



SPECIAL CATEGORIES

EXCEPTIONAL BENEFITS LABEL

BIOCARBON TOOL

BIOCARBON CERT[®]

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BIOCARBON CERT

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1 Introduction

This tool provides the eligibility criteria, evidence requirements, and procedures for AFOLU projects applying for recognition under the “Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label” of the BIOCARBON STANDARD.

Under the BIOCARBON STANDARD, AFOLU-sector projects that comply with all mandatory program requirements may apply for a Special Category – Exceptional Benefits Label. This optional distinction recognizes projects that deliver exceptional and verifiable results in biodiversity conservation, community development, and gender equity.

These categories evolve from the previous “special categories” structure, preserving their symbolism while introducing measurable, verifiable, and performance-based criteria. This scheme applies exclusively to AFOLU projects and does not replace the Sustainable Development Safeguards (SDS); rather, it highlights measurable, additional outcomes.

2 Purpose

The purpose of this tool is to define the rules, eligibility criteria, and documentation requirements for AFOLU-sector projects applying for recognition under the Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label of the BIOCARBON STANDARD. This optional recognition mechanism aims to highlight outstanding achievements in biodiversity conservation, community development, and gender equity that go beyond the minimum sustainability and REDD+ safeguards required under the BioCarbon Program.

By establishing clear and measurable performance thresholds, this tool ensures consistency, transparency, and credibility in the evaluation of exceptional outcomes. It supports project holders in demonstrating leadership in environmental and social integrity and provides a publicly visible label of excellence within the registry platform of BioCarbon.

This tool is applicable only to AFOLU projects and is intended to complement, not replace, the Sustainable Development Safeguards (SDS) and other core program requirements.

3 Objectives

This tool aims to:

- (a) Recognize exceptional performance by AFOLU projects that go beyond the mandatory requirements of the BIOCARBON STANDARD, particularly in the areas of biodiversity, community development, and gender equity;
- (b) Define clear eligibility criteria for the Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label, ensuring consistency, transparency, and verifiability across all project applications;
- (c) Promote measurable social and environmental impacts that are scalable, replicable, and aligned with global sustainability goals, including the SDGs and international conservation frameworks;
- (d) Support market integrity and differentiation, enabling project holders to publicly showcase their achievements through a recognized label within the registry platform of BioCarbon.
- (e) Encourage continuous improvement and innovation among project holders in advancing high-quality, community-centered and nature-positive climate action.

4 Scope and applicability

This tool is applicable exclusively to projects validated and registered under the BIOCARBON STANDARD as part of the AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector. It provides an optional recognition mechanism for projects that go beyond the minimum sustainability safeguards and demonstrate exceptional, verifiable results in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) Biodiversity conservation
- (b) Socioeconomic development and community empowerment
- (c) Gender equity and women's leadership

This tool may be applied at any verification cycle, starting from the first issuance of Verified Carbon Credits (VCCs), provided that the project has integrated the required indicators in the Monitoring Plan and can demonstrate compliance with the eligibility criteria for the selected category(ies).

The use of this tool is voluntary and does not affect the eligibility of the project under the BIOCARBON STANDARD or the issuance of VCCs. However, projects that meet the criteria defined herein may obtain a publicly recognized label—Special Categories: Exceptional Benefits—in the BioCarbon platform registry.

This tool does not apply to biodiversity or water crediting projects under the BioCarbon Biodiversity Standard or Water Standard, nor to initiatives outside the AFOLU domain.

5 Version

This document constitutes Version 1.0 July 15, 2025.

This document may be updated periodically to reflect technical improvements, regulatory developments, or decisions by the BioCarbon Technical Committee. Users are responsible for ensuring they are referring to the most recent version available at the official BioCarbon website. The version number and date of publication are indicated on the cover page. In case of discrepancy between versions, the most recent officially published version shall prevail.

6 Definitions

For the purpose of this tool, the following definitions apply:

AFOLU Projects

Activities categorized under Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use, as defined by the BIOCARBON STANDARD.

Community-based Enterprise or Cooperative

A legally or socially recognized group, led by local stakeholders, engaged in production, conservation, or service activities that are supported or enhanced by the project.

Disaggregated Indicator

A quantitative or qualitative metric that is broken down by relevant variables (e.g., gender, income group, vulnerability status) to allow for differentiated analysis.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

A principle requiring that communities and stakeholders give consent to a project's actions or agreements, based on accessible, timely, and comprehensive information, without coercion or pressure, prior to implementation.

High Conservation Value (HCV)

Areas with outstanding biological, ecological, social or cultural values, formally identified and managed for conservation purposes.

Participating Household

A household or economic unit that actively engages in project activities and is directly affected by the project's benefit-sharing or capacity-building mechanisms.

Special Category

An optional distinction awarded to AFOLU projects that demonstrate exceptional, verifiable outcomes beyond the core requirements of the BIOCARBON STANDARD, under one or more thematic areas (Orchid, Wax Palm, Andean Condor).

Verified Result

A measurable and documented outcome that has been assessed and confirmed by an approved Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) during a verification cycle.

7 Framework for special categories

The BIOCARBON STANDARD recognizes that some AFOLU projects achieve environmental and social outcomes that go beyond minimum program requirements. To provide visibility and credibility to these exceptional contributions, the Standard introduces the Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label as an optional recognition mechanism.

The Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label provides a structured, voluntary framework for recognizing outstanding project contributions in three key domains:

- (a) Biodiversity Conservation
- (b) Community Development
- (c) Gender Equity

Each category is based on clearly defined eligibility criteria and requires robust, project-specific evidence of achievement. These categories do not replace or modify the Sustainable Development Safeguards (SDS), which remain mandatory for all AFOLU projects. Rather, they serve to highlight and reward efforts that deliver measurable, verifiable, and sustained outcomes in areas of strategic importance to the Standard.

This framework is consistent with the integrity principles of the BIOCARBON STANDARD, which promote not only climate integrity but also the equitable distribution of benefits and the safeguarding of natural ecosystems.

To be eligible, project holders seeking recognition under one or more categories shall:

- (a) Integrate relevant indicators into the project's Monitoring Plan, including a clear set of indicators aligned with the selected category;
- (b) Provide documented evidence of outcomes that are exceptional, measurable, and sustained;
- (c) Demonstrate that these outcomes are directly attributable to the project activities.

The Special Categories represent an evolution of the previous “co-benefit classes” by transitioning from descriptive qualifications to performance-based distinctions. Through this approach, the BIOCARBON STANDARD supports innovation, visibility, and accountability in the delivery of nature-based and community-centered climate solutions.

8 Special categories components

Each Special Category highlights a specific area of outstanding performance, with clearly defined thematic focus, rationale, and expectations. These components guide both the design of eligible activities and the verification of outcomes.

These represent the strategic dimensions in which the project shall demonstrate exceptional performance. They describe the thematic priorities, scope of intervention, and outcome domains that define the nature and purpose of each Special Category. Projects shall show that their efforts in these areas are intentional, measurable, and sustained over time.

8.1 Exceptional biodiversity conservation: Orchid Category

Orchids are the most diverse and evolving group of flowering plants on the planet, with about 25,000 to 30,000 species worldwide, of which 4,270 are native to Colombia, and 1,572 are endemic.

This category recognizes AFOLU projects that actively contribute to the protection and recovery of biodiversity values of national or global significance.

These represent the specific dimensions in which the project holder shall demonstrate outstanding and verifiable biodiversity outcomes.

The following are the key focus areas that define eligibility under this category:

- (a) Protection of critical habitats for threatened or endemic species;

- (b) Prevention and monitoring of invasive species;
- (c) Conservation of formally identified High Conservation Value (HCV) areas;
- (d) Demonstrated ecological improvements over time.

Projects holders shall go beyond habitat preservation by integrating biodiversity into management systems, applying restoration techniques, and using scientifically valid monitoring protocols. Eligible projects should demonstrate measurable improvements in habitat quality, species population trends, or landscape connectivity.

8.2 Transformational socioeconomic impact: Wax Palm category

The Wax Palm (*Ceroxylon quindiuense*) grows in one of the most threatened ecosystems globally, the Tropical Foggy Forest. The *Ceroxylon quindiuense* palms constitute one of the most spectacular landscapes of the Colombian Andes. Despite representing Colombia's national tree, the species was categorized as endangered (EN) by Galeano & Bernal (2005). Although there are still large populations in some sectors of the central mountain range, their habitat has been considerably reduced, and it is estimated that their populations have decreased by more than 50% in the last three generations (210 years).

This category highlights projects that catalyze tangible, equitable improvements in local livelihoods and community governance.

These reflect the main areas where the project shall demonstrate transformative and measurable socioeconomic impact.

To qualify under this category, the project holder shall demonstrate performance across the following key areas:

- (a) Transparent and inclusive benefit-sharing mechanisms;
- (b) Reinvestment of carbon revenues into community-led initiatives;
- (c) Strengthening of small-scale enterprises or cooperatives;
- (d) Positive, documented changes in income, skills, or access to resources.

Projects are expected to demonstrate not only economic benefits, but also empowerment and resilience outcomes among community groups, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable populations. Monitoring frameworks shall capture the differentiated impacts and sustainability of the socioeconomic interventions.

8.3 Leadership in gender equity: Andean Condor Category

The Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*), the sun's messenger, is considered the most giant and most massive flying bird globally (Ministerio de Ambiente, 2006). It is also one of the birds that fly at the highest altitudes, fly using the vertical thermal updrafts of warm air, and reach up to 6500 meters of height; then, it can glide for hundreds of kilometers almost without moving its extended wings. The natural distribution of Andean Condor covers the Andes Mountains, from southern Tierra del Fuego (Argentina and Chile) to western Venezuela. One of its significant habitats is in the Colca Canyon (Peru). The Andean Condor is considered a near-threatened species by the UICN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), threats to the population include habitat loss and secondary poisoning.

This category recognizes projects that integrate gender equity as a core dimension of governance, implementation, and impact.

These define the aspects in which the project shall demonstrate meaningful and sustained progress on gender equity and women's empowerment.

Eligibility under this category requires measurable results in the following focus areas:

- (a) Representation of women in leadership and decision-making;
- (b) Gender-responsive governance and training frameworks;
- (c) Identification and mitigation of gender-related risks;
- (d) Improved access of women and girls to economic, institutional, or land-related opportunities.

Eligible projects shall go beyond gender neutrality, actively addressing structural barriers and enabling conditions for women's empowerment. Indicators shall be disaggregated by sex and demonstrate progress toward equitable outcomes. Projects should ensure that gender strategies are embedded in governance structures and aligned with national and international frameworks.

9 General rules for application

These categories are optional and apply exclusively to projects within the AFOLU sector. They are not required for certification, nor do they affect the project's eligibility under the core BIOCARBON STANDARD.

Projects holders seeking recognition shall include a demonstration of eligibility, with justification and evidence, in their Project Document or Monitoring Report. This application shall include:

- (a) A technical justification demonstrating how the project meets all the eligibility criteria for the selected category(ies);
- (b) Supporting documentation (e.g., reports, data, field evidence);
- (c) Clear references to the relevant sections of the Monitoring Plan, where indicators and outcomes are tracked and verified.

Each application will be evaluated during a verification cycle by the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB), based on evidence submitted and performance reported. Projects may apply for one or more categories simultaneously.

Recognition is granted per verification period and may be renewed, upgraded, or discontinued based on subsequent performance and monitoring results.

Projects that are granted recognition under one or more categories will be publicly identified in the BioCarbon platform registry with the designation “Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label”, along with the specific category(ies) achieved.

Projects holders may apply for the label at any verification cycle, including retroactively, provided the required documentation and evidence are available and verifiable.

This tool replaces the earlier narrative-based special categories framework and introduces a quantitative, performance-driven mechanism that aligns with the Standard’s principles of transparency, environmental integrity, and social impact.

9.1 Recognition in subsequent verification cycles

Projects that have previously been awarded a Special Category label shall re-demonstrate compliance with all applicable criteria during each subsequent verification cycle.

The label is not permanent: it shall be revalidated based on updated monitoring results, evidence of continued performance, and ongoing alignment with eligibility criteria.

If a project no longer meets the criteria during a future verification, the label shall be removed from the Registry entry for the corresponding verification period. Prior recognitions will remain visible for historical reference.

Projects may upgrade their recognition by applying for additional categories or demonstrating improved outcomes over time.

9.2 Transition from previous recognitions

Projects that were previously recognized under the earlier descriptive version of the special categories shall not retain the label automatically under this tool. To maintain recognition, they shall re-apply under the current framework and demonstrate full compliance with the updated eligibility criteria and documentation requirements.

However, projects may request retroactive recognition under this tool for a past verification cycle, provided that verifiable evidence exists and all criteria applicable to that category were demonstrably met during that period.

10 Exceptional benefits label

10.1 Orchid: Exceptional Biodiversity Conservation

To be eligible for the Orchid Category, the project shall meet all of the following criteria:

- (a) The project protects or restores critical habitat for at least one species categorized as Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR) by the IUCN, or for a species endemic to the project area;
- (b) The project integrates both scientific and traditional ecological knowledge in biodiversity planning and monitoring;
- (c) The project area includes a formally designated High Conservation Value (HCV) zone, with documented and implemented protection or management measures;
- (d) The Monitoring Plan includes biodiversity indicators (e.g., species population trends, habitat condition) showing positive outcomes in at least one completed verification cycle.

10.2 Wax Palm: Transformational Socioeconomic Impact

To be eligible for the Wax Palm Category, the project shall meet all of the following criteria:

- (a) The project distributes a share of net project revenues directly to community organizations or households through a transparent and participatory financial mechanism, beyond compliance-based benefit-sharing;
- (b) A minimum of 30% of net carbon revenue is demonstrably reinvested in locally led productive or restoration activities;
- (c) The project actively supports at least two community-based enterprises or cooperatives that are operational;

- (d) The Monitoring Plan includes disaggregated socioeconomic indicators (by gender and vulnerability status) and provides documented evidence of sustained, measurable improvements in income levels, productive capacity, or access to economic opportunities for at least 50% of participating households.

10.3 Andean Condor: Leadership in Gender Equity

To be eligible for the Andean Condor Category, the project shall meet all of the following criteria:

- (a) At least 30% of leadership or governance roles within the project structure are held by women.
- (b) The project integrates gender-responsive training, governance mechanisms, and consultation processes.
- (c) The project conducts a comprehensive gender risk and vulnerability assessment led by qualified professionals or women-led organizations. It integrates the results into the project's grievance mechanism and publishes a summary of findings and mitigation measures in Monitoring Reports.
- (d) The Monitoring Plan includes at least three gender equity indicators, including one specifically related to women's access to economic resources or opportunities.

11 Verification and Review Process

All claims under the Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label shall be reviewed by an approved Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) as part of the project's regular verification process.

To be eligible, the project holder shall:

- (a) Include a demonstration of eligibility, with justification and evidence, in their Project Document;
- (b) Integrate the selected Special Category(ies) into the Monitoring Plan;
- (c) Provide documented evidence of compliance with each applicable criterion;
- (d) Submit supporting materials as part of the Monitoring Report or a dedicated annex.

The CAB shall:

- (a) Verify the presence, consistency, and reliability of the evidence provided;
- (b) Assess whether each eligibility criterion has been fully met, partially met, or not met;
- (c) Indicate in the Verification Report whether the Special Category recognition is awarded, denied, or deferred pending clarification;
- (d) Record the outcome in the official verification statement submitted to the Program.

Where a project applies for more than one category, each category shall be assessed independently. Partial compliance does not warrant recognition.

If a project does not meet the requirements in a given verification cycle, it may reapply in the future once corrective measures are taken, and evidence is updated.

BioCarbon may issue additional guidance or require clarification from the CAB in cases of ambiguity, dispute, or methodological uncertainty.

12 Recognition and labeling in the registry

Projects that meet all criteria under one or more Special Categories and provide sufficient supporting evidence during the verification process shall receive formal recognition under the BIOCARBON STANDARD.

Such recognition will be publicly visible in the BioCarbon platform registry and will include:

- (a) The name(s) of the Special Category(ies) awarded;
- (b) The verification period for which the label applies;
- (c) A clear indication that the recognition is based on optional, performance-based criteria beyond the core program requirements.

The Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label is granted per verification period and is not permanent. Recognition is subject to renewal at each verification cycle and may be discontinued if the project no longer meets the criteria.

Retroactive recognition is allowed if the project demonstrates that it met all eligibility criteria during a past verification cycle and provides verifiable documentation to support the request.

Only AFOLU projects validated and registered under the BIOCARBON STANDARD are eligible to receive this designation.

13 Entry into force and transition

This tool enters into force on July 15, 2025, as approved by the BioCarbon Technical Committee.

From this date forward, any project seeking recognition under the Special Categories – Exceptional Benefits Label shall comply with the eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, and review procedures set forth herein.

Projects that were previously recognized under the earlier narrative-based version may request continued or retroactive recognition under this updated tool, provided that they meet all applicable requirements and submit verifiable evidence. No new recognitions will be granted under the previous framework after the entry into force of this version.

BIOCARBON may issue additional guidance to support implementation and interpretation of this tool, if needed.

History of document

Type of document

BioCarbon Tool. SPECIAL CATEGORIES. Exceptional Benefits Label

Version	Date	Nature of the document
Version 1.0	July 15, 2025	First version of the document