BioCarbon Standard

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

# BioCarbon Water Standard (BWS)

Participation, methodologies, quantification, issuance, and use of Verified Water Credits

**BioCarbon Cert®**

Based on BWS Version 2.2 | November 2026 · www.biocarbonstandard.com

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

# Frequently Asked Questions

These frequently asked questions explain how to participate in the BioCarbon Water Standard (BWS), which water benefits can be recognized, how they are quantified and audited, and what buyers of Verified Water Credits (VWCs) should consider. They are intended for project holders, communities, water users, companies, public entities, conformity assessment bodies, and buyers.

> The applicable requirements are set out in the BWS, the approved methodologies, the tools, and the other normative documents of the program. This document facilitates their understanding and does not replace them. An activity covered by the Standard may only request issuance where an applicable approved methodology exists and its requirements are met. Section 4 presents the program's methodologies, including one that is under public consultation, and explains their main conditions of application.

CONTENTS


## 01 The program and VWCs

1.1 What is the BioCarbon Water Standard?
1.2 What is a Verified Water Credit and what does it represent?
1.3 Does buying VWCs mean buying water or acquiring rights over a water source?
1.4 What types of outcomes does the program recognize?
1.5 Do all cubic meters have the same environmental meaning?
1.6 What is the difference between abstraction, consumption, and return flows?
1.7 Are VWCs carbon or biodiversity credits?
1.8 What does demonstrating additionality mean?
1.9 Who can participate in the BWS?

## 02 How to obtain VWCs

2.1 What are the main steps to obtain VWCs?
2.2 Who conducts the independent audit?
2.3 Who determines conformity and authorizes issuance?
2.4 What is the role of the registry?
2.5 Are VWCs issued before or after outcomes are demonstrated?
2.6 Does registering a project guarantee VWC issuance?
2.7 What documents support an issuance?
2.8 How long does it take to register a project and obtain the first issuance?
2.9 What deadlines apply to audits?
2.10 Where can the program fees be found?
2.11 In what language must documentation be submitted?

## 03 Eligible projects

3.1 How can I find out whether my project is eligible, and how do I get started?
3.2 Is there a minimum location requirement or project size?
3.3 Can a project that already receives funding participate?
3.4 Can an activity required by law obtain VWCs?
3.5 How long must a project last?
3.6 Can activities prior to registration be recognized?

## 04 Available methodologies

4.1 Which methodologies are available?
4.2 How is the appropriate methodology selected?
4.3 What does BWS0001 require for projects that increase infiltration?
4.4 Does installing a rainwater tank automatically generate VWCs?
4.5 What is the difference between infiltration and managed aquifer recharge?
4.6 How can a water quality improvement become a volumetric benefit?
4.7 Is wastewater treatment covered by BWS0004?
4.8 Does every reduction in losses or billed consumption generate a water benefit?
4.9 Does efficient irrigation always generate eligible water savings?

## 05 Quantification and monitoring of water benefits

5.1 How is the baseline established?
5.2 Does the baseline remain fixed for the entire project duration?
5.3 How is the net water benefit calculated?
5.4 Can models or satellite data be used?
5.5 How often are outcomes monitored?
5.6 What happens if data are missing or evidence is insufficient?
5.7 What is leakage and how is it addressed?
5.8 How is uncertainty managed?
5.9 What happens if the benefit decreases or is lost?
5.10 Does the BWS require a credit buffer to cover reversals?
5.11 Can the same project generate VWCs in successive periods?

## 06 Rights, stakeholder engagement, and safeguards

6.1 What rights must the project holder demonstrate?
6.2 How are the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities protected?
6.3 How are benefit sharing and VWC ownership defined?
6.4 What safeguards must a project meet?
6.5 How many Sustainable Development Goals must a project demonstrate?
6.6 How can stakeholders participate or submit comments and complaints?
6.7 Is it mandatory to consider climate change adaptation?

## 07 Purchase, use, and claims related to VWCs

7.1 Who sets the price of VWCs and who markets them?
7.2 What should a buyer review before purchasing VWCs?
7.3 What information is available in the public registry?
7.4 Does buying VWCs allow a company to claim immediately that it has offset a water impact?
7.5 What does retiring a VWC mean?
7.6 Does buying VWCs demonstrate that a company is water positive or has a zero water footprint?
7.7 Can VWCs offset any abstraction, consumption, or pollution elsewhere?
7.8 Can a water project share an area or activities with carbon or biodiversity projects?
7.9 Can VWCs and units from other programs be sold together?
7.10 Can more than one VWC be issued for the same volume when activities or methodologies are combined?

## Reference documents

# 01

# The program and VWCs

## 1.1 What is the BioCarbon Water Standard?

The BioCarbon Water Standard (BWS) establishes the requirements for assessing projects for the sustainable management and conservation of water resources and for issuing VWCs for demonstrated net water benefits. It includes rules on eligibility, baseline, additionality, quantification, monitoring, safeguards, independent audit, conformity determination, and registration.

The program covers nature-based, engineered, and hybrid solutions. Eligibility depends on the benefit that can be demonstrated and on the applicable methodology, not only on the technology or the type of intervention.

## 1.2 What is a Verified Water Credit and what does it represent?

A Verified Water Credit (VWC) is a unit representing one cubic meter (1 $m^3$) of net water benefit, conservatively quantified in accordance with the BWS and an approved methodology. The benefit is net because it is calculated after deducting leakage, uncertainty, reversals, and any other required adjustments. The result must have been monitored, audited, and determined to be in conformity by BioCarbon before issuance is authorized.

Each unit is linked to a project, a methodology, and a monitoring period, and has a unique serial number in the registry. A VWC does not represent one cubic meter per year indefinitely: it corresponds to the benefit demonstrated for the period that supports its issuance.

## 1.3 Does buying VWCs mean buying water or acquiring rights over a water source?

**No**. VWCs represent quantified environmental benefits. Purchasing them does not, by itself, constitute a sale of physical water, nor does it transfer ownership of a source, a water concession, or rights to abstract, use, or discharge water.

The permits and rights needed to implement the activities must be obtained and maintained independently. Ownership of VWCs and the conditions for their transfer are based on the project agreements and the applicable rules.

## 1.4 What types of outcomes does the program recognize?

The BWS covers three categories: water supply enhancement; water demand reduction and efficiency; and water quality improvement. These may include greater water availability, infiltration, recharge, or regulation; lower abstraction or consumption, as applicable; or restoration of water usability for a defined use.

Outcomes must be expressed as net water benefits in cubic meters and demonstrated against a baseline, which represents the conditions that would reasonably be expected without the project. They must also meet the usability conditions, meaning that the water must be suitable for the defined use or function, in addition to the applicable additionality and quantification requirements. The same benefit cannot be issued more than once because it falls under several categories.

## 1.5 Do all cubic meters have the same environmental meaning?

**No**. The volumetric unit allows the outcome to be expressed, but interpreting it requires knowing the basin, the source, the location, the period, and the availability, use, and quality of the water. A cubic meter of additional infiltration should not automatically be presented as a cubic meter of drinking water supplied or as avoided abstraction in another basin.

Claims must identify the type of benefit and its context. Expressing results in $m^3$ does not, by itself, establish ecological, functional, or regulatory equivalence between projects and uses.

## 1.6 What is the difference between abstraction, consumption, and return flows?

Abstraction is the water withdrawn from a source. Consumption is the portion that does not return to the system after use, for example through evaporation, transpiration, or incorporation into products. Return flows are the water returned to the water system, which may contribute to downstream availability or to recharge.

These quantities are not interchangeable. A project that reduces abstraction may also reduce relevant return flows. The methodology must establish how to assess these effects and what net volume can be recognized, taking into account the affected users and ecosystems.

## 1.7 Are VWCs carbon or biodiversity credits?

**No**. VWCs represent net water benefits; carbon credits represent greenhouse gas mitigation outcomes, and BioCredits represent biodiversity conservation outcomes.

An intervention may benefit water, climate, and biodiversity, but those effects do not automatically generate units under all three programs. Each outcome must meet the requirements of the corresponding program, and double counting must be prevented.

## 1.8 What does demonstrating additionality mean?

It means demonstrating, through measurable and verifiable evidence, that the water benefit would not have occurred without the project activities. The assessment compares the without-project scenario with the with-project scenario and considers hydrological conditions, natural trends, policies, legal obligations, and other interventions that could explain the changes.

An observed improvement is not necessarily additional. The causal relationship between the activity and the claimed benefit must be substantiated, separating out changes that would have occurred anyway.

## 1.9 Who can participate in the BWS?

Individuals, communities, organizations, companies, public utilities, and public entities that develop eligible projects and demonstrate the necessary rights and authorizations may participate. The program also provides for the participation of conformity assessment bodies, specialists, investors, and buyers.

Implementation may rely on different ownership, operation, and financing arrangements. These must make it possible to identify responsibilities and rights over the water benefits and the VWCs.

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**
BWS v2.2, Sections 2, 6 to 8, 10, 18, 20, 21, 28, and Annex A.

# 02

# How to obtain VWCs

## 2.1 What are the main steps to obtain VWCs?

The process comprises the following activities, in accordance with the applicable registration, audit, and issuance procedures:

1. **Define the project and check its eligibility.** Identify the activities, the water benefit, the rights, the permits, the affected users, and the applicable methodology.
2. **Request listing of the project**. Submit a request identifying the project, its holder, its general location, the activity categories covered, and the start date of the activities. BioCarbon Cert assigns the project identifier and records the listing date. From that date, the project holder has six months to submit the Project Document and the Monitoring Plan and start the Project Registration Audit or the Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit. Listing does not constitute project registration or authorize VWC issuance.
3. **Prepare the Project Document and the monitoring plan.** Delineate the project and its area of influence, establish the baseline, demonstrate additionality, and define the quantification, safeguards, and risk management.
4. **Carry out stakeholder engagement and the applicable consultations.** Involve stakeholders, document agreements, and address the applicable rights and consent processes.
5. **Submit the design to a Project Registration Audit.** A Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) accredited and approved by BioCarbon assesses the requirements prior to registration. The project holder submits the application and the documentation required for registration. The audit must be concluded within six months of the opening meeting (see question 2.9).
6. **Implement, monitor, and report.** Collect the data for the period, quantify the net benefit, and prepare the Monitoring Report with supporting evidence.
7. **Submit the results to a VWC Issuance Audit.** The CAB examines the data, calculations, deductions, and other applicable requirements and documents its findings and conclusions. This audit must start within twelve months after the end of the monitoring period.
8. **Obtain the determination of conformity and the issuance authorization.** BioCarbon reviews the evidence and, where appropriate, issues the corresponding declarations and authorizes the VWCs, which are recorded with unique serial numbers.

The BWS also allows a Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit, covering the design and the monitored results of the first period. The applicable option depends on the project's situation and the program procedures.

## 2.2 Who conducts the independent audit?

It is conducted by a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) accredited and approved by BioCarbon. The BWS requires valid accreditation under ISO/IEC 17029 and, additionally, under ISO/IEC 17065 and/or ISO/IEC 17020, depending on the scope of the audit activities.

The CAB must demonstrate technical competence relevant to the water outcome and the project context, as well as independence, impartiality, and the absence of conflicts of interest. Accreditation is necessary, but it does not replace BioCarbon's assessment and approval of the body.

## 2.3 Who determines conformity and authorizes issuance?

BioCarbon retains responsibility for determining conformity and authorizing issuance. To do so, it reviews the Audit Report, the CAB Audit Statement where applicable, and the supporting documentation.

The CAB provides the independent assessment and its conclusions. Its report and statement do not, by themselves, amount to a BioCarbon Declaration of Conformity, an issuance authorization, or issued VWCs. Issuance is formalized through the Declaration of Issuance, which identifies the quantity, the period, and the serial numbers.

## 2.4 What is the role of the registry?

The public registry makes it possible to identify projects and trace VWCs through unique serial numbers. It records the applicable issuance, transfer, and retirement transactions and helps prevent duplicate claims.

The BWS provides that the platform is operated by an independent entity. Registry transactions do not replace BioCarbon's conformity determination or issuance authorization. For projects admitted to the Multi-Program Framework, the records of the participating programs are linked in Global Carbon Trace while maintaining their independent identity.

## 2.5 Are VWCs issued before or after outcomes are demonstrated?

They are issued exclusively after the net water benefits have been demonstrated, through ex post issuance. Each issuance must be supported by monitoring, reporting, an independent audit, and BioCarbon's conformity determination.

Projections, estimates of potential, and modeled results not supported by monitored data do not constitute issued VWCs. Advance purchase agreements may refer to future units, but they cannot be presented or used as if those units already existed.

## 2.6 Does registering a project guarantee VWC issuance?

**No**. Project registration and the issuance of units are separate decisions. Each issuance depends on the net water benefit demonstrated for the corresponding period and on compliance with the applicable requirements.

An estimate included in a registered project does not guarantee the quantity of VWCs or their future availability. Losses, uncertainty, leakage, and required adjustments may reduce the volume ultimately authorized.

## 2.7 What documents support an issuance?

Issuance is supported by the Project Document, the monitoring plan, the Monitoring Report, the supporting data and calculations, the Audit Report, and the CAB Audit Statement where required. BioCarbon issues the Declaration of Conformity and, where appropriate, the Declaration of Issuance.

The file must include the applicable evidence on rights, permits, safeguards, stakeholder engagement, contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and climate change adaptation. Records must make it possible to reconstruct the calculation and link the data to the authorized volume, the methodology, and the audited period.

## 2.8 How long does it take to register a project and obtain the first issuance?

The time required depends on document preparation, available data, stakeholder engagement processes, the audit, and the resolution of observations or corrective actions. Submitting an application or installing infrastructure is not enough.

From the listing date, the project holder has six months to submit the Project Document and the Monitoring Plan and start the Project Registration Audit or the Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit. Once started, the audit must be concluded within the applicable time limit described in question 2.9. These deadlines do not guarantee a registration or issuance date, as both require BioCarbon's review and the corresponding decisions.

The first issuance requires results from an eligible monitoring period and sufficient data to demonstrate them. Under the BWS, these periods last from one to three years. Where retroactive recognition is requested, the corresponding requirements must be met, including the duration limits and audit deadlines for each period.

## 2.9 What deadlines apply to audits?

Within six months after listing, the project holder must submit to BioCarbon the Project Document and the Monitoring Plan and start the Project Registration Audit or the Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit. If either requirement is not met within this deadline, the listing ceases to be valid and a new listing must be requested to continue the process.

The audit start date is the date of the opening meeting between the CAB and the project holder, and it must be recorded in the Audit Report. The audit must be concluded within six months of that date. It is deemed concluded when BioCarbon receives the final Audit Report.

If a Project Registration Audit or a Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit is not concluded within the applicable time limit, the benefit of using the listing date to determine retroactivity is lost. The five years are counted backward from the date on which BioCarbon receives the final Audit Report.

For a VWC Issuance Audit or a Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit that exceeds the applicable time limit, the date on which the final Audit Report is received is used as the start date solely to determine whether the audit of the monitoring period started on time.

BioCarbon may extend the deadline for concluding the audit where the project holder demonstrates that the delay is due to causes not attributable to the project holder. In that case, the consequences above apply if the audit is not concluded within the extended time limit.

In addition, the VWC Issuance Audit for each monitoring period, or the Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit covering that period, must start within twelve months after the end of the period. Benefits from periods whose audit does not start within that deadline are not eligible for issuance. Listing does not suspend or extend this deadline. This provision applies to monitoring periods ending after the entry into force of BWS Version 2.2.

## 2.10 Where can the program fees be found?

BioCarbon's fees are available in the Fees section of our website. Before starting an application, we recommend reviewing the applicable items and current conditions.

Audit costs are agreed directly with the CAB and are in addition to BioCarbon's fees. The costs of studies, measurement, monitoring, and any registry transactions corresponding to the project should also be considered.

## 2.11 In what language must documentation be submitted?

The BWS operates in Spanish and English, but documentation in the public registry must be submitted in English. This includes the Project Document, the Monitoring Report, the Audit Report, the applicable CAB Audit Statement, and any required annexes.

BioCarbon may accept supporting documentation in Spanish or other languages where necessary for the assessment. It may require official translations or summaries in English for audit, public review, registration, and traceability purposes. Information intended for communities must be accessible and appropriate for their participation.

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**

BWS v2.2, Sections 5, 13.1, 21, 28 to 33, and Annex A; BWS Audit Manual v1.1, Sections 13.2 and 18.1; BioCarbon Multi-Program Framework v1.0, registry and traceability provisions.

# 03

# Eligible projects

## 3.1 How can I find out whether my project is eligible, and how do I get started?

The first step is to identify the water problem, the intended outcome, and the mechanism that produces it. The conditions of an approved methodology, rights and permits, data availability, and the feasibility of establishing a baseline and monitoring results must be reviewed.

It is advisable to gather a description of the location, the water system, the activities, the users, the financing, and the available historical information. BioCarbon can provide guidance on the applicable documents and procedures through its official channels. Consultations, meetings, correspondence, and submissions of drafts do not constitute a listing, establish a reference date for retroactivity, or represent project approval.

To formally open the project file, the project holder may request listing using the basic project information described in question 2.1. Upon formalization of the listing, BioCarbon Cert assigns the identifier and records the date from which the applicable deadlines are calculated.

The technical review for registration begins once the project has a valid listing, a registration application has been submitted, and BioCarbon has received the required documentation, including the final Audit Report. The project holder is responsible for preparing, completing, and correcting the documentation; the CAB conducts the audit, and BioCarbon reviews the documentation and determines conformity.

## 3.2 Is there a minimum location requirement or project size?

The BWS allows projects in any country and in rural, peri-urban, or urban settings, provided that they comply with the applicable provisions. The Standard does not set a minimum project scale or a minimum area unit.

This does not remove the specific conditions of each methodology. The boundaries, data representativeness, and measurement scale must be sufficient to identify, attribute, and quantify the benefit, assess impacts, and prevent double counting.

## 3.3 Can a project that already receives funding participate?

Existing funding must be analyzed when assessing additionality and the rights over the outcome. The sources, the associated obligations, and the investments or improvements that would occur without the project incentives must be identified.

The project holder must demonstrate that the claimed benefit is not already committed or recognized in a way that would lead to double counting or incompatible claims. Receiving funds does not, by itself, demonstrate either eligibility or additionality.

## 3.4 Can an activity required by law obtain VWCs?

Legal compliance is mandatory and does not, by itself, demonstrate additionality. The BWS excludes activities that are fully required and enforced by current regulations where there is no evidence of additionality.

For efficiency and demand reduction, the Standard contains a specific safeguard for assessing regulatory obligations, performance beyond what is required, and the relevant implementation, common practice, and viability conditions. The project holder must justify the eligible outcome in accordance with that safeguard and the methodology; it is not enough to state that the credits help finance compliance.

VWCs do not replace permits, treatment obligations, concessions, or other legal requirements.

## 3.5 How long must a project last?

The BWS establishes a minimum quantification period of ten years, which may be extended for another ten years by justifying the reasons, objectives, and expected results. For the extension, the baseline, additionality, and other applicable requirements must be reassessed.

The project holder must define the start and end dates and the monitoring periods. If regulations or project agreements require longer commitments, these must be met; their existence does not guarantee an extension or future issuances under the program.

## 3.6 Can activities prior to registration be recognized?

**Yes**. The BWS allows the recognition of water benefits generated up to five years before the date of the project's valid listing, provided that the deadlines for submitting documentation and starting and concluding the audit described in question 2.9 are met. There must be a valid baseline and sufficient evidence to demonstrate additionality and the benefits of the claimed period.

If the listing ceases to be valid, a new listing must be requested and the five years are counted backward from the new date, without retaining the previous listing date. If the Project Registration Audit or the Combined Registration and VWC Issuance Audit is not concluded within the applicable time limit, the five years are counted backward from the date on which BioCarbon receives the final Audit Report.

The retroactive period must be divided into monitoring periods of one to three years that are continuous and non-overlapping. The benefits of each period must be monitored, audited, and determined to be in conformity before issuance, and the applicable audit deadlines must be met.

For example, if a project is listed on March 1, 2027, and meets the applicable deadlines, the earliest date that could be eligible is March 1, 2022. If that listing ceases to be valid and the project is listed again on December 1, 2027, the earliest date becomes December 1, 2022. These dates illustrate the retroactivity limit; they do not mean that all subsequent benefits are automatically eligible.

Retroactivity does not allow issuance for future results or waive monitoring, audit, or conformity determination requirements.

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**
BWS v2.2, Sections 10 to 15, 18, 21.1, 24, 30, 32, and 33.

# 04

# Available methodologies

## 4.1 Which methodologies are available?

The program has four approved methodologies for quantifying net water benefits and a fifth, BWS0005, which is under public consultation. The choice depends on the main benefit being quantified and on the applicability conditions, not only on the name of the intervention.

| Code | Main outcome and application |
|---|---|
| **BWS0001** | Net water gains from increased infiltration in watersheds. |
| **BWS0002** | Rainwater harvesting through capture, storage, and use, replacing conventional sources. |
| **BWS0003** | Managed aquifer recharge, underground storage, and temporary regulation of water flows. |
| **BWS0004** | Water quality improvement and functional restoration of surface water bodies. |
| **BWS0005** | Water-use efficiency and loss reduction, through a demonstrable reduction in freshwater abstraction. Under public consultation. |

Each project must apply the corresponding approved version and demonstrate compliance with its eligibility, baseline, additionality, quantification, and monitoring conditions. The availability of a methodology does not guarantee the eligibility of every water-related activity. A methodology under public consultation cannot be applied to request issuance until BioCarbon approves and publishes it, and its conditions may change as a result of the consultation.

## 4.2 How is the appropriate methodology selected?

The methodology is selected according to the main mechanism through which the quantified water benefit is generated: additional infiltration, rainwater capture and use, recharge or regulation, water quality restoration, or reduced abstraction through efficiency.

The project holder must review the scope, exclusions, data, and applicability conditions. The same infrastructure may produce related effects, but this does not allow any methodology to be applied interchangeably or overlapping benefits to be added together. Where the outcome is not covered by an approved methodology, its general inclusion in the BWS is not sufficient to request issuance.

## 4.3 What does BWS0001 require for projects that increase infiltration?

BWS0001 v1.0 quantifies net water gains from increased infiltration in watersheds. It covers soil improvement practices and the restoration or recovery of vegetation cover, subject to specific eligibility conditions.

Among them, eligible areas must not be classified as forest and must show verifiable evidence of conversion of natural cover that occurred at least ten years before the project start. The methodology requires hydrographic units with high runoff, a curve number (a parameter that estimates how much rainfall becomes runoff depending on soil type and cover) of 60 or higher, and evidence of water stress, as well as restrictions on species, substances, and practices that could degrade ecosystems.

These conditions apply to BWS0001 and should not be generalized to all BWS methodologies. The presence of forest or a conservation activity does not automatically enable the application of this methodology.

## 4.4 Does installing a rainwater tank automatically generate VWCs?

**No**. BWS0002 v1.0 requires demonstrating the effective volume of water captured, stored, and used, compared with a without-project situation. The tank capacity or the rainfall on the roof does not, by itself, equal the water benefit.

The methodology requires a context of water stress, access limitations, or climate vulnerability, verifiable catchment surfaces, defined storage, and an identifiable use. The full or partial replacement of conventional sources must also be demonstrated, taking into account operational losses, storage constraints, and actual demand.

## 4.5 What is the difference between infiltration and managed aquifer recharge?

Water that enters the soil does not necessarily reach an aquifer or create additional availability at the place and time of interest. BWS0001 addresses additional infiltration; BWS0003 addresses managed recharge, underground storage, and temporary regulation of water flows.

BWS0003 requires demonstrating the hydrological or hydrogeological connection with the outcome and distinguishing the volumes captured, conveyed, infiltrated, actually recharged or regulated, as well as losses. Where relevant transit times exist, that is, where water takes time to travel from where it infiltrates to the aquifer or the point where it is used, they must be taken into account before the benefit is recognized. The existence of a trench or a traditional system does not, by itself, demonstrate additional recharge.

## 4.6 How can a water quality improvement become a volumetric benefit?

It must be demonstrated what volume of water reaches a condition suitable for a defined use or function, compared with the baseline. Reducing a concentration or a pollutant load does not automatically equal an equivalent volume of restored water.

BWS0004 develops this approach for surface water bodies and requires linking physical, chemical, biological, or ecological indicators to the volume and duration of the demonstrated benefit. Dilution alone, the volume flowing through equipment, and the reduction of the grey water footprint (the volume of water that would be needed to dilute a pollutant load until quality standards are met) do not automatically constitute eligible benefits.

Usability must be assessed considering the parameters that actually limit the selected use or function. Improving one parameter does not allow the entire volume to be declared restored if another material parameter still fails to meet the relevant thresholds.

## 4.7 Is wastewater treatment covered by BWS0004?

**No**. Although the BWS includes wastewater treatment activities within its general scope, BWS0004 excludes wastewater collection, conveyance, treatment, and sanitation infrastructure, including treatment plants and their construction, expansion, rehabilitation, optimization, or operation.

This exclusion does not prevent the assessment of an eligible activity restoring a surface water body affected by discharges, where the benefit comes from the restoration and not from the wastewater treatment itself. The volume of treated effluent cannot be presented as an eligible volume under BWS0004.

The inclusion of an activity in the Standard does not replace the need for an approved methodology covering the specific outcome.

## 4.8 Does every reduction in losses or billed consumption generate a water benefit?

**No**. A real and additional reduction must be demonstrated, not merely an improvement in metering, billing, or commercial accounting. Correcting meters may change the reported volume without reducing freshwater abstraction.

BWS0005, which is under public consultation, quantifies efficiency and loss reduction through a demonstrable reduction in freshwater abstraction. If measurement takes place at a downstream facility or network, its relationship with the abstraction point must be substantiated. Internal reuse only contributes to the benefit to the extent that it reduces the external supply of freshwater.

## 4.9 Does efficient irrigation always generate eligible water savings?

**No**. Reducing the volume applied per hectare does not, by itself, demonstrate lower pressure on the water system. Actual abstraction, climate, effective rainfall, production, changes in the irrigated area, return flows, and possible rebound effects must be considered, that is, the saved water being used to increase consumption.

For example, an efficiency improvement may be used to expand irrigation instead of reducing abstraction. The proposed BWS0005 limits this pathway to demonstrable reductions in abstraction and excludes activities that require quantification based solely on consumptive use (water that does not return to the system after use; see question 1.6).

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**

BWS v2.2, Sections 10 and 20; BWS0001 v1.0, Sections 4 to 10; BWS0002 v1.0, applicability and quantification conditions; BWS0003 v1.0, scope, applicability, and quantification; BWS0004 v1.0, scope, applicability, and quantification provisions; BWS0005, public consultation version.

# 05

# Quantification and monitoring of water benefits

## 5.1 How is the baseline established?

The baseline represents the conditions that would reasonably be expected without the project. It must be based on relevant hydrological, environmental, operational, and historical information and allow a consistent comparison with the with-project scenario.

The approach depends on the outcome: hydrological conditions and natural recharge for supply; expected abstraction, consumption, or losses for efficiency; and quality conditions and pollutant loads for restoration. Changes that would occur regardless of the project must be considered. A single initial measurement does not always adequately represent that scenario.

## 5.2 Does the baseline remain fixed for the entire project duration?

**No**. It must be reassessed at least every five years, and earlier if significant changes affect its representativeness, such as new regulations, infrastructure, rainfall patterns, land uses, or demand conditions.

Adjustments must be documented, based on verifiable data, and applied prospectively to future periods. They are not applied retroactively to VWCs already issued, except where material errors or inconsistencies are identified.

## 5.3 How is the net water benefit calculated?

The additional change attributable to the project compared with the baseline is determined, and deductions for leakage, uncertainty, reversals, and other required conservative adjustments are applied. The result must be expressed in cubic meters and correspond to the monitoring period.

The direction of the comparison depends on the activity: a supply improvement implies greater eligible availability; an efficiency measure may imply lower abstraction compared with the adjusted baseline; a quality improvement requires demonstrating the volume that meets the defined functional condition. A generic subtraction must not be applied without following the equations and rules of the corresponding methodology.

## 5.4 Can models or satellite data be used?

**Yes**, where the methodology allows it and its use is justified. The BWS prioritizes direct measurement, followed by empirical data and monitored parameters, documented and validated models, and finally conservative default values supported by credible sources.

When using lower tiers, the project holder must justify why higher tiers are not reasonably feasible. Models must be supported by representative data and calibrated where possible. A simulation of future benefits or a model not supported by monitored results does not enable issuance.

## 5.5 How often are outcomes monitored?

The BWS requires monitoring periods of at least one year and no longer than three years, continuous and non-overlapping. The frequency of each measurement must reflect the methodology, seasonality, system operation, and project risks. The VWC Issuance Audit for each period must start within twelve months after the period ends (see question 2.9).

A three-year monitoring period does not mean that measuring once every three years is enough. Continuous records, periodic measurements, seasonal sampling, or more frequent operational information may be required to represent the benefit over the entire period.

## 5.6 What happens if data are missing or evidence is insufficient?

The project holder must identify the gaps and apply the treatment provided for in the methodology. Depending on the case, it may be necessary to complete measurements, use admissible alternative information, apply conservative adjustments, or exclude volumes and periods that cannot be demonstrated.

An uncertainty deduction does not replace the minimum evidence that the benefit exists, is attributable, and can be quantified. VWCs must not be issued for results that cannot be robustly substantiated.

## 5.7 What is leakage and how is it addressed?

Leakage refers to project-related impacts that shift water use, abstraction, consumption, or pollution outside the considered boundary. It may occur upstream, downstream, in other systems, or through changes in activities or markets.

The project must identify leakage pathways, assess their materiality, quantify them conservatively, and deduct the corresponding impacts. Risks are reassessed in each period. Projects whose leakage increases net pressure on water resources or cannot be reasonably assessed are not eligible.

## 5.8 How is uncertainty managed?

Uncertainties in measurement, sampling, data, models, parameters, and environmental variability must be identified. They must be quantified where feasible and treated conservatively to avoid overestimating the benefit.

Where uncertainty is material, justified deductions must be applied before issuance, for example through lower bounds or discount factors provided for in the methodology. Methods, sources, and deductions must be documented and reported.

## 5.9 What happens if the benefit decreases or is lost?

The project must detect, quantify, and report losses and apply the corresponding corrective measures. When a loss occurs within the period, it must be deducted before issuance. VWCs are not issued for reversed or undemonstrated benefits.

If a reversal is identified after issuance, the BWS requires quantifying the loss, reporting it in the next report, and deducting an equivalent volume in future periods.

A later decline in performance does not, by itself, cancel what has already been credited. For example, if an efficiency project saved water during an audited period and its performance declines years later, the savings for that period remain valid. A correction applies only if it is shown that the credited benefit was overestimated or if the loss corresponds to a reversal case provided for in the BWS.

## 5.10 Does the BWS require a credit buffer to cover reversals?

The BWS does not require a buffer pool to manage reversal risk. It relies on conservative quantification, monitoring, reporting, and ex post adjustments to benefits and issuance.

This provision does not remove the project holder's responsibility to prevent losses, maintain systems, report reversals, and apply the required deductions and corrections.

## 5.11 Can the same project generate VWCs in successive periods?

**Yes**, where it demonstrates additional eligible benefits for each period, without overlap or double counting. Each issuance requires monitoring, quantification, audit, and BioCarbon authorization.

Continued operation of infrastructure or conservation of the same area does not guarantee future issuances. Nor can benefits that have not met the monitoring, audit, conformity, and issuance requirements for the defined period be carried over to later periods.

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**

BWS v2.2, Sections 14 to 22 and 29; applicable methodologies, provisions on baseline, quantification, data quality, leakage, uncertainty, and monitoring.

# 06

# Rights, stakeholder engagement, and safeguards

## 6.1 What rights must the project holder demonstrate?

The project holder must demonstrate the rights and authorizations needed to carry out the activities, access and operate in the relevant areas or facilities, use the resource in accordance with the law, and request the issuance and disposal of VWCs. Proving ownership of a property is not enough if the activities require other permits or agreements.

Where communities, operators, owners, funders, or other entities participate, responsibilities, ownership of VWCs, and representation and marketing authorizations must be documented. Agreements must respect existing rights and allow the chain of ownership to be verified.

## 6.2 How are the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities protected?

Projects must comply with applicable law and respect their rights, forms of organization, knowledge, territories, and relationship with water. The BWS recognizes their role in ecosystem management and requires ongoing interaction and communication during design and implementation.

Participation must be accessible, inclusive, and culturally appropriate. Free, prior, and informed consent requirements must be met where applicable under the safeguards and relevant frameworks. Water benefits do not justify unduly restricting access to water or affecting third-party rights.

## 6.3 How are benefit sharing and VWC ownership defined?

Ownership and transfer rights are determined by the applicable rules and project agreements. In projects with several participants, rights may be shared or subject to specific agreements.

Agreements must be clear regarding responsibilities, benefits, and the authority to request issuance and market the units, and must be communicated to the relevant parties. The ownership section of the BWS does not set a universal sharing percentage; the requirements of the safeguards, rights, and corresponding agreements must be applied.

## 6.4 What safeguards must a project meet?

It must apply BioCarbon's Sustainable Development Safeguards Tool and identify and manage environmental, social, and economic risks from the design stage and throughout implementation. This includes effects on water, biodiversity, ecosystems, climate, labor, gender equality, land, communities, cultural heritage, health, safety, corruption, and economic impacts.

The analysis must consider upstream and downstream users, environmental flows, existing rights, pollution sources, and possible displacement of impacts. Preventive and mitigation measures, responsible parties, indicators, and follow-up must be defined.

A positive volumetric outcome does not offset non-compliance with safeguards or allow harm to be shifted to other communities, ecosystems, or water bodies. The BWS excludes activities with net negative environmental or social impacts.

## 6.5 How many Sustainable Development Goals must a project demonstrate?

The BWS requires activities to be aligned with at least three SDGs and to explain clearly how and to what extent they contribute to them. Measurable criteria and indicators relevant to the project must be defined and monitored over time.

The contribution must be reflected in the design, implementation, and monitoring and supported by evidence. A conceptual association with an SDG does not replace demonstrating the outcome or the independent quantification of the net water benefit.

## 6.6 How can stakeholders participate or submit comments and complaints?

The project holder must identify stakeholders and facilitate their participation during design and implementation, including water users, communities, and other affected actors. It must provide accessible information, carry out the applicable consultation processes, and document the input received and how it was addressed.

Public consultations on program documents allow comments on methodologies and other instruments through the channels and timelines of each call. For projects, consultation and participation must follow the applicable requirements of the BWS, the safeguards, and the program procedures. Public project information facilitates review and the submission of comments.

Stakeholders may use the grievance mechanisms applicable to the project and submit petitions, complaints, and claims through BioCarbon's PQR channels. Confidentiality, accessibility, and the protection of individuals must be respected in accordance with the applicable provisions. CABs must also have procedures for complaints, appeals, and disputes related to their work.

## 6.7 Is it mandatory to consider climate change adaptation?

**Yes**. The BWS requires a Climate Change Adaptation Plan directly linked to project activities. It must consider climate impacts and risks on water resources and identify strategies to strengthen the resilience of ecosystems and communities.

Monitoring and adaptive management must allow activities to be adjusted in response to droughts, floods, rainfall variability, changes in sources, or other relevant conditions. Expected benefits do not replace the demonstration of actual performance during each period.

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**

BWS v2.2, Sections 10.5.1, 11, 16, 23 to 29, and 31; Sustainable Development Safeguards (SDS) Tool v2.1.1 and other applicable procedures.

# 07

# Purchase, use, and claims related to VWCs

## 7.1 Who sets the price of VWCs and who markets them?

The sale price is agreed between the parties to each transaction and must be distinguished from program, audit, and registry fees. Marketing is the responsibility of the unit holder or those duly authorized to act on its behalf.

Contracts must identify the units or future results covered by the agreement, the delivery conditions, the rights, and the restrictions on use. Registration and conformity assessment do not guarantee buyers, a price, or a specific income.

## 7.2 What should a buyer review before purchasing VWCs?

Buyers must check what benefit the unit represents and whether it was actually issued, with evidence of monitoring, audit, and BioCarbon authorization. They should review:

- **The project:** holder, location, basin or water system, activities, and rights.
- **The outcome:** benefit category, methodology, period, water use or function, and hydrological context.
- **The quantification:** baseline, data, deductions, uncertainty, and evidence of the net benefit.
- **The assessment:** Audit Report, Declaration of Conformity, and Declaration of Issuance.
- **The units:** quantity, serial numbers, status, availability, and restrictions in the registry.
- **The safeguards:** stakeholder engagement, rights, impact management, and relevant public documentation.

Buyers must also verify that their intended claim is compatible with the outcome and distinguish issued credits from estimates or forward delivery contracts. In multi-program transactions, they must identify which types of units are being acquired and which outcomes are credited separately.

## 7.3 What information is available in the public registry?

The information must make it possible to identify the project and link the VWCs to their origin, methodology, monitored results, assessment, and issuance. Serial numbers and records make it possible to track transactions and check the status of the units.

The BWS provides for the public availability of information, with the legal exceptions for classified or reserved information. Disclosure must respect the applicable confidentiality

and information protection provisions. Access to public documentation does not imply unrestricted access to personal data or protected information.

## 7.4 Does buying VWCs allow a company to claim immediately that it has offset a water impact?

**No**. Buying units, holding them in an account, and retiring them are separate transactions. A use claim must be supported by eligible units and by the corresponding retirement transaction, in accordance with the rules of the registry and the applicable mechanism.

In addition, retirement does not, by itself, demonstrate equivalence between the benefit and the impact to be addressed. The claim must be specific, verifiable, and traceable and identify the relevant type of benefit, location, and period. It must not present the buyer as the implementer of activities it did not carry out or allow duplicate claims.

## 7.5 What does retiring a VWC mean?

Retirement records the use of a unit for the declared purpose, in accordance with the applicable rules, and excludes it from further transfers or incompatible uses. The registry must preserve the traceability of the serial number and the transaction.

Holding a VWC in an account is not the same as retiring it. A retired unit cannot be sold again or used to support another, duplicate claim.

## 7.6 Does buying VWCs demonstrate that a company is water positive or has a zero water footprint?

**No**. VWCs support specific results from defined projects and periods. Purchasing or retiring them does not, by itself, demonstrate the performance of all of a company's operations or automatically neutralize all of its water impacts.

A claim of that scope requires assessing its own basis, boundaries, sources, location, timing, uses, and water quality, in addition to the requirements of the framework used. Holding credits does not replace measuring and managing the water footprint or legal compliance.

## 7.7 Can VWCs offset any abstraction, consumption, or pollution elsewhere?

There is no automatic equivalence. The basin and hydrological connections, the timing of the benefit, its usability, and the type of pressure or impact to be addressed must be considered. Expressing both results in $m^3$ does not, by itself, demonstrate that they correspond.

The BWS recognizes that the use of VWCs may be subject to regulatory restrictions and voluntary agreements. The assessment of the applicable mechanism and the required authorizations are independent of issuance. Under no circumstances does a VWC constitute a permit or justification to pollute, degrade ecosystems, abstract water without authorization, or affect other people's access and rights.

## 7.8 Can a water project share an area or activities with carbon or biodiversity projects?

**Yes**, where it complies with BioCarbon's Multi-Program Framework and the requirements of each program. The framework allows exactly two separate projects or initiatives from two different programs; it does not allow carbon, biodiversity, and water to be combined over the same area and overlapping periods.

Each project must retain its own methodology, eligibility, additionality, quantification, audit, decisions, and registration. Both must have been originally developed and submitted under BioCarbon; projects migrated from other programs are not eligible for this framework.

The initial scope is limited to nature-based solutions and enabled methodological combinations and excludes REDD+ (projects that reduce emissions by avoiding deforestation and forest degradation). An industrial or infrastructure water intervention does not automatically enter the framework because it is eligible under the BWS. The combination must be assessed and admitted by BioCarbon.

## 7.9 Can VWCs and units from other programs be sold together?

**Yes**, where the projects comply with the Multi-Program Framework and the applicable conditions. Different units may be offered in the same commercial package or sold separately, retaining their identity, quantity, serial numbers, period, and restrictions.

A joint sale does not create a composite credit or convert VWCs into carbon credits or BioCredits. Buying only one type of unit does not confer rights over separately credited outcomes. Each use and claim must comply with the rules of its program and the corresponding transfer and retirement transactions.

If the package includes BioCredits subject to the Multi-Program Framework, those BioCredits cannot be used to offset biodiversity damage. That restriction is specific to BioCredits and does not mean that VWCs can be used without restrictions: their use is governed by the rules of the BWS and the applicable mechanism (see question 7.7).

## 7.10 Can more than one VWC be issued for the same volume when activities or methodologies are combined?

The same water benefit cannot be issued twice for the same spatial and temporal scope. Infiltration, recharge, harvesting, savings, and quality improvement may be related and must not be added together automatically.

Where an intervention produces different outcomes, the project holder must demonstrate their causal separation and their spatial, temporal, and volumetric boundaries. If that separation cannot be substantiated, a conservative treatment must be applied, assigning the benefit to the relevant methodology and treating the other effects as co-benefits, in accordance with the applicable rules.

Having several funders, contracts, equipment, or indicators does not multiply the eligible volume or authorize duplicate claims.

**NORMATIVE REFERENCES**

BWS v2.2, Sections 10.4, 10.5, 20, 21, 28, and 30 to 33; BioCarbon Multi-Program Framework v1.0; applicable methodologies, provisions on boundary setting and prevention of double counting.

SOURCES

# Reference documents


- BioCarbon Water Standard (BWS). Sustainable Management and Conservation of Water Resources. Version 2.2, November 3, 2026.
- BWS0001. Methodology for quantifying net water gains from increased infiltration in watersheds. Version 1.0, September 22, 2025.
- BWS0002. Rainwater harvesting practices. Capture and storage for water security. Version 1.0, April 30, 2026.
- BWS0003. Managed Aquifer Recharge and Water Regulation Systems. Version 1.0, August 28, 2026.
- BWS0004. Water Quality Improvement and Functional Restoration of Surface Water Bodies. Version 1.0, October 29, 2026.
- BWS0005. Quantification of Volumetric Water Benefits from Water-Use Efficiency and Loss Reduction. Public consultation version.
- BioCarbon Multi-Program Framework (MPF). Version 1.0, September 11, 2026.
- Audit Manual for Water Resource Management and Conservation Projects (BWS Audit Manual). Version 1.1, November 3, 2026.
- Sustainable Development Safeguards (SDS). SDS Tool. Version 2.1.1, September 1, 2026.