

Forestry Commission Great Britain

Developing the Woodland Carbon Code



Background and drivers

The potential for woodlands to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere while providing a host of other benefits for society and biodiversity is increasingly recognized in the UK. Many individuals and businesses wish to contribute to tree planting to help society soak up the carbon it emits. However, before investing in such projects, people want to be sure schemes will actually deliver the carbon savings that they claim.

The UK government is also interested in this issue, for two main reasons. Firstly, it wishes to ensure that the positive benefits of woodland creation don't become diminished by false claims about carbon savings. Secondly, it hopes to mobilize more private finance by increasing investor confidence. This will help to achieve the ambitious woodland creation targets that all four countries of the UK have set.

Through the Forestry Commission, the government has developed a Woodland Carbon Code to provide assurance in the voluntary carbon market.

Summary of the main code requirements

An accredited certification body, appointed by the independent UK Accreditation Service, will assess projects. Those that meet the code's requirements will be able to use the Woodland Carbon Code logo.

To do so, projects must:

- be registered with the Forestry Commission, stating the exact location of the new woodland and their long-term objectives
- meet national forestry standards as set out in the UK Forestry Standard to ensure they are sustainably and responsibly managed
- have a long-term management plan
- use standard methods for estimating the carbon that will be sequestered
- demonstrate additionality – that they will deliver carbon benefits that wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Methodology

Projects must register with the Forestry Commission, then organize assessment by one of the accredited certification bodies. Projects will only be able to claim carbon benefits once these have been realized, although finance may be provided up front to help initiate a project. Other protocols such as long-term carbon sequestration averages have been built into the code, so timber can still be harvested without undermining the carbon claims.

The code also requires a rigorous assessment of additionality at project level. Finally, the code includes an agreed method for applicants to report the benefits they are providing to society, to help deal with any potential false claims.

HOW TO OBTAIN THE WOODLAND CARBON CODE



Governance

The code has been developed using a multi-stakeholder process with full public consultation. The Forestry Commission has provided the capacity to develop the technical requirements, and consulted on all main proposals before finalizing the code. Forest Research, the Forestry Commission's research arm, has been crucial in providing models and protocols to ensure carbon estimates are accurate and include a full account of emissions from tree establishment and other forest operations.

Challenges

Developing a voluntary code for the UK has been challenging for two main reasons. Firstly, there is the interface with the compliance market, where it's not possible to trade carbon credits generated in the UK. The code has had to be clear and firm about what claims are legitimate via a voluntary route. Secondly, the development has been very technical – both in the science of overall carbon savings and in finding robust ways to demonstrate additionality and permanence.

Results

The code was piloted through 15 woodland creation projects across the UK. This pilot exercise will enable certification bodies to be appointed, and firm up the requirements of the code. It was launched UK-wide in summer 2011.

Only after the code is up and running will it be possible to judge its success. The code is about regularizing an emerging market; ultimately, its success will be dictated by market uptake.



More private carbon finance will help to achieve the UK's ambitious woodland creation targets.