

A Guide to Carbon Market Options for Family Forest Owners

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The carbon market is an exciting place these days. Landowners of all sizes are now able to generate revenue from carbon offsets, whereas entry to the market was formerly limited to large land holdings.

“Carbon offsets” is a buzzword floating around but what does it really mean? Not all carbon offsets are equal, neither in market value nor level of landowner commitment. So, for any interested landowner, it is necessary to consider some of the essential differences between programs as not all are the same.

What is the minimum acreage? Acreages as low as 40 can now participate in a few select programs like Forest Carbon Works, CORE Carbon, and NCAPIX, to name a few.


Are there any upfront costs to the landowner? How much time and effort is involved for the landowner? Most programs do not charge any fees to participate; however, all programs require landowners to assemble property information, such as maps. For a fee, some foresters may act as an agent for landowners to navigate the various programs and to submit information on their behalf. Both CORE Carbon and Forest Carbon Works advertise a free service directly to landowners.

What about payment, contracts, and independent oversight? The highest paid carbon credits currently available are those recognized by the California Air Resources Board. This is the gold standard in carbon credits, the most rigorous and widely recognized. Payments for viable projects range

from \$20 per acre per year to \$200 plus per acre per year. Under this standard, program contracts are for a 25-year crediting period, where the permanence of credited offsets is monitored for 100 years.

Other programs such as NCX have lesser time commitments, which may be favorable for some landowners, however without recognition from any third-party standard. Third-party recognition requires the independent verification of carbon offsets to ensure their integrity, and generally, buyers are willing to pay the most for verified carbon offsets. As all third-party standards prohibit landowners from participating in more than one program, landowners must carefully consider each program before making any commitments, even if for a single year.

Not least to consider are the additional impacts or co-benefits of participating in a program. Verified carbon offsets require multi-generational commitments to biodiversity and habitat conservation, cleaner air and water, and protected recreation areas. To truly realize these benefits as additional impacts, most programs require long-term contracts.

To compare programs side by side, we have assembled a table of carbon offset programs, prepared by programs’ stakeholders and Forest Carbon Works staff at the request of landowners. Forest Carbon Works is currently working with more than 1,000 landowners to provide access to carbon markets. For further information, please contact inquire@forestcarbonworks.com. 

Comparison of Forest Carbon Programs

| Program | Lead Organization(s) | Partners | Description | Independent Third-Party Approval | Status | Credits Sold | Credit Price (\$ per tco2e) | Compatibility Consideration | Term | Geography | Type of Support | Who is Eligible? |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|--|---|--|
| Forest Carbon Works | Forest Carbon Works | AXA Impact Fund | Landowners with a minimum of 40 acres are eligible for no-cost services, no fees for participants. Completes free carbon inventories of properties to determine eligibility and pays landowners annually for sequestering carbon. | California Air Resources Board (CARB) | Accounting methodology fully approved by CARB, projects verified by third-party auditors | Verified credits sold | \$13 ² | Exclusive crediting under CARB during project term | 25-year Crediting Period and 100-year Monitoring Period. 25-year Crediting Periods are renewable up to two times (75 years total) | Entire U.S. excluding Hawaii and parts of Alaska. Projects are currently underway in Oregon, Vermont, and Maine. Inventories have been completed in 15 states. | Forest Carbon Works membership benefits include: fully funded project development including inventory, verification, marketing, monitoring, and reporting; forestry services including forest management planning and harvest guidance; estate planning and conservation easement assistance | Landowners owning a minimum of 40 acres. Premium Membership options available for landowners owning 1,200+ acres |
| CORE Carbon | Finite Carbon | British Petroleum | CORE Carbon™ will enable landowners with as few as 40 acres to receive revenue from the sale of carbon offsets resulting from long term commitments to sustainable management. | American Carbon Registry (ACR) | No development process officially approved by ACR, no verified projects | Verified credits not yet sold | \$4 ¹ | Exclusive crediting under ACR during project term | 40-year project term | Entire U.S. will be rolled out in phases starting summer of 2021. | There is no cost to landowners. Participants receive technical assistance with all aspects of carbon project development and access to Finite Carbon’s free digital platform and mapping tools that facilitate program enrollment. | Family forest owners, non-industrial forest owners, and land trusts with at least 40 acres and a max of 5,000 acres. |
| NCAPIX/Natural Capital Exchange | NCX | Union Square Ventures and Version One, Microsoft | Transactional marketplace that allows sellers and buyers to submit bids and offers which are matched periodically. Platform is built over Silviaterra’s Basemap technology. | None | No development process officially approved by ACR, no verified projects. Concept | Unverified credits have been sold | Not publically available | Precludes future participation in ACR and CARB, potentially VCS | 1-year project term | Southeast U.S. in 2021, continental US thereafter. | There is no cost to landowners. NCX simply matches buyers and sellers, manages payments, and performs annual measurement. | All forest owners. |
| Family Forest Carbon Program | The American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy | Amazon | Provides incentive payments to eligible family forest owners (30 - 2,400 acres) to implement sustainable forestry practices that increase carbon sequestration and timber production. Carbon produced from land enrolled in the program is available for purchase in the form of verified carbon credits. | Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) | Accounting methodology not yet approved by VCS, no verified projects | Verified credits not yet sold | \$4 ¹ | Exclusive crediting under VCS during project term | Landowners commit to 10-20 year agreements, depending on the practice | A pilot is underway in northwest and central Pennsylvania. Expanding throughout Mid-Atlantic States, New England, and Lake states in 2021. | Funding (incentive payments to implement practices) and expert assistance with project development, forest management planning, verification | Family forest owners with 30-2,400 acres |