioned in VCS project documentation.

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

Project proponents must identify and mitigate negative environmental impacts, and the application of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or CCB standards is recommended. No safeguards related to ecosystem services or biodiversity are explicitly mentioned, though use of the CCB Standard is advised to demonstrate such safeguards are being implemented.

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

The VCS requires projects to abide by all laws, statutes, and regulatory frameworks relevant to the project's implementation and to demonstrate that they are in compliance with applicable laws, even if they are not enforced. The VCS project documentation does not explicitly mention stakeholder participation, transparency beyond GHG accounting or grievance mechanisms. However, projects are required to demonstrate that any relevant stakeholder consultations are conducted and that their outcomes discussed in the project description. Further, new methodologies submitted for approval are posted online for a global stakeholder consultation, and then independently assessed

before approval by the VCS Association.

[Monitoring and Reporting](#) [20]

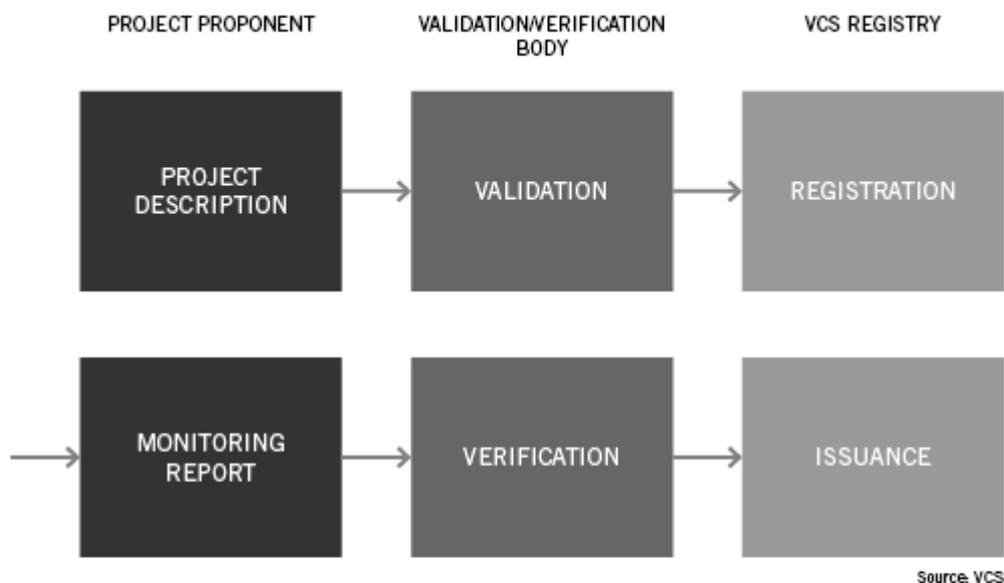
A monitoring plan and reporting framework are included in each approved methodology. Such plans can vary in both intervals required for monitoring and the parameters monitored. For example, some methodologies require annual monitoring of some parameters, while others only require monitoring every 10 years. Most include description of procedures used to estimate GHG emissions and removals, spatial data, plot data, allometric equations used, sampling procedure (if applicable), quality assurance and control measures, etc. Projects must complete a VCS Monitoring Report to undergo verification and request issuance of Verified Carbon Units (VCUs).

[Registry](#) [21]

The VCS Registry System is currently supported by two registry operators: APX and Markit. New registry service providers are able to join the VCS Registry System at any time. The VCS Registry System is an expandable system where multiple registry operators connect directly to the central VCS Project Database. The VCS Project Database acts as a central record of all registered projects and issued VCUs.□

[Process](#) [22]

Projects developed under VCS must (i) apply an approved methodology or develop and submit a new one for approval (which requires assessment by two separate validation/verification bodies), (ii) submit a project description (PD) using the VCS PD template for validation by an accredited, third-party validation/verification body (VVB), (iii) monitor emission reductions, (iv) have emission reductions verified by a VVB, (v) register the project with a VCS registry operator and request issuance of VCUs, the unit of VCS credits. Validation and verification may happen simultaneously or sequentially.



All standards in

Voluntary Carbon Standards ▼

Apply

[Natural Forest Standard](#) [23]

[Plan Vivo Standard](#) [24]

[The Gold Standard Land Use and Forests Framework](#) [25]

[Climate Action Reserve: Mexico Forest Protocol](#) [26]

[Verified Carbon Standard | Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ \(VCS JNR\)](#) [27]

[Verified Carbon Standard](#) [28]

Initiatives on the REDD Desk linked to this standard

Tanzania (1)

- [Reforestation in Grassland of Uchindile, Kilombero, Tanzania & Mapanda, Mufindi, Tanzania](#) [29]

Kenya (2)

- [Kasigau Corridor REDD Project Phase I - Rukinga Sanctuary](#) [30]
- [The Kasigau Corridor REDD Project Phase II-The Community Ranches](#) [31]

Indonesia (1)

- [Rimba Raya Biodiversity Reserve Project](#) [32]

Cambodia (1)

- [Oddar Meanchey Community Forestry REDD+ Project](#) [33]

Malaysia (1)

- [INFAPRO Rehabilitation of logged-over dipterocarp forest in Sabah](#) [34]

Brazil (1)

- [Ecomapuá Amazon REDD Project](#) [35]

Mexico (1)

- [Carbon Sequestration in Communities of Extreme Poverty in the Sierra Gorda, Mexico](#) [36]

Colombia (1)

- [Chocó-Darien Conservation Corridor](#) [37]

Peru (10)

- [Biocorridor Martin Sagrado REDD+ Project](#) [38]
- [Reforestation of pastures in Sociedad Agrícola de Interés Social 'José Carlos Mariátegui' - Joven Forestal Project](#) [39]
- [Alto Huayabamba: Carbon Dioxide sequestration through reforestation with small-scale farmers](#) [40]
- [Cordillera Azul National Park REDD Project](#) [41]
- [Alto Mayo Conservation Initiative](#) [42]
- [REDD in Tambopata National Reserve and Bahuaja-Sonene National Park](#) [43]
- [REDD+ in the Conservation Concession Alto Huayabamba](#) [44]
- [REDD project in Brazil nut concessions in Madre de Dios](#) [45]
- [Reforestation of pastures in Campo Verde with native species, Pucallpa, Peru](#) [46]
- [Madre de Dios Amazon REDD Project](#) [47]

Non-REDD Desk Initiatives

The REDD Desk may not list all project activities that are covered by the VCS. We list projects that are included in our "REDD Countries" section. Find more information on the full range of projects by looking at the VCS website.

Related news

- [Three Months Into Partnership, SOCIALCARBON And VCS Verify First Joint Project](#) [48]
- [What will voluntary carbon markets look like in 2015? Q+A with Verified Carbon Standard](#) [49]
- [Kenyans Earn First Ever Carbon Credits From Sustainable Farming](#) [50]
- [Carbon Credits Ready for Sale in Oddar Meanchey Forest](#) [51]
- [In the Philippines, Fighting Climate Change Impacts with Nature \(Part 1\)](#) [52]

Further reading

[Measurement, Reporting and Verification \(MRV\) Manual for Improved Forest Management in Central Suau REDD+ area, Papua New Guinea](#) [53]

[Nakau Methodology Framework](#) [54]

[REDD Feasibility Study for Central Suau, Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea](#) [55]
[The Role of Voluntary Agricultural Certification Standards in Quantifying and Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Exploring the Cocoa, Coffee, Palm Oil and Shrimp Aquaculture Sectors](#) [56]
[REDD+ standards in a fragmented market: What opportunities exist for REDD+ financing?](#) [57]

External Links

[Verified Carbon Standard - Version 3](#) [58]
[VCS Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use \(AFOLU\) Requirements](#) [59]
[VCS Registry System](#) [60]
[VCS Project Database](#) [61]
[VCS project cycle](#) [62]
[VCS Programme documents](#) [63]

Related encyclopaedia articles

- [Activity](#) [64]
- [Afforestation](#) [65]
- [Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation](#) [66]
- [Allometric equation](#) [67]
- [Baseline](#) [68]
- [Benefit Sharing](#) [69]
- [Carbon Market](#) [70]
- [Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standard](#) [71]
- [Common practice analysis](#) [72]
- [Deforestation](#) [73]
- [Ecological leakage](#) [74]
- [Ecosystem](#) [75]
- [Ecosystem Services](#) [76]
- [Forest](#) [77]
- [Forestry](#) [78]
- [Free, Prior and Informed Consent](#) [79]
- [Improved Forest Management](#) [80]
- [Leakage belt](#) [81]
- [Market Leakage](#) [82]
- [Mitigation](#) [83]
- [Reforestation](#) [84]
- [Removals](#) [85]
- [Revegetation](#) [86]
- [Source](#) [87]
- [Sustainable Development](#) [88]
- [Validation](#) [89]
- [Verification](#) [90]
- [Voluntary Carbon Market](#) [91]

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Links

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[11] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/scope>

[12] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/scale>

[13] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/reference-levels>

[14] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/additionality>

[15] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/leakage-displacements>

[16] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/permanence-reversals>

[17] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/social-measures-or-requirements>

[18] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/environmental-measures-or-requirements>

[19] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/procedural-measures-or-requirements>

[20] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/monitoring-and-reporting>

[21] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/registry>

[22] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/design-features/process>

[23] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/natural-forest-standard>

[24] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/plan-vivo-standard>

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[26] <http://theredddesk.org/markets-standards/climate-action-reserve-mexico-forest-protocol>

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[56]

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[57]

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[64] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/activity>

[65] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/afforestation>

[66] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/afforestation-reforestation-and-revegetation>

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[72] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/common-practice-analysis>

[73] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/deforestation>

[74] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/ecological-leakage>

[75] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/ecosystem>

[76] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/ecosystem-services>

[77] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/forest>

[78] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/forestry>

[79] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/free-prior-and-informed-consent>

[80] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/improved-forest-management>

[81] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/leakage-belt>

[82] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/market-leakage>

[83] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/mitigation>

[84] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/reforestation>

[85] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/removals>

[86] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/revegetation>

[87] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/source>

[88] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/sustainable-development>

[89] <http://theredddesk.org/encyclopaedia/validation>

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