



Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund

Stewardship and Conservation Easement Standards & Carbon Project Guidelines *(December 2021)*

Overview

Stewardship of projects that the Appalachian Landscape Protection Fund (ALPF) supports must be consistent with *maintaining or increasing ecosystem resilience to climate change and forest ecosystem carbon*. Because there are multiple ways to design a conservation project and meet the same goals, OSI does not require particular conservation easement (CE) or stewardship plan terms or language. Instead OSI provides the following standards that every ALPF project must meet. OSI staff are available to discuss and review CE and stewardship plan language and share sample provisions. In addition, OSI neither requires nor prohibits enrollment in carbon offset projects but rather we provide guidance for projects that are enrolled in a carbon project.

- *Prior to submitting a grant proposal, applicants should review the following standards and guidance.*
- *Grant proposals should describe how their project will meet these standards and goals.*
- *OSI staff will review and approve the final conservation easement, stewardship plan and/or carbon offset project¹ goals prior to distribution of grant funds.*

Standards for Landowners and CE Holders

- Conservation landowners and CE holders should have as a primary mission the protection of biological diversity, forest ecosystem carbon, wildlife habitat and/or other closely related conservation values.
- Conservation landowners should have a track record in land stewardship and sufficient resources to manage the land for these values.
- CE holders should have a track record in CE monitoring and enforcement, and sufficient funds and staff to monitor and enforce the CE.

¹ Forest carbon offset projects are defined as land management actions that sequester and store atmospheric greenhouse gases and are developed to generate carbon credits within a carbon offset market.

Stewardship Standards

Every ALPF project should provide a stewardship plan that meets the following standards:

- Have as primary purposes maintaining ecosystem resilience to climate change and maintaining and/or increasing forest ecosystem carbon;
- Give priority to maintenance of forests exhibiting old growth characteristics and to protection of “hub” or “mother” trees;
- Recognize the need to accommodate adaptation to shifts in species composition;
- Prohibit development and forest conversion to tree plantations or agriculture;
- Prohibit logging and road building on steep slopes (generally greater than 15%) and in high altitude forests;
- Prohibit surface mining, except for limited removal of gravel or sand to be used on the protected property, and prohibit hydrocarbon and mineral extraction to the maximum extent possible;
- Seek coordination with and input on stewardship from organizations and peoples that have long term connections and knowledge of the land or project area;
- Address ecosystem resilience by
 - Defining “climate resilience” with language similar to the following – “the ability of an area to adjust and adapt to climate change while maintaining species diversity and ecological function,”
 - Identifying and minimizing impacts to sensitive or under-protected geology or habitat types including floodplains, stream buffers and limestone areas;
 - Enhancing connectivity through road closures, reforestation, and removal of invasive species and by minimizing road building, stream crossings and other activities that may inhibit wildlife movement, and
 - Minimizing intensive recreational uses (ATVs and RV camping, for example) that can destroy micro-climates, impede wildlife movement and alter the site’s hydrology;
- Address forest ecosystem carbon by
 - Defining forest ecosystem carbon to include above and below ground carbon stocks, including soil carbon,
 - Prescribing actions that will maintain or increase carbon storage in trees and soil,
 - Maintaining or enhancing native forests with diverse structure and composition, protecting forest soils and mature stands, and minimizing forest fragmentation, and
 - Addressing the risk of forest carbon loss from invasive species, insects, disease, wildfire, and other disturbances.

Additional Standards for Conservation Easements

In addition, conservation easements should also meet the following standards:

- Recitals section should describe the property’s value for carbon storage and sequestration, conserving aquatic and/or terrestrial biological resources and sustaining climate resilience,

including the presence of any unique geology types and the land's role in providing microclimates and ensuring local and regional connectivity for wildlife;

- Restrictions and Reserved Rights sections should establish enforceable and clear standards for permanent protection of the land's ecosystem resilience characteristics and forest ecosystem carbon²;
- Forestry must be governed by a management plan that specifies how forest management will be conducted to meet the CE's purposes, that is regularly updated, and that is approved by the CE Holder. If allowed, to the extent practicable, commercial forest management should receive or follow the guidelines of Forest Stewardship Council certification;
- Include effective and practical monitoring and enforcement provisions;
- Include a process for regular, productive communication between the easement holder and landowner; and,
- Contain a Baseline Documentation Report that includes, along with the standard sections, description of the project's forest carbon attributes and climate resilience characteristics³.

Guidance for Carbon Offset Programs

OSI grantees (and landowners they are working with) may choose to enroll their land conservation project in a carbon offset project, while also permanently protecting their land. OSI's goal is to accommodate enrollment, where possible, while also meeting the standards set forth above.

OSI's [Forest Carbon Resource Guide](#) provides helpful information on carbon programs and stewardship to protect and increase forest carbon. The Land Trust Alliance has provided extensive guidance on blending conservation easements and carbon programs in [Carbon Offsets in Conservation Easements: The Essentials for Land Trusts](#)⁴. We strongly suggest consulting LTA's document and/or a carbon offset developer to discuss your project.

² This provision may limit the ability to enroll in a carbon offset project in the future. Note that this provision for ecosystem carbon can be omitted if the carbon will be protected through a 99+ year verified carbon project.

³ OSI can provide broad scale carbon data if needed.

⁴ LTA charges non-members for this publication. OSI will cover the cost of this document if needed.