July 2026

Comparison of the HIFOR Methodology (v2.1) with the 2025 High Level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market

Contents

Executive Summary

This report evaluates the alignment between version 2.1 of the High Integrity Forest Investment Initiative (HIFOR) Methodology and the 2025 High Level Principles (HLPs) to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market, developed by the World Economic Forum, the Biodiversity Credit Alliance, and the International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits. The assessment examines the extent to which HIFOR aligns with emerging international best practice for high-integrity biodiversity crediting.

HIFOR is a nature crediting standard of the ‘maintenance’ or ‘stewardship’ type designed to mobilise finance for the conservation of high-integrity tropical forests through the issuance of tradable HIFOR units. These units represent hectares of effectively conserved, high-integrity tropical forest within large management areas and include an associated climate metric based on net CO_2 removal. Unlike biodiversity or carbon offsets, HIFOR units support contributory rather than compensatory claims and are intended to finance long-term stewardship rather than offset environmental impacts.

The assessment demonstrates a high degree of alignment between HIFOR and the HLP framework. Excluding six requirements within the 21 HLPs that were assessed as not applicable to stewardship-based credits, HIFOR fully aligns with 71 of 83 requirements (86%), partially aligns with seven (8%), and does not align with five (6%). Overall, the methodology is broadly consistent with emerging standards for high-integrity biodiversity markets.

Strong alignment is evident across all three HLP categories. Within the category of ‘verified positive outcomes for nature’, HIFOR includes robust requirements for financial additionality, third-party auditing, monitoring, durability, and transparent credit issuance. Within the ‘social equity and fairness’ category, the methodology includes comprehensive safeguards covering legal and customary land rights, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' participation, benefit sharing, and grievance mechanisms. The ‘governance’ provisions similarly align closely with HLP expectations regarding transparency, stakeholder participation, data sovereignty, and interoperability with other market frameworks.

Areas of partial alignment primarily reflect differences in emphasis rather than fundamental inconsistencies. HIFOR deliberately places relatively limited requirements on buyers, does not explicitly address large-scale leakage beyond project boundaries, and does not yet include detailed supplementary guidance on topics such as FPIC implementation, locally led monitoring approaches, and project-level risk management. Some of these gaps arise because HIFOR remains in an early implementation phase with only three pilot projects underway. Others represent deliberate design choices based on the view that project-specific approaches are preferable to prescriptive, one-size-fits-all requirements.

The principal areas of non-alignment relate to HLP requirements concerning buyer obligations under the mitigation hierarchy, the quantification of leakage, prescriptive benefit-sharing procedures, and mechanisms for redistributing profits from secondary market trading. In most cases, HIFOR intentionally adopts alternative approaches that it considers more appropriate for stewardship-based credits or seeks to avoid requirements that could reduce market demand or project viability without delivering commensurate benefits to projects or local stakeholders.

Overall, the review concludes that HIFOR demonstrates substantial alignment with the 2025 High Level Principles and provides a credible framework for stewardship-based biodiversity finance. As both HIFOR and the HLPs continue to evolve, further convergence is likely through iterative refinement informed by implementation experience and emerging market practice.

Introduction

The High Integrity Forest Investment Initiative (HIFOR, www.hifor.org) seeks to mobilise finance for the conservation of high-integrity forest landscapes by providing tangible incentives for the maintenance of their nature- and climate-positive attributes to forest stewards (including governments, Indigenous Peoples and local communities), through the issuance of tradable HIFOR units.

A growing number of biodiversity crediting systems have emerged in recent years. HIFOR aims to establish itself as a high-quality standard within this evolving market. In May 2025, the High Level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market (HLPs)[1] were published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), in collaboration with the Biodiversity Credit Alliance (BCA) and the International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits (IAPB). Although the HLPs are not a formal certification standard, they represent an important statement of emerging international consensus on the characteristics of high-integrity biodiversity credit markets.

Demonstrating a high degree of alignment with the HLPs is expected to increase confidence that a biodiversity crediting standard delivers robust environmental and social outcomes, thereby strengthening buyer confidence and supporting the sustainable development of the market.

The purpose of this report is to assess the alignment between version 2.1 of the HIFOR Methodology (released in March 2026) and the HLPs. It highlights areas of close alignment, identifies areas of divergence, and discusses the reasons for these differences. The assessment relates only to the current versions of the two documents and does not take account of future revisions to either framework.

Overview of the Two Frameworks Being Compared

Overview of HIFOR

The High Integrity Forest Investment Initiative (HIFOR) is a stewardship-based nature crediting standard developed by the Wildlife Conservation Society with input from a broad range of partner organisations and technical experts.

Two key normative documents define the HIFOR framework:

1. the HIFOR Program Guide and Standard, which sets out the programme's objectives, principles, governance arrangements, procedures and definitions; and

2. the HIFOR Methodology, which specifies the requirements that Project Proponents shall meet to quantify, generate, and enable the issuance of HIFOR units.

HIFOR utilises the Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII)[2], together with additional eligibility criteria defined in the Methodology, to identify forest areas that are eligible to generate HIFOR units. A HIFOR Project Proponent shall demonstrate that a comprehensive intervention strategy for the Project Area and an adjacent Extended Project Zone exists, that all relevant safeguards are being applied, and that effective interventions aimed at conserving high-integrity forests are being undertaken.

[1] WEF, BCA & IAPB (2025) High Level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market. World Economic Forum, Biodiversity Credit Alliance and International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits.

[2] Grantham *et al.* (2020) Anthropogenic modification of forests means only 40% of remaining forests have high ecosystem integrity. *Nature Communications*, 11(1), 5978. https://www.forestintegrity.com/.

A HIFOR unit represents a hectare of well-conserved, high-integrity tropical forest within an effectively and equitably managed HIFOR Accounting Area (HAA) over a five-year reporting period. The unit serves as an indicator of nature-positive outcomes achieved through the conservation of high-biodiversity ecosystems. Each HIFOR unit is also associated with the number of tons of net CO_2 removal from the atmosphere (as a climate-positive indicator for climate change mitigation impact).

Buyers of HIFOR units may make non-compensatory claims regarding their contribution to achieving global net zero and global nature positive goals. HIFOR units may not be utilised for compensatory claims such as carbon- or biodiversity-offsetting because they do not aspire to meet offset market requirements of formal adherence to additionality and permanence definitions or leakage estimates.

HIFOR remains at an early stage of implementation. Three pilot projects are currently underway in Brazil, Colombia, and the Republic of Congo, and experience from these pilots will inform the continued development of the Standard.

Overview of the HLPs

The High Level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market (HLPs) are currently published as a guidance framework rather than a formal certification standard. Nevertheless, they carry considerable authority because they have been developed collaboratively by leading international organisations and reflect an emerging consensus on good practice for high-integrity biodiversity credit markets.

There are 21 HLPs, grouped in the source document into three broad categories:

- Verified positive outcomes for nature
- Equity and fairness for people
- Good governance for high-integrity markets

Although the current HLPs include some demand-side considerations, these are not yet fully developed. A dedicated working group is developing additional guidance on demand-side integrity and the appropriate use of biodiversity credits [3].

Each HLP consists of a broad principle (for example, Leakage or Benefit-sharing) supported by a number of specific requirements. This assessment evaluates alignment at the level of these individual requirements rather than at the level of the principles themselves.

Findings of the comparison

Overview

The detailed assessment presented in the Annex shows that HIFOR aligns with the vast majority of the requirements set out in the HLPs. Table 1 summarises these findings. Each requirement was assessed as fully aligned ('Yes'), partially aligned ('Partial'), not aligned ('No') or not applicable ('n/a').

[3] The published version notes that topics to be covered by future demand-side integrity guidance include but are not limited to: – If biodiversity credits are considered as part of compensation or offsetting of any loss (current, historic or indirect), the need for equivalence in both type and amount of biodiversity. - The development of comparable units for corporate biodiversity footprints and biodiversity credits. – Different requirements for development of, and claims associated with the purchase of, “uplift and avoided loss” biodiversity credits versus “maintenance” credits.’ – Further guidelines on claims and tradability of biodiversity credits. – A process for verification of implementation of the above by buyers of credits.

Excluding the six requirements that were considered not applicable to stewardship-based credits, HIFOR was found to fully align with 71 of 83 requirements (86%), partially align with seven (8%), and not align with five (6%). Twelve of the 21 HLPs demonstrate complete alignment across all applicable requirements, while the remaining nine contain one or more areas of partial or non-alignment.

Table 1 Summary of Alignment Between HIFOR and the HLPs

HLP	Yes	Partial	No	n/a
	71	**7**	**5**	**6**
1	8			1
2		1	1	
3	5			
4	3			2
5	1			2
6				1
7	4			
8		1	1	
9	5	1		
10	4	1		
11	3			
12	5			
13	4	1		
14	2	1		
15	7	1		
16	4		2	
17	2			
18	6			
19	5			
20	2			
21	1		1	

Note: 'n/a' means that a given requirement within an HLP was assessed as not applicable to the maintenance/stewardship category of units that includes HIFOR.

A key consideration when interpreting these results is that the HLPs explicitly recognise two complementary categories of biodiversity credits:

1. Avoided loss and restoration credits, which quantify biodiversity outcomes relative to a baseline or counterfactual scenario; and
2. Maintenance (or stewardship) credits, such as HIFOR, which quantify the successful conservation of existing biodiversity over a defined period.

The HLPs therefore recognise stewardship credits as a legitimate and distinct category of biodiversity finance. Both categories are needed to achieve global biodiversity and climate objectives, but they serve different purposes and are likely to appeal to different segments of the market. Consequently, some HLP requirements are not relevant to stewardship-based approaches and were therefore assessed as not applicable in this review.

HIFOR already demonstrates a high level of alignment with emerging guidance for high-integrity biodiversity markets. As with most standards, however, the framework will continue to evolve through periodic review and revision. Experience gained through implementation, together with developments in international guidance and market practice, will inform future updates to both the Methodology and supporting documentation.

Similarly, the HLPs are expected to continue evolving as biodiversity markets mature. Continued refinement of both frameworks is therefore likely to result in even closer alignment over time.

Areas of Close Alignment Between HIFOR and the HLPs

The assessment identified numerous areas in which HIFOR closely aligns with the High Level Principles. Selected examples are presented below to illustrate the breadth of this alignment. A comprehensive assessment, including references to the relevant sections of the HIFOR Methodology and Guide and Standard, is provided in the Annex.

Verified Positive Outcomes for Nature

HLP 5: Additionality

HIFOR's applicability conditions are consistent with the form of additionality that the HLPs consider appropriate for stewardship-based biodiversity credits. Specifically, long-term conservation finance must be directed towards areas that are not under immediate threat, thereby supporting the sustained maintenance of biodiversity outcomes while recognising the contribution of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to biodiversity conservation.

HLP 10: Third-party Audits

The HIFOR Guide and Standard establishes an independent audit process that closely reflects the corresponding HLP requirements. In particular:

- biodiversity credit projects must be validated and verified by suitably qualified and independent third-party auditors;
- audits are required at project inception and subsequently at a minimum of five-year intervals; and
- auditors must possess the necessary expertise and operate independently, with appropriate safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest.

HIFOR also demonstrates strong alignment with the remaining principles in this category, including Defined Biodiversity Objectives and Activity Types (HLP 1), Credit Issuance and Tracking (HLP 3), Ex-ante and Ex-post Credits (HLP 4), Durability (HLP 7), and Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (HLP 9). HLP 6 (Baselines) is not applicable to stewardship-based credits because HIFOR does not rely on counterfactual baselines. The reasons for the partial alignment with HLP 2 (Demand Integrity and the Mitigation Hierarchy) and HLP 8 (Leakage) are discussed later in this report.

Equity and Fairness for People

HLP 11: Legal and Customary Land and Water Rights

HIFOR incorporates comprehensive requirements relating to legal and customary land and water rights through its applicability conditions, safeguards and project planning requirements. Project

Proponents must demonstrate the legal and customary authority to implement a project. Where Indigenous Peoples or local communities hold customary or other rights that overlap with the project area, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) must be obtained, irrespective of whether those rights are formally recognised by national law.

Project Proponents are also required to undertake appropriate due diligence, including identifying historical or ongoing disputes relating to land or water rights and ensuring that any such disputes are addressed in a manner consistent with the principles of FPIC.

HLP 13: Free, Prior and Informed Consent

Project proponents should receive the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples and local communities for each stage of a project, following or exceeding a published source of best practices. Ongoing engagement of stakeholders should be secured throughout the duration of the project. All identified potential risks and benefits associated with projects should be accurate, clear, objective, and accessible to Indigenous Peoples and local communities and should be documented as part of the FPIC process.

HIFOR also aligns closely with the remaining principles within this category, including Respecting Human Rights and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (HLP 12), Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Involvement in Governance (HLP 14), No Harm (HLP 15), Benefit-sharing (HLP 16), and Grievance Mechanisms (HLP 17).

Good Governance for High-integrity Markets

HLP 18: Transparent Governance Structure

HIFOR requires project governance arrangements to include stakeholders with legal or customary rights within, or adjacent to, the project area. Governance structures must also provide for the effective participation of relevant stakeholders, taking account of gender and other groups that may otherwise be under-represented.

The framework also requires transparent disclosure of project ownership, accountability arrangements, project design, unit ownership and any overlaps with Indigenous lands. Relevant project information must be made publicly available, including in local languages where appropriate.

HLP 19: Data Sovereignty

The HIFOR safeguards set out clear, auditable requirements relating to data sovereignty, ensuring, for example, that 'Indigenous Peoples and local communities have rights to govern the collection, management, access, interpretation, dissemination and reuse of data related to them on Indigenous or traditional lands, territories, seas, waters, and oceans.' If a project proponent collects sensitive data with consent (e.g., names, addresses or other personal details), it must be managed appropriately and consistent with data privacy laws, and sensitive data about biodiversity is also subject to rules that avoid increasing threat to sensitive species or habitats.

HIFOR also demonstrates strong alignment with Alignment with Frameworks (HLP 20) and Tradability (HLP 21).

Areas of Partial Alignment Between HIFOR and the HLPs

The assessment identified seven requirements for which HIFOR was assessed as partially aligned with the HLPs. In two cases, partial alignment reflects the absence of supplementary guidance documents rather than differences in the underlying requirements. In the remaining five cases, the differences relate to substantive aspects of the HIFOR approach. The areas of partial alignment are summarised below.

HLP 2: Demand Integrity and the Mitigation Hierarchy

HIFOR partially aligns with the HLP requirement that biodiversity credit schemes establish clear rules governing claims and buyer eligibility to ensure consistency with the mitigation hierarchy.

HIFOR clearly restricts the use of HIFOR units to contributory (non-compensatory) claims, and supplementary guidance on claims has been published[4]. However, the Standard does not establish additional demand-side requirements, such as requiring buyers to demonstrate application of the mitigation hierarchy.

This reflects a deliberate design choice. HIFOR considers such requirements to be less relevant for stewardship-based units that support contributory claims than for offset mechanisms, where compensatory claims depend more directly on buyer behaviour.

HLP 8: Leakage

HIFOR partially aligns with the HLP requirement that project proponents assess and mitigate leakage beyond the project boundary.

The methodology addresses leakage within management units and across the Extended Project Zone by requiring comprehensive conservation planning and prohibiting the exclusion of portions of management units from project accounting.

However, HIFOR does not require assessment of broader landscape-scale leakage beyond the Extended Project Zone. This reflects the expectation that, for the types of high-integrity forest landscapes eligible under HIFOR, such leakage is likely to be limited over the short to medium term.

HLP 9: Monitoring, Reporting and Verification

HIFOR partially aligns with the HLP requirement that methodologies explain how uncertainty and reversals are addressed when converting monitoring results into crediting units.

The methodology clearly describes the relationship between ecological metrics and HIFOR units. However, uncertainty associated with the Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII) is not explicitly quantified because the index is a dimensionless composite metric. Similarly, the concept of reversals is not directly applicable, as HIFOR units certify completed periods of successful stewardship rather than permanent biodiversity outcomes.

[4] https://hifor.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WCS_HIFOR_ESG.pdf

HLP 10: Third-party Audits

HIFOR partially aligns with the HLP requirement that audit systems remain proportionate and accessible for locally led or small-scale projects.

The methodology already minimises monitoring costs through the use of the publicly available FLII, reducing the need for expensive primary biodiversity surveys. Although independent small-scale projects are not currently eligible under HIFOR (minimum size 100,000 ha), they may participate through grouped projects that share monitoring costs.

At present, however, the methodology does not include specific provisions for simplified or decentralised verification approaches tailored to locally led projects. Whether such approaches are required will be evaluated as implementation experience is gained.

HLP 13: Free, Prior and Informed Consent

HIFOR requires Project Proponents to implement FPIC in accordance with recognised best practice.

Rather than prescribing a single mandatory procedure, however, the methodology requires Project Proponents to identify and apply an appropriate body of recognised good practice that reflects the local context. This approach recognises that FPIC implementation varies across jurisdictions and continues to evolve internationally.

Consequently, HIFOR aligns closely with the intent of the HLP requirement but not with its more prescriptive wording.

HLP 14: Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Involvement in Governance

HIFOR has benefited from extensive input from independent experts, including Indigenous Peoples and local community representatives, during its development and subsequent revisions.

However, the governance framework does not currently include a formal advisory body with permanent independent IP&LC representation, as envisaged by the HLPs. As the programme matures, the establishment of such a body may be considered.

At the project level, however, HIFOR includes robust requirements to ensure equitable and meaningful participation through governance arrangements, benefit-sharing, and FPIC.

HLP 15: No Harm

HIFOR incorporates substantive safeguards addressing environmental and social risks associated with project implementation.

The area of partial alignment relates solely to the absence of detailed supplementary guidance on due diligence, risk assessment and mitigation procedures beyond the normative documents.

Given the early stage of programme implementation and the limited number of pilot projects, HIFOR has not yet developed separate guidance materials on these topics. Such guidance may be introduced as the programme evolves.

Areas of Non-Alignment Between HIFOR and the HLPs

The assessment identified five HLP requirements with which HIFOR does not align. In each case, the difference reflects either the distinct characteristics of stewardship-based credits or a deliberate design decision intended to support market uptake and long-term project viability. The principal areas of non-alignment are summarised below.

HLP 2: Demand Integrity and the Mitigation Hierarchy

The HLPs recommend that buyers of biodiversity credits should develop and publicly disclose a nature strategy, apply the mitigation hierarchy and align their use of biodiversity credits with emerging guidance on nature-positive corporate action.

HIFOR does not impose these requirements on buyers. Instead, the standard focuses on defining the claims that may legitimately be made by owners of HIFOR units and restricts those claims to contributory, non-compensatory uses.

This reflects the view that stewardship-based units differ fundamentally from offset mechanisms. Because HIFOR units cannot be used to compensate for environmental impacts, broader corporate behavioural requirements are considered outside the scope of the standard.

HLP 8: Leakage

The HLPs recommend that biodiversity credit schemes publish detailed guidance for assessing and documenting primary leakage beyond project boundaries.

HIFOR does not include requirements to quantify or report landscape-scale leakage. This reflects the design of the methodology, which focuses on long-term stewardship of high-integrity forest landscapes where the principal threats are generally expected to occur over longer timescales than those typically addressed by avoided-loss or restoration approaches.

Accordingly, HIFOR does not consider quantified leakage estimates to be necessary to support the claims associated with HIFOR units.

HLP 16: Benefit-sharing

HIFOR does not fully align with two benefit-sharing requirements.

First, the HLPs recommend that biodiversity credit schemes provide detailed guidance, tools and procedures for establishing equitable benefit-sharing arrangements. HIFOR currently requires Project Proponents to develop benefit-sharing arrangements consistent with recognised good practice but does not yet provide dedicated guidance documents. This reflects the early stage of implementation of the programme and the limited number of pilot projects. More detailed guidance may be developed as implementation experience grows.

Second, the HLPs recommend that the proportion of benefits distributed to Indigenous Peoples and local communities should be maximised. HIFOR adopts a different approach. Rather than prescribing a particular distribution of benefits, the methodology requires benefit-sharing arrangements to be developed through consultation and FPIC, while also demonstrating that the project remains financially viable over the long term and delivers meaningful socio-economic benefits to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

This approach recognises that benefit-sharing involves balancing multiple objectives, including effective conservation management, long-term financial sustainability and equitable outcomes for all stakeholders.

HLP 21: Tradability

The HLPs recommend that an appropriate proportion of profits from secondary market trading should be returned to project proponents through benefit-sharing arrangements.

HIFOR does not include this requirement. While acknowledging the objective of increasing financial returns to projects, the methodology takes the view that requiring mandatory redistribution of secondary trading profits could reduce market demand by increasing transaction complexity and limiting incentives for buyers.

Should future experience demonstrate that such mechanisms improve conservation outcomes without materially reducing demand, they could be considered in future revisions of the standard.

Annex – Detailed Comparison Between the Two Frameworks

Alignment of HIFOR with each requirement of the HLP is graded as full ('YES'), PARTIAL, mostly or wholly not aligned ('NO'), or not applicable ('n/a'). The rationale for grades is given for each. Of the 89 requirements, 6 are not applicable. Of the remaining 83, HIFOR aligns fully with 71, partially with 7 (marked in yellow below) and not at all with 5 (marked in orange below).

1.1 Verified Positive Outcomes for Nature

HLP 1: Defined Biodiversity Objectives and Activity Types

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
A. Defined biodiversity objectives	
Project proponents must define specific intended objectives, regarding how the project will benefit biodiversity. This should normally mean conserving or restoring natural features (such as species) and/or ecological processes or restoring towards a natural state for the location (see HLP 15B).	YES Applicability Condition 4 requires Project Proponents to define clear biodiversity objectives for the project, including the conservation of high ecological integrity.
Project proponents must prepare a credible Theory of Change that intends to achieve the defined specific objectives of the Project. The Theory of Change must be endorsed by the Governance body of the Project (HLP 18).	YES Section 6.3(2i) requires Project Proponents to develop a Theory of Change describing how project activities will achieve the project's biodiversity objectives, subject to approval by the Project Governance Body.
The choice of biodiversity indicators used to track the specified objectives must be documented and disclosed including how the chosen indicators are proxies for other biodiversity values if relevant, and evidence that the indicators are responsive to the planned project activities.	YES Section 7 specifies the primary biodiversity outcome indicators and provides the rationale for their selection.
[S]chemes must ensure adequate safeguards to prevent projects from causing harm to biodiversity in line with HLP 15B (i.e., Biodiversity credit projects must cause no harm to broader communities, nature and climate).	YES Safeguards 3.1–3.13 establish requirements to prevent adverse impacts on biodiversity, consistent with this principle.
Projections of how project plans may impact upon nature should be reviewed as part of the audit process.	YES Safeguards 1.2 and 3.1–3.13 require project proponents to identify and address potential adverse impacts on nature, and these are subject to independent audit.
Schemes that allow crediting for restoration of biodiversity to a non-natural state should provide clear criteria for when this is acceptable and establish additional safeguards to ensure alignment with global goals.	n/a Restoration is not currently a part of the HIFOR system.
B. Activity types	
Any non-extractive activity that does not result in environmental harm and results in measurable, durable and additional biodiversity benefits	YES This statement is framed as guidance rather than a normative requirement. HIFOR is consistent with this guidance.

attributed to the project is permitted, so long as it aligns with these principles.	
"Uplift and avoided loss" credits should be distinct from "maintenance" credits.	YES HIFOR defines itself as a maintenance crediting system (Methodology Section 1; Guide and Standard v1.1, Section 2.3).
Stacking and bundling of biodiversity credits with other ecosystem services should only be allowed if adequate transparency measures can be put in place to safeguard against double counting and ensure additionality.	YES HIFOR defines the limited circumstances in which co-location with other environmental units is permitted (Guide and Standard v1.1, Section 2.5).

HLP 2: Demand Integrity & the Mitigation Hierarchy

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes should define and publish clear rules around claims and entry requirements to ensure credits are purchased and retired in alignment with the mitigation hierarchy and with nature positive outcomes	PARTIAL HIFOR restricts claims to contributory (i.e. non-compensatory) claims, and supplementary guidance on claims has been published[5]. However, the methodology does not establish demand-side requirements for buyers, including alignment with the mitigation hierarchy. The rationale for this design choice is discussed in the main text.
While guidelines are still in development, buyers should as a minimum: – Develop and maintain a robust nature strategy – Apply the principles of the mitigation hierarchy. – Publicly disclose their approach to the above. Buyers of biodiversity credits should be proactive in enacting the above guidelines. Their nature strategy should be aligned with emerging guidance regarding corporate approaches to nature positive and contributions towards the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).	NO HIFOR does not establish demand-side requirements for buyers, such as the development of corporate nature strategies, application of the mitigation hierarchy or related disclosure requirements. The rationale for this approach is discussed in the main text.

HLP 3: Credit Issuance and Tracking

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credits must be issued and tracked by third parties, independent from the project proponents.	YES HIFOR will create a relevant registry.
Biodiversity credit schemes should use transparent, independent and digitally accessible registries that uniquely identify, record and track projects.	YES HIFOR will create a relevant registry.
Biodiversity credit registries should track the issuance of credits and transactions, while securely and unambiguously retiring credits to avoid double counting and guarantee transparency and rigor	YES The registry will include these functions.

[5] https://hifor.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WCS_HIFOR_ESG.pdf

Biodiversity credit registries should require the collection and sharing of accurate georeferenced location data for project areas to avoid double counting with other project proponents and registries	YES The registry will include these functions.
Credit schemes must publicly disclose the mechanism by which the measures of biodiversity are converted into a defined quantity of credits (see also HLP 9)	YES The Methodology specifies how ecological metrics are translated into HIFOR units, providing a transparent basis for unit issuance.

HLP 4: Ex-ante & Ex-post Credits

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
…any ex-ante assessment of likely credits to be generated should be conservative, verified and dynamically adjusted ex-post.	YES HIFOR does not recognise the issuance of ex-ante credits. However, the Methodology requires conservative estimates of the likely generation of future HIFOR units for project planning purposes. These estimates are subject to validation and subsequent verification and therefore align with the intent of this requirement.
Biodiversity credit schemes should ensure that they follow a conservative methodology ex-ante to be adjusted ex-post (e.g., buffer pools).	YES The Methodology requires conservative projections of future HIFOR unit generation, which are subsequently verified.
Ex-ante credits successfully undergoing a third-party validation ex-post, can have their associated claims exerted and be retired. Where possible, it is preferable to allow investors to buy the rights to potential future credits that are predicted to be generated by the project, rather than selling ex-ante credits.	n/a HIFOR does not recognise ex-ante credits. Where forward sales occur, they relate only to the future delivery of verified ex-post HIFOR units.
Credits issued during the life of the project should be conservative considering the fluctuations of natural systems.	YES The primary HIFOR metrics are based largely on anthropogenic pressures and are therefore relatively insensitive to natural fluctuations. The associated climate metric includes provisions to account for natural variability.
Schemes should ensure that they provide clear guidance on the claims and communications that buyers can make, including differentiating between ex-ante credits, and the purchase of verified credits ex-post.	n/a Because HIFOR does not recognise ex-ante credits, this requirement is not applicable. Where forward transactions occur, they relate solely to the future delivery of verified ex-post HIFOR units.

HLP 5: Additionality

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
An uplift or avoided loss biodiversity credit project should be considered additional if the following statement is fulfilled: Additionality is fulfilled by improved biodiversity outcomes, including those relating to the conservation of a species, habitat or ecosystem under threat that would not have happened in the project’s absence (i.e., known threats to the ecosystem can only be mitigated if conservation work is ongoing).	n/a HIFOR is a stewardship-based (maintenance) crediting standard and therefore this requirement is not applicable.
A maintenance biodiversity credit project should be considered additional if long-term sustainable funding that ensures the long-term maintenance of conservation outcomes is provided to areas not under immediate threat (e.g., Indigenous Peoples’ lands), including recognizing the contribution of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to biodiversity protection.	YES Applicability Condition 7 requires long-term, sustainable finance to support the maintenance of biodiversity outcomes in areas that are not under immediate threat, consistent with the HLP definition of additionality for stewardship-based credits.
Biodiversity credit schemes must ensure against the deliberate degradation of biodiversity in order to make a later case for additionality. This should include a cut-off date for uplift credits, from which date degradation or conversion cannot have taken place.	n/a This requirement applies to avoided loss and restoration crediting approaches and is therefore not applicable to stewardship-based credits such as HIFOR.

HLP 6: Baselines

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes should require robust, scientifically credible baselines. Baseline methodology should cover the following: – Selection of representative control sites or counterfactuals, e.g., exposed to the same level of pressures on biodiversity as the project site. – Any ex-ante predictions of biodiversity gains should be conservative (see HLP 4). – Use of temporal data to inform the selection of an appropriate baseline. – Incentives to collect a variety of relevant data, in both the project site and the control site(s) if applicable, to ensure changes in biodiversity can be verified through a number of sources.	n/a As a stewardship-based (maintenance) crediting standard, HIFOR does not rely on counterfactual baselines.

HLP 7: Durability

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes must achieve positive biodiversity outcomes that are durable and sustainable over the long-term to be considered credits. The timeframe of durability must be transparently disclosed.	YES HIFOR requires projects to have a minimum duration of 30 years (Section 3.2.2) and to demonstrate long-term ecological and financial viability

	(Applicability Condition 2.1; Section 7). HIFOR units represent verified stewardship outcomes over a defined period and therefore do not imply permanence.
The project must have adequate financial, technical capacity to ensure durability.	YES Section 6.3 (4–5) of the methodology requires Project Proponents to demonstrate the financial and technical capacity necessary to deliver long-term project outcomes.
Schemes must provide evidence of reasonable confidence that the project activity can be legally maintained for the promised timeframe.	YES Applicability Condition 2.1 and Section 7 of the methodology require evidence that the project can be maintained legally and operationally over the required timeframe.
Where ongoing effort is required to maintain biodiversity outcomes, schemes can offer ongoing, regular biodiversity credit payments to stewards of biodiversity that continue to deliver and maintain demonstrated biodiversity outcomes.	YES HIFOR allows new units to be issued at five-year intervals, enabling continued financial support for demonstrated stewardship outcomes.

HLP 8: Leakage

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Project proponents should be required to assess and take steps to mitigate leakage i.e. the potential for their project to lead to the displacement of activities that harm biodiversity in the project area to areas outside the project	PARTIAL HIFOR addresses potential leakage within management units and the Extended Project Zone through requirements for comprehensive project design and effective conservation interventions. However, the methodology does not require the assessment or mitigation of broader landscape-scale leakage beyond the Extended Project Zone, as such leakage is expected to be limited for the types of high-integrity forest landscapes eligible under HIFOR.
Biodiversity credit schemes should publish clear and transparent guidance for project proponents to assess and document local leakage, in the vicinity of project areas i.e. the displacement of activities in the project area to areas outside the project at least for primary leakage	NO The HIFOR methodology does not require the quantification or reporting of primary leakage beyond the Project Area or Extended Project Zone. This reflects the scope of the claims supported by HIFOR units, which do not depend on quantified leakage estimates.

HLP 9: Monitoring, Reporting and Verification

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance

Quantification of biodiversity outcomes must be underpinned by sound scientific methods to a level of rigor sufficient to detect meaningful change in biodiversity and should take account of best available technologies, techniques, metrics and sampling design	YES The Methodology uses the published Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII) as its primary measure of ecological integrity, providing a scientifically robust and transparent basis for quantifying biodiversity outcomes.
Selected indicators should reflect project specific goals and threats and monitoring should allow the inclusion of locally relevant, context specific metrics. The indicators should be demonstrated to be representative of the target biodiversity features.	YES The primary biodiversity outcome metric is based on the FLII, a universal metric of ecological condition, to allow good comparability between sites. To complement this, operational monitoring must include locally appropriate threat metrics that relate to the key pressures on biodiversity and ecological integrity. Project Proponents may supplement these indicators with direct biodiversity monitoring where appropriate, although this is not required by the Methodology.
The methodology for converting measured values of the indicators to a crediting unit should be documented and disclosed including how uncertainty (measurement errors) and reversals are handled.	PARTIAL The Methodology clearly specifies how ecological metrics are translated into HIFOR units. Measurement uncertainty associated with FLII is not explicitly quantified because FLII is a dimensionless composite index. Similarly, reversals are not addressed because HIFOR units certify completed stewardship outcomes rather than permanent biodiversity outcomes.
Monitoring, reporting and verification of biodiversity outcomes should be transparent and made publicly available for audit.	YES The Methodology and Guide and Standard require monitoring, reporting and verification information to be documented and made available to support independent audit (Methodology Sections 7 and 8 and Guide & Standard Section 4.2).
Monitoring, reporting and verification design should involve local rights-holders and, subject to their free, prior and informed consent, incorporate traditional knowledge, unless they have made an informed decision not to participate. If the project takes place on Indigenous lands, territories, or waters, Indigenous Peoples should be encouraged to meaningfully participate in MRV processes.	YES Section 8 of the methodology requires the participation of relevant stakeholders in monitoring activities and supports the incorporation of Indigenous and local knowledge where appropriate and consistent with FPIC.
Any conflicts of interest must be transparently documented, along with safeguards to address them. For example, where project proponents, including Indigenous Peoples and local	YES Section 6.3(3) of the methodology establishes procedures to identify and manage potential conflicts of interest,

communities, are beneficiaries of the credits and are involved in the collection of monitoring data, their contribution towards monitoring outcomes should be triangulated using other independent data sources and/or verified during and through the use of third-party audits.	including the use of independent verification where project proponents contribute to monitoring activities.

HLP 10: Third-party Audits

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit projects must be audited by a suitably qualified and independent third party to validate and verify environmental and social outcomes.	YES The Guide and Standard (Section 4.2) requires projects to undergo validation and verification by suitably qualified and independent third-party auditors.
Third-party audits are required at periodic intervals. At a minimum, at the beginning of a project and at 5-year intervals.	YES The Guide and Standard requires independent audits at project validation and at subsequent five-year verification intervals (Sections 2.3 and 4.2).
Auditors should be independent, suitably qualified, skilled and have the necessary experience to undertake the audits, ensuring conflicts of interest are avoided.	YES Section 5.1 of the Guide and Standard establishes requirements relating to auditor independence, qualifications, experience and the management of conflicts of interest.
Auditors should have access to relevant stakeholders and sufficient data and metadata about the project to evaluate its compliance with all principles.	YES Section 4.2 of the Guide and Standard requires auditors to have access to the information and stakeholders necessary to assess compliance with the HIFOR requirements.
Biodiversity credit schemes should seek to ensure auditing costs do not preclude the involvement of small-scale or locally led projects, and to prevent a disproportionate amount of project revenue being spent on monitoring and auditing relative to project implementation and benefit sharing. One way to approach HLP 11A for small scale, locally led projects is to develop a more decentralized verification process, based on publicly and digitally available data and transparent governance in order to keep costs commensurate with project size.	PARTIAL Small-scale projects are not eligible on their own (minimum size 100,000 ha) but can benefit from the pooled monitoring that is possible for grouped projects no special low-cost monitoring requirements exist for locally-led projects. The use of the FLII inherently avoids the need for costly collection of primary biodiversity data, which helps to minimise audit costs.

1.2 Equity and Fairness for People

HLP 11: Legal and Customary Land and Water Rights

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit project proponents must have the legal and customary right to carry out a biodiversity credit project.	YES Applicability Condition 2 requires Project Proponents to demonstrate the legal and customary rights necessary to implement a HIFOR project.
Where Indigenous Peoples and local communities have customary or other land and water rights or territorial and resource access rights overlapping with the project boundaries, their consent must be obtained through FPIC even if such claims are not honored by national governments. For Indigenous Peoples, the right to FPIC is conferred by UNDRIP. For local communities, FPIC is good practice which supports universal rights to self-determination and participation.	YES Safeguard 2.4 requires Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) wherever Indigenous Peoples or local communities hold customary or other rights within the project area, irrespective of formal legal recognition.
Project proponents must undertake adequate due diligence, including understanding any historical and/or ongoing conflict regarding land and water rights, and that ownership structures and rights allocations are resolved in line with the principles of FPIC.	YES Section 5.1 (3-4) and Applicability Condition 2.3 of the methodology require Project Proponents to undertake due diligence on existing and historical land and water rights and to ensure that any conflicts are addressed in accordance with FPIC principles.

HLP 12: Respecting Human Rights and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes must recognize and respect the territorial and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, in line with international human rights law, instruments, and jurisprudence, particularly UNDRIP.	YES Applicability Condition 2 and Safeguards 2.1, 2.4 and 2.5 require recognition and protection of the territorial and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, consistent with international human rights principles.
Biodiversity credit schemes should recognize the role of Indigenous Peoples as effective stewards of nature and biodiversity, and actively support them to maintain or strengthen their roles and rights as guardians, stakeholders and knowledge-holders.	YES Section 6.1 of the methodology and the associated safeguards recognise the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as key stewards of biodiversity and require their effective participation in project governance and implementation.
Biodiversity credit schemes should recognize, respect, and protect Indigenous Peoples' differentiated rights to their lands, territories and resources, irrespective of the existence of formal land title or demarcation.	YES The HIFOR safeguards recognise and protect Indigenous Peoples' rights to their lands, territories and resources irrespective of formal legal title.

Biodiversity credit schemes should enable Indigenous Peoples, including those without government recognized ownership of land, territories and resources to fully and effectively participate in and govern projects as well as generate and own biodiversity credits.	YES Where legal ownership and customary rights differ, HIFOR requires both legal rights holders and traditional users to participate in project governance, including, where appropriate, as joint Project Proponents, alongside the FPIC requirements. This approach enables meaningful participation while ensuring that issued units can be recognised and transferred within relevant market frameworks.
Biodiversity credit schemes must ensure respect for individual and collective human rights. - Biodiversity credit schemes must respect, recognize and safeguard human rights as defined by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. And biodiversity credit schemes must respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples (in line with UNDRIP) as well as the rights of local communities, women, youth, the elderly, LGBTQI, persons with disabilities and any marginalized groups, through robust due diligence and the establishment of safeguard requirements.	YES Safeguards 1.1 and 2.1 require Project Proponents to respect internationally recognised human rights and provide protections for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other potentially vulnerable groups.

HLP 13: Free, Prior and Informed Consent

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes must respect and uphold the differentiated rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to Free, Prior and Informed Consent.	YES Safeguard 2.4 requires Project Proponents to respect and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
Project proponents should receive the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples and local communities for each stage of a project, including prior to any project development and at the project application stage. For Indigenous Peoples, the right to FPIC is conferred by UNDRIP. For local communities, FPIC is good practice which supports universal rights to self- determination and participation.	YES Safeguard 2.4 requires engagement with Indigenous Peoples and local communities from the earliest stages of project development, with FPIC obtained before project implementation proceeds.
Biodiversity credit schemes should have clear guidance, tools and compliance procedures to ensure that activities conform with or go beyond widely established industry best practices and safeguards around FPIC and that these tools and guidance are made available to Indigenous Peoples and local communities in an appropriate format (e.g., local language).	PARTIAL HIFOR requires Project Proponents to implement FPIC in accordance with recognised best practice but does not prescribe a single mandatory procedure or guidance document. Instead, Project Proponents must identify and apply an appropriate body of recognised good

	practice that reflects the local context (Safeguard 2.4). This approach aligns closely with the intent of the HLP, although not with its more prescriptive wording.
Ongoing engagement of stakeholders should be secured throughout the duration of the project, and the structures that are established through the FPIC process should support and form the basis for this.	YES Safeguard 2.4 requires ongoing engagement with Indigenous Peoples and local communities throughout the project lifecycle following the FPIC process.
All identified potential risks and benefits associated with projects should be accurate, clear, objective, and accessible to Indigenous Peoples and local communities and should be documented as part of the FPIC process.	YES Safeguards 1.2 and 2.3 require potential project risks and benefits to be identified, communicated and documented as part of the FPIC process.

HLP 14: Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Involvement in Governance

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Indigenous Peoples and local communities must have meaningful input throughout the project cycle.	YES Section 6.1 and Safeguard 2.4 of the methodology require Indigenous Peoples and local communities to participate in project governance and decision-making throughout the project lifecycle.
If projects impact Indigenous Peoples and local communities due to the usage of land, territories, water, natural resources, or other impacts on the local environment and culture, affected persons and communities must be given the option to participate fully in project design, governance, execution and oversight to ensure that their rights and well-being are respected and upheld *For this requirement the HLPs give three examples at project level (listed below) and two at scheme level (following row)* -Where IPs&LCs have governance rights over biodiversity, they should be the project proponents and/or entities receiving benefits from biodiversity credits, and/or consent to an equitable benefit sharing agreement (at the choice of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities). – Where more than one group has rights overlapping with the project, the interests and wishes of all groups must be considered transparently. – Involvement of IPs&LCs must ensure appropriate representation from all groups, including women, youth, the elderly, LGBTQI, persons with disabilities and any marginalized groups.	YES HIFOR requires Indigenous Peoples and local communities to participate in project governance, benefit-sharing and FPIC processes. These requirements ensure meaningful and equitable participation by relevant rights holders, including where multiple groups hold overlapping rights and where representation of women and other under-represented groups is required (Applicability Condition 2, Section 6.1 and Safeguard 2.4).
Examples at scheme level	PARTIAL

– Biodiversity credit schemes should incorporate independent IP&LC advisors in scheme design and periodic scheme reviews. – Biodiversity credit schemes should ensure appropriate incentives for IPs'&LCs' fair, equitable, and meaningful participation.	The development and periodic revision of HIFOR have benefited from input from a wide range of independent reviewers, including Indigenous Peoples and local community representatives. However, the HIFOR governance framework does not currently include a formal advisory body with permanent independent IP&LC representation, as envisaged by the HLPs. Such a governance mechanism may be considered as the programme continues to evolve.

HLP 15: No Harm

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit projects should cause no harm to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.	YES Safeguard 1.2 establishes requirements to prevent harm to Indigenous Peoples and local communities throughout project implementation.
Project proponents must implement safeguards to ensure against false, misleading and fraudulent claims, and against withholding relevant information, especially from IP&LCs.	YES Safeguard 1.3 requires Project Proponents to prevent false, misleading or fraudulent claims and to ensure that relevant information is disclosed appropriately.
Biodiversity credit projects should comply with the more stringent of national law or international safeguarding standards[6] for environmental and human rights protections, and the principles of social justice and equity	YES Safeguard 1.1 requires compliance with applicable national legislation and relevant international safeguard standards relating to environmental protection, human rights and social equity.
Project proponents should have in place processes that actively monitor for harm to Indigenous Peoples and local communities throughout the duration of the project.	YES Annexes 5 and 7 of the methodology require Project Proponents to monitor potential environmental and social harms throughout the project lifecycle and to respond appropriately where risks are identified.
Projects should seek to maintain existing access to resources by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Where this is not possible, adequate compensation should be provided (see HLP 16).	YES Annex 5 and the associated safeguards require projects to maintain existing access to resources wherever possible and to provide appropriate mitigation or compensation where restrictions cannot be avoided.

[6] For further information consult the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Biodiversity credit schemes should require and ensure that project proponents implement the requirements of this principle, including by providing clear guidance on assessing risk arising from all project activities, through including guidance on due diligence, risk assessment and mitigation processes.	PARTIAL The HIFOR Methodology includes substantive requirements relating to due diligence, risk assessment and safeguards. However, it does not currently provide separate supplementary guidance on implementing these requirements. As implementation experience grows, additional guidance may be developed to support consistent application.
Should harm occur, biodiversity credit schemes should require an investigation into the cause of the harm and detail a plan to redress and compensate Indigenous Peoples and local communities commensurate with the degree of harm and to prevent other such instances (see also HLP 17).	YES Safeguard 1.3 establishes a grievance redress mechanism through which harms can be investigated, addressed and remedied.
Biodiversity credit projects should cause no harm to broader communities, nature and climate.	YES Safeguards 3.1-3.13 establish comprehensive environmental safeguards designed to prevent adverse impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems and climate.

HLP 16: Benefit Sharing

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Benefit sharing mechanisms must be fair, equitable and transparent.	YES Section 6.3(2iii) of the methodology requires benefit-sharing arrangements to be fair, equitable and transparent.
Biodiversity credit schemes should provide clear guidance, tools and procedures to project proponents for establishing fair and equitable benefit sharing arrangements, including with Indigenous Peoples and local communities.	NO The HIFOR Methodology does not currently provide separate guidance, tools or procedures for developing benefit-sharing arrangements. Instead, Project Proponents are expected to apply recognised published good practice appropriate to the local context. Given the early stage of programme implementation and the limited number of pilot projects, supplementary guidance may be developed as implementation experience grows.
Benefit sharing mechanisms must be codesigned and agreed on in collaborative partnership with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other relevant affected stakeholders, taking into account collective rights, customary law, and social, economic and cultural needs and priorities.	YES Section 6.3(2iii), Section 6.1, and Safeguard 2.4 of the methodology require benefit-sharing arrangements to be developed collaboratively through consultation, project governance and

	Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), taking account of the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other affected stakeholders.
Biodiversity credit projects should provide appropriate capacity building and support to Indigenous Peoples and local communities prior to the co-design of the benefit sharing agreements.	YES Section 6.1 of the methodology requires Project Proponents to support the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including through appropriate capacity building where needed to enable informed participation in project governance and benefit-sharing.
The proportion of benefits distributed to Indigenous Peoples and local communities should be maximized ensuring that project management and monitoring requirements are commensurate with the nature of the project.	NO HIFOR does not prescribe a minimum or maximum proportion of benefits to be distributed to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Instead, the Methodology requires benefit-sharing arrangements to be developed through consultation and FPIC while ensuring equitable outcomes and the long-term financial viability of the project. This reflects a different methodological approach from that set out in the HLP. Further discussion is provided in the main text.
Benefit sharing mechanisms must be documented and transparent and periodically reviewed.	YES Benefit-sharing arrangements form part of the Project Performance Report and are therefore documented, subject to periodic review and updated as necessary (Annex 7 of the methodology).

HLP 17: Grievance Mechanism

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes must both establish themselves, and require project proponents to establish transparent, confidential and robust grievance mechanisms that are relevant to all stakeholders and rights-holders including Indigenous Peoples and local communities women, youth, the elderly, LGBTQI, persons with disabilities and any marginalized groups.	YES WCS operates a grievance mechanism applicable to the scheme as a whole. Safeguard 1.3 requires Project Proponents to establish a grievance mechanism that is accessible, transparent and appropriate to affected stakeholders.
Grievance mechanisms should be designed using best practice recommendations, e.g., those specified by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (28-30), UNDP Social and	YES Examples of best practices are listed, and the proponent is required to use one of these or another of equivalent/greater strength (Safeguard 1.3).

Environmental Standards' Grievance Redress Mechanisms or in the FSC Remedy Framework.	

1.3 Good Governance for High-integrity Markets

HLP 18: Transparent Governance Structure

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
The structure of the project governance must reflect the stakeholders with legal and customary resource ownership within and in the vicinity of the boundaries of the project. The governance structure must also reflect the considerations related to gender and other vulnerable groups. Moreover, the effective participation of identified stakeholders in the project governance must be ensured.	YES Section 6.1 of the methodology requires project governance arrangements to reflect legal and customary rights holders, ensure the effective participation of relevant stakeholders, and take account of gender and other potentially under-represented groups.
The following information on project governance and implementation must be publicly disclosed:	
Continued/ – The ownership and governance structure of biodiversity credit projects.	YES The Project Design Document (PDD) and Project Performance Reports (PPRs), which are publicly disclosed, require information on project ownership and governance arrangements.
Continued/ – Who will have ownership of and accountability for biodiversity credits generated by a project including documented agreements on ownership and accountability between relevant stakeholders built upon FPIC where relevant, as outlined above.	YES The PDD and PPRs require the ownership of, and accountability for, HIFOR units to be documented, including agreements between relevant stakeholders developed through FPIC where applicable.
Continued/ – Comprehensive and transparent information on data, project design and credit issuance.	YES The PDD and PPRs require disclosure of project data and design information, while information on the issuance of HIFOR units will be disclosed through the HIFOR registry.
Continued/ – Whether the project is taking place on, or directly adjacent to Indigenous lands and territories.	YES Section 5C of the methodology requires Project Proponents to identify whether the project is located on, or directly adjacent to, Indigenous lands and territories.
Information on project governance and implementation should be accessible to all rights-holders (e.g., available in local language and appropriate for target groups), in an electronic format with scrutiny welcomed.	YES Safeguards 1.3, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6 require project information to be communicated in an accessible manner that is appropriate for affected rights holders, including through local languages where appropriate.

HLP 19: Data Sovereignty

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes should ensure the data sovereignty of all Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to enable them to leverage benefits both within and beyond biodiversity credit schemes whilst also recognizing that locally specific laws and regulations may govern appropriate data ownership and use.	YES Safeguards 2.10 and 2.11 recognise the data sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and require data relating to them to be managed in accordance with applicable legal requirements and recognised good practice.
Biodiversity credit schemes should ensure that Indigenous Peoples and local communities have rights to govern the collection, management, access, interpretation, dissemination and reuse of data related to them on Indigenous or traditional lands, territories, seas, waters, and oceans.	YES Safeguards 2.10 and 2.11 recognise the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to govern the collection, management, access, interpretation, dissemination and reuse of data relating to their lands, territories and resources.
Biodiversity credit schemes should ensure that if a project proponent collects sensitive data with consent (e.g., names, addresses or other personal details), it is managed appropriately and consistent with data privacy laws.	YES Safeguards 2.10 and 2.11 require sensitive personal data collected with consent to be managed appropriately and in accordance with applicable data protection and privacy requirements.
Biodiversity credit schemes must ensure that the biodiversity data that may be considered sensitive such as geolocation of specific wild animals or ranger patrol routes, is managed with utmost caution and are available to authorized persons only. However, processed information and analysis may be made available to wider stakeholders.	YES Safeguard 3.13 requires sensitive biodiversity information, including data that could increase risks to species or conservation activities, to be managed securely and made available only to authorised persons where appropriate.
Data pertaining to Indigenous Peoples' ways of life, knowledge systems, customs or lands, waters, seas, territories, and resources is owned by Indigenous Peoples. Project proponents and related schemes must obtain FPIC to collect or use such data.	YES Safeguards 2.10 and 2.11 recognise Indigenous Peoples' rights over data relating to their knowledge systems, lands and resources, and require Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for its collection and use.

HLP 20: Alignment with Frameworks

Requirement	HIFOR v2.1 conformance
Biodiversity credit schemes should align with evidence-based international, national, regional and local conservation and sustainable development frameworks and biodiversity action plans (e.g., National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans).	YES HIFOR projects are designed to support the conservation of large, high-integrity forest landscapes and are therefore expected to contribute to relevant international, national, regional and local conservation and sustainable development frameworks, including National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, where applicable.

Biodiversity credit schemes should align, where possible, with nature targets and reporting guidance as specified within international frameworks: the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) strategic plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals.	YES The conservation outcomes delivered through HIFOR are expected to contribute directly to the objectives of international biodiversity frameworks, including the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. For example, HIFOR projects support Goal A and Action Targets 1 and 3, among others, through the long-term conservation of high-integrity tropical forests.

HLP 21: Tradability

Essence of requirement	HIFOR conformance
If and when any secondary trading exists there must be clear and accurate attribution of the originator of the credits and full details of safeguards covering claims and double counting in the publicly available registry.	YES The HIFOR Guide and Standard provides for the establishment of a registry that will record the origin, ownership and transfer of HIFOR units, together with the information necessary to support appropriate claims and prevent double counting.
Any profits arising from secondary trading must be transparent, with an appropriate proportion flowing back to the project proponents via any benefit sharing arrangements.	NO The HIFOR Methodology does not require a proportion of profits arising from secondary trading to be returned to Project Proponents through benefit-sharing arrangements. HIFOR adopts a different approach, reflecting the view that mandatory redistribution of secondary trading profits could reduce market participation and increase transaction complexity. Further discussion is provided in the main text.

For further information contact the HIFOR team at, hifor@wcs.org