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# Bay Bank

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## The Chesapeake's Conservation Marketplace

### Bay Bank Forest Conservation Protocol – Worcester County

#### I. Introduction

- a. About Bay Bank
- b. About Forest Conservation In Maryland
- c. Organization of this Protocol
- d. Contact Information
- e. Information for Credit Purchasers

#### II. Eligibility

- a. Legal Requirements
- b. Geographic/Ecological Requirements

#### III. Credit Definition

- a. What is a Forest Mitigation Bank?
- b. Forest Mitigation Credit Units
- c. Trading Ratio

#### IV. Credit Origination

- a. LandServer
- b. Verification of Eligibility
- c. Listing of Originated Credits on the Bay Bank Marketplace Registry

#### V. Credit Development

- a. Forest Mitigation Bank Plan
- b. Conservation Easement
- c. Maintenance Agreement/Surety Bond
- d. Bank Verification
- e. Regulatory Approval/Certification
- f. Credit Registration
- g. Sale of Credits on the Bay Bank Marketplace
- h. Credit Sale Reporting

#### VI. Monitoring

#### Appendix A: Estimated Costs and Returns from Establishing a Forest Bank

- a. Option A: Landowner Financed
- b. Option B: Developer Financed

#### Appendix B: Bay Bank Certified Verifier/Monitor Requirements

## **I. Introduction**

### **a. About Bay Bank**

The mission of Bay Bank is to sustain and improve the environment and the economic health of communities using innovative, market-based solutions. Bay Bank has established trading protocols that are compliant with existing regulatory and voluntary markets and ensure only high quality credits are transacted. This document provides the Bay Bank Regulatory Forest Conservation Market Protocol for use by participants in Maryland's regulatory forest mitigation bank market. This protocol provides the specific rules that must be followed to generate forest mitigation credits for transaction through the Bay Bank marketplace.

In addition to market protocols, which provide the rules for market participation, Bay Bank also provides an online marketplace and registry for ecosystem services credits. All credits generated using Bay Bank protocols, as well as credits generated through the use of other approved protocols, are listed in the Bay Bank market registry. The registry provides a listing of credits available for purchase in the forest mitigation banking and other ecosystem markets. It also tracks credits throughout the credit generation, marketing, sale, and monitoring process. The registry provides enough information to buyers to allow them to make initial inquiries about credit purchases, while protecting the identity of sellers. The Bay Bank registry is fully integrated with the Bay Bank marketplace, which connects buyers and sellers, provides basic transactional data, and reports transactions to the Bay Bank registry.

### **b. About Forest Conservation In Maryland**

The key regulatory driver for forest mitigation markets and the only significant state level driver in the Chesapeake is Maryland's Forest Conservation Act (FCA). In short, the FCA requires developers to replace trees cut because of development through afforestation, reforestation, or forest conservation. Developers must first consider replacement of trees on-site. But if on-site reforestation is not possible, the developer may reforest off-site, using a mitigation bank, or pay into a forest mitigation fund. The Bay Bank facilitates the use of off-site and mitigation bank compliance through this protocol and its online marketplace and registry

Forest mitigation regulations exist at both the state and local level. Generally, a forest mitigation bank must be located in a priority area as defined by state and local statute, subject to a permanent conservation easement, and meet the rules of the local jurisdiction. Eight counties, Calvert, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, Howard, Frederick, Dorchester, Carroll, and Worcester have specific forest mitigation banking rules contained within their local forest conservation law. A market protocol is available to landowners in each of these counties. For landowners outside of these counties, there are other options they can consider including offering their land for offsite mitigation and participating in fee in-lieu programs where available. Information about these options is included in the landowner education portion of Bay Bank's website.

### **c. Organization of this Protocol**

This protocol is divided into five sections: eligibility, credit definition, credit origination, credit development, and monitoring. Together, these sections provide a step-by-step guide to developing a forest mitigation bank in a given county, consistent with that county's regulations. Landowners interested in developing a forest mitigation bank should first read the entire protocol to gain a comprehensive understanding of the bank development process. Credits developed using this protocol are guaranteed to be eligible for sale through the Bay Bank marketplace. Questions about the protocol should be directed to Bay Bank staff at \_\_\_\_\_ or a Bay Bank approved service provider (hyperlink).

### **d. Contact Information**

Bay Bank Forest Conservation Market Coordinator: Name, email, phone  
Bay Bank Approved Service Provider List: Hyperlink  
County Forest Conservation Staff Contact: Name, email, phone

### **e. Information for Credit Purchasers**

Credit buyers are encouraged to review this protocol and contact Bay Bank staff with any questions or concerns. This protocol is designed to provide buyers with confidence that the credits they are purchasing are of high quality, meet regulatory standards, and are approved by county or state regulators. Transparency is critical to the success of ecosystem markets. As a result of this protocol, buyers can be assured that credits offered for sale through the Bay Bank marketplace are of the highest quality and were developed using standardized practices.

It is also possible for credit purchasers to participate in the credit development process through the use of this protocol. "Eligible" credits that have yet to be developed into sale-ready credits are listed on the Bay Bank marketplace. These credits may be developed under contract with the landowner by the buyer as an offsite mitigation project, subject to regulatory approval. Buyers interested in developing mitigation projects in this manner may use the Bay Bank protocol to guide the establishment of the offsite mitigation site, as the rules for location, planting density, etc. are the same for offsite mitigation and forest mitigation banking.

This protocol does not provide credit purchasers with information or guidance about when forest mitigation is required as a result of development activity.

## **II. Eligibility**

### **a. Legal Requirements**

Forest mitigation banks within Worcester County must meet the following requirements:

- Banks shall be a minimum of one acre in size and at least 50 feet wide
- Banks shall be outside of county priority funding areas

- Credits from forest mitigation banks may only be purchased to mitigate impacts in the same watershed as the mitigation bank.

### **b. Geographic/Ecological Requirements**

Forest mitigation banks must be established within or adjacent to one or more of the following priority areas:

- A coastal bay
- A perennial or intermittent stream
- Contiguous with an existing forest of at least 50 acres
- Within a state or county greenway node or corridor
- Within a 100-year floodplain
- Within the C-1 zoning district as defined by the Worcester County Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map.
- On properties that contain no more than 25% wetlands.

In addition, forest banks must be established using trees native to Worcester County. No more than 85% of the forest mitigation bank may be planted using Loblolly pine. Natural regeneration is a permitted method of establishing a forest bank in situations where a seed source is present.

## **III. Credit Definition**

### **a. What is a Forest Mitigation Bank?**

In Worcester County, a forest bank is either new forest created by afforestation or existing forest that is protected through a conservation easement and agreements between the county and the landowner establishing the forest mitigation bank. Forest mitigation banks are used by developers to meet forest mitigation requirements created by the state of Maryland's Forest Conservation Act. In order for a forest mitigation bank to be accepted into Worcester County's banking program it must meet the eligibility requirements noted in the previous sections and the administrative requirements discussed below. In order to sell credits through the Bay Bank, the landowner must first receive county approval for the forest mitigation bank and credits.

### **b. Forest Mitigation Credit Units**

Credit units are the commodity being bought and sold in a market transaction. There are two components to credit units: what does the credit represent and how much of it is contained within each credit, in this case measured in land area. In the case of forest mitigation banking in Worcester County, a credit represents a fixed amount of reforested land.

The Bay Bank defines one forest mitigation bank credit as 1/10<sup>th</sup> of an acre of a county approved forest mitigation bank. For example, a mitigation bank containing 20 acres of reforested land contains 200 forest mitigation credits.

### **c. Trading Ratio**

Trading ratios are the ratio between the number of credits needed for mitigation by the buyer and the number of credits the buyer is required to purchase by county regulations to meet its mitigation requirements stemming from development activity.

The trading ratio for Worcester County forest mitigation banks is one to one: for each 1/10<sup>th</sup> of an acre of mitigation needed by a buyer, he/she must purchase one credit from a forest mitigation bank. A bank containing 20 acres contains 200 credits and may sell the 200 credits to buyers requiring up to 20 acres of mitigation.

## **IV. Credit Origination**

### **a. LandServer**

LandServer is an easy to use, online tool for landowners. It allows landowners to estimate the environmental/ecosystem services produced by their land and generates a report outlining the programs and market areas they may be eligible for, including forest mitigation banking. LandServer can be accessed through Bay Bank's website ([www.thebaybank.org](http://www.thebaybank.org)) or directly ([www.landserver.org](http://www.landserver.org)).

Landowners interested in participating in a forest mitigation banking program, posting their forest mitigation bank credits in the Bay Bank registry, and connecting with credit purchasers through the Bay Bank marketplace should utilize LandServer to estimate their eligibility for forest mitigation banking and to begin the credit development process. LandServer will provide landowners with an estimate of eligibility for forest mitigation banking, an indication of the amount of land that may be eligible for forest mitigation banking and how many credits this land represents, an estimate of the value of forest mitigation bank credits based on previous market transactions, and provide landowners with the option to register their land in the Bay Bank registry if they are interested in pursuing the development of a forest mitigation bank. Landowners are not required to register in the Bay Bank registry to use LandServer, but they are required to register if they wish to develop forest mitigation bank credits. Landowners who elect to register with the Bay Bank registry are assigned an account and the estimated credits as determined by LandServer are posted as "estimated." Estimated credits are unverified for eligibility and may not be contracted for sale or sold through the Bay Bank marketplace.

### **b. Verification of Eligibility**

Estimated credits must be verified on-site by a Bay Bank approved technical service provider before credits may be listed for contract or sale in the Bay Bank registry. The technical service provider must verify the following and submit a verification report to the Bay Bank registry (available in Appendix X):

- Land eligibility: does the proposed forest mitigation bank area meet the county requirements for slope, stream buffers, etc. (see Section II: Eligibility)?
- Land Area: Does the number of credits estimated by LandServer match the number of eligible credits available to the landowner? For example, LandServer

may indicate that a land area of 20 acres are eligible for forest mitigation banking, resulting in 20 forest mitigation credits. On-site verification checks the LandServer estimate and adjusts it as necessary

- Size: After the land area is verified, verify that the actual acreage of eligible forest mitigation bank land complies with the county requirements (see Section II: Eligibility).

Bay Bank provides a list of approved technical service providers on its website at [www.thebaybank.com](http://www.thebaybank.com).

### **c. Listing of Originated Credits on the Bay Bank Marketplace Registry**

When verification of eligibility by a Bay Bank approved technical service provider has been completed and the verification report accepted by the Bay Bank, estimated credits as determined by the landowner using LandServer, plus or minus any changes to the number of forest mitigation credits discovered during on-site verification, are upgraded in the Bay Bank registry to “prospective” credits.

Designation of forest mitigation credits as prospective is an important milestone in the forest mitigation bank development process. When credits are designated prospective, they represent credits that have a high probability of receiving regulatory approval. Prospective credits are listed on the Bay Bank registry and are visible to potential forest mitigation credit buyers on the Bay Bank marketplace. Prospective credits are eligible for contract with buyers to meet offsite mitigation requirements if a landowner does not wish to complete the forest mitigation bank development process. The terms of such contracts and the ultimate sale price of the credits are set between the buyer and the seller. For a discussion of the some of the advantages and disadvantages of contracting for offsite mitigation vs. forest mitigation banking, see Appendix A.

## **V. Credit Development**

### **a. Forest Stand Delineation?**

### **b. Forest Mitigation Bank Plan**

A forest mitigation bank plan must be developed by a Bay Bank approved technical service provider. The technical service provider developing the forest mitigation bank plan must be different from the provider who reviewed forest mitigation bank eligibility to help ensure there is no conflict of interest.

A landowner seeking to develop a forest mitigation bank in Worcester County must submit a forest mitigation banking plan containing the following information:

- A map of the forest mitigation bank area and its vicinity
- A simplified forest stand delineation prepared by a forester, landscape architect, or other qualified professional approved by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. A list of qualified professionals is available on the Bay Bank website at [www.thebaybank.org](http://www.thebaybank.org)

- A plan prepared by a qualified professional that includes a timetable for the establishment of the forest mitigation bank; a description of the site and soil preparation needed prior to planting of a forest mitigation bank; and the species, size, and spacing of trees that will be utilized to establish the forest mitigation bank.

In addition, the landowner must submit a forest mitigation bank application, included in Appendix X of this protocol.

### **c. Conservation Easement**

Worcester County regulations require perpetual protection of forest mitigation banks. For credits transacted through the Bay Bank, this protection must come in the form of a permanent conservation easement. The conservation easement shall be granted to Worcester County. Evidence of recordation of the conservation easement in the Worcester County land records and county approval of the easement must be submitted to the Bay Bank before any credits are transacted through Bay Bank.

### **d. Maintenance Agreement/Surety Bond**

Forest mitigation bank owners must enter into a two-year maintenance agreement with Worcester County. The maintenance agreement must detail how the landowner will ensure protection and establishment of the forest such that it achieves the definition of “forest” by the end of the maintenance period and a plan for watering of the bank area and replacement of trees as needed throughout the establishment period. The agreement must also provide provisions for access to the site by Worcester County to inspect the bank to ensure it is meeting establishment requirements; a copy of the property’s deed and title information that demonstrate the ability of the landowner to enter into a conservation easement covering the forest mitigation bank area, as described above; and a description of the system that will be used to track credit sales. Bay Bank provides landowners with a pre-approved system for tracking credit sales through the Bay Bank registry and marketplace

Financial assurance is required for forest mitigation banks only if the landowner intends to sell forest mitigation credits during the two-year maintenance agreement/bank establishment period. To sell credits during this two-year period, a landowner must post financial assurance payable to the county in the form of a surety bond or irrevocable letter of credit from a financial institution AND plant an area 25% larger than the amount of credits that will be debited during the two-year establishment period. The financial assurance must be equal to the cost of establishing the bank. The bond will be released at the end of the maintenance agreement period.

### **e. Bank Verification**

Forest Mitigation Bank site verification is performed by the county. A county representative will review the forest mitigation bank plan, the proposed mitigation bank site, and the replanting plan for the site.

Documentation of county forest mitigation bank verification must be submitted to Bay Bank.

#### **f. Regulatory Approval/Certification**

Worcester County has final approval authority for all forest mitigation banks in the county. In order for a bank to be approved by the county, the owner of the forest mitigation bank must submit an approved forest bank plan as described above, detail and gain approval for how credit sales will be tracked to ensure credits are sold only once, acknowledge the rules related to maintenance agreements as described above, and enter into a forest mitigation agreement with the county. The Bay Bank provides landowners with an pre-approved system for tracking credit sales through the Bay Bank registry and marketplace; landowners who have developed a forest mitigation bank according to this protocol, have submitted verification by a Bay Bank approved verifier, and have joined the Bay Bank registry will be provided with a verification of registry to submit to the county.

#### **g. Sale of Credits on the Bay Bank Marketplace**

Upon receipt of documentation showing county regulatory approval of a forest mitigation bank, the Bay Bank will reclassify the bank owner's credits as "saleable forest mitigation credits" in the Bay Bank registry. Credit buyers will be able to access basic information and inquire about the purchase of the credits through the Bay Bank marketplace. The Bay Bank registry will record all transactions that take place through the Bay Bank marketplace and deduct forest mitigation credits sales from the seller's forest mitigation bank account in the registry. The terms of transactions are decided between the buyer and seller.

#### **h. Credit Sale Reporting**

In order to meet their regulatory obligations, developers must report the purchase of credits from a certified forest mitigation bank or FCTDR site to the county. The county paperwork required for reporting transactions is provided to buyers and sellers participating in the Bay Bank marketplace. In addition to reporting transactions to the county, transactions must also be reported to Bay Bank to enable the tracking of credits in the Bay Bank registry. Buyers and sellers can report transactions through their accounts on Bay Bank's website.

### **VI. Monitoring**

Monitoring of forest mitigation banks is generally carried out by the county where the bank is located. The county is to holder of the conservation easement providing for permanent protection of the forest bank, and therefore assumes the monitoring responsibility for the bank.

Counties have different approaches to monitoring; landowners should discuss monitoring procedures followed by the county at the beginning of the forest mitigation bank development process. Generally, monitoring will be relatively unobtrusive – its goal is to ensure the forest bank remains in place over time and that restricted uses do not take place within the forest bank area.

In addition to county monitoring, if a landowner elects to participate in more than one ecosystem market, Bay Bank or a Bay Bank representative may also conduct monitoring visits from time to

time. The purpose of these visits will be to monitor the other ecosystem credits present on the property and to ensure these credit values do not inappropriately overlap with the forest bank credits. Bay Bank monitoring will only occur if a landowner is engaged in more than one market; if forest conservation is the only market a landowner is currently participating in, Bay Bank will rely on the county to carry out its own monitoring program.

**Appendix A: Estimated Costs and Returns from Establishing a Forest Bank**

**a. Option A: Landowner Financed**

**b. Option B: Developer Financed**

**Appendix B: Bay Bank Certified Verifier/Monitor Requirements**