



Natural Forest Standard

Methodology Development Modification and Review Procedures



Version 1.0
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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.

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. Scope

As a program, the NFS adopts a unified, risk-based performance benchmark approach to provide baselines for NFS projects. NFS methodology AM001.1b offers a unique approach to reducing emissions associated with deforestation and degradation through the use of a risk-based approach to baseline calculation.

The NFS continues to review and improve the risk-based metrics for regions where NFS projects are implemented. This ensures that NCCs remain credible, robust and aligned best practice and best available data. It also ensures that projects and the associated methodologies adhere to best practice within the voluntary carbon market.

The NFS requires independent experts to review methodologies prior to review and approval. The NFS Technical Advisory Panel members and expert reviewers provide advice to the NFS on an independent professional basis and are responsible for providing recommendation for approval to the ECO Governance Panel for acceptance and publication.

3. Principles of the NFS

Singular Purpose: Focused on the needs of natural forest conservation and restoration projects.

Regionally specialised: Regional risk mapping / reference levels for baseline setting, using national and sub-national data for quantifying historic and current deforestation.

Programmatic approach: Adopting a singular, consistent methodological approach.

Simplified, streamlined approach: Reducing complexity, less resource-intensive processes for project development and implementation, and simplify the verification and certification process by standardising the regionality of applicable data.

4. Methodology Development and Modification Process

Any stakeholders may submit modified, regionally specific methodologies that are not already offered as approved methodologies by the NFS. These methods should follow the underlying principles of methodology development specified by the NFS, as detailed in the NFS Guidance:

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:

- *Mapping of vegetation to be conserved and restored within the project area and identification of potential leakage zones.*
- *Estimation of carbon stocks within the project area and leakage zones at the start of the project.*
- *Stratification of the project area and leakage zones according to the risk of deforestation into the NFS risk categories, using an approved risk methodology.*
- *Calculation of emissions expected under the baseline scenario.*
- *Monitoring of carbon stocks over the course of the project in the project and leakage area.*
- *Calculation of net annual carbon benefits.*

Transparency of Evidence and Assumptions: *Methodologies should be based on transparent and relevant evidence and assumptions and should take account of best available evidence.*

Methods for Monitoring of Changes in Carbon Stocks: *Monitoring methods should be consistent with good practices set out in [GOFC-GOLD](#).*

Leakage Areas: *A -5% leakage adjustment shall be applied to take account of any residual leakage impacts. The NFS does not require projects to estimate the potential impacts of project activities on national or international markets.*

Carbon Quantification Units: *Methodologies should quantify Natural Capital Credits (NCCs) that can be issued to a project or project area. Projects may, but are not required to, quantify non-CO₂ greenhouse gas benefits, such as avoided emissions of methane (CH₄) or nitrous oxide (N₂O). Where methodologies do quantify non-CO₂ greenhouse gas benefits, the IPCC Global Warming Potential (GWP) 100-year values relative to CO₂ (Sixth Assessment Report AR6) should be used.*

5. Methodology Review

To ensure the utmost integrity and objectiveness in our evaluation processes, the NFS employs a dynamic and rigorous review process that combines internal assessments, stakeholder input and the expertise of independent external professionals to ensure the highest standards of accuracy and integrity.

While internal reviews and stakeholder input allow us to efficiently monitor and refine our methodologies, we engage independent experts from the NFS Technical Advisory Panel for their

specialized knowledge and unbiased perspectives where appropriate. This is to ensure that that our assessments adhere strictly to the highest standards of scientific rigor and transparency.

Where appropriate, the NFS encourages additional independent experts to conduct reviews, which are conducted free from internal biases. By utilizing external experts, we ensure that our evaluations are thorough, impartial, and uphold our commitment to maintaining the credibility and reliability of the NFS. This practice not only enhances the robustness of our assessments but also reinforces our dedication to upholding best practices within the environmental certification landscape.

This hybrid approach ensures that our evaluations are thorough, incorporating both in-depth internal insights and impartial external expertise. By balancing internal assessments with expert external review, we maintain the robustness and credibility of our standards, fostering trust and transparency within the environmental certification community.

Risk Map Updates: It is expected that the risk maps may be updated over time, to take account of deforestation occurring in the intervening period as and when newly available information and ground data becomes available. Project baselines should be reviewed every 5 years.

6. Public Consultation

Dependent on the scope of the development, modification or revision, a public consultation period may be required, to take account of stakeholder's feedback, prior to approval. Where required, the appropriate documentation shall be made available for public consultation and comment, on the Public Consultation page of the NFS website and appropriate social media channels. The open comment and response period shall be set at a minimum of thirty (30) days or any extended period as deemed appropriate.

Public Consultation shall be required when a methodology modification or additional methodology for a region not already offered as approved methodologies by the NFS; or when a significant revision is made to an existing methodology.

Public Consultation is optional for additions to an existing methodology, that have not previously been established in an approved methodology, dependent on the source of the proposed addition. If the suggestion is made as part of the independent, third-party validation or verification process, the suggested addition may be considered and approved by the TAP without the need for public consultation. Public Consultation is not required if revisions are not material.

The Public Consultation must proactively reach out to key stakeholders, including local stakeholders involved with active NFS projects. Submitted responses shall be collated, summarised and assessed for applicability and consideration in the review process.

The Technical Advisory Panel will review all comments regarding the methodology documentation and advise the ECO Governance Board of any appropriate improvements or clarifications to be made.

Following this process, the updated documentation will be published on the Natural Forest Standard website and the results of the consultation process, including measures taken to incorporate comments, will be made publicly available to stakeholders in summary form.

7. Approval Phase

If a Public Consultation is not deemed necessary, the chair of the Technical Advisory Panel must incorporate comments from the remainder of the TAP independent experts and submit the methodology document for final review and approval at a formally convened TAP meeting.

Where there was a Public Consultation, the TAP review must incorporate relevant comments and suggestions into the final proposed methodology document for review and approval by the TAP.

The TAP can either accept the methodology document; or deem it incomplete and send it back for further revisions. This can be done an unlimited number of times. There is no obligation for any development, revision, or modification to be approved if consensus is not achieved.

8. Direct Revisions

Direct modifications may be implemented for minor changes; changes that do not significantly alter the intent or implications of existing methodology documents, such as non-substantive changes, procedural refinements or clarification of language. Direct Revisions are not subjected to TAB approval or Public Consultation.

9. Public Disclosure

Where any new, modified or revised methodology is approved, it will be made publicly available and available for use on the Methodology page of the NFS website. The results of any consultation process undertaken, and ratified recommendations from the TAP, including measures taken to incorporate comments, will be made publicly available to stakeholders in summary form.