

Understanding carbon projects: a guide for peatland communities

Peatlands are valuable. Companies and governments may offer to pay your community to protect them because healthy peatlands store carbon. When peatlands burn or get damaged, that carbon affects the air. Your community could earn income by keeping peatlands healthy and preventing fires.

This can be a good opportunity for your community. This guide helps you understand carbon projects and make informed decisions.

STEP 1 / Community Meeting and Approval First

Things you need to know

Before any agreement, your community must have a public meeting where you can ask questions and understand the project fully. An independent expert (not hired by the company) should verify their carbon measurements.

What to do

- Ask the company to hold a public meeting and give your community time to discuss
- Bring in an independent expert to check their carbon data
- Take time as a community to understand and decide together before signing

STEP 2 / Understand What You're Getting Paid For and When

Things you need to know

You need to understand exactly how they measured the carbon, how much can actually be sold, when you'll receive money, and what happens if payments are late or stop. It's also important to know whether your community gets direct payments or whether the money funds development projects that benefit you.

What to do

- Ask to see their measurements and have community members who know your land review them
- Clarify in the contract whether individuals receive direct payments or whether funds go to community development projects
- Check that the contract clearly states when payments will arrive (3 months? 1 year?)
- Make sure the contract explains what happens if payments are late, delayed, or stop

STEP 3 / Real Benefits for Your Community

Things you need to know

Many carbon projects only measure carbon. A good project brings real, lasting benefits to your community - fire prevention, income, jobs, and your say in decisions.

What to do

- Check that the contract includes fire prevention programs, protection of plants and animals, and regular income (not just one payment)
- Make sure it creates job opportunities for community members
- Ensure your community helps decide what happens to your land
- Confirm that women, elders, and young people were all asked what matters to them

STEP 4 / Community Training and Monitoring

Things you need to know

Your community has knowledge that outsiders don't have. The project should invest in training your community members systematically - not just hire them, but build their skills and capacity. Their monitoring roles and pay should be clearly written in the contract.

What to do

- Ask the company what training programs they will provide to your community
- Make sure monitoring roles and pay are written into the contract
- Ensure community members are hired not just as workers but developed as trained monitors
- Include local leaders in all planning and decision-making meetings from the start

STEP 5 / Check the Maps and Land Boundaries

Things you need to know

Maps provided by the company may not be accurate or may not reflect how your community actually owns or uses the land. It's critical that the map shows which parts of the peatland belong to which families or groups, so payments and benefits reach the right people.

What to do

- Keep your own records of land boundaries and who owns which parts
- Get copies of the company's maps and review them carefully with community members
- Make sure the map clearly shows land ownership and distribution so payments go to the correct families or groups
- Fix any differences before you sign anything

STEP 6 / Get Independent Advice and Learn from Others

Things you need to know

After you sign, you may need help if something goes wrong. Other communities are negotiating these deals too - what they learn can help you.

What to do

- Have an independent adviser review the contract before you sign
- Keep contact information for the adviser and company in case problems happen
- Talk with other communities about their deals and what they've learned

Quick checklist

Use this to check your understanding and preparation:

- ☐ Can you explain to someone else why the carbon measurements matter and where they came from?
- ☐ Would every community member know where to find the payment terms in the contract?
- ☐ Could your community easily describe what "real benefits" you negotiated for?
- ☐ Do you have names of people who will do monitoring and know what they'll earn?
- ☐ Can you draw or describe your land boundaries and how they compare to the company's map?
- ☐ Do you have contact information for someone outside the project who can help later?
- ☐ Can you name at least one other community working on a similar project?

**If you can't confidently answer these, your community isn't ready yet.
Take more time to discuss and prepare together.**

This guide is designed to help peatland communities understand carbon projects and negotiate fair terms. Always seek independent advice and ensure your community's free, prior, and informed consent before entering any agreement.