
Natural Forest Standard

Guidance Addendum III

Guidance for Environmental and Social Safeguards for NFS Projects



Version 1.0
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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1. Introduction

The NFS aims to conserve and restore natural forests through actions of projects that benefit both local communities while maintaining the biodiversity present in the project area. This all-encompassing approach to environmental, social and biodiversity benefits of projects under the NFS is designed to ensure that social and environmental safeguards are integral throughout the project design and implementation. Employing a comprehensive approach that ensures environmental, social, and biodiversity benefits are integral to every project, embedding robust social and environmental safeguards throughout all phases of project design and implementation.

The Natural Forest Standard Requirements document sets out the normative requirements for projects using the NFS. The accompanying NFS Guidance document should be consulted in addition to the Standard. The Guidance is designed to assist project developers in meeting the normative requirements of the Standard. The guidance 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 communities and biodiversity.

The working language of ECO and the NFS is English.

2. Purpose

This addendum serves as an integral extension of our main guidance document, providing additional information and updates necessary for the comprehensive understanding and implementation of the Natural Forest Standard (NFS). It includes recent amendments, and/or clarifications that enhance the original guidance. The purpose of this addendum is to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the most current and relevant information, maintaining the effectiveness and applicability of our program. Please refer to this addendum in conjunction with the main guidance document to ensure that your activities are aligned with the latest standards and practices established by the NFS.

The Natural Forest Standard Requirements includes the core requirements and outlines the essential norms for projects operating under the NFS. Additionally, project developers are advised to consult the NFS Guidance document(s), which provides further support in meeting these normative requirements. The Guidance is aimed to facilitate a pragmatic, professional, and balanced application, ensuring project designs and management practices effectively contribute to forest conservation and restoration while benefiting local communities and biodiversity.

This document has been drafted to align the Natural Forest Standard (NFS) with the Environmental and Social Safeguard criteria specified by the ICVCM. Whilst the NFS requirements and guidance imply adherence to these safeguards, they may not explicitly detail the individual criteria.

This guidance is designed to provide clear, specific language to provide additional, detailed guidance to ensure full compliance with the safeguards specified by the ICVCM. It aims to clarify the adherence to the specific safeguards and the necessary measures required within NFS projects, enhancing both transparency and accountability for environmental and social practices.

3. Scope

This document provides the guidance that projects should follow for including Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) in their project design and implementation. The NFS adopts a holistic approach for projects to deliver ecological and social benefits, placing equal emphasis on the combined carbon, socio-economic and biodiversity benefits and values of a project. This supports the necessary protections for people and the environment, through the resilient and inclusive development and implementation of projects under the NFS.

This approach can facilitate meaningful contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals enabling projects to support and align their mitigation activities with global sustainability targets. It also supports the necessary safeguard protections for people and the environment, through the resilient and inclusive development and implementation of projects under the NFS.

There are separate guidance addenda available that specifically details the alignment of the Natural Forest Standard with the Cancun Safeguards for REDD+ Projects, and for UN SDG contributions and reporting for NFS projects.

4. Aim

Where a normative requirement of the Natural Forest Standard (NFS) clearly aligns with a specific safeguard, or there is an overlap, the normative requirement shall take precedence. In instances where the normative requirements do not explicitly address a safeguard, this guidance document is designed to provide the necessary clarification and direction.

4.1 Relevant Extract from the NFS Guidance Document v1.4

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, the draft UN-REDD Programme Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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. 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.

5. Environmental and Social Safeguards

Project activities must not negatively impact the natural environment or communities. Project developers must identify and address any negative environmental and socio-economic impacts of project activities.

In addition to adhering to the normative requirements of the Standard, NFS projects should implement these safeguards to prevent, minimize, or mitigate negative impacts on the environment and local communities. These measures are crucial not only for achieving carbon benefits but also for protecting and respecting local environmental values and social welfare.

The NFS requires projects to abide by national and local laws, objectives, programs and regulations and where relevant, international conventions and agreements.

The project shall confirm that it:

- i. provides safe and healthy working conditions for employees.
- ii. provides fair treatment of all employees, avoiding discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities.
- iii. prohibits the use of forced labour, child labour, or trafficked persons, and protects contracted workers employed by third parties.
- iv. identifies and where applicable minimises pollutant emissions to air.
- v. identifies and where applicable minimises pollutant discharges to water, noise and vibration.
- vi. identifies and where applicable minimises generation of waste and release of hazardous materials, chemical pesticides and fertilisers.
- vii. prevents or minimises the displacement and/or involuntary resettlement of residents and/or their economic activities.
- viii. avoids, or where this is not feasible, minimises negative impacts on terrestrial and marine biodiversity and ecosystems.
- ix. does not convert natural forests, grasslands, wetlands, or high conservation value habitats.
- x. minimises soil degradation and soil erosion.
- xi. minimises water consumption and stress in the mitigation activity.
- xii. avoids discrimination and respects human rights.
- xiii. abides by the International Bill of Human Rights and universal instruments ratified by the host country.
- xiv. provides for equal opportunities in the context of gender
- xv. protects against and appropriately responds to violence against women and girls
- xvi. provides equal pay for equal work.

6. Assessing Associated Risks

Projects should assess whether there are associated risks of negative environmental and social impacts with regard to the safeguard criteria detailed herein, relevant to the scope and scale of the project. This ensures that potential negative environmental and/or social impacts are identified and managed effectively.

Projects shall confirm that it adheres to and/or includes measures to mitigate where mitigation measures are identified as needed.

- i. **Identify and Assess:** Project developers should identify and assess any potential negative impacts of the project. This includes both environmental risks (including biodiversity loss, or soil degradation) and social risks (such as impacts on local communities, displacement, or changes to local economies).
- ii. **Consideration of Scope and Scale of the Project:** The assessment should consider the extent of the project is and be relevant to the area it covers. The scope (what the project involves) and scale (the size of the project) will influence the type potential impact(s).
- iii. **Measures to minimise and address identified risks:** Projects should describe the appropriate measures to be adopted to minimise and address such negative environmental and/or social impacts within the Project Design Document, and in the ongoing Project Implementation Reports, in accordance with the Effective Date herein.

7. ESS Reporting Applicability for NFS Projects

For projects being submitted to the Natural Forest Standard from 1st November 2024, Project Developers should include confirmation of these safeguards within the Project Design Document, which will be submitted for validation. This should also include identifying any potential negative impacts and the mitigation measures being implemented to address such impacts.

For projects registered with the Natural Forest Standard prior to 31st October 2024, Project Developers should include confirmation of these safeguards, including identifying any potential negative impacts and the mitigation measures being implemented to address such impacts within their Project Implementation Reports from 1st November 2025.

Document Name	NFS Guidance Addendum III Guidance for Environmental and Social Safeguards for NFS Projects
Publication Date	21 st October 2024
Version	1.0