

Voluntary nature and carbon market projects on public conservation land

The Government is enabling voluntary nature and carbon market (VNCM) projects on public conservation land

This creates new opportunities for private organisations, iwi, philanthropists, community groups and conservation organisations to invest in projects on public conservation land that restore nature and generate environmental benefits.

Potential projects include:

- Native tree planting and regeneration
- Wetland restoration
- Pest control
- Other activities that support biodiversity, restore ecosystems, increase carbon removals, and strengthen resilience

All projects will require approval through the Department of Conservation's (DOC) concession process.

Public conservation land remains protected and managed under conservation legislation. All projects must be consistent with conservation legislation and the purposes for which the land is managed.

Why is the Government enabling this?

New Zealand faces a significant gap between the environmental restoration needed and the public funding available to deliver it.

VNCMs provide one way to attract additional private investment into conservation projects and environmental outcomes that would not otherwise occur.

By enabling high-quality projects on public conservation land, the Government aims to support additional investment in activities that restore nature, over and above what is funded by the Crown.

How do voluntary nature and carbon markets work?

VNCMs help connect environmental projects with businesses and investors wanting to support them.

The steps to get a project funded through these markets are:

1. Make plans for the type of conservation and/or climate change project you would like to undertake and work with a project developer to identify a suitable voluntary market crediting scheme and methodology for the project.
2. Register the project with the crediting scheme you choose and make detailed plans to undertake it. These plans are then independently validated and certified by the crediting scheme. For more information on crediting schemes, see: <https://environment.govt.nz/what-you-can-do/voluntary-nature-carbon-markets/supporting-high-integrity-voluntary-nature-and-carbon-markets-in-new-zealand/>
3. Implement the conservation and/or climate change project and begin to monitor outcomes.
4. Credits are issued to the project owner by the crediting scheme provider, based on verified outcomes, such as tonnes of carbon removed or biodiversity improvements achieved.
5. Those credits can then be sold to organisations or individuals seeking to support climate or nature outcomes.

Participation in VNCMs comes with costs, these usually include:

- Registration fees, charged by the crediting scheme.
- Measurement, reporting, and verification costs including independent auditing and ongoing monitoring of environmental outcomes.
- Ongoing compliance and reporting costs.

VNCM projects on public conservation land

VNCM projects on public conservation land must be authorised through a concession.

DOC encourages VNCM projects on public conservation land to use a government endorsed or recognised crediting scheme. Other innovative approaches may be considered where risks can be appropriately managed.

Before applying for a concession, check that your project can meet the requirements of your preferred crediting scheme and begin the process of seeking registration with that scheme.

To generate credits, projects must meet the requirements of the relevant crediting scheme, including independent monitoring and verification. Verification, monitoring, and credit issuance are managed by the relevant crediting scheme, not by DOC.

How do I apply for a concession for a VNCM project on public conservation land?

1. **Talk with DOC about your plans [optional]** DOC offers up to one hour of free pre-application advice. This can help you understand the type of concession you will need, check whether your proposed activity aligns with statutory planning documents, and understand any consultation requirements with Treaty partners.

2. **Prepare your application** Complete the concession application form and provide information about:
 - The crediting scheme you are seeking registration under.
 - The activities you plan to undertake (for example, planting, trapping, or monitoring) and any potential effects. This includes whether you are already undertaking these activities via another agreement with DOC and are looking to enter the market.
 - Where the activity will take place and how you will access the site.
 - The concession term you are requesting. You will need to provide reasons if you are requesting a term length longer than 30 years.
 - How your proposal is consistent with relevant statutory planning documents.
3. **Identify the public conservation land area** Use DOC's *Discover the Outdoors* map to identify the public conservation land where you propose to operate.
4. **Submit your application** Send your completed application to permissions@doc.govt.nz.
5. **Assessment and consultation** DOC will assess your application and seek views from Treaty partners and technical experts. Applications for concession terms longer than 10 years are publicly notified for 20 working days and may be subject to a public hearing.

The concession application process can take **up to nine months**, depending on the complexity of the application, consultation requirements, and any public notification processes.

The minimum processing fee for a VNCM concession application is \$7,600 plus GST. Additional costs may apply depending on the complexity of the proposal and assessment requirements.

More information is available on DOC's website:

- <https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/apply-for-permits/apply-for-a-permit/>
- <https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/apply-for-permits/managing-your-concession/pre-application-advice/>

How will the concession process protect environmental integrity?

All proposals will be assessed through DOC's concession and authorisation processes. Projects must:

- Be appropriate for the proposed site.
- Be consistent with conservation legislation.
- Demonstrate clear and measurable environmental benefits.
- Meet any relevant concession conditions.
- Deliver environmental benefits that would not have occurred through existing Crown-funded restoration activities alone.

Projects participating in VNCMs will also need to meet the requirements of the relevant crediting scheme, including any independent verification and monitoring requirements. Projects on public conservation land are encouraged to use a government endorsed or recognised scheme as another integrity safeguard.

Find out more

For further information about:

- Concession applications
- Nature restoration opportunities on public conservation land

Visit: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/apply-for-permits/all-permissions/voluntary-nature-and-carbon-market-projects-on-public-conservation-land/>

- Voluntary nature and carbon markets
- Government endorsed and recognised schemes

Visit: <https://environment.govt.nz/what-you-can-do/voluntary-nature-carbon-markets/supporting-high-integrity-voluntary-nature-and-carbon-markets-in-new-zealand/>

Glossary

Additionality

The integrity principle that a project delivers environmental benefits beyond what would have happened without the project or its funding.

Biodiversity

The variety of living things in an area, including plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms, and the ecosystems they form.

Carbon removal

The process of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it. Examples include native forest regeneration and wetland restoration.

Concession

A legal authorisation granted by the Department of Conservation (DOC) that allows an activity to take place on public conservation land.

Crediting scheme

A framework that sets the rules for developing, assessing, monitoring and verifying environmental projects, and for issuing credits based on the outcomes achieved.

Ecosystem

A community of living things and their physical environment, and the interactions between them.

Environmental integrity

Confidence that environmental outcomes are real, measurable, independently verified and maintained over time.

Government endorsed and recognised schemes

A crediting scheme that has been endorsed or recognised by the Government as meeting specified standards and criteria.

Some schemes are already recognised because they've been accredited by reputable international bodies such as the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market, Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation and Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism. Several project developers and other providers are already offering these schemes in New Zealand, but they are not suited to every project.

Other New Zealand schemes will soon be able to apply for government endorsement. This is an opt-in opportunity. Schemes will need to meet government endorsement criteria. This means having governance rules and systems needed to run with integrity and reliability over time.

For more information on Government endorsed and recognised schemes:

<https://environment.govt.nz/publications/voluntary-nature-and-carbon-markets-domestic-scheme-endorsement-criteria/>

Independent verification

Assessment by a qualified third party to confirm that a project's reported outcomes are accurate and meet the requirements of the relevant crediting scheme.

Nature restoration

Activities that protect, improve or restore natural ecosystems, habitats and indigenous biodiversity.

Public conservation land

Land managed for conservation purposes under conservation legislation, including national parks, conservation parks, reserves and other protected areas.