

## **Carbon Policy for Forests, Wild Areas, and Other Lands**

Goal Statement: The Sierra Club seeks to promote policies that prioritize the protection, maintenance and restoration of forests, wetlands, grasslands, estuaries, and other important ecosystems and their native biodiversity worldwide. Managing for the health of ecosystems needs to be the overarching land management goal. Protecting and maintaining ecosystems in their natural, undeveloped state will best preserve and maintain ecosystem services that we use and enjoy, as well as increase carbon pools, and should be prioritized. Restoration practices and other active management carried out with the intent to maintain species viability and increase carbon storage should emphasize a precautionary approach that does not sacrifice known benefits of ecosystem services for experimental practices and hypothetical or low gains in carbon storage. Carbon storage and ecosystem maintenance and restoration programs should include an adaptive management provision that includes monitoring, ongoing data collection and analysis, and a review of the program's effectiveness.

First, we must protect, maintain, and restore our U.S. federal and non-federal forests, deserts, grasslands, natural water bodies and watercourses, coastal ecosystems, and other ecosystem types, and create incentives for sustainable forestry and land and water management practices.

- Protect old-growth and mature forests and all other forested and non-forested roadless ecosystems across all agency jurisdictions.
- Encourage acquisitions that promote restoration and resilience of our federal and non-federal forests and other natural areas. Such acquisitions should include as priorities maximum buffering and corridors to facilitate migration of species as climates change.
- Current environmental laws must continue to be applied.
- Work at local, regional, national, and international levels, without regard to political boundaries (such as state lines), to achieve ecosystem resilience goals.
- Provide support for conservation easements and other programs on private forests and other private lands to help protect their carbon storage and other ecosystem services from net loss and where possible to increase their total carbon storage capability.
- Every effort should be made to keep peatlands, coastal estuaries, and prairie potholes and their hydrology intact so that they can continue to provide carbon storage, habitat, and water storage benefits.
- Management practices should be established to ease the transition of forests or other important ecosystems to other ecosystem types caused by climate change. This should include assisted migration of selected species to newly suitable areas where appropriate.
- Federal land management plans should strive to prolong the survival of indigenous species and maintain or increase the biodiversity of current forest types and other plant communities. Efforts should be made to protect areas adjacent to large parks, preserves, and wilderness areas, especially in the directions (usually north or northeast) toward which the climate is predicted to

- shift in coming decades, to maximize migration opportunities. Buffering in the opposite direction also may help to delay climate impacts on the preserved areas.
- A research program focusing on superior adaptation methods must be developed and implemented, and the findings should be promptly transmitted to land managers for immediate broad-scale implementation.
  - In order to prepare for the impacts of coastal sea level rise and the resulting human population migration, infrastructure removal and replacement, and to develop strategies to preserve biodiversity and its habitats, we encourage an increased and coordinated land, coastal, and marine spatial planning system between all federal and state agencies concerned.

Second, we will advocate for policies that will accomplish sustainable food and fiber production and restore and protect the full array of ecosystem services, one important part of which is long-term carbon storage. [see also Club policies on sustainability and zero waste]

- Programs and practices designed to improve the sustainability of food and fiber production should be analyzed through a full cost carbon accounting in order to reduce the probability of regional or international leakage and to ensure that new management regimes genuinely result in an overall decrease of carbon emissions.
- Management strategies for carbon storage should rely on natural ecosystem maintenance and restoration rather than on sequestration projects that use plantations, monocultures, and non-native species.
- Low tillage and no tillage farming practices that rely on heavy doses of herbicides and fossil fuels for transport should not be eligible for carbon credits since little if any net carbon would be sequestered.
- Agricultural programs designed to slow the release of carbon or sequester more carbon in soils, such as biochar, should be appropriate to the geographic region in which they are proposed, subject to a full cost carbon accounting, and determined to be effective and appropriate through pilot projects before attempting to institute them on a broad scale.
- There should be no subsidies for commercial ventures, carbon trading or credit schemes that result in no net reduction in carbon emissions.

Third, we need responsible, effective policies and consistent practices for carbon offsets and sequestration.

- Carbon reduction offsets should be additional, verifiable, and sustainable, and should protect and restore native biodiversity, respect local communities and indigenous peoples, and avoid shifting emissions to a different location.
- A mitigation requirement should be established for conversion of a forest, wetland, or any other ecosystem component with a quantifiable carbon-storing benefit to other uses that might decrease that carbon storing capacity.
- Forests managed for timber should include longer rotations no matter what adaptation methods are found because such rotations store carbon for long periods of times and release it at a relatively slow rate. Longer rotations also will help preserve many wildlife species that are endemic to mature and old growth forests.

- Federal domestic grazing programs and non-federal grazing practices should be incentivized and improved to encourage grassland, shrub, and riparian area restoration and ecosystem health.
- Harvested wood products should not be counted as a carbon pool.
- States should be encouraged, funded, and, where appropriate, directed to improve monitoring of changes in carbon stocks in forests, wetlands, riparian areas, arid lands, and coastal areas, as well as changes in ecosystem services and native biodiversity, and to implement policies for maintaining climate, ecosystem, and biodiversity benefits.

Fourth, with regard to international advocacy, we must insist that U.S. agencies involved in trade, commerce or having other involvement or jurisdiction adopt strong safeguards to protect critical ecosystems, conserve global biodiversity, and ensure the integrity of international forest activities and U.S. compliance markets.

- The above principles of protecting, maintaining and restoring ecosystems and their biodiversity that guide our work in North America should be applied to Sierra Club's work internationally.
- International forest management and trade should be subject to a full cost carbon accounting system before being eligible for US federal subsidies or preferential trade practices.
- Sierra Club should continue to support programs and practices that reduce the overall demand for wood and paper products from both domestic and international sources.
- Both nationally and internationally, increased attention to restoring land-based carbon sinks and reservoirs is raising new concerns relating to public financing, carbon markets, certification, measurement and verification, and other issues. In the event that the Sierra Club engages in these or other new issue areas, the Sierra Club should enhance its volunteer and staff capacity and expertise on these issues so as to promote the principles described in this policy more effectively.

Position development by America's Wild Legacy Task Force of the Mission Strategy Committee and approved by Board of Directors Sept. 26, 2009