



A New Finance Mechanism to Scale the Conservation of High Integrity Tropical Forests

Creating a New Finance Mechanism for Forests

The High Integrity Forest (HIFOR_{sw}) Initiative is creating a new finance mechanism for the conservation of high integrity tropical forests — i.e., those that are largely undegraded. HIFOR may be thought of as finance for “preventive care” for healthy forests. It is distinct from forms of forest finance like REDD+, which are designed as “urgent care” funding for forests that are already suffering substantial deforestation and degradation or, at a minimum, are imminently threatened. Both urgent and preventive care are needed along with “remedial care”, i.e., forest restoration.

High integrity forests are responsible for keeping the Earth at least 0.5°C cooler than it would be without them. That difference, for example between 1.5 and 2 degrees of global warming, has an estimated impact on the global economy in the trillions of dollars. But the value of forests that provide that cooling is currently priced at zero.

The HIFOR Initiative aims to directly correct that market failure by introducing a new financial mechanism — the HIFOR unit — which represents one hectare of well maintained, high integrity tropical forest.

Associated with this unit are metrics that quantify:

- Biodiversity conservation benefits, in terms of the number of hectares of high biodiversity forest maintained with high integrity.
- Climate regulation benefits, in terms of the number of tons of net CO₂ removals from forest biomass growth.

The HIFOR unit also embodies other environmental services including:

- A “biophysical cooling” effect (separate from CO₂ absorption) that adds an extra 50% to its cooling value.
- Social benefits associated with ensuring that payments for these ecosystem services benefit local communities, including Indigenous Peoples.

A single investment,
with multiple benefits:

750 million

hectares of high integrity tropical
forest across Africa, Latin America,
Asia, and Oceania

1.8 billion

tons of CO₂ removal from
the atmosphere per year

At least **36%**

of the world's main blocks of
high integrity forest are managed
by Indigenous Peoples



Investment from a different perspective

Existing financing mechanisms for forests, including REDD+, do not explicitly focus on high integrity forest areas because the threats to them are too distant to “count” in carbon credit markets. Those markets require interventions to influence net land-use change emissions rather than to maintain the continued delivery of ecosystem services such as net absorption of CO₂.

WCS is leading the development of the HIFOR Initiative and is working with partners on the development of an initial set of HIFOR pilots as well as the design of a system to enable scaling of this initiative. The HIFOR methodology has been reviewed by a group of internal and external experts and will be applied to two initial HIFOR pilots in Brazil and Republic of Congo.

HIFOR units are not carbon credits, which are the credits issued by REDD+ projects. In the context of beyond value chain mitigation, HIFOR investors or purchasers could claim quantitative contribution to global climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation but could not count their claim against a corporate net zero commitment or to offset damage to biodiversity caused by their operations.

For example, some corporations count their purchases of REDD+ credits against their net zero claims since those credits are verified to represent emission reductions that would not have occurred without the project interventions. In contrast, HIFOR offtake purchasers would pay for maintaining ongoing ecosystem services in a high integrity forest, which does not convey offset value.

At UNFCCC CoP 27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, the Forests and Climate Leaders' Partnership, a “coalition of the willing” of 27 countries and the European Union, identified high integrity forests as one of six action areas for accelerated implementation.

At CoP 27, WCS and the state of Amazonas, Brazil signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the first HIFOR pilot in the Mamirauá and Amanã Sustainable Development Reserves, covering 3.6 million hectares of high integrity tropical forest. Between 2010 and 2020 the two reserves combined absorbed over 6.4 million tons of CO₂ annually. There are 12,000 people living in and around the Reserves who depend on nature-based economies for their livelihoods.

At CoP 28, WCS signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of the second HIFOR pilot in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, Republic of Congo. This area of 400,000 hectares is one of the last untouched areas of intact forest in the world.

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