Haven

The Core Criteria

Ratified by Haven Scientific Council, September 2026

Overarching position statement

Halting carbon emissions from forest loss is essential for any viable pathway to achieving the Paris 2015 temperature goals. Therefore, providing that climate impact is properly accounted, avoided conversion of natural forest should be a priority for carbon finance because it delivers a benefit to the atmosphere equivalent to restoration that is usually more immediate, greater in scale, and potentially lower cost. These actions also confer biodiversity benefits that are unmatched by restoration on comparable timescales.

Overview

Haven's mission is to accelerate a new generation of nature-based emissions reductions credits with greater scientific rigour, bringing them into alignment with the highest grade nature-based removals credits.

The scope initially focuses on Avoided Unplanned Deforestation & Degradation (AUDD).

Haven assessment applies at the project-level for specified vintages, rather than to a methodology in the abstract. The process for assessment against the Criteria will be handled by technically capable, independent organisations with appropriate conflict management.

The Criteria build upon the latest AUDD standards in the market. Meeting the Criteria provides additional assurance, beyond current AUDD standards, that issued credits are aligned with the best current scientific estimate of real-world climate impact, with the objective that credited tonnes are not overstated, while safeguarding communities and biodiversity.

The Criteria ensure a step-change in climate impact assurance and trust for AUDD, while not being overly prescriptive, to avoid restricting methodological innovation or project designs to meet the Criteria. They are consistent with the Core Carbon Principles of the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM).

The Criteria are not designed to be a standalone methodology, but to be met either alongside today's methodologies or integrated into updated methodologies or modules over time.

The Criteria do not focus on areas already dealt with effectively within the latest certification methodologies, for example, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), already required under today's certification standards. They focus instead on the areas which provide the greatest uplift in climate impact assurance and community and biodiversity safeguarding.

The Criteria aim to strengthen the empirical basis for AUDD credit quality and credibility; concerns about how credits should be used and which claims should be made sit beyond the current scope of Haven. These questions are important for most efficiently deploying resources to tackle the climate crisis and are being addressed by other initiatives (e.g. SBTi, The Oxford Principles, and VCMi).

The criteria are developed by Haven's technical team, in partnership with ecosystem partners, and approved by Haven's independent Scientific Council.

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Project design and safeguards

Communities

Principle: Projects safeguard the rights and wellbeing of affected indigenous peoples and local communities and meaningfully incorporate their development ambitions into project design and implementation, recognizing this both as an ethical imperative and essential to delivering climate impact through achieving additionality, mitigating leakage, and limiting reversals.

Criterion: Projects must respect the rights (statutory and customary, and individual and collective), and safeguard the wellbeing of affected indigenous peoples and members of local communities following the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standard v3.0, or an equivalent standard. Through their full and effective participation, projects must identify and incorporate the affected communities' development ambitions into project design and implementation, including measures to sustain livelihoods and economic opportunities and thereby limit leakage and reversals. The key documents that provide evidence of this process must be consistently recorded and auditable. The basis, proportion and distribution of project revenues and benefits must be transparently reported. Claims of positive community impact that go beyond current standards are encouraged but must be well evidenced.

Biodiversity

Principle: Projects protect biodiversity by preventing deforestation and degradation of natural forest, particularly where it is carbon-rich and ecologically irreplaceable.

Criterion: Projects that demonstrably reduce the deforestation or degradation of natural habitat relative to a credible baseline are recognised as producing an on-site biodiversity benefit, provided that project activities and associated leakage do not cause biodiversity harm elsewhere. The magnitude of this benefit depends on factors including ecosystem condition and connectivity, the species affected and their extinction risks. Claims beyond the impact attributable to conserving natural habitat, such as changes in species' abundance or extinction risk must be well evidenced.

Leakage mitigation

Principle: Projects take actions to reduce forgone production so that it is not displaced to cause emissions from deforestation or degradation elsewhere.

Criterion: Projects are incentivised to take actions to reduce forgone production because not doing so results in large deductions from credit issuance. Such actions include (i) situating projects where potential yields are low relative to existing carbon stocks; (ii) maintaining or increasing production on land where marginal greenhouse gas impacts are low through demonstrably additional actions; or (iii) taking demonstrably additional actions to reduce demand, or lower loss or waste.

Durability

Principle: Projects maintain climate outcomes throughout the project lifetime and put mechanisms in place to sustain them beyond it.

Criterion: Credits do not need to be permanent to be beneficial, since even delayed emissions can have a value to reducing climate change, provided the claim made from credits is scientifically accurate. Carbon credits of finite durability can mitigate climate change when they store carbon to reduce or delay peak warming temperatures, due to reductions in the economic costs of warming and the greater time afforded for adaptation. The period over which monitoring must occur and compensation be made for any reversals, must be clearly stated and supported by appropriate agreements or contracts. No climate impact can be attributed beyond this period, which is the foundation for determining the claim made. Even though considerably longer periods of durability may be estimated with high confidence, without dedicated monitoring, claims cannot be made on these estimates. Projects are incentivised to increase durability, by implementing actions that reduce risks of carbon loss. This includes changing economic development trajectories, land management practices or conservation policies, which are supported by effective mechanisms such as contractual agreements, trust funds, and the possibility of future credit issuances for anticipated reversals that do not occur.

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Climate accounting

Intervention additionality

Principle: Carbon finance is necessary to deliver the intervention and associated climate benefits that would not otherwise occur.

Criterion: Projects must demonstrate that the anticipated incentive from carbon finance was necessary for the intervention to occur, considering financial, regulatory, and barriers analysis, which is essential for informing causal analysis

The baseline

Principle: The baseline credibly represents what would have occurred in the absence of the carbon financed intervention.

Criterion: The baseline must provide credible ex post estimates of greenhouse gas emissions in the absence of the carbon financed intervention. This entails using an appropriate causal-inference design that adjusts for confounders. Justifiable alternative design specifications should be considered, including the use of model inputs, covariates or features that capture potentially important confounders, as well as alternative modelling approaches or algorithms. Placebo testing, using pseudo-treated areas alongside causal reasoning, must be used to select between alternative models. Controls affected by the intervention or by related interventions must be excluded or appropriately accounted for. Climate impact additionality is estimated in tonnes of CO_2e as the difference between the observed project trajectory and the baseline trajectory. Uncertainty in this estimate must be quantified and propagated.

Carbon stock

Principle: Changes in carbon stocks and their consequences for the atmosphere are robustly quantified and validated in the project landscape.

Criterion: All carbon pools and their changes associated must be estimated, except where they may be justifiably assumed to be unaffected by the project or their exclusion has conservative effects on climate accounting. Models, remotely sensed products and conversion factors must be calibrated or validated using representative observations from the project landscape or from demonstrably equivalent nearby forests. Major sources of uncertainty must be accounted for and propagated including from sampling, wood density, allometric equations, model extrapolation and mapping. Where validation is incomplete, the limitation must be disclosed and reflected in conservative crediting.

Leakage

Principle: Emissions from displaced activities are quantified and deducted wherever those occur.

Criterion: All forgone production under the project relative to the counterfactual is assumed to be displaced and result in emissions as large as those reduced by the project, even if these occur internationally. Therefore, credits must only be issued when there is credible evidence the emissions associated with forgone production are reduced. Leakage deductions may be reduced where: (i) credible evidence demonstrates that production is actively or passively leaked to areas with lower emissions per unit production, and that these are accounted for, (ii) some or all of the forgone production is replaced through demonstrably additional project interventions that maintain or increase production on land where marginal greenhouse gas impacts are low, or (iii) demonstrably additional project interventions reduce demand, or lower loss or waste. Mitigation impacts must not be double counted. Calculations must account for all emissions of displaced and replacement production relative to the relevant counterfactual, including the effects of additional inputs, non-CO_2 emissions and any rebound or overcompensation. In estimating active or passive leakage deductions, credible evidence means assessing the uncertainty in the locations where displaced production may occur, across all plausible locations and their associated emissions per unit production. Uncertainties are typically substantial for leakage, so conservative assumptions must always be used to avoid over-crediting and incentivise mitigation.

Reversals

Principle: Reversals that occur are tracked and compensated for.

Criterion: Monitoring of projects and the controls used to estimate counterfactuals must continue throughout the stated period of durability. Reversals occur when additionally stored carbon is returned to the atmosphere before the end of the period of estimated durability. This happens when the difference between the carbon stocks under the project and the baseline is reduced below the amount previously used to issue credits. In the event of reversals, buffer credits used for compensation must meet Haven Criteria for climate accounting. Projects or standards bodies must have a sufficient quantity of buffer credits based on an independent and rigorous risk assessment that considers future risk of carbon loss from climate-related disturbances (wildfire, pests, pathogens and disease, storms, etc.) and socio-economic risks (financial, political, management, illegal harvest or land conversion). Mechanisms to replace credits may be used where they are legally enforceable, adequately capitalised and designed to secure replacement of the lost climate impact.

Uncertainty

Principle: The propagated uncertainty associated with all material aspects of project impact is reported.

Criterion: All material sources of uncertainty, including those associated with the baseline, carbon stocks, land-cover change, must be propagated jointly through the credit calculation using appropriate methods. The resulting central estimate and specified confidence intervals must be reported. Developers may choose to increase the probability that a credit represents its claimed climate impact by issuing fewer credits.

Assurance, transparency and improvement

Validation

Principle: Independent assessment, beyond certification, provides additional assurance that carbon accounting and project design is robust.

Criterion: A qualified independent assessor must review all material project design and carbon accounting claims. This requires access to sufficient data, code, assumptions, methods, contracts, monitoring records and audit trails. Project technical materials such as site boundary polygons and carbon accounting calculations must be publicly available for validation by independent third parties. Restrictions necessary to protect personal information, Indigenous and local knowledge, conservation-sensitive information, commercially sensitive intellectual property or legitimately licensed data must be documented and must not prevent effective independent scrutiny. Validation must be ex post.

Improvement

Principle: Project design and climate accounting continue to improve through transparent adoption and integration of the best available data and methods.

Criterion: Project proponents must reasonably update credit calculations as improved datasets and modelling approaches become available. The versions of all material data and methods, the reason for each change and its effect on calculated credits must be documented. Updates must be reasonably and consistently applied and must not be selected opportunistically. Transitions between methodologies or registries must preserve a complete audit trail and prevent double counting.