



Carbon offset project compatibility with other forestland programs

Forestlands enrolled in a forest carbon offset project can be actively managed for timber and other wood products along with additional goals like improved wildlife habitat or recreational opportunities. In general, forest carbon offset projects are compatible with other forest programs if they do not restrict timber harvests or mandate carbon storage.

Current use programs

Forests enrolled in a state tax equity program, often called current use, are generally eligible for enrollment in a carbon offset market. The programs vary from state to state and many require forest management plans for actively managed forestland. If the land continues to be actively managed under a carbon offset project, selling carbon will not invalidate the current use status of the land but it may require changes to documentation, including with the forest management plan if one is required. Each state current use program is different in the northeast and so landowners interested in forest carbon projects should contact their state to assess what issues might arise if land in current use is the subject of a forest carbon project.

Conservation easements

Having a conservation easement on forestland, like through a local land trust or government organization, should not restrict eligibility in a carbon offset project. The exceptions would be if the easement specifically mandates that the landowner maximize forest carbon or restricts timber harvest. In these cases, future carbon capture is already accounted for to meet the legal agreement of the easement and the landowner cannot sell the forest carbon a second time. For some projects, having a conservation easement can lower the risk associated with the project, which can increase the number of offsets credited, but on the other hand, a conservation easement that restricts certain levels of harvest will result in a higher carbon baseline. The Forest Legacy Program is a federal program that provides funding to states to conserve private land with unique or important forest characteristics and environmental value. It is compatible with carbon markets, conservation easements, forest certification, and current use programs, and the program requires a management plan.

Cost-share programs

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), can provide financial and technical assistance to landowners for forest management planning and silviculture, including forestland enrolled in a carbon offset program. While details are still emerging in these programs, assistance for activities like forest inventories is available. Contact your local NRCS agent or a private forester for more information on forest carbon related NRCS assistance.

Third-party forest certification

Forest certification programs ensure that forestland owners use sustainable forest management practices. All three types of forest certifications available in the northeast U.S. – Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and American Tree Farm System (ATFS) – are compatible with carbon offset markets.