

# Beyond Carbon: How Impact Assessment (IA) Strengthens Nature-based Solutions (NbS)



**Ross Mitchell**

*Principal Social Scientist / AtkinsRéalis*

*Canada*

[linkedin.com/in/rossmitchell44](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rossmitchell44)

<https://www.atkinsrealis.com/>



# Why this Topic?

---

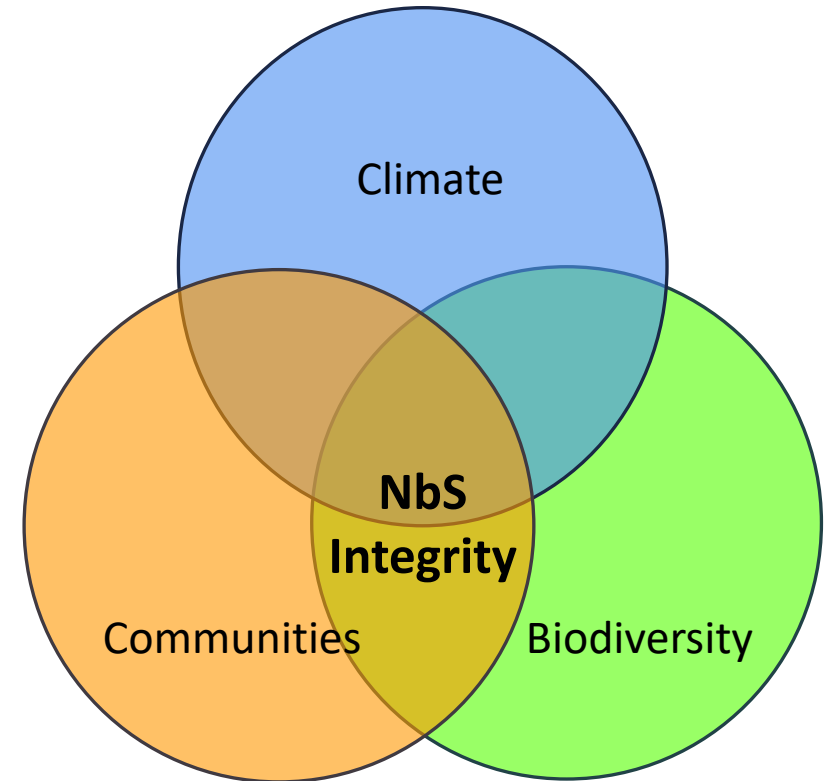
- Impact assessment is rarely used in NbS practice
- Seen as **unnecessary** or **too expensive**
- Yet projects **reshape land use at scale for decades**



# Carbon Integrity vs. Impact Integrity

---

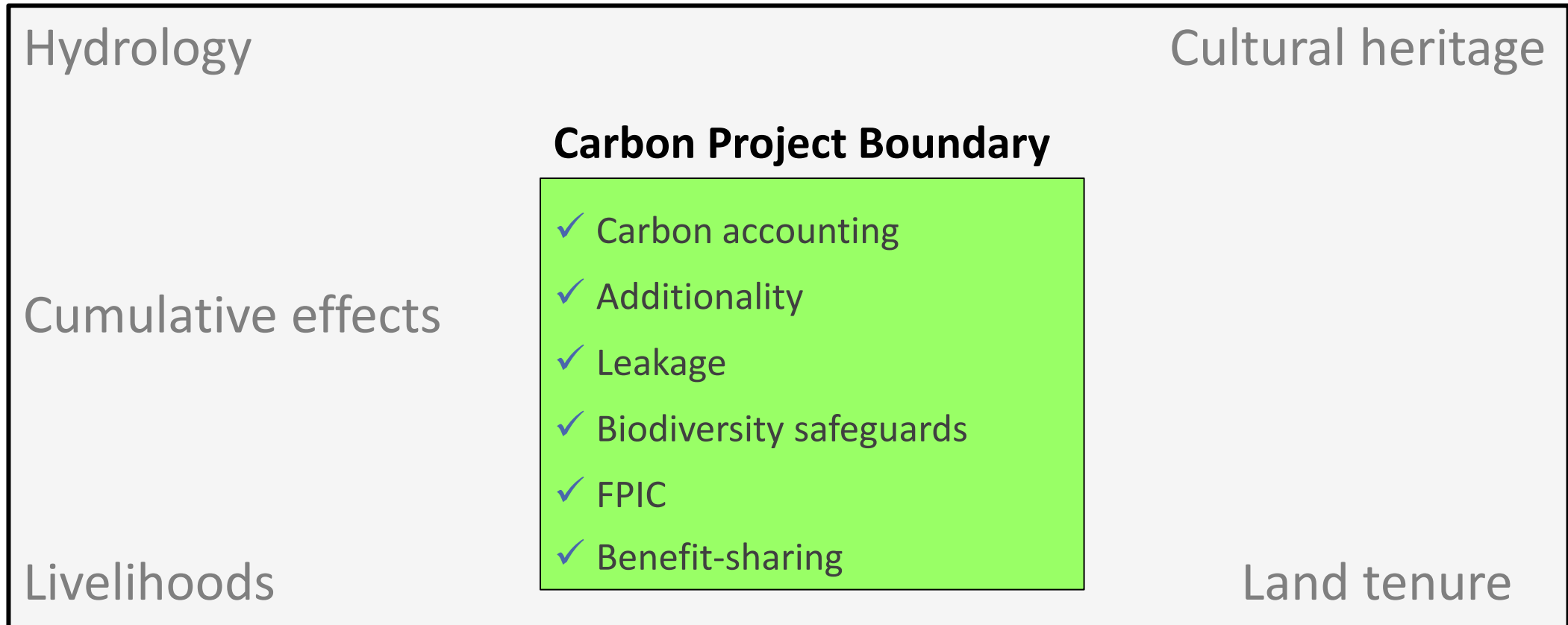
- NbS must deliver **climate**, **biodiversity**, and **community** outcomes
- Carbon standards focus on carbon and safeguards
- IA can strengthen whole-system risk management



But .... carbon integrity  $\neq$  impact integrity

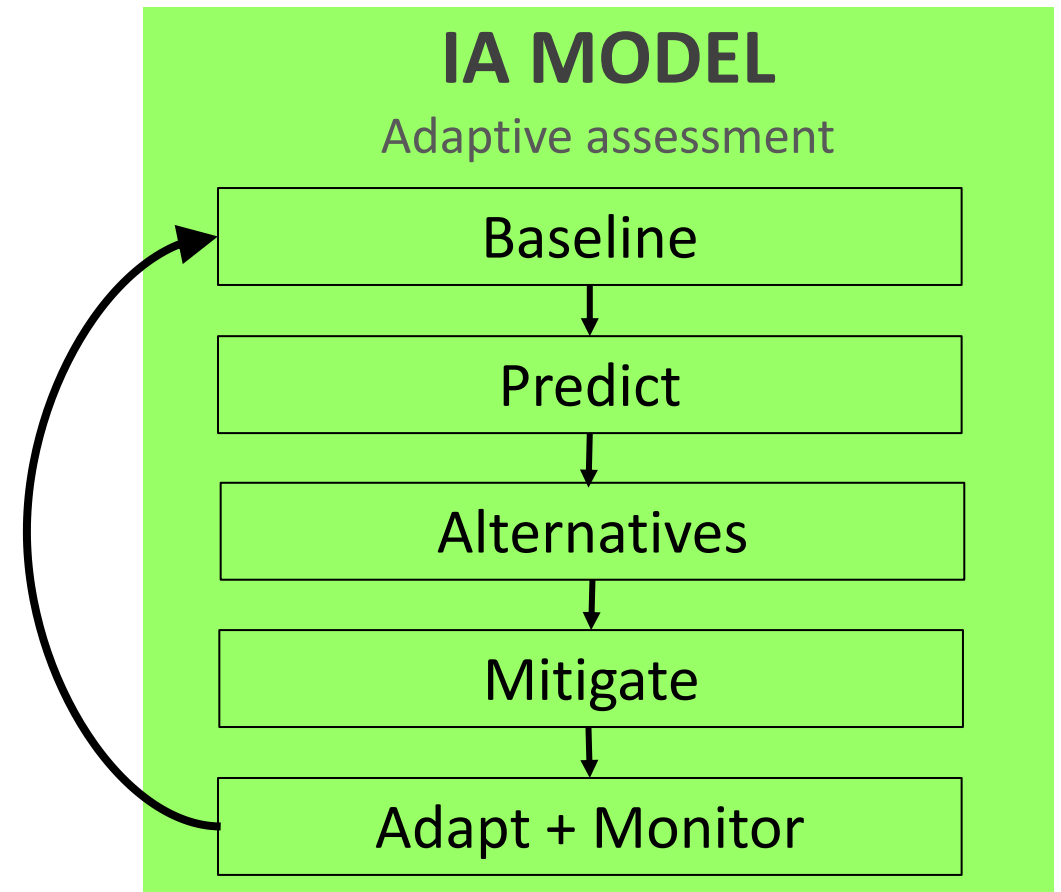
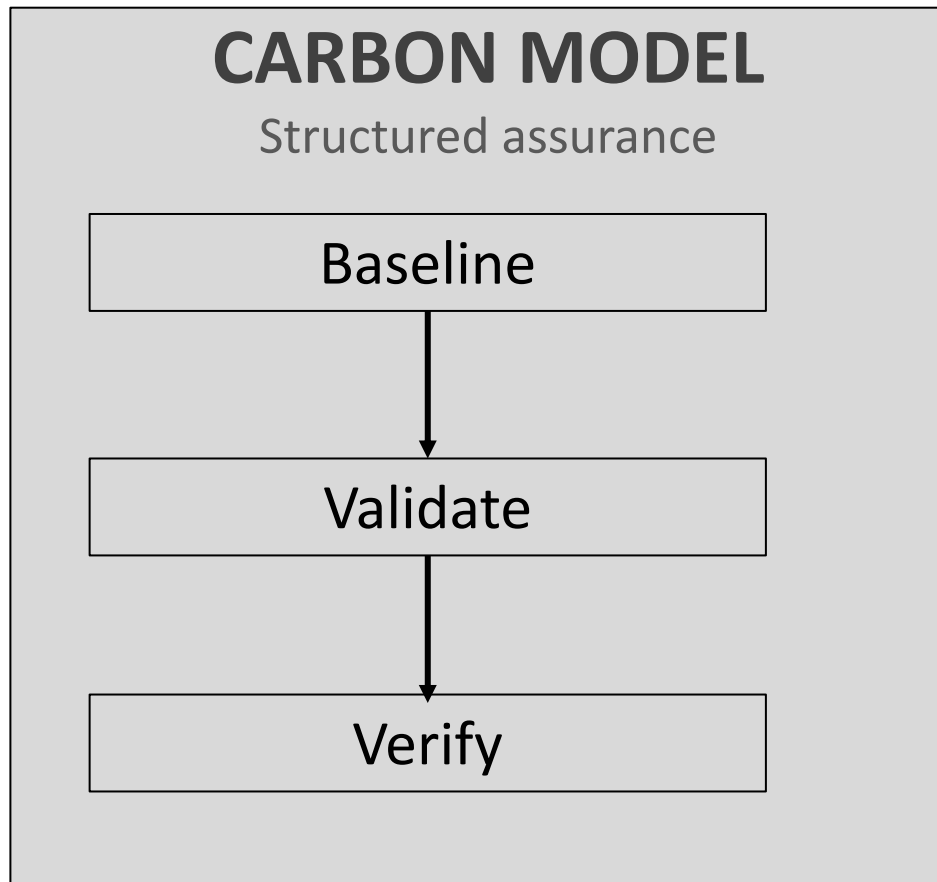
# Where Carbon Standards Stop Short

## Impact Assessment Boundary



Carbon boundary  $\neq$  Impact boundary

# How IA Strengthens NbS



IA is about better decisions, not just better documentation

# FPIC in NbS: Beyond Compliance

---

<b>Carbon Standard FPIC (Verra / Gold Standard)</b>	<b>IA-Integrated FPIC</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong FPIC requirements</li><li>• Stakeholder engagement</li><li>• Benefit-sharing &amp; grievance mechanisms</li><li>• Consent at validation stage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starts earlier, at scoping</li><li>• Linked to impacts &amp; alternatives</li><li>• Revisited when conditions change</li><li>• Strengthens adaptive governance</li></ul>

# IA Tools Applied to NbS: Turning Risks into Management Actions

---



Security

**Security Risk Assessment (SRA)**



Indigenous Rights

**Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP)**



Human Rights

**Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA)**



Biodiversity

**Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)**



Livelihoods

**Livelihood Restoration Plan**



Cumulative Effects

**Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA)**

# Peru: Managing Complex NbS Risks

---



Logistical and market access constraints, Ucayali

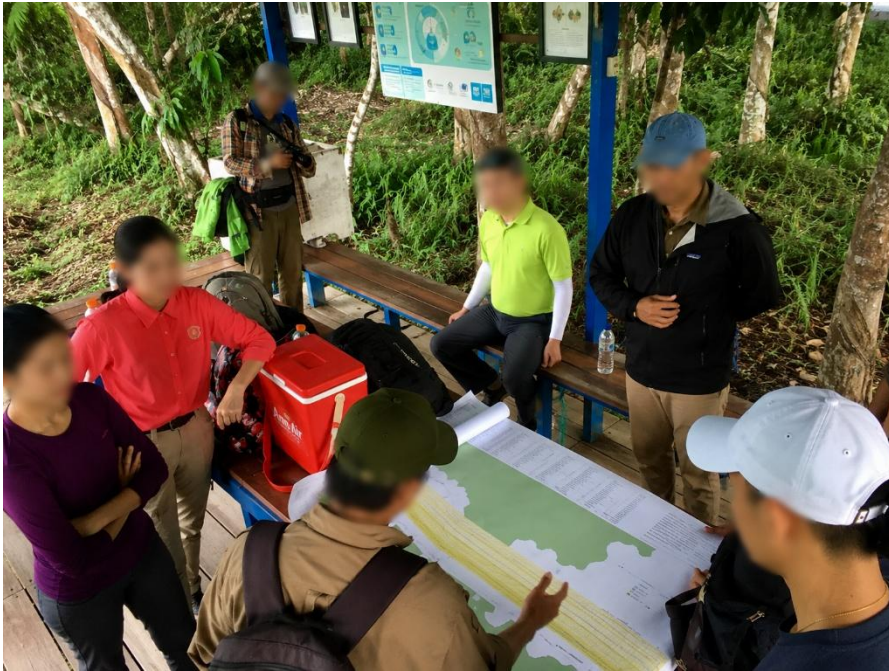
## Key Risks

- Land tenure insecurity
- Illegal encroachment & security threats
- Livelihood dependency & vulnerability
- Limited local governance capacity

Early risk screening and risk mapping  
improved land tenure security

# Indonesia: Building Stronger Baselines

---



157,000 ha of protected peatland  
34 villages engaged  
43,000 people in project area

## IA Contributions

- Socio-economic baselines
- Livelihood dependency analysis
- Community land-use mapping
- Local monitoring capacity

Stronger socio-economic baselines  
improved livelihood plans & monitoring



## UPFRONT COSTS



### Longer upfront design phase

More time for baseline studies, engagement, and iterative design



### Higher early-stage development cost

More investment in studies, specialist inputs and risk identification



## LONG-TERM BENEFITS



### Better decisions

Compare options and design more effective solutions



### Higher credibility

Evidence-based results build trust with stakeholders and buyers



### Fewer disputes

Early risk identification and engagement reduce conflicts and grievances



### Stronger outcomes

Greater long-term resilience and co-benefits



### Better access to finance

Verifiable impacts attract investment and funding

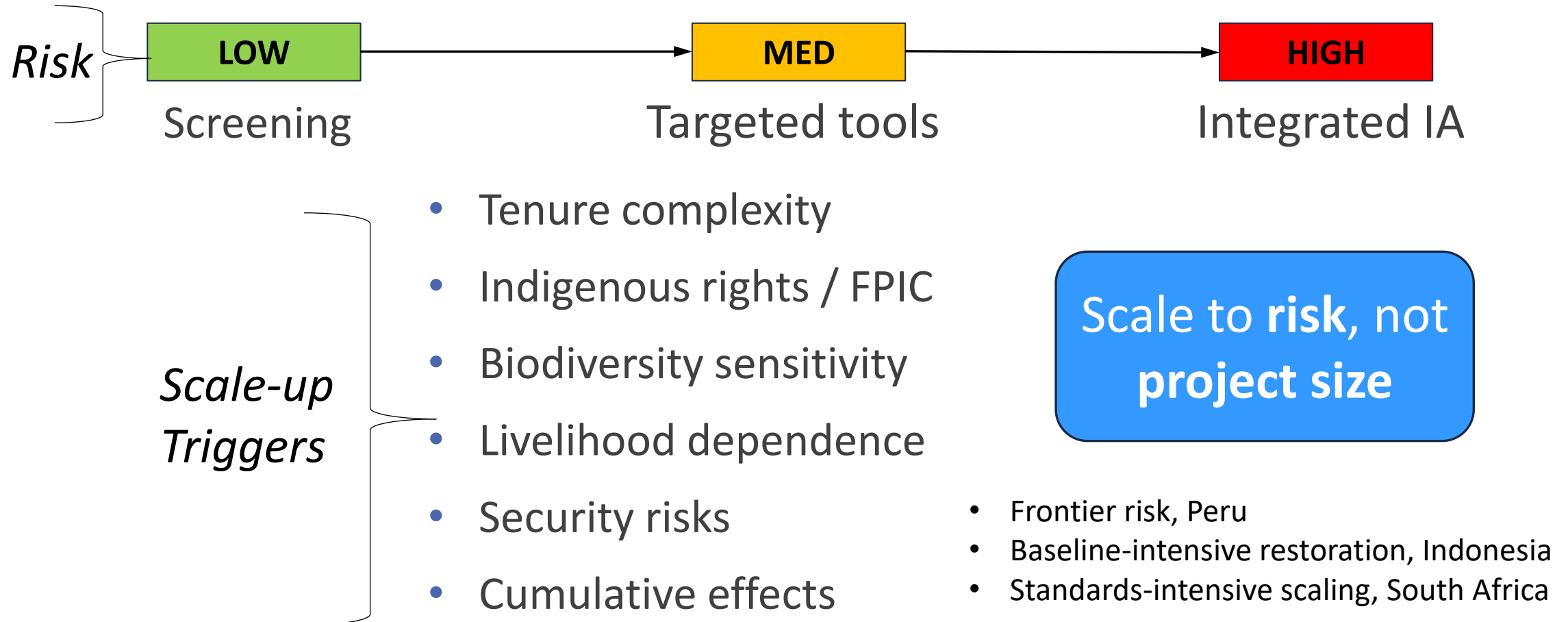


IA requires more upfront investment, but delivers greater long-term value and lowers risk.

The question is not just “to do or not to do IA” — it’s how much, and for what risk.

# The IA Trade-off: From Upfront Cost to Long-term Value

# When to Scale Up IA in NbS?



# *Can carbon integrity exist without impact integrity?*

- Integrity extends **beyond carbon**.
- NbS tools identify **risks**. *IA integrates them into **better decisions***.
- IA strengthens **evidence**, **participation**, **mitigation**, and resilience.
- Better design delivers stronger **long-term outcomes**.
- Strengthens **credibility** and **investment confidence**





**IAIA26**  
QUÉBEC CITY, CANADA

# Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.

**Ross Mitchell**

*Principal Social Scientist / AtkinsRéalis*

*Canada*

[linkedin.com/in/rossmitchell44](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rossmitchell44)

<https://www.atkinsrealis.com/>

**#iaia26**