U.S. Forest Protocol
Summary of Changes from Version 5.0 to Version 5.1

July 2023

In addition to minor editorial changes, the U.S. Forest Protocol (USFP) Version 5.1 incorporates the following changes from Version 5.0.

General

- **Reforestation was reincorporated as a project type.** After removal of reforestation as a project type under v5.0 (under the intention of producing a stand-alone reforestation protocol), reforestation is being brought back into the USFP. Provisions related to reforestation that were previously in v4.0 of the USFP have been restored throughout the protocol, along with several updates and improvements.

- **Provisions were added to indicate the ability to transition reforestation projects under the Climate Action Reserve's Climate Forward program and Reforestation Forecast Methodology.** Added language indicating the possibility to transition projects and credits to a project under the USFP for projects previously registered with the Reserve's Climate Forward program under either the Reforestation Forecast Methodology or the Mature Forest Management Forecast Methodology. Initial guidance provided in the USFP is limited in scope, with more detailed guidance to be provided in a future update to the protocol.

Section 2 – Forest Project Definitions and Requirements

- **A clarification was add to state that afforestation of native grassland habitat is not allowed (Section 2.1).** Safeguard added to prevent establishment of tree cover on sites where native grasslands are present. The safeguard is applicable to all project activity types.

Section 3 – Eligibility Rules and Other Requirements

- **Provisions were added to address situations where forest projects may be stacked with other project types (Section 3.1 and 3.11).** Understanding that activities taking place under certain other carbon project types may overlap with the activities and GHG sources, sinks, and reservoirs associated with a forest project registering under the USFP, guidance has been added indicating such "project stacking" may be allowed but requires review and approval from the Reserve so that project eligibility can be ensured and guidance regarding potential quantification adjustments to prevent double-counting can be provided.

- **Updated start date parameters for Avoided Conversion projects (Section 3.2.3)** An additional start date indicator has been added that allows for project submission to signify the start date. The intent is to provide more flexibility regarding when the conservation easement associated with the project must be recorded. Rather than requiring the easement to be recorded prior to project submission, the easement may be recorded any time prior to the registration of the project.

- **Added clarification regarding the role of the Project Implementation Agreement (Section 3.6)** Although the purpose of the Project Implementation Agreement has been implied by the text of the protocol, explicit language has been added to indicate the intended role that it plays in assuring the permanence of issued credits.

- **Incorporated easement requirement for Qualified Conservation Easements (Section 3.7)** A new provision was added requiring that Qualified Conservation Easements reference the state-enabling statute for conservation easements in the state in which the easement is being recorded to ensure the easement has a basic level of integrity, as defined by relevant legal requirements.

Section 4 – Identifying the Project Area
- **Improved the description of the process for determining the Assessment Area(s) for a project (Section 4)** Provided additional details about how to determine the Supersection(s) within which the project is located, which in turn serve as the basis for establishing the Assessment Area(s) comprising the Project Area.

Section 8 – Project Monitoring
- **Clarified the definition of Reporting Periods in relation to a project's permanence monitoring period (Section 8.3.1) and added guidance in relation to permanence monitoring obligations (Section 8.3.2)** New language was added to clarify that the definition of a reporting period includes those periods after a project's crediting period has ended and the project is subsequently required to continue monitoring the project to ensure the permanence of any previously issued credits. Additional provisions were incorporated outlining the obligations of project owners to monitor the project for permanence purposes.

Section 9 – Verification Guidance
- **Provided clearer overview description of sequential sampling approach (Section 9.3.5)** Revised language describing the general approach to sequential sampling to improve understandability.

- **Incorporated soil sequential sampling requirements for verification from an Erratum issued April 9, 2021 (Section 9.3.5.6)** Guidance previously issued under Erratum by the Reserve pertaining to guidance for the sequential sampling requirements for soil carbon.

Section 10 – Glossary of Terms
- **Added definition for Supersection (Section 10)** Provided a definition for "Supersection" to support the use of the term throughout the protocol.

Appendix B – Quantification Guidance for Use with Forest Carbon Projects

- **Clarified when excluded plots must be reincorporated into inventory (Appendix B.2.2.2)** Provided clearer guidance as to how long any plots excluded from an inventory update, as is allowed under certain circumstances under the protocol, may be excluded before they must be re-sampled so that new data can be incorporated into the project's carbon inventory.

- **Clarified that the Cairn's equation for belowground tree biomass is to be applied at the plot level (Appendix B.2.6)** Indicated that the application of the Cairn's equation for the calculation of belowground tree biomass is to be performed at the plot level, as opposed to the tree, stratum, or project level.

- **Clarified laboratory qualifications for soil sample analysis (Appendix B.2.9)** Added further guidance concerning the labs that are to conduct the analysis of soil samples for organic carbon content and bulk density.