

Forest-Climate Working Group Entry Principles: Case Statement and Guidelines for Collaboration

Background: The Case for Forests and Climate Change

America's forests are an invaluable asset that perpetually delivers essential natural resources and ecosystem services, including clean air and water for our families, forest products for our economy, habitat for wildlife and fisheries, and recreational opportunities that support a healthy, active lifestyle. With the onset of climate change and the related need to stabilize carbon levels in the atmosphere, there is now renewed attention to another ecosystem service that forests provide: the ability to sequester and store carbon. Federal climate policy can help enhance this climate stabilizing capacity by supporting forest management and conservation activities that capture and store carbon in domestic and international forests. This enhanced carbon management through forests could contribute an essential "wedge" of needed atmospheric carbon reductions—a 2005 EPA study projected that increasing carbon sequestration in the forest sector could mitigate a substantial portion of annual domestic carbon dioxide emissions.

At the same time, the adjustment of forests to a changing climate could compromise these systems when we need them most. Forest systems are finely tuned to particular temperature and moisture regimes and climate change could disrupt forest systems by altering these patterns. A 2008 EPA study and other similar studies have projected potential impacts that include shifting distribution of forest types across the landscape and increasing threats from invasive species, pests, pathogens, and wildfire. These changes could imperil important forest resources such as drinking water supplies, forest products, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities. They could also compromise forest carbon sequestration and storage and even accelerate carbon emissions from forests due to forest mortality and wildfire. Federal and state forestry agencies and landowners will face new stewardship challenges and service demands as they support forest adaptation to a changed climate. Their success will be required to continue delivery of the many ecosystem services, forest-related products, and other public values that Americans need.

Our efforts to enhance forest carbon sequestration and storage and manage forest adaptation will likely be complicated by the continued subdivision and development of America's private forests. The U.S. Forest Service projects that 44.2 million acres (over 11 percent) of private forestland nationwide will experience substantial increases in housing density by 2030. In some regions forest conversion to development is projected to have particularly acute impacts—the Southern Forest Resource Assessment projected future forest loss of almost one million acres per year in just the South alone. Research has shown that once parcelization and conversion push housing density past 64 housing units per square mile, forests provide declining outputs of ecosystem services. Conserving our "forests as forests" will help maintain the capacity of these systems to capture and store carbon, protect water supplies, and deliver myriad other public benefits.

Developing a Policy Response – The Forest-Climate Working Group

The participants in the Forest-Climate Working Group all agree that forests will be essential to the success of any comprehensive federal climate strategy and related legislation. To help support inclusion of appropriate forest measures in federal climate policy, the Forest-Climate Working Group has begun a series of consensus dialogues that will enable the forest community to explore and seek consensus on: 1) the necessary elements for effective design of high quality forest carbon activities; 2) the most efficient and effective forest-climate policy mechanisms; and

3) opportunities to support forest conservation in the context of natural resource adaptation efforts. Our goal is to advance toward consensus on these issues across the full spectrum of forest stakeholders—landowner, industry, conservation, wildlife, and forestry organizations—to help empower federal decision makers to include our recommendations in federal climate policies under development. Establishing U.S. leadership in forest-climate policy through new legislation and related rulemaking will provide a much-needed example for international negotiations and demonstrate U.S. commitment to making a strong contribution to international climate mitigation efforts.

Principles of Collaboration

The Forest-Climate Working Group is founded on six key principles for its collaboration:

- Consensus among the forest community will be helpful to advancing federal climate policy that recognizes a strong role for forests. Our impact will be enhanced by seeking consensus with a broad range of interest groups working on climate policy.
- The group will be led by a steering committee that is open to any recognized participant organization—that is, any group that endorses our Entry Principles. Each participant organization is encouraged to identify a designated representative, with alternates or additional representatives welcome as needed. The steering committee will form task subcommittees to take on particular projects, with participation open to any participant. To assure tight coordination and accountability, the communications and activities of the steering committee and full group will be coordinated by two co-chairs.
- The actions and deliberations of the group, including the steering committee, will be transparent to all participants.
- The group will strive to operate by full consensus of the participants whenever taking a public position on an element of forest-climate policy. When a position has very strong support but falls short of endorsement by full consensus, the group may consider publicly endorsing that position on an “opt-in” basis provided that no more than one-quarter of recognized participants oppose that position. Documents relating to any position adopted by “opt-in” will clearly list only those participants endorsing the position.
- The group will use facilitated consensus dialogues to develop consensus recommendations for specific components of forest-climate policy. As part of each dialogue, the group is committed to serving as a learning network for its participants—all the participants still have informational needs and research in the climate arena is rapidly evolving. The group will create learning opportunities as part of each dialogue featuring leading thinkers on key aspects of forest-climate policy and policy design, with a goal of helping to move us toward informed consensus on key issues.
- The group will seek to learn from climate policy conversations occurring at other scales, including regional climate compacts within the U.S. and international efforts. It will seek to establish links to leaders in these areas and encourage their participation in our efforts.

To become a participant in the Forest-Climate Working Group, please contact the co-chairs of the steering committee:

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