



CITY FOREST  
CREDITS

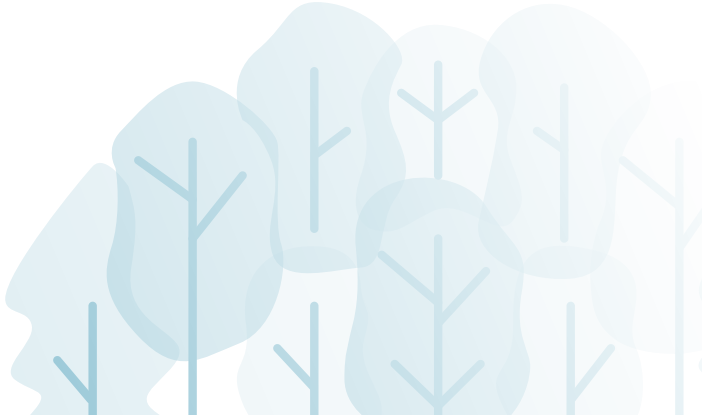
# PRIVATE LANDOWNERS GUIDE TO CARBON+ CREDITS

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# CONTENTS

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Carbon Credits and the Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM)	3
<hr/>	
<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>	<b>4</b>
Private Landowner (You)	4
Project Operator (PO)	4
<hr/>	
<b>Eligibility - Is Your Land a Good Fit?</b>	<b>5</b>
Preliminary Eligibility Considerations	5
<hr/>	
<b>Carbon Revenue—What to Expect (and What Not to Expect)</b>	<b>6</b>
Important Financial Transparency for Landowners	6
<hr/>	
<b>The Landowner’s Journey Through a Carbon Project</b>	<b>7</b>
Step 1: Initial Conversation	7
Step 2: Eligibility Confirmation	7
Step 3: Carbon Credit Estimation	7
Step 4: Application to CFC	7
Step 5: Preservation Commitment and Documentation	8
Step 6: Documentation and Validation/Verification	8
Step 7: Credit Issuance and Sale	8
<hr/>	
<b>Long-Term Stewardship and Expectations</b>	<b>9</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>10</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11</b>



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


Carbon credits are a valuable tool to help landowners generate revenue to steward and maintain their property. Private landowners commit to protecting their forested property for forty years, working with a trusted environmental organization that can assist with the crediting process. Below is more about an opportunity to register your property with City Forest Credits to receive carbon credits which can be sold on the voluntary carbon market.

## CARBON CREDITS AND THE VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET (VCM)

Carbon credits represent verified climate benefits—in this case, **avoided emissions from preserving forests that might otherwise be lost to development**. These credits are sold on the **Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM)** to businesses and other organizations seeking to meet climate goals beyond regulatory requirements.

City Forest Credits (CFC) is a non-profit carbon registry that focuses specifically on **high-integrity, preservation-based forest carbon projects**, particularly those with strong local, urban, and community benefits. City Forest Credits has worked with over 30 environmental organizations across the U.S. to register forest preservation carbon projects.

For private landowners, participation in the VCM through CFC means:

-  **You continue to own your land with no restrictions to access or non-consumptive land use**
-  **You are committing to conserve forested acreage for 40 years**
-  **Generate revenue to help steward your land and create investible climate benefits that others can purchase**

Carbon markets can be complex, which is why landowners work with **experienced Project Operators** to manage the technical and administrative process. Learn more about the role of a Project Operator in the next section.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Understanding who is responsible for each part of the project is critical for trust, compliance, and long-term success.

## PRIVATE LANDOWNER (YOU)

As a landowner, your role includes:

- Owning and stewarding the forestland
- Deciding whether long-term or permanent conservation aligns with your goals
- Providing access, records, and documentation as needed
- Entering into legal agreements that protect the land for 40 years
- As part of the protection, you may not harvest timber or remove trees within the Project Area



**You do not manage carbon accounting, verification, or credit sales on your own. Work with a local land trust or environmental organization that can act as a Project Operator.**

## PROJECT OPERATOR (PO)

The Project Operator is the central coordinator of the carbon project. They:

- Design and implement the project under CFC rules
- Complete carbon documentation and submit applications
- Sign a contract with CFC for the project duration
- Act as your guide through a complex process
- Act as your guide throughout the crediting and sales process

The PO signs the Project Implementation Agreement (contract) with CFC and ensures all requirements are met. The PO may also sign a contract with you as the landowner to clearly establish roles and responsibilities.

# ELIGIBILITY—IS YOUR LAND A GOOD FIT?

## PRELIMINARY ELIGIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Not all forestland qualifies for a City Forest Credits preservation project. Your forest age, composition, and acreage can influence the carbon credits generated. Additionally, the zoning of the property is important and will impact the credit total because the project is based on possible development that could take place on the property but is avoided through land protection.

Early conversations typically assess:



### 1. GEOGRAPHIC ELIGIBILITY, INCLUDING PROXIMITY TO:

- URBAN AREAS OR CLUSTERS
- CITY OR TOWN BOUNDARIES
- REGIONAL PLANNING BOUNDARIES
- WATERSHEDS OR MUNICIPAL WATER PROTECTION LANDS



### 2. FOREST TYPE, AGE, AND ACREAGE



### 3. THREAT OF LOSS OF THE FOREST TO DEVELOPMENT



### 4. CURRENT ZONING CLASSIFICATION



### 5. ALIGNMENT WITH CONSERVATION GOALS

Your Project Operator may use an Initial Eligibility Survey to determine whether your land is a strong match.

# CARBON REVENUE—WHAT TO EXPECT (AND WHAT NOT TO EXPECT)

## IMPORTANT FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY FOR LANDOWNERS

Carbon credit revenue can support conservation, but it is not guaranteed.

Key points to understand early:

- **Credit estimates are projections, not promises.** The detailed credit total is determined during the crediting process and it includes a detailed review of local ordinances to determine possible development opportunities.
- **Market prices fluctuate.** Depending on the negotiation in the credit sale process, credits can sell at vastly different prices.
- **Strength of the VCM fluctuates.**
- **Revenue should be viewed as a complement to conservation goals, not the primary motivation.**

A Project Operator may provide an initial revenue estimate to help you evaluate whether the project aligns with your financial needs—but honest uncertainty is part of the process.

# THE LANDOWNER'S JOURNEY THROUGH A CARBON PROJECT

From a landowner's perspective, the process typically takes 6 months once the project application is approved by CFC. Typical steps include:

## STEP 1: INITIAL CONVERSATION

- Learn about CFC and carbon credits.
- Share your land goals and motivations.
- Ask questions about risks, benefits, and commitments.

## STEP 2: ELIGIBILITY CONFIRMATION

- PO assesses geographic and forest eligibility.
- PO assesses threat of loss test and willingness to protect forest for the long-term.
- Alignment with conservation outcomes is confirmed.

## STEP 3: CARBON CREDIT ESTIMATION

- PO gathers information from landowner about forest type, age, and eligible acreage.
- PO integrates threat of loss and avoided impervious surfaces based on zoning classification.
- Preliminary credit and revenue estimates are shared with the landowner.
- PO and landowner determine revenue split up front.

## STEP 4: APPLICATION TO CFC

- PO gathers information from a landowner and submits draft application to CFC.
- CFC reviews application. If the project is high-quality and meets all Preservation Protocol requirements, CFC approves project.
- PO will have 6 months to gather all relevant information for documentation and crediting process.

## STEP 5: PRESERVATION COMMITMENT AND DOCUMENTATION

- An important part of a carbon project is the Preservation Commitment. This is a legal document, such as a conservation easement, deed restriction, or a covenant, that protects the trees within the Project Area from being removed during the 40-year project duration.
- A land trust or conservation entity, likely the PO, holds the conservation easement or covenant.
- PO works on all other documentation requirements, including maps, deeds, and agreements with information from the landowner.
- Landowner signs an Agreement to Transfer Credits document with the PO. This is a legal document that lays out the rights and responsibilities between the landowner and the PO for the duration of the carbon project.

## STEP 6: DOCUMENTATION AND VALIDATION/VERIFICATION

- CFC completes validation to ensure project meets protocol requirements.
- Independent verification completed to ensure credibility.

## STEP 7: CREDIT ISSUANCE AND SALE

- Credits are registered with CFC.
- Credits will be marketed and sold, depending on agreements.
- Project Operator is responsible for selling all issued credits. A PO can't guarantee a specific timeframe for credits sales and it will depend on buyer interest.
- Credits are generally sold to local companies or organizations interested in offsetting their emissions and investing in local land conservation.

**Throughout the process, the Project Operator serves as your translator, coordinator, and guide.**

# LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP AND EXPECTATIONS

Once the project is complete, landowners commit to:

- **Maintaining forest canopy cover consistent with the preservation commitment**
- **Allowing periodic monitoring every three years by the PO**
- **Communicating changes in ownership or loss of forest**
- **These responsibilities protect both the land and the integrity of the carbon credits.**



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **Can I develop my property after enrolling in a carbon project?**

For the trees that are enrolled in the Project Area of a carbon project, those need to be protected for the entire duration of the contract. However, you don't have to enroll your entire property. If you know there are areas that you would like to develop in the next 40 years, they can be left out of the Project Area.

## **How long are the obligations of a carbon project?**

The landowner is signing up for a 40-year commitment to keep the mature forest enrolled in the carbon project protected and intact. It's important to discuss this project with your local land trust or environmental organization as some entities will only hold perpetual conservation easements.

## **What happens if some of the trees in the project are damaged or destroyed?**

If trees are lost in a carbon project, a 'reversal' is triggered. There are unavoidable reversals which include any reversal not due to the Project Operator's negligence, including, but not limited to disease, fire, drought, cold, ice/snow, wind/hurricane, flooding, earthquake, landslide, and volcano. CFC holds back 10% of credits from all projects to cover potential unavoidable loss.

A project can experience an avoidable reversal as well. This is any reversal caused by negligence, including intentionally harvesting, developing, or harming trees in the Project Area. The Project Operator is responsible for compensating for the reversed credits.

## **Are there fees associated with enrolling in a carbon project?**

Yes, there is a \$3,000 application fee and a \$3,000 verification fee. You as a landowner can discuss with the Project Operator about who would pay these fees and when the revenue generated from the project would be collected to reimburse this cost.

## **Can I still sell my property?**

Yes, you can still sell your property. You will need to disclose the preservation that protects the trees within a carbon project but you retain the rights to sell your property. The protections run with the land and are enforceable through the life of the project.

# CONCLUSION

Preservation carbon projects under City Forest Credits work best when landowners and Project Operators are aligned around a shared goal: long-term conservation with meaningful climate and community benefits.

This toolkit is designed to help private landowners:



**UNDERSTAND CARBON CREDITING IN ACCESSIBLE TERMS**



**EVALUATE WHETHER A PROJECT FITS THEIR LAND AND VALUES**



**ENGAGE CONFIDENTLY WITH PROJECT OPERATORS**



**ENTER THE PROCESS WITH REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND CLARITY**

When approached thoughtfully, carbon preservation projects can help landowners protect their land, support conservation financially, and contribute to credible climate solutions—without navigating the complexity alone.

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*City Forest Credits® is a nonprofit that empowers businesses to take local action to plant and protect trees through carbon offsets and impact certification.*

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